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Genesis

Book of Genesis

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the surface of the deep. The Spirit of God moved over the surface of the waters.

God said, “Let there be light!” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and he called the darkness “night.” So there was evening, and then the morning, making day one.

God said, “Let there be an expanse in the middle of the waters to divide the waters.” So God made an expanse to divide the waters that were above from the waters that were below. And that's what happened. God called the expanse, “sky.” So there was evening, and then the morning, making day two.

God said, “Let the waters below the sky collect together in one place so that the land may appear.” And so it was. God called the land “earth” and the waters “seas.” God saw that it was good.

God said, “Let the earth produce vegetation—plants that produce seeds and trees that produce seeded fruit—each one according to its own kind.” And that's what happened. The earth produced vegetation—plants that produce seeds and trees that produce seeded fruit—each one according to its own kind. God saw that it was good. So there was evening, and then the morning, making day three.

God said, “Let there be lights in the sky to separate day from night, and to provide a way to mark seasons, days, and years. They shall be lights in the sky to shine on the earth.” And that's what happened. God created two great lights: the larger one in charge of the day, and the smaller one in charge of the night. He created the stars too. God placed these lights in the sky to shine upon the earth, to be in charge of the day and in charge of the night, and to separate light from darkness. God saw that it was good. So there was evening, and then the morning, making day four.

God said, “Let the waters be full of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the sky.” So God created huge sea creatures and all the living things that swim and fill the waters, each one according to its own kind; and every bird that flies, each one according to its own kind. God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Reproduce and increase, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” So there was evening, and then the morning, making day five.

God said, “Let the land produce living creatures, each one according to its own kind—the livestock, the creatures that run along the ground, and the wild animals, each one according to its own kind.” And that's what happened. God made the wild animals, the livestock, and the creatures that run along the ground, all according to their own kind. God saw that it was good.

God said, “Let us make human beings in our image who are like us. They will have authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, and over the whole of the earth and every creature that moves on it.” So God created human beings in his own image. He created them in the image of God. He created them male and female. God blessed them and told them, “Reproduce, increase, and spread throughout the earth and control it; exercise authority over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every creature that moves on the earth.”

God said, “Look, I'm giving you as your food every seed-bearing plant anywhere on earth, and every tree that produces fruit with seeds. I'm giving all the green plants to all the land animals, to the birds, and to every creature that moves on the earth—to every living thing.” And that's what happened.

God saw everything that he had created, and yes, it was very good. So there was evening, and then the morning, making day six.

The creation of the heavens, the earth, and everything in them was complete. By the time the seventh day came, God had finished the work he'd done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work he'd been doing. God blessed the seventh day, and set it apart as holy, because he rested from all the work he'd done in creation.

This is the account of the Lord God's creation when he made the heavens and the earth.

Up to this point there were no wild plants or crops growing on the earth, because the Lord God hadn't sent rain, and there was no one to cultivate the ground. Dew came up from the earth and made the whole surface of the ground wet. The Lord God shaped the man Adam from the dust of the ground. He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living being.

The Lord planted a garden in Eden, in the east. There he put the man Adam he had created. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow in the garden, beautiful trees and trees producing fruit that's good to eat. The tree of life was in the middle of the garden, along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out from Eden to water the garden. From there it split into four branches. The first branch was called the Pishon and it flowed through the whole land of Havilah, where gold is found. (The gold from that land is pure. Bdellium and onyx stone are also found there.) The second branch was called the Gihon and it flowed through the whole land of Cush. The third branch was called the Tigris and it flowed east of the city of Asshur. The fourth branch was called the Euphrates.

The Lord God put the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it and care for it. The Lord God ordered Adam, “You are free to eat fruit from every tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because the day you eat from it you are certain to die.”

Then the Lord God said, “It's not good for Adam to be alone. I will make someone to help him, someone that's like him.”

The Lord God used the ground to make all the wild animals, and all the birds. He took them all to Adam to see what he would call them, and Adam named every living creature. Adam gave names to all the livestock,

all the birds, and all the wild animals. But Adam didn't find anyone like him who could help him.

So the Lord God put Adam into a deep sleep and as he slept the Lord God removed one of Adam's ribs and closed up the place where he took it with body tissue. The Lord God made a woman, using the rib he'd taken from Adam, and presented her to Adam.

"Finally!" said Adam. "Here is bone from my bone and flesh from my flesh. She shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."

This is the reason a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two become one being. Adam and his wife Eve were both naked, but they weren't embarrassed about it.

The serpent was more cunning than any of the other wild animals that the Lord God had made. He asked Eve, "Did God really say that you can't eat fruit from every tree in the garden?"

Eve replied to the serpent, "We can eat from the trees in the garden, but not the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. God told us, 'You mustn't eat from that tree, or even touch it, otherwise you'll die.'"

"You certainly won't die," the serpent told Eve. "It's because God knows that as soon as you eat it, you'll see things differently, and you'll be like God, knowing both what is good and what is evil."

Eve saw that the fruit of the tree appeared good to eat. It looked very attractive. She really wanted it so she could become wise. So she took some of its fruit and ate it, and she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it too. Immediately they saw everything differently and realized they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves up.

Later they heard the Lord walking in the garden in the evening when the breeze was blowing. Adam and Eve went and hid out of sight of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

The Lord God called out to Adam, "Where are you?"

"I heard you walking in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid," he replied.

"Who told you that you were naked?" asked the Lord God. "Did you eat fruit from the tree I ordered you not to?"

"It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate it," Adam replied.

The Lord God asked Eve, "Why have you done this?"

"The serpent tricked me, and so I ate it," she replied.

Then the Lord God told the serpent, "Because of what you've done, you are cursed more than any of the other animals. You will slide along on your belly and eat dust as long as you live. I will make sure you and your children, and the woman and her children, are enemies. One of her children will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

He told Eve, "I will make pregnancy much more difficult, and giving birth will be very painful. However, you will still desire your husband, but he will have control over you."

He told Adam, "Because you did what your wife told you, and ate fruit from the tree after I ordered you, 'Don't eat fruit from this tree,' the ground is now cursed because of you. You will have to work painfully hard to grow food from it throughout your whole life. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, and you will have to eat wild plants. You will have to sweat to grow enough food to eat until you die and return to the ground. For you were made from dust and you will return to dust."

Adam named his wife Eve, because she was to be the mother of all human beings. The Lord God made Adam and Eve clothes from animal skins and dressed them.

Then the Lord God observed, "Look, the human beings have become like one of us, knowing both what is good and what is evil. Now if they take the fruit from the tree of life and eat it, then they'll live forever!" So the Lord God expelled them from the Garden of Eden. He sent Adam to cultivate the ground from which he'd been made. After he drove them out, the Lord God placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden angels and a sword that flashed in every direction. They were to prevent access to the tree of life.

Adam slept with his wife Eve and she became pregnant. She gave birth to Cain, and said, "With the Lord's help I have made a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a shepherd, while Cain was a crop farmer.

Sometime later Cain brought some of the produce he'd grown as an offering to the Lord. Abel also brought an offering: the firstborn lambs of his flock, selecting the very best parts to offer. The Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering, but he wasn't pleased with Cain and his offering, which made Cain very angry and he frowned in annoyance.

The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you so angry? Why do you look so annoyed? If you were doing what's right, then you'd be looking happy. But if you don't do what's right, then sin will be like an animal crouching outside your home, ready to pounce on you. It wants to have you, but you must be the one in control."

Later, when Cain was talking with his brother Abel they went out into the fields where Cain attacked his brother and killed him.

"Where is your brother Abel?" the Lord asked Cain.

"How should I know?" he replied. "Am I supposed to be my brother's care-giver?"

"What have you done?" the Lord asked. "Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground. Consequently you are more cursed than the ground because you soaked it with your brother's blood. When you cultivate the ground, it won't produce crops for you. You'll be always on the run, wandering all over the earth."

"My punishment is more than I can take," Cain replied. "Look! You're driving me away right now—cursing the ground and banishing me from your presence. I'm going to have to hide and always be on the run, left to wander all over the earth. Anyone who finds me is going to kill me!"

But the Lord replied, "No, Cain. Anyone who kills you will be punished seven times over." The Lord placed a mark on Cain so that no one who came across him would kill him.

So Cain left the Lord's presence and went to live in a land called Nod, east of Eden.

Cain slept with his wife and she became pregnant. She had a son named Enoch. At that time Cain was building a town, so he named it after his son Enoch.

Enoch had a son named Irad. Irad was the father of Mehujael, Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech. Lamech married two women. The first was named Adah, and the second was named Zillah. Adah had a son named Jabal. He was the father of those who live in tents and have livestock. He had a brother named Jubal; he was the father of all those who play stringed and wind instruments. Zillah also had a son. He was named Tubal-cain and he was a blacksmith, making different kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-cain's sister was named Naamah.

At one time Lamech told his wives, “Adah and Zillah, listen to me. You wives of Lamech, pay attention to what I have to say. I killed a man because he wounded me; I killed a young man because he injured me. If the sentence for killing Cain was to be punished seven times over, then if someone kills me, Lamech, the punishment should be seventy-seven times.”

Adam slept with his wife again, and she had a son and named him Seth, explaining that, “God has given me another child to replace Abel, the one Cain killed.” Later Seth had a son named Enosh, because at that time people began to worship the Lord by name.

This is the record of Adam's descendants. When God created human beings, he made them to be like him. He created them male and female, and blessed them. On the day he created them he called them “human.”

When Adam was 130, he had a son who was like him, made in his image; and he named him Seth. Adam lived another 800 years after Seth was born, and had other sons and daughters. Adam lived a total of 930 years, and then he died.

When Seth was 105, he had Enosh. Seth lived another 807 years after Enosh was born, and had other sons and daughters. Seth lived a total of 912 years, and then he died.

When Enosh was 90, he had Kenan. Enosh lived another 815 years after Kenan was born, and had other sons and daughters. Enosh lived a total of 905 years, and then he died.

When Kenan was 70, he had Mehalalel. Kenan lived another 840 years after Mehalalel was born, and had other sons and daughters. Kenan lived a total of 910 years, and then he died. When Mahalalel was 65, he had Jared. After Jared was born, Mahalalel lived another 830 years and had other sons and daughters. Mahalalel lived a total of 895 years, and then he died.

When Jared was 162, he had Enoch. After Enoch was born, Jared lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters. Jared lived a total of 962 years, and then he died.

When Enoch was 65, he had Methuselah. He had a close relationship with God. After Methuselah was born, Enoch lived another 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Enoch lived a total of 365 years. Enoch had such a close relationship with God that he didn't die, he just wasn't there anymore, because God took him.

When Methuselah was 187, he had Lamech. After Lamech was born, Methuselah lived another 782 years and had other sons and daughters. Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, and then he died.

When Lamech was 182, he had a son. He named him Noah, with the explanation, “He will provide relief for us from all the hard manual labor we need to do in cultivating the ground the Lord has cursed.” After Noah was born, Lamech lived another 595 years and had other sons and daughters. Lamech lived a total of 777 years, and then he died.

Noah was 500 before he had Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

People started to increase in number and spread out across the earth. Daughters were born to them, and the sons of God saw that these women were beautiful, and they took whichever ones they wanted.

Then the Lord said, “My life-giving Spirit will not remain in these people forever, because they are only mortal. The time they have left will be 120 years.”

There were giants on earth in those days, and also later on. They were born after the sons of God slept with the daughters of these people. Their sons became the great warriors and famous men of ancient times.

The Lord saw how terribly evil people on earth had become—every single thought in their minds was evil all the time! The Lord was sorry he'd made human beings to live on the earth; it made him very sad to think about it. So the Lord said, “I'm going to wipe out these people I created from the earth, and not only them but also the animals, the creatures that run along the ground, and the birds, because I'm sorry I made them.”

But the Lord was pleased with Noah.

This is the story of Noah and his family. Noah was a man of integrity, living a moral life among the people of his time. He had a close relationship with God. Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

God saw how corrupt the whole world had become, full of violent and lawless people. God recognized that the corruption in the world was due to everyone on earth living corrupt lives. So God told Noah, “I have decided to put an end to all people on earth because they are all violent and lawless. I myself am going to destroy all of them, along with the earth.

Build an ark out of cypress wood. Make rooms inside the ark, and coat it with tar, both inside and out. This is how to build it: the ark is to measure 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, and 30 cubits high. Make a roof for the ark, leaving a cubit-wide opening between the roof and the top of the sides. Put a door in the side of the ark, and construct three decks inside.

I myself am going to flood the earth with water that will destroy everything that breathes. Every living thing everywhere on earth will die. But I will keep my agreement with you. You are to go into the ark, taking with you your wife and your sons and their wives. Take a pair, male and female, of every kind of animal into the ark and make sure you keep them alive. The same applies to every kind of bird, livestock, and the creatures that run along the ground—a pair of every kind will come to you so they can be kept alive. Take all kinds of food with you too. Store it so you and the animals will have enough to eat.”

Noah did exactly what God ordered him to do.

The Lord told Noah, “Go into the ark with all your family. I have seen how you are a man of integrity,

living a moral life among the people of this generation. Take with you seven pairs, male and female, of every kind of clean animal, and one pair, male and female, of every kind of unclean animal. In addition take seven pairs, male and female, of all the birds, so their different kinds will survive throughout the earth. In seven days I'm going to make it rain for forty days and nights. I'm going to wipe out from the surface of the earth all the living creatures I made."

Noah did exactly what the Lord ordered him to do.

Noah was 600 when the flood waters covered the earth. Noah went into the ark, taking with him his wife and his sons and their wives, because of the flood. Clean and unclean animals, birds, and creatures that run along the ground, went into the ark with Noah. They came in pairs, male and female, just as God had told Noah. After seven days the floodwaters swept over the earth.

Noah was 600 when on the seventeenth day of the second month all the subterranean waters burst through the earth, and heavy rain poured down from the sky. Rain continued to fall on the earth for forty days and nights.

That was the actual day when Noah, his wife, and their sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth together with their three wives went into the ark. They had with them every kind of wild animals, livestock, creatures that run along the ground, and birds—everything with wings. They all came into the ark with Noah in pairs—every living thing that breathes. A male and a female of every creature entered, as God had told Noah. Then the Lord shut the door behind him.

The flood increased for forty days, lifting the ark so that it floated up from the earth. The floodwaters surged and grew deeper and deeper over the earth, but the ark floated along on the surface. Finally the water grew so deep that even the highest mountains were covered—all that could be seen was sky. The water rose so much that it was higher than the mountains by fifteen cubits. Everything living on earth died—the birds, livestock, wild animals, all creatures that run along the ground, and all the people. Everything on land that breathed, died. The Lord wiped out all life on earth—people, livestock, creatures that run along the ground, and birds. All were killed. The only ones left were Noah and those with him on the ark. The earth remained flooded for 150 days.

But God hadn't forgotten about Noah and all the wild animals and livestock with him in the ark. God sent a wind to blow over the earth, and the floodwaters started to drop. The subterranean waters were closed off, and the heavy rainfall was stopped. The floodwaters steadily receded from the earth. They had gone down so much that by 150 days after the flood began the ark grounded on the mountains of Ararat. This happened on the seventeenth day of the seventh month. The waters continued to drop so that by the first day of the tenth month the tops of mountains could be seen.

Forty days later Noah opened the window he'd made in the ark, and sent a raven out. It flew back and forth until the water on the earth had dried up. Then he sent a dove out to see if the waters had gone down enough to expose dry ground. But the dove couldn't find anywhere to land. So it came back to Noah in the ark because water was still covering the whole earth. He reached out his hand, picked up the dove, and took it back into the ark with him. He waited another seven days and sent the dove out from the ark again. When it came back to him in the evening it had a freshly-picked olive leaf in its beak, so Noah knew the floodwaters were mainly gone from the earth. Again he waited another seven days and sent the dove out again, but this time it didn't return to him.

By now Noah was 601, and by the first day of the first month, the floodwaters on the earth were gone. Noah pulled back the ark's covering and saw that the ground was drying out. By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was dry.

Then God told Noah, "Leave the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives. Let all the animals go—the birds, the wild animals, the creatures that run along the ground—so that they can breed and increase their numbers on the earth." So Noah and his wife, his sons and their wives, left the ark. All the animals, all the creatures that run along the ground, all the birds—everything that lives on land—also left, each kind leaving together.

Noah built an altar, and sacrificed some of the clean animals and birds as a burnt offering. The Lord accepted the sacrifice, and said to himself, "I won't ever again curse the ground because of human beings, even though every single thought in their minds is evil from childhood. I won't ever destroy all life again as I have just done. As long as the earth exists, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never come to an end."

God blessed Noah and his sons, and told them, "Reproduce, increase, and spread throughout the earth! All animals will be very afraid of you—this includes all the birds, all the creatures that run along the ground, and all the fish in the sea. You are in charge of them. Every living creature that moves will be food for you, as well as all the green plants. But do not eat meat with the lifeblood still in it. If your blood is shed by any animal, I will call it to account; and if your blood is shed by any person, I will call that person to account. Whoever sheds the blood of a human being will have their blood shed by human beings. For God made human beings in his image. Reproduce, increase, and spread throughout the earth—have many descendants!"

Then God told Noah and his sons who were there with him, "Listen, I'm making my agreement with you and your descendants, and with all the animals around you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals of the earth—every animal that accompanied you on the ark. In my agreement I'm promising you that I won't ever again destroy all life by means of a flood—there won't be a destructive flood like this again."

Then God said, "I'm going to give you a sign to confirm the agreement I'm making between me and you and all living creatures, an agreement that will last for all generations. I've placed my rainbow in the clouds, and this will be the sign of my agreement with you and with all life on earth. Whenever I make clouds form over the earth and the rainbow appears, it will remind me of my agreement between me and you and

every kind of living creature that floodwaters won't ever again destroy all life. I will see the rainbow in the clouds and it will remind me of the eternal agreement between God and every kind of living creature that lives on the earth."

Then God told Noah, "This is the sign of the agreement I'm making between me and every creature on earth."

Noah's sons who left the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of the Canaanites.) All the people who are spread over the world are descended from these three sons of Noah.

Noah started to cultivate the ground as a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. He drank some of the wine he'd produced, got drunk, and fell asleep in his tent, naked. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's private parts and went and told his two brothers who were outside. Shem and Japheth picked up a cloak and, holding it over their shoulders, walked in backwards and covered up their father's privates. They made sure to look the other way so they wouldn't see their father's privates.

When Noah woke up from his drunken sleep, he discovered what his youngest son had done, and said, "May Canaan be cursed! He will be the lowest kind of slave and will serve his brothers!"

Then Noah continued, "May the Lord be blessed, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave. May God give Japtheth plenty of space to accommodate his many descendants, and may they live at peace among Shem's people, and may Canaan also be his slave."

Noah lived for another 350 years after the flood. Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.

The following are the genealogies of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. They had sons born to them after the flood.

The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim. The descendants of these ancestors spread throughout the coastal areas, each group having their own language, with their families developing into different nations.

The sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca.

The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

Cush was also the father of Nimrod, who set himself up as the first tyrant on earth. He was a powerful fighter who defied the Lord; which is why there's the expression, "Like Nimrod, a powerful fighter who defied the Lord." His kingdom began in the cities of Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh, all located in the land of Shinar. From there he moved into Assyria and built the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen, which lies between Nineveh and the great city of Calah.

Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, the Anamites, the Lehabites, the Naphtuhites, the Pathrusites, the Casluhites, and the Caphtorites (ancestors of the Philistines).

Canaan was the father of Sidon, his firstborn, and of the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite tribes spread out and the territory of the Canaanites stretched from Sidon towards Gerar and all the way to Gaza, then towards Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, all the way to Lasha. These were the sons of Ham according to their tribes, languages, lands, and nation.

Shem, whose older brother was Japheth, also had sons. Shem was the forefather of all the sons of Eber.

The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

Arphaxad was the father of Shelah. Shelah was the father of Eber.

Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; the name of his brother was Joktan.

Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. These were all sons of Joktan. They lived in the land lying between Mesha to Sephar, in the hill country to the east.

These were the sons of Shem, according to their tribes, languages, lands, and nations.

These were all the tribes descended from Noah's sons, according to their genealogies and national groups. From these ancestors the different nations of the earth spread around the world after the flood.

At that time the whole world spoke just one language and used words with the same meaning. As they moved east they discovered a plain in the land of Shinar so they settled there.

They said to one another, "Come on, let's make some bricks and bake them with fire." (They used brick instead of stone, and tar instead of cement). Then they said, "Now let's build a city for ourselves with a tower whose top reaches the heavens. That way we'll gain a great reputation and we won't end up being scattered all over the world."

But the Lord came down to take a look at the city and the tower that the people were building. The Lord said, "Look! These people are united and they all speak one language. If this is what they can do now when they're just getting started, nothing will be impossible for them when they all put their minds to it! We need to go down and mix up their language and make it confused so they won't be able to understand what they're saying to one other."

The Lord sent them away from there and scattered them all over the world, and they gave up building the city. That's why it was called Babel, because the Lord made the language of the world confused.

The following is the genealogy of Shem. When Shem was 100, he had Arphaxad. This was two years after the flood. Shem lived another 500 years after Arphaxad was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Arphaxad was 35, he had Shelah. Arphaxad lived another 403 years after Shelah was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Shelah was 30, he had Eber. Shelah lived another 403 years after Eber was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Eber was 34, he had Peleg. Eber lived another 430 years after Peleg was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Peleg was 30, he had Reu. Peleg lived another 209 years after Reu was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Reu was 32, he had Serug. Reu lived another 207 years after Serug was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Serug was 30, he had Nahor. Serug lived another 200 years after Nahor was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Nahor was 29, he had Terah. Nahor lived another 119 years after Terah was born and had other sons and daughters.

When Terah was 70, he had Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

The following is the genealogy of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. However, Haran died while his father, Terah, was still alive, in Ur of the Chaldeans, the land of his birth. Abram and Nahor both got married. Abram's wife was named Sarai, and Nahor's wife was named Milcah. (She was the daughter of Haran, who was the father of both Milcah and Iscah). Sarai wasn't able to become pregnant and so had no children.

Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot (who was the son of Haran), his daughter-in-law Sarai (the wife of his son Abram), and left Ur of the Chaldeans to move to the land of Canaan. They got as far as Haran and settled there. Terah lived for 205 years and died in Haran.

The Lord told Abram, “Leave your country, your relatives, your family home, and travel to the land I'm going to show you. I will make you the ancestor of a great nation and I will bless you. I will make sure you have a great reputation and that you are a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you; I will curse those who curse you. Everyone on earth will be blessed through you.”

So Abram left following the Lord's instructions, and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 when he left Haran. With him went his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, together with all the possessions they had collected and the people that had joined them in Haran. They left for the land of Canaan.

When they arrived there, Abram traveled on through the land as far as a place called Shechem, stopping at the oak tree of Moreh. At that time the land was occupied by Canaanites.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “I'm going to give this land to your descendants.” So Abram built an altar to the Lord there because that was where the Lord appeared to him. Then he moved on to the hill country east of Bethel and set up camp there. Bethel was to the west and Ai to the east. He built an altar to the Lord there and worshiped him. After that he went on his way, heading towards the Negev.

But the land had been hit by famine. So Abram continued on to Egypt, planning to live there because the famine was so bad. As he approached Egypt and was about to cross the border, he said to his wife Sarai, “Look, I know what a beautiful woman you are. When the Egyptians see you, they'll say, ‘She's his wife,’ and they'll kill me but not you! Tell them you're my sister so I'll be treated well because of you, and my life will be spared for your sake.”

When Abram arrived in Egypt, the people there saw how beautiful Sarai was. Pharaoh's officials also noticed and spoke positively about her to Pharaoh. So Sarai was taken to his palace to become one of his wives. Pharaoh treated Abram well because of her, giving him sheep and cattle, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

But the Lord caused Pharaoh and the people in his palace to suffer from terrible diseases because of Sarai, Abram's wife. So Pharaoh ordered Abram brought to him and said, “What have you done to me? Why didn't you tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She's my sister,’ and let me take her to become one of my wives? So here's your wife! Take her and leave!”

Pharaoh ordered his guards to expel him and his wife from the country, along with everyone with them and all their possessions.

So Abram left Egypt and went back into the Negev along with Sarai, Lot, and everyone with them, as well as all their possessions. Abram was very rich, having many herds of livestock and a great deal of silver and gold. He left the Negev and traveled in stages to Bethel, back to the place where he'd camped before, between Bethel and Ai. This was where he'd first built an altar. He worshiped the Lord there as he had done previously.

Lot, who was traveling with Abram, also had many flocks, herds, and tents, so much so that the available land couldn't support both of them—they had so much livestock they couldn't stay together anymore. Abram's and Lot's herdsmen were arguing, and in addition the Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

So Abram said to Lot, “Please let's not have arguments between us, or between our herdsmen, because we're family. You see all this land that's available right in front of you? We have to split up. If you choose to go to the left, I'll go to the right. If you choose to go to the right, I'll go to the left.”

Lot looked over the whole Jordan valley towards Zoar, and saw that it was well-watered, looking like the Garden of Eden, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) So Lot chose the whole Jordan valley and went east, and the two separated from each other. Abram went to live in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled down among the towns in the valley, setting up his tents near Sodom. (The people of Sodom were very wicked, committing terrible sins that offended the Lord.)

After separating from Lot, the Lord told Abram, “Look around you from where you're standing, to the north, south, east, and west. I'm giving all this land you see to you and your descendants forever. You will have so many descendants that they'll be like the dust of the earth. If anyone could count dust then they could count the number of your descendants! Go and walk through the whole land in all directions because I'm giving it to you.”

So Abram went to live at Hebron, setting up his tents among the oaks at Mamre, where he built an altar to the Lord.

At that time Amraphel was king of Shinar, and he allied himself with Arioch, king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and Tidal, king of Goiim. They attacked Bera, king of Sodom, Birsha, king of Gomorrah, Shinab, king of Admah, Shemeber, king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (otherwise known as Zoar).

All these in the second group joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (the Dead Sea valley). They had been under the rule of Chedorlaomer for twelve years, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled against him. In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer invaded, along with the kings in his alliance. They defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham, the Emites in Shaveh-kiriathaim, and the Horites in their hill country of Seir, all the way to El-paran, near the desert. Then they swung back through and attacked En-mishpat (otherwise known as Kadesh) and conquered the whole country belonging to the Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who lived in Hazazon-tamar.

Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (otherwise known as Zoar) marched out and prepared for battle in the Valley of Siddim. They fought Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, Tidal, king of Goiim, Amraphel, king of Shinar, and Arioch, king of Ellasar—four kings on one side against five on the other.

There were many tar pits in the Valley of Siddim, and as the defeated kings of Sodom and Gomorrah ran away, some of their men fell into them while the rest ran to the hills. The invaders took from Sodom and Gomorrah all their possessions and food and left. They also captured Lot, Abram's nephew, and his possessions, because he was living in Sodom. But one of those captured escaped and went and told Abram the Hebrew what had happened. Abram was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, whose brothers were Eshcol and Aner. All of them were Abram's allies.

When Abram found out that his nephew had been captured, he called together 318 fighting men who had been born in his household and chased after them all the way to Dan. There he divided his men into groups and attacked at night, defeating the enemy and chasing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. Abram recovered all that had been taken, including Lot and his possessions, and also brought back the women and others who had been captured.

When Abram returned after defeating Chedorlaomer and his allies, the king of Sodom came out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (or Valley of the King). Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of the Most High God. He blessed Abram, telling him, “May Abram be blessed by the Most High God, Creator of heaven and earth. May the Most High God be praised, who handed your enemies over to you.” Then Abram gave Melchizedek one tenth of everything.

The king of Sodom told Abram, “Let me have the people back, and you can keep everything else for yourself.”

But Abram replied to the king of Sodom, “I raise my hand, making a solemn promise to the Lord, the Most High God, Creator of heaven and earth, that I refuse to take anything belonging to you, not a single thread or a sandal strap. Otherwise you might claim, ‘It was me who made Abram rich!’ I won't take anything except what my men have eaten, and the share for those who accompanied me—Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. Let them have their share.”

After all this had happened, God spoke to Abram in a vision, telling him, “Don't be afraid, Abram! I am your protector, and your truly great reward!”

But Abram replied, “Lord God, what good is whatever you give me? I don't have any children, and the heir to all that I have is Eliezer of Damascus.” Abram went on to complain, “Look! You haven't given me any children, so a servant from my household has to be my heir!”

But then the Lord told him, “This man won't be your heir. Your heir will be your very own son.”

The Lord took Abram outside and said to him, “Look up at the sky. See if you can count the stars! That's how many descendants you will have!”

Abram trusted what the Lord said, and so the Lord counted Abram as being in a right relationship with him.

The Lord also told him, “I am the Lord, who led you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land for you to own.”

“But Lord God, how can I be certain that I will own it?” Abram asked.

The Lord told him, “Bring me a cow, a goat, and a ram, all of them three years old, together with a dove and a young pigeon.” So Abram took and killed the three animals. Then he cut them in half, and placed each half opposite the other. However, he didn't cut the birds in half. When vultures flew down on the carcasses, Abram frightened them off.

As the sun went down, a deep sleep came over Abram, and at the same time a dense and terrifying darkness fell on him. The Lord explained to Abram, “You can be absolutely sure that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be slaves and mistreated for 400 years. However, I will punish the nation that makes them slaves, and later on they will leave, taking many valuable possessions with them. But as for you, you will die in peace and be buried, having lived a good long life. Four generations later your descendants will come back here to live, because right now the sins of the Amorites have not reached their full extent.”

After the sun set and it grew dark, suddenly a smoking furnace and a flaming torch appeared and passed between the halves of the animal carcasses. This is how the Lord made an agreement with Abram that day and promised him, “I'm giving this land to your descendants. It extends from the Wadi of Egypt to the great Euphrates River, and includes the territory of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.”

Sarai, Abram's wife, hadn't been able to have any children for him. However, she owned a female Egypt-

ian slave named Hagar, so Sarai said to Abram, “Please listen to me. The Lord hasn't let me have any children. So please go and sleep with my slave. Maybe I can have a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai had suggested. So Sarai, Abram's wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband as his wife. Abram had been living in the land of Canaan for ten years when this happened.

Abram slept with Hagar and she became pregnant. When she realized she was pregnant, she treated her mistress with contempt.

Then Sarai complained to Abram, “What I'm suffering is all your doing! I gave you my servant to sleep with, and now that she knows she's pregnant, she treats me with contempt. May the Lord decide who's at fault —you or me!”

“Listen, she's your slave!” Abram replied. “You can do whatever you want to her.” Sarai treated Hagar so badly that she ran away.

The angel of the Lord met Hagar at a spring in the desert—the spring on the road to Shur.

He asked her, “Hagar, Sarai's slave—where have you come from, and where are you going?”

“I'm running away from my mistress Sarai,” she replied.

“Go back to your mistress and do what she tells you,” the angel of the Lord told her. Then he continued, “I will give you many, many descendants—in fact they'll be so many they can't be counted.” The angel of the Lord went on to tell her: “Listen! You're pregnant, and you will have a son. You are to name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard how you've suffered. He'll be a wild donkey kind of man—he will fight with everyone, and everyone will fight with him. He will forever be fighting with his relatives.”

From then on Hagar called the Lord who spoke to her, “You are the God who sees me,” because she said, “Here I saw the one who sees me.” That's why the well is called “the Well of the Living One who Sees Me.” It's still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

Hagar gave birth to a son for Abram. Abram named his son Ishmael. Abram was 86 when Hagar had Ishmael.

When Abram was 99, the Lord appeared to him and told him, “I am God Almighty. Live in my presence and don't do wrong. I will make my agreement between me and you, and I will give you many, many descendants.”

Abram bowed down with his face to the ground, and God told him, “Listen! This is the agreement I'm making with you. You will be the father of many nations, so your name won't be Abram any longer. Instead, your name will be Abraham because I'm going to make you the father of many nations. I will make sure you have a large number of descendants. They will become many nations, and some of their kings will also come from your line. I promise to continue my agreement with you, and with your descendants who come after you, for generations to come. This is an eternal agreement. I will always be your God, and the God of your descendants. I will give you and your descendants the whole country of Canaan—where you've been living as a foreigner—as land to own forever, and I will be their God.”

Then God told Abraham, “Your part is to keep my agreement—you and your descendants for generations to come. This is my agreement with you and your descendants who come after you, the agreement you are to keep: every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to circumcise your foreskin, and this will be the sign of the agreement between me and you. From now and for all generations to come every male among you who is eight days old must be circumcised. This includes not only your sons but also those born in your household or bought from foreigners. You must circumcise those born in your household or bought from foreigners as a sign in your bodies of my eternal agreement. Any uncircumcised male who refuses circumcision will be excluded from his people because he has broken my agreement.”

Then God told Abraham, “Now about Sarai your wife. Don't call her Sarai any longer. Instead, her name will be Sarah. I will bless her and I promise to give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will become the mother of nations, and kings will be among her descendants.”

Abraham bowed down with his face to the ground. But inside he was laughing, asking himself, “How on earth could I have a son at the age of one hundred? How could Sarah have a child when she is ninety?”

Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael always live under your blessing!”

“No, it's your wife Sarah who is going to have a son for you!” God replied. “You are to call him Isaac. I will keep my agreement with him and his descendants as an eternal agreement. Now about Ishmael. I heard what you said, and I will also bless him. I will make sure he has a great many descendants. He will be the father of twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. But it's with Isaac that I will keep my agreement, the son Sarah will give birth to about this time next year.” When God had finished speaking with Abraham he left him.

That day Abraham circumcised his son Ishmael as well as all those born in his household or purchased, in fact every male among the members of Abraham's household, just as God had told him. Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised, and his son Ishmael was thirteen. Both Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on the same day. All the males in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or purchased from foreigners, were circumcised with him.

The Lord appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent as the day became really hot. He looked up and all of a sudden he saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran over to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

He said, “Sir, if you please, don't continue your journey without spending some time here with me, your servant. Let me have some water brought so you can wash your feet and rest under the tree. Also let me bring some food so you can get your strength back before you go on your way, now that you've come to visit me here.”

“That would be fine,” they answered. “Please do as you've suggested.”

Abraham hurried back to the tent and told Sarah, “Quick! Make some bread using three large measures of the best flour. Knead the dough and bake the bread.” Then Abraham ran to the cattle herd and chose a good, young calf and gave it to his servant who quickly killed and cooked it. Then he took some yogurt, milk, and the cooked meat, and placed the food in front of them. He stood nearby under a tree while they ate.

“Where is your wife Sarah?” they asked him.

“Over there, inside the tent,” he replied.

Then one said, “I promise you that I will come back to visit you about this time next year, and your wife Sarah will have a son.” Sarah was listening, hiding just inside the entrance to the tent behind him.

Abraham and Sarah were old, getting on in years. Sarah was well past the age of having children. Sarah was laughing inside, saying to herself, “Now that I'm old and worn out, how would I experience pleasure? My husband is old too!”

The Lord asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and ask, ‘How could it possibly be true that I'll have a child now I'm so old?’ Is anything too difficult for the Lord to do? I will come back next year when I said I would, in the spring, and Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah denied it because she was afraid, claiming, “I didn't laugh.”

“Yes, you did laugh,” the Lord replied.

Then the men left. They looked down on Sodom and headed in that direction. Abraham accompanied them part of the way.

Then the Lord said, “Should I keep from Abraham what I'm going to do? Abraham will definitely become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations on earth will be blessed through him. I've chosen him so that he will teach his sons and their families to follow the way of the Lord by doing what is right and good, so that I, the Lord, can do for Abraham what I promised.”

Then the Lord said, “There are many complaints made against Sodom and Gomorrah because they sin so blatantly. I'm going to see if these complaints that have reached me are completely true. I'll know if they're not.”

The two men turned and went towards Sodom, but the Lord stayed there with Abraham.

Abraham came to him and asked: “Are you really going to wipe out the good people along with the wicked? What if there are fifty good people in the town? Are you still going to wipe it out despite the fifty good people there? No, you can't do something like that! You can't kill the good with the wicked, otherwise you would be treating the good and the wicked in the same way. You can't do that! Isn't the Judge of all the earth going to do the right thing?”

“If I find fifty good people in Sodom, I'll spare the whole town because of them,” the Lord replied.

“Since I've started, let me go on speaking to my Lord, even though I'm nothing but dust and ashes,” Abraham continued. “What if there are forty-five good people, just five less? Are you still going to wipe out the whole town just because there are five fewer people?”

“I won't destroy it if I find forty-five,” the Lord replied.

Abraham spoke up again and he asked the Lord, “What if only forty can be found?”

“I won't do it for the sake of the forty,” the Lord replied.

“My Lord, please don't get angry with me,” Abraham went on. “Let me ask this—what if only thirty were found?”

“I won't do it if I find thirty,” the Lord replied.

“I admit I've been very bold to speak to my Lord like this,” Abraham said. “What if only twenty are found there?”

“I won't do it for the sake of the twenty,” the Lord replied.

“Please don't get angry with me, my Lord,” Abraham said. “Just let me ask one more thing. What if only ten are found there?”

“I won't destroy it for the sake of the ten,” the Lord replied.

The Lord left once he had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham went home.

The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening. Lot happened to be sitting at the entrance to Sodom, and when he saw them he stood up to meet them, and bowed low with his face to the ground.

“Sirs, please come and stay with me for the night,” he said. “You can wash your feet and then be on your way early in the morning.”

They replied, “No, it's fine. We'll spend the night here in the square.”

But Lot insisted, and they went with him to his house. He made them a meal and baked bread for them to eat. But they hadn't even gone to bed before the men of Sodom, young and old, from every part of town, came and surrounded the house. They shouted out to Lot, “Where are the men who came to stay with you tonight? Bring them out here to us so we can have sex with them.”

Lot went out to talk to them in the doorway, closing the door behind him.

“My friends, please don't do such an evil thing! Listen, I've got two virgin daughters. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do to them whatever you want, but please don't do anything to these men. It's my responsibility to look after them.”

“Out of our way!” they shouted. “Who do you think you are, coming to live here and now trying to judge us? We'll do even worse things to you than we were going to do to these men!” They rushed forward at Lot and tried to break down the door.

But the men inside reached out and grabbed Lot, dragged him inside, and slammed the door shut. Then they made all the men in the doorway, young and old, suddenly go blind so they couldn't find the door.

The two men asked Lot, “Is there anyone else here who's part of your family—sons-in-law, or sons or daughters, or anyone else in the town? If there are, make sure they leave, because we are about to destroy this place. The complaints that have reached the Lord about its people have become so bad that he has sent us to destroy it.”

Lot went immediately to speak to the men who were engaged to marry his daughters. “Get up quickly and leave,” he said, “because the Lord is about to destroy the town!” But they thought it was just a joke.

At dawn, the angels begged Lot to be quick, telling him, “Hurry up! Leave right now with your wife and

your two daughters here, otherwise you'll be wiped out when the city is punished." But Lot hesitated. The men grabbed his hand, and those of his wife and two daughters, and dragged them along, leaving them outside the town. The Lord was kind to them to do this.

As soon as they were outside, one of the men said, "Run for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the valley! Run to the mountains otherwise you'll be destroyed!"

"Please sir, not that!" Lot replied. "If you don't mind, since you have already been so kind to me by saving my life, don't make me run to the mountains—I just can't make it. The destruction will overtake me and I'll die! Look, there's a town nearby that's close enough to run to, and it's so small. Please let me run there—it's really very small. It would save my life."

"Fine—I'll do as you ask," he replied. "I won't destroy this town you've mentioned. But hurry up and run there quickly, because I can't do anything until you get there." (This is why the town was called Zoar.)

The sun had already risen by the time Lot reached Zoar. Then the Lord rained down fire and burning sulfur from the sky on Sodom and Gomorrah. He completely destroyed the towns and all their inhabitants, the whole valley and everything growing there. But Lot's wife, who was lagging behind, looked back, and she turned into a pillar of salt.

Abraham got up early the next morning and went back to where he had stood before the Lord. He looked down at Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole valley floor, and saw the land burning, sending up smoke like from a furnace.

When God destroyed the towns of the valley he didn't forget the promise he made Abraham, and he saved Lot from the destruction of the towns where Lot was living.

Lot was afraid to stay in Zoar, so he left town and went to live in a cave in the mountains with his two daughters. Sometime later the older daughter said to the younger one, "Our father is growing old, and there's no men left to give us children like everyone does. Come on, let's get our father drunk with wine and sleep with him so we can keep his family line going."

So they got their father drunk with wine that night. The older daughter went and slept with him, and he didn't notice when she lay down or when she got up.

The next day the older daughter said to the younger one, "Last night I slept with our father. Let's get him drunk with wine again tonight and you can go and sleep with him so we can keep his family line going."

So once again that night they got their father drunk with wine and the younger daughter went and slept with him, and he didn't notice when she lay down or when she got up.

This is how both Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she called him Moab. He is the ancestor of the Moabites of today. The younger daughter had a son too, and she called him Ben-ammi. He is the ancestor of the Ammonites of today.

Abraham traveled towards the Negev, staying between Kadesh and Shur. After that he moved on to live in Gerar. During his time there, when Abraham told people about his wife Sarah, he said, "She's my sister." So Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and took her to become one of his wives.

But God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and told him, "Listen! You're going to die because the woman you've taken is already married—she has a husband."

Abimelech hadn't touched Sarah, and he asked, "Lord, do you kill good people? Didn't Abraham tell me himself, 'She's my sister,' and didn't Sarah also say, 'He's my brother'? I did this in all innocence—my conscience is clear!"

God told him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this in all innocence, so I prevented you from sinning against me. That's why I didn't let you touch her. Send the man's wife back to him. He's a prophet. He will pray for you, and you will live. But if you don't send her back to him, you should know for sure that you and all your family will die."

Abimelech got up early in the morning and called all his servants together. He explained everything that had happened, and they were all terrified. Then Abimelech summoned Abraham and asked him "What have you done to us? How have I wronged you that you should treat me like this, bringing this terrible sin on me and my kingdom? You've done things to me that no one should ever do!"

Then Abimelech asked Abraham "What were you thinking when you did this?"

"Well, I thought to myself, 'Nobody respects God in this place. They'll kill me just to get my wife,'" Abraham replied. "Anyway, she really is my sister, the daughter of my father but not my mother, and I married her. Since my God made me move far away from my family home, I told her, 'If you really love me, then wherever you go with me you must tell people: He's my brother.'"

Then Abimelech gave Abraham gifts of sheep, cattle, and male and female slaves, and returned his wife Sarah to him. Abimelech told him, "Look over my land. You can choose to live anywhere you like." Abimelech also told Sarah, "Notice that I'm giving your brother a thousand pieces of silver. This is to compensate you for the wrong done to you in the eyes of everyone with you, and to make sure that your name is publicly cleared."

Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife, and his female slaves, so that they could have children again. For the Lord had made all the women unable to have children because Abraham's wife, Sarah, had been taken.

The Lord came to help Sarah as he'd said he would. The Lord did for Sarah what he'd promised. She became pregnant and had a son for Abraham when he was old, at the exact time God said she would. Abraham named their son Isaac. Abraham circumcised him when Isaac was eight days old, following God's command. Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born.

Sarah declared, "God has made me laugh, and all those who hear about this will laugh with me." She also said, "Would anyone have announced to Abraham that Sarah was going to have children to nurse? But now I have had a son for Abraham even when he was old!"

The baby grew up, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a large feast. But Sarah noticed

that Ishmael, Hagar the Egyptian's son she'd had for Abraham, was making fun of Isaac. So she went to Abraham and told him, “You have to get rid of this slave woman and this son of hers! A slave woman's son is not going to be one of your heirs and inherit together with my son Isaac!”

Abraham felt very bad about it because Ishmael was his son. But God told Abraham, “Don't feel bad about the boy and the slave woman. Do whatever Sarah tells you, because it's through Isaac that your descendants will be counted. Don't worry—I will also make the son of the slave woman into a nation because he's your son.”

Abraham got up early the next morning. He packed up some food and a skin of water which he gave to Hagar, putting them on her shoulder. Then he sent her and the boy away. She left and wandered through the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water ran out, she left the boy under one of the bushes. She went and sat down some way off, a few hundred yards away, saying, “I can't bear to watch my son die!” As she sat down she burst into tears.

God heard the boy's cries, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and asked her, “What's the matter, Hagar? Don't be afraid! God has heard the boy crying from where he is. Get up, go over and help the boy up, and encourage him, for I will make him into a great nation.”

God opened her eyes and she saw a well nearby. She went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

God blessed Ishmael and he grew up, living in the desert. He became a skilled archer. He lived in the Desert of Paran. His mother chose a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Around this time Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, to see Abraham. “God blesses you in everything you do,” Abimelech said. “So swear to me right here and now that you won't betray me, my children, or my descendants. In the same way I've proved I'm trustworthy to you, do the same to me and my country where you're currently living.”

“I so swear,” Abraham replied. Then Abraham raised an issue with Abimelech of a well that Abimelech's servants had taken by force.

“I don't know who did this, and you didn't mention it before. I haven't heard anything about it until today,” Abimelech responded.

Then Abraham gave Abimelech some of his sheep and cattle, and the two of them made an agreement. Abraham also separated out seven female lambs from the flock.

“What are these seven female lambs for that you've separated from the flock?” Abimelech asked.

“I'm giving you these seven female lambs in return for your admission that I dug this well,” Abraham replied. That's why he called the place Beersheba, because the two of them swore an oath to each other.

After making the agreement at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army left and went home to the country of the Philistines. Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and there he worshiped the Lord, the Eternal God. Abraham lived in the country of the Philistines for a long time.

Sometime later God tested Abraham. He called out to him, “Abraham!”

“I'm here,” Abraham replied.

God told him, “Go with your son, your only son, the one you love, to the land of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I'll tell you about.”

Abraham got up early in the morning and saddled up his donkey. He took two servants and Isaac with him and went to cut firewood for the burnt offering. Then he left with them to go to the place God had told him about.

After traveling for three days Abraham could see the place in the distance. He told his servants, “Wait here with the donkey while I go with the boy and worship God. Then we'll return.”

Abraham had Isaac carry the wood for the burnt offering, while he carried the fire and the knife, and they walked up together.

Isaac said to Abraham, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“Well, we have the fire and the wood, but where's the lamb for the burnt offering?” Isaac asked.

“God will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son,” Abraham replied, and they went on walking up together.

When they arrived at the place where God had told him to go, Abraham built an altar and placed the wood on it. Then he bound his son Isaac and placed him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham picked up the knife, ready to slaughter his son.

But the angel of the Lord shouted to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

“Yes, I'm here,” he replied.

The angel said, “Don't touch the boy! Don't do anything to him, because now I know that you truly do what God tells you. You didn't refuse to give me your son, your only son.”

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught by its horns in some bushes. He brought the ram over and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son. Abraham called the place “The Lord will Provide.” That's still a saying people use today: “the Lord will provide on his mountain.”

The angel of the Lord shouted again to Abraham from heaven, “I swear by myself, says the Lord, that because you have done this and didn't refuse to give me your son, your only son, you can be sure that I will bless you and give you many descendants. They will be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sand of the seashore, and they will conquer their enemies. All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your descendants because you did what I told you.”

Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they went back together to Beersheba where Abraham was living.

Sometime later, Abraham was told, “Milcah has had sons for your brother Nahor.” Uz was the firstborn, then his brother Buz, Kemuel (who became the ancestor of Arameans), Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel. (Bethuel was Rebekah's father.) Milcah had these eight sons for Abraham's brother Nahor. In addition, Reumah his concubine had Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

Sarah lived to be 127, and then she died at Kiriath-arba (or Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Abraham went in to mourn her death and to weep over her.

Then Abraham got up from beside his wife's body and went to talk with the leaders of the Hittites. “I am a foreigner, a stranger living among you,” he said. “Please let me buy a burial site so I can bury my dead wife.”

The Hittites answered Abraham, telling him, “Listen, my lord, you are a highly-respected prince among us. Choose the very best of our burial sites to bury your dead. None of us will say no to you.”

Abraham got up and bowed low before the Hittites, the local people, and said to them, “If you agree to help me bury my dead, listen to my proposal. Could you please ask Ephron, son of Zohar, to sell me the cave of Machpelah that belongs to him, down at the end of his field. I'm willing to pay him the full price here in your presence so I can have my own burial site.”

Ephron the Hittite was sitting there among his people. He replied to Abraham in the presence of the Hittites who were there at the town gate. “No, my lord,” he said. “Please listen to me. I give you the field and the cave that is there. I give it to you and my people are my witnesses. Please go and bury your dead.”

Abraham bowed low before the local people, and said to Ephron so everyone could hear, “Please listen to me. I will pay the price for the field. Take the money and let me go and bury my dead there.”

Ephron replied to Abraham, telling him, “My lord, please listen to me. The land is worth four hundred pieces of silver. But what's that between us? Go and bury your dead.”

Abraham accepted Ephron's offer. Abraham weighed out and gave to Ephron the four hundred pieces of silver he'd mentioned, using the standard weights used by merchants, and with the Hittites acting as witnesses.

So the property was legally transferred. It comprised Ephron's field in Machpelah near Mamre, both the field and the cave there, as well as all the trees in the field, and all the area up to the existing boundaries. This all became Abraham's property, and the transaction was witnessed by the Hittites who were there at the town gate.

Then Abraham went and buried Sarah his wife in the cave in the field at Machpelah near Mamre (or Hebron) in the land of Canaan. Ownership of the field and the cave there was transferred from the Hittites to Abraham to serve as his burial place.

Abraham by now was old, really old, and the Lord had blessed him in every possible way. At that time Abraham told his oldest servant who was in charge of his whole household, “Put your hand under my thigh, and swear an oath by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you won't arrange for my son to marry any daughter of the these Canaanite people that I'm living among. Instead, go to my homeland where my relatives live, and find a wife there for my son Isaac.”

“What if the woman refuses to come back with me to this country?” the servant asked. “Should I take your son back to the country you came from?”

“No, you mustn't take my son back there,” Abraham replied. “The Lord, the God of heaven, took me from my family home and my own country. He spoke to me and swore an oath to me in which he promised, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ He is the one who will send his angel ahead of you so that you can find a wife there for my son. However, if the woman refuses to return here with you, then you are released from this oath. But make sure you don't take my son back there.”

The servant put his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to do as he had been told. Then the servant arranged for ten of his master's camels to carry all kinds of valuable gifts from Abraham and left for the town of Nahor in Aram-naharaim. Arriving in the evening, he had the camels kneel down by the spring that was outside the town. This was the time when women went out to fetch water.

He prayed, “Lord, the God of my master Abraham, please let me be successful today, and please show your faithfulness to my master Abraham. Look, I'm standing here beside this spring, and the young women of the town are coming to get water. May it happen like this. The young woman that I ask, ‘Please hold your water jar so I can have a drink,’ and she replies, ‘Please drink, and I'll give your camels water too’ —may she be the one you've chosen as a wife for your servant Isaac. This way I'll know that you've shown your faithfulness to my master.”

He hadn't even finished praying when he saw Rebekah coming to get water, carrying her water jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milkah. Milkah was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. She was very beautiful, a virgin—no one had slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came back up. The servant ran over to meet her and asked, “Please let me drink a few sips of water from your jar.”

“Please drink, my lord,” she replied. She quickly lifted the jar down from her shoulder and held it for him to drink. After she finished giving him a drink, she said, “Let me get water for your camels too until they've had enough.”

She quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran back to the spring to get more water. She brought enough for all his camels.

The man observed her in silence to see if the Lord had made his journey successful or not. Once the camels had finished drinking, he gave her a gold nose-ring and two heavy gold bracelets for her wrists.

Then he asked her, “Whose daughter are you? Also could you tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?”

She replied, “I'm the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor.” Then she added, “We have plenty of straw and food for the camels, and yes, we have room for you to spend the night.”

The man kneeled down and bowed in worship to the Lord. “Thank you Lord, the God of my master Abraham,” he prayed. “You have not forgotten your commitment and faithfulness to my master. And Lord, you have led me directly to the home of my master's relatives!”

She ran to her mother's house and told her family what had happened. Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he ran out to meet the man who had remained at the spring. He'd noticed the nose-ring and the bracelets she was wearing, and he'd heard his sister Rebekah explaining, “This is what the man told me.” When he arrived the man was still there, standing with his camels beside the spring.

“Please come home with me, you who are blessed by the Lord,” said Laban. “What are you standing out here for? I've got a room at home ready for you, and a place for the camels to stay.”

So the man went home with him. Laban unloaded the camels and gave them straw and food to eat. He also provided water for the man to wash his feet, as well as for the men who were with him. Then Laban had food brought in.

But the man told him, “I'm not going to eat until I've explained why I'm here.”

“Please explain,” Laban replied.

“I'm Abraham's servant,” the man began. “The Lord has blessed my master so much, and now he is a wealthy and powerful man. The Lord has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, male and female servants, and camels and donkeys. His wife Sarah has had a son for my master even in her old age, and my master has given him everything he owns. My master made me swear an oath, saying, ‘You must not arrange for my son to marry any daughter of the Canaanite people in whose land I'm living. Instead, go to my family home where my relatives live, and find a wife there for my son Isaac.’

I said to my master, ‘What if the woman refuses to come back with me?’

He told me, ‘The Lord, in whose presence I have lived my life, will send his angel with you, and he will make your journey successful—you will find a wife for my son from my relatives, from my father's family. You will be released from the oath you swear to me if, when you go to my family, they refuse to let her return with you.’

Today when I arrived at the spring, I prayed, Lord, God of my master Abraham, please let the journey I have taken be successful. Look, I'm standing here beside this spring. May it happen like this. If a young woman comes to get water, and I say, ‘Please give me a few sips of water to drink,’ and she says to me, ‘Please drink, and I'll get water for your camels too’ —may she be the one you've chosen as a wife for your servant Isaac.”

“I hadn't even finished praying silently when I saw Rebekah coming to get water, carrying her water jar on her shoulder. She went down to the spring to get water, and I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ She quickly lifted the jar down from her shoulder and she said, ‘Please drink, and I'll get water for your camels too.’ So I drank, and she got water for the camels.

I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She replied, ‘I'm the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah and Nahor.’ So I put the ring in her nose, and the bracelets on her wrists.

Then I kneeled down and bowed in worship to the Lord. I thanked the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, for he led me directly to find my master's niece for his son. So please tell me now, will you show commitment and faithfulness to my master? Please tell me yes or no so I can decide what to do next.”

Laban and Bethuel replied, “Clearly all this is from the Lord, so we can't argue one way or the other. Rebekah's here, you can take her and leave. She can become the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has decided.”

As soon as Abraham's servant heard their decision, he bowed down in worship to the Lord. Then he unpacked silver and gold jewelry and expensive clothes and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave valuable presents to her brother and her mother. He and the men with him ate and drank, and spent the night there. When they got up in the morning, he said, “Let me leave now and go home to my master.”

But her brother and her mother said, “Let her stay with us for another ten days or so. She can leave after that.”

“Please don't delay me,” he told them. “The Lord has made my journey successful, so let me leave and go back to my master.”

“Let's call Rebekah and find out what she wants to do,” they suggested.

They called Rebekah in and asked her, “Do you want to go with this man now?”

“Yes, I'll go,” she replied.

So they let Laban's sister Rebekah leave with Abraham's servant and his men, together with the woman who had nursed her as a child. They asked a blessing on her, saying, “Our dear sister, may you become the mother to thousands and thousands of descendants, and may they conquer their enemies.” Then Rebekah and her servant girls got on the camels. They followed Abraham's servant and left.

Meanwhile Isaac, who was living in the Negev, had just come back from Beer-lahai-roi. He went out into the fields one evening to think things over. He looked into the distance and saw camels coming.

Rebekah was also keeping a look out. When she saw Isaac, she got down from her camel. She asked the servant, “Who is this walking through the fields to meet us?”

“He's my master, Isaac,” he replied. So she put on her veil to cover herself.

The servant told Isaac everything he'd done. Isaac took Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and he married her. He loved her, and she brought him comfort after his grief over his mother's death.

Abraham married another wife; her name was Keturah. She had the following sons: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites, and the Leummites. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. These were all descendants of Keturah.

Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. But while he was still alive, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them to live in the east, well away from Isaac.

Abraham lived to be 175 when he breathed his last and died at a good old age. He had lived a full life, and

now he joined his forefathers in death. His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field that had belonged to Ephron, son of Zohar, the Hittite. This was the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. Abraham was buried there with his wife Sarah. After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who was living near Beer-lahai-roi.

This is the genealogy of Abraham's son Ishmael. His mother Hagar was Sarah's Egyptian slave. These were the names of the sons of Ishmael according to their family genealogy: Nebaioth (firstborn), Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were the sons of Ishmael, and these became the names of the places where they lived and camped—the twelve family rulers of their tribes. Ishmael lived to be 137. Then he breathed his last and died, and joined his forefathers in death. Ishmael's descendants inhabited the region from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt in the direction of Asshur. They were forever fighting with one other.

The following is the genealogy of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham was the father of Isaac. When Isaac was 40 he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan-aram and the sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac prayed to the Lord for help on behalf of his wife because she couldn't have children. The Lord answered his prayer and she became pregnant. The twin babies inside her struggled with each other. So she asked the Lord, “Why is this happening to me?”

“You have two nations inside you,” the Lord replied. “You're going to give birth to two peoples who will compete against each other. One will be stronger than the other; the older one will be the servant of the younger one.”

When the time came she gave birth to twins. The first baby to be born was red, and covered with hair like a coat. So they named him Esau. Then his twin brother was born, holding on to Esau's heel. So he was named Jacob. Isaac was 60 when they were born.

The boys grew up and Esau became a skilled hunter, at home in the countryside. Jacob was quiet and liked to stay at home in the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he brought him tasty wild game to eat, while Rebekah loved Jacob.

One day Jacob was cooking some stew when Esau got back from the countryside, tired out and starving hungry. “Give me some of that red stew,” Esau told Jacob. “I'm absolutely starving!” (That's how Esau got his other name, “Edom,” meaning “red.”)

“First sell me your rights as the firstborn son,” Jacob replied.

“Look! I'm dying here! What use are the rights of the firstborn to me?” Esau declared.

“First you have to swear to me,” Jacob demanded. So Esau swore an oath selling his rights of the firstborn to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then he got up and left. By doing this Esau showed how little he cared for his rights as the firstborn son.

There was a famine in the country—not the one that happened before in Abraham's time, but a later one. So Isaac moved to Gerar in the territory of Abimelech, king of the Philistines.

The Lord appeared to Isaac and told him, “Don't go to Egypt—live in the country that I tell you to. Stay here in this country. I will be with you and I will bless you, because I'm going to give you and your descendants all these lands. I will keep the solemn promise that I swore to Abraham your father. I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and I will give them all these lands. All the nations of the earth will be blessed by your descendants, because Abraham did what I told him, and kept my requirements, my commands, my regulations, and my laws.”

So Isaac stayed in Gerar. When the men there asked him about his wife, he told them, “She's my sister,” because he was afraid. He said to himself, “If I say she's my wife, the men here will kill me to get Rebekah, because she's so beautiful.” But later on, after he'd been there a while, Abimelech, king of the Philistines, happened to look out the window and saw Isaac lovingly fondling his wife Rebekah.

Abimelech sent for Isaac and complained. “From what I saw she's clearly your wife!” he said. “Why on earth did you say, ‘She's my sister’?”

“Because I thought I'd be killed because of her,” Isaac replied.

“Why would you do this to us?” Abimelech asked. “One of the men here might have slept with your wife, and you would have made us all guilty!”

Abimelech issued orders to all the people, warning them, “Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be executed.”

Isaac sowed grain that year, and the Lord blessed him with a harvest that was a hundred times what he planted. He became a rich man, and his wealth steadily increased until he was very rich. He owned many flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, as well as many slaves. He had so much that the Philistines became jealous of him. So the Philistines used dirt to block up all the wells his father Abraham's servants had dug.

Then Abimelech told Isaac, “You have to leave our country, because you've become much too powerful for us.”

So Isaac moved away and set up his tents in the Gerar Valley where he settled down. He unblocked the wells that had been dug in his father Abraham's time—the ones the Philistines had blocked after the death of Abraham. He gave them the same names his father had.

Isaac's servants also dug a new well in the valley and found spring water. But the herdsmen from Gerar argued with Isaac's herdsmen, claiming, “That's our water!” So Isaac named the well, “Argument,” because they argued with him. He had another well dug, and they argued over that one too. He named the well, “Opposition.” So they moved on from there and he had another well dug. This time there was no argument so he named the well, “Freedom,” saying, “Now the Lord has given us freedom to expand and be successful in this land.”

From there he moved on to Beersheba. That night the Lord appeared to him and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Don't be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless you and give you many descendants for the

sake of my servant Abraham.” Isaac built an altar and worshiped the Lord. He also set up his tent, and his servants dug a well there.

Sometime later Abimelech came from Gerar to see Isaac, along with Ahuzzath his advisor, and Phicol the commander of his army. “Why have you come to see me?” Isaac asked them. “Previously you hated me and told me to leave!”

“Now we realize that the Lord is with you,” they replied. “So we agreed that we should make a sworn agreement with you. You'll promise not to harm us in the same way we've never hurt you. You'll agree that we've always treated you well, and when we asked you to leave we did so kindly. Now look at how the Lord is blessing you!”

So Isaac had a special meal prepared to celebrate the agreement. They ate and drank, and got up early in the morning and they each swore oaths to one other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left in peace.

It was that very day when Isaac's servants who'd been digging a well came and told him, “We've found water!” So Isaac named the well, “Oath,” and that's why the name of the town is “Well of the Oath” (Beersheba) to this day.

When Esau was 40, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, as well as Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite. They caused Isaac and Rebekah a great deal of grief.

Isaac was old and going blind. He called for Esau, his oldest son, and said, “My son.”

“I'm here,” Esau replied.

“I'm old now,” said Isaac, “I may die soon, who knows? So please take your bow and arrows and go hunting in the countryside for some meat for me. Make me that tasty food that I love and bring it to me to eat, so I can bless you before I die.”

Rebekah heard what Isaac told his son Esau. So when Esau left to go hunting in the countryside for wild game, Rebekah told her son Jacob, “Listen! I heard your father tell your brother, ‘Get me some wild game and make me some tasty food so I can eat it and then bless you in the presence of the Lord before I die.’ Now then, my son, listen to me and do exactly what I tell you. Go to the flock and bring me two nice young goats. I'll cook them and make the tasty food your father loves. Then you take it to your father to eat, so he can bless you in the presence of the Lord before he dies.”

“But listen,” Jacob replied to his mother Rebekah, “my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a smooth man. Maybe my father will notice when he touches me. Then it will look like I'm deceiving him and I'll bring a curse down on myself instead of a blessing.”

“Let the curse fall on me, my son,” his mother replied. “Just do what I tell you. Go and get the young goats for me.”

So Jacob went and got them and took them to his mother, and she made some tasty food, the way his father loved. Then Rebekah went and got her older son Esau's best clothes that she had at home and put them on Jacob her younger son. She put the goatskins on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she handed her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she'd made.

He went in to see his father, and called out, “My father, I'm here.”

“Which son are you?” Isaac asked.

“It's me Esau, your firstborn son,” Jacob told his father. “I did what you told me. So please sit up and eat some of my wild game meat so you can bless me.”

“How did you find an animal so fast, my son?” Isaac asked.

“Because the Lord your God sent it my way,” Jacob replied.

“Come over here so I can touch you, my son,” Isaac told Jacob, “so I can tell if you're really my son Esau or not.”

Jacob went over to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “It's Jacob's voice but Esau's hands.” Isaac didn't realize it was really Jacob because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's, so Isaac got ready to bless him.

“It's really you, my son Esau?” he asked again. “Yes, it's me,” Jacob replied.

Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your wild game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.” Jacob brought some for him to eat, as well as some wine for him to drink.

Afterwards his father Isaac said to him, “Come here and kiss me, my son.” So Jacob went over and kissed him, and Isaac could smell the clothes Jacob was wearing. So he went ahead with the blessing, saying to himself, “See—the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.”

“May God use the dew of heaven and fertile land to give you rich harvests of grain and new wine! May the people of different nations serve you and bow down to you. May you rule over your relatives, and may they bow down to you. May everyone who curses you be cursed, and may everyone who blesses you be blessed.”

After Isaac finished blessing Jacob—in fact Jacob had just left his father—Esau returned from his hunting trip. He had also made some tasty food, and took it to his father. Esau said to Isaac, “Sit up, my father, and eat some of my wild game so you can bless me.”

“Who are you?” Isaac asked him.

“I'm your son, your firstborn son, Esau,” he replied.

Isaac started to shake all over and asked, “So who was it who went hunting game and then brought it to me? I ate it all before you came back and I blessed him. His blessing will remain.”

When Esau heard his father's words, he cried out in great anger and bitterness, and pleaded with his father, “Please bless me too, my father!”

But Isaac replied, “Your brother came and deceived me—he stole your blessing!”

“Isn't he well named—Jacob the deceiver!” said Esau. “He's deceived me twice. First he took my birthright, and now he's stolen my blessing! Haven't you kept a blessing for me?”

Isaac replied to Esau. “I have made him ruler over you, and have said that all his relatives will be his servants. I have declared that he will be well supplied with grain and new wine. So what is left that I can do for you, my son?”

“Do you only have one blessing, my father?” Esau asked. “Please bless me too!” Then Esau began to cry very loudly.

Then his father Isaac declared, “Listen! You will live far away from fertile land, far from the dew of heaven that falls from above. You will make a living by using your sword, and you will be your brother's servant. But when you rebel, you will throw off his yoke from your neck.”

From then on Esau hated Jacob because of his father's blessing. Esau said to himself, “Soon the time will come when I'll mourn my father's death. Then I'll kill my brother Jacob!”

However, Rebekah found out what Esau was saying, so she sent for Jacob. “Look,” she told him, “your brother Esau is making himself feel better by making plans to kill you. So, my son, listen carefully to what I tell you. Leave immediately and go to my brother Laban in Haran. Stay with him for a while until your brother's anger cools down. Once he's cooled down and forgets what you did to him, I'll send for you to come back. Why should I lose both of you in a single day?”

Then Rebekah went and told Isaac, “I'm so sick of these Hittite women—they're ruining my life! If Jacob also marries a Hittite woman like them, one of the local people, I'd rather die!”

Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. “Don't marry a Canaanite woman,” he ordered him. “Leave right away and go to Paddan-aram, to the home of Bethuel, your mother's father. Find yourself a wife there—a daughter of Laban, your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and may your descendants be so numerous that you become the ancestor of many nations. May he grant you and your descendants the same blessing he gave to Abraham, so that you may take over the land where you now live as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham.”

So Isaac sent Jacob on his way. He traveled to Paddan-aram, to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean. Laban was the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Esau found out that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan-aram to find a wife there, and that when he blessed him he ordered him, “Don't marry a Canaanite woman.” He also discovered that Jacob had done what his father and mother told him and had left for Paddan-aram. This made Esau realize how much his father disliked Canaanite women. So he went to Ishmael's family and married an additional wife—Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

In the meantime Jacob had set off from Beersheba on his way to Haran. He arrived after sunset at a particular place and stopped there for the night. He picked up a stone, put it under his head, lay down and went to sleep.

He dreamed he saw a stairway that started on earth, and the top reached all the way into heaven. He saw God's angels going up and down on it. Then he saw the Lord standing over him, who said, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham, and the God of Isaac. I'm giving you and your descendants the land you're lying on. Your descendants will be as numerous as the dust of the earth, and will spread out west and east, and north and south. Everyone on earth will be blessed by your descendants. Listen! I am with you and will take care of you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this country. I won't leave you because I'm going to do what I've promised you.”

When Jacob woke up he said to himself, “The Lord is right here, in this place, and I didn't realize it!” He became frightened and said, “This is a scary place! It must be the house of God and the entrance to heaven.”

When Jacob got up in the morning he took the stone he'd put under his head and set it upright as a stone pillar and poured some olive oil on it. He named the place “Bethel,” (previously it was called Luz). Jacob also made a solemn promise, saying, “God, if you will be with me, and take care of me on my journey, and give me food to eat and clothes to wear so I can return safely to my father's home, then you Lord will be my God. This stone pillar that I've set up will be the house of God, and I will give you one tenth of all you give me.”

Jacob went quickly on his way, and arrived in the land of the eastern people. As he looked around he saw a well in a field with three flocks of sheep lying down beside it, waiting to be given water. A large stone covered the top of the well. The usual practice was that once all the flocks had arrived, the shepherds would roll away the stone from the well and give their sheep water. Then they would put the stone back again.

Jacob asked them, “My brothers, where are you from?”

“We're from Haran,” they replied.

“Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?” he asked.

“Yes, we know him,” they replied.

“How is he?” he asked.

“He's well,” they replied. “Look! In fact here's his daughter Rachel coming with the sheep right now.”

“Look, there's still plenty of daylight left,” said Jacob. “It's too early to round up the sheep yet. Why not let them drink so they can go back to grazing?”

“We can't do that until all the flocks have arrived,” they told him. “Then we roll away the stone from the well and let the sheep drink.”

While he was still talking with them Rachel arrived with the flock she was looking after for her father. When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, he went over and rolled away the stone from the well so Laban's sheep could drink. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept for joy. (He had told her that he was a relative of her father, Rebekah's son.) She ran and told her father what had happened.

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob he ran out to meet him. He hugged him and kissed him, and took him home. After Jacob had explained everything to Laban, Laban told him, “No question about it—you're my own flesh and blood!” Jacob stayed with Laban for a month.

One day Laban said to him, “You're my relative so you shouldn't be working for me for nothing! Tell me, what should I pay you?”

Laban had two daughters. The older one was Leah, and the younger one was Rachel. Leah had kind eyes, but Rachel had a shapely figure and beautiful looks. Jacob was in love with Rachel so he promised Laban, “I'll

do seven years work for you for Rachel, your younger daughter."

"Well it's better for me to give her to you than anyone else," Laban replied. "So stay here and work for me." Jacob worked for Laban for seven years, but to him they seemed like just a few days because he really loved her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, "I've completed the time we agreed. Now give me your daughter to be my wife."

So Laban organized a wedding banquet and invited everyone around to come. But once it was dark Laban brought his daughter Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. (Laban also arranged for his servant Zilpah to be Leah's personal maid.)

When morning came, he saw it was Leah! He went to Laban and asked angrily, "What have you done to me? It was for Rachel that I worked for you! Why have you deceived me?"

"Here we don't give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn," Laban replied. "Finish this week of wedding celebrations and then I'll give you the other daughter as well, as long as you work another seven years for me."

Jacob agreed. He finished the week of wedding celebrations for Leah, and then Laban gave Jacob his daughter Rachel as his wife as well. (Laban also arranged for his servant Bilhah to be Rachel's personal maid.) So Jacob slept with Rachel as well, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He worked for Laban another seven years for Rachel.

When the Lord saw that Leah wasn't loved he helped Leah to have children, but not Rachel. Leah became pregnant, and had a son she named Reuben, for she said, "The Lord saw how much I was suffering and now my husband will love me!"

Then Leah became pregnant again, and had another son. She said, "The Lord has heard that I'm not loved so he gave me this son." So she named him Simeon.

Leah became pregnant for the third time, and had another son. She said, "Finally my husband will be attached to me because now I've given him three sons." That's why he was named Levi.

Once again Leah became pregnant and had another son. She named him Judah, for she said, "Now I can really praise the Lord!" After that she had no more children.

When Rachel realized she was unable to give Jacob any children she was jealous of her sister. She complained to Jacob, "I'll die if you don't give me children!"

Jacob became angry with Rachel and told her, "Am I God? Do you think I'm the one stopping you from having children?"

"Here's my personal maid Bilhah," Rachel replied. "Sleep with her and she can have children for me so I'll have a family too." She gave her personal maid Bilhah to him as a wife and Jacob slept with her. Bilhah became pregnant and had a son for Jacob. Rachel said, "God has judged in my favor! He listened to me and gave me a son." So she named him Dan. Rachel's personal maid Bilhah became pregnant again and had a second son for Jacob. Rachel said, "I've had a hard struggle with my sister, but I've won." So she named him Naphtali.

Leah realized she wasn't having any more children, so she gave her personal maid Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah had a son for Jacob. Leah said, "I'm really fortunate!" So she named him Gad. Leah's personal maid Zilpah became pregnant again and had a second son for Jacob. Leah said, "I'm so happy, and the other women will say I'm happy too!" So she named him Asher.

At the time of the wheat harvest Reuben found some mandrake plants when he was out in the fields. He took them back to his mother Leah. Rachel asked Leah, "Please give me some of the mandrakes your son found."

"Aren't you satisfied with stealing my husband?" Leah replied. "Are you going to take my son's mandrakes too?"

"Fine, he can sleep with you tonight if you give me some mandrakes in return," Rachel responded.

When Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You have to sleep with me because I've paid for you with my son's mandrakes," she told him. So he slept with her that night. God heard Leah's request, and she became pregnant and had a fifth son for Jacob. Leah said, "The Lord has rewarded me for giving my personal maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar. Then Leah became pregnant again and had a sixth son for Jacob. Leah said, "God has given me a good gift. Now my husband will honor me because I've given him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. Later she had a daughter she named Dinah.

Then God paid attention to Rachel and listened to her appeals, and helped her to have children. She became pregnant and had a son. "God has removed my disgrace," she said. She named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord give me an additional son."

Once Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Let me leave so I can return to my home and my own country. Give me my wives and children because I worked for you to have them. Let me go now because you know very well how much work I've done for you."

"Please be so kind as to stay," Laban replied, "because I have discovered that the Lord has blessed me because of you." Then Laban continued, "Tell me how much to pay you and I'll give it to you."

"You certainly know how much work I've done for you, and how well your flocks have done under my care. You hardly had anything before I arrived, but now you have so much! The Lord has blessed you through what I've done. When am I going to be able to provide for my own family?"

"Well, what do you propose I give you?" Laban asked again.

"You don't have to give me anything," Jacob replied. "If you want to do something for me, then how about this: I'll go on looking after your flocks, making sure they're fed. Let me go through your flocks today and take all the sheep that are speckled or spotted, and all the dark ones, as well as all the speckled and spotted goats. They'll be my wages. In the future you'll be able to prove that I've been honest. When you check my flock, any goats that don't have speckles or spots, or any sheep that aren't dark will be considered stolen from you."

"Very good," Laban agreed. "We'll do as you say." However, the same day Laban went and removed all

the striped and spotted male goats, all the speckled and spotted female goats, and all the dark sheep. He had his sons look after them and sent them away— a three day journey between them and Jacob, while Jacob was looking after the rest of Laban's flocks.

Then Jacob cut some sticks from poplar, almond, and plane trees that had white wood under the bark. He peeled off some of the bark, making the sticks look streaked with white. He put the sticks he'd peeled in the water troughs where the flocks came to drink because that's where they mated. The flocks mated in front of the sticks and gave birth to young that were streaked, speckled, and spotted. Jacob separated all these ones out. Then he made his flock face towards those in Laban's flock that were streaked and dark. This is the way he kept his flocks apart from Laban's flock.

When the strong females were ready to breed, Jacob put the sticks in the troughs where the flocks could see them when they mated. He didn't do this for the weaker females. The weaker ones went to Laban, and the strong ones went to Jacob. In this way Jacob became an extremely rich man with large flocks, and many male and female slaves, camels, and donkeys.

Jacob found out that Laban's sons were saying, “Jacob has taken everything that belonged to our father. All the wealth he has actually came from our father.” Jacob also noticed that Laban was treating him differently to the way he had before.

The Lord told Jacob, “Go back to the country of your forefathers, to your family home. I will be with you.”

Jacob sent for Rachel and Leah, telling them to come and meet him out in the fields where he was with his flock. “I've noticed that your father is treating me differently to the way he did before,” he told them. “But the God of my father will be with me. You both know very well how hard I worked for your father. But he's been cheating me—he's reduced my wages ten times! However, God hasn't let him hurt me. If he said, ‘You can have the speckled ones as your wages,’ then the whole flock had speckled young. If he said, ‘You can have the streaked ones as your wages,’ then the whole flock had streaked young. This is how God took your father's livestock and gave them to me. During the time the flock was breeding I had a dream where I saw that the male goats mating with the flock were all streaked, speckled, or spotted. Then in the dream the angel of the Lord spoke to me and said, ‘Jacob!’ I replied, ‘I'm here.’

He told me, ‘Take a look and you'll see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I've been watching everything that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you poured olive oil on the stone pillar and made a solemn promise to me. Now get ready to leave this land and go back to your homeland.’”

“There's nothing for us to inherit from our father's estate anyway,” Rachel and Leah replied. “He treats us like foreigners because he sold us to you, and now he's spent all that money. All the wealth that God has taken from him belongs to us and our children, so do whatever God has told you to do!”

So Jacob got ready. He helped his children and his wives onto the camels, and drove all his livestock in front of him. He took with him all his possessions and livestock he'd gained during his time in Paddan-aram, and left to go back to his father in the country of Canaan.

While Laban was away from home shearing his sheep, Rachel stole the household idols that belonged to her father. Jacob also deceived Laban the Aramean by not informing him that he was going to run away. So Jacob left in a hurry with everything he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed towards the hill country of Gilead.

Three days later Laban found out that Jacob had run away. Taking some of his relatives with him, he chased after Jacob and caught up with him seven days later in the hill country of Gilead. But during the night God came to Laban in a dream and told him, “Watch what you say to Jacob. Don't try to persuade him to come back, and don't threaten him either.”

Jacob had set up his tents in the hill country of Gilead when Laban caught up with him, so Laban and his relatives did the same. “Why did you deceive me like this?” Laban asked Jacob. “You carried off my daughters as if they were some prisoners captured by the sword! Why did you run away in secret, trying to trick me? Why didn't you come and tell me? I would have given you a good send-off, a celebration with singing and the music of tambourines and lyres. You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and daughters goodbye! You've really acted stupidly! I could really punish you badly, but the God of your father spoke to me last night and told me, ‘Watch what you say to Jacob. Don't try to persuade him to come back, and don't threaten him either.’ Clearly you wanted to leave and go back to your family home, but why did you have to steal my idols?”

“I ran away because I was afraid,” Jacob explained to Laban. “I was worried that you would take your daughters from me by force. As for your idols, anyone you find who has them will die. You can search everything in the presence of our relatives, and if you find I have anything that belongs to you, you can take it.” (Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen the household idols.)

Laban searched the tents of Jacob, Leah, and the two personal maids, but didn't find anything. He left Leah's tent and went into Rachel's tent. Rachel had put the household idols in a camel's saddlebag and was sitting on it. Laban carefully searched the whole tent but couldn't find them. She said to her father, “Sir, please don't get upset with me for not standing up in your presence, but I have my period.” He looked everywhere but didn't find the idols.

Jacob got angry with Laban and confronted him, saying, “What crime am I guilty of? What wrong have I done to you that you've come hunting me down? You've searched through all my possessions. Did you find anything belonging to you? If you did, bring it out here before my relatives and yours so they can decide who's right!

I've worked for you for these past twenty years. During that time none of your sheep and goats miscarried, and I haven't eaten a single ram from your flock. If any of them were killed by wild animals, I never even brought you the carcass to prove the loss—I bore the loss myself. But you on the other hand always made

me compensate you for any animals that were stolen, whether at night or in broad daylight.

Whether it was sweating in the heat of the day, or freezing in the cold of the night when I couldn't sleep, I went on working for you for twenty years in your home. I worked fourteen years for your two daughters, and six more years with your flocks. You reduced my wages ten times! If it weren't for the God of my father, the God of Abraham, the awesome God of Isaac, who took care of me, you would have dismissed me with nothing. But God saw my suffering, how hard I worked, and he condemned you last night."

Laban replied, "These are my daughters and these are my children and these are my flocks! In fact, everything you see here is mine! However, what can I do now about my daughters and their children? So let's make a solemn agreement between you and I, and it will be a witness to our mutual commitment."

Jacob took a stone and set it upright as a pillar. Then he told his relatives, "Go and collect some stones." They all made a pile of stones and then sat beside it to eat a meal. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, while Jacob called it Galeed.

Laban announced, "This pile of stone serves as a witness between me and you." This is why it was called Galeed. It was also called Mizpah, for as Laban said, "May the Lord keep a close eye on both of us when we're not together. If you treat my daughters badly or marry more wives in addition to them, God will see what you do even if no one else finds out!"

Then Laban told Jacob, "Look at this pile of stones and this pillar that I have set up as a memorial of the agreement between you and me. They also act as a witness to our solemn promises to each other: I will not come past them to attack you; and you will not come past them to attack me. May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor—the God of our forefathers—be the one to judge between us in any dispute." Jacob in turn made his solemn promise in the name of the awesome God of his father Isaac.

Then he offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited all his relatives to eat a meal there. They spent the night on the mountain. Laban got up early in the morning and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters goodbye. He blessed them, and then left to go back home.

Jacob went on his way and some angels of God came to meet him. When he saw them he said, "This must be God's camp!" He named the place "Two Camps."

He sent messengers on ahead to meet his brother Esau who was living in the region of Seir in the country of Edom. He told them, "This is what you are to say to my lord Esau. Your servant Jacob sends you this message. I've been staying with Laban up till now, and I have cattle and donkeys and sheep and goats, and male and female slaves. I've sent these messengers to explain this to you my lord, hoping you'll be pleased to see me."

The messengers returned to Jacob and told him, "Your brother Esau is coming to meet you with 400 armed men!" When Jacob heard this, he was absolutely terrified. He split all the people with him, along with the sheep, goats, cattle, and camels, into two groups, saying to himself, "If Esau comes and destroys one group, the other one can get away."

Jacob prayed, "God of my grandfather Abraham, God of my father Isaac! Lord, you were the one who told me, 'Return to your own country and your family home, and I will treat you well.' I don't deserve all the trustworthy love and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I crossed the Jordan years ago with just my walking stick, and now I have two large camps. Please save me from my brother; defend me from Esau! I'm terrified that he's coming to attack me, my wives, and my children. You yourself told me, 'I will definitely treat you well. I will make your descendants as numerous as the sand of the seashore—too many to count.'"

Jacob stayed the night there. Then he picked out animals as a gift to his brother Esau: 200 female goats, 20 male goats; 200 ewes, 20 rams; 30 female camels with their young, 40 cows, 10 bulls; 20 female donkeys, 10 male donkeys. He put his servants in charge of each of the separate herds and told them, "Go on ahead of me, and keep a good distance between the herds."

He gave these instructions to those with the first herd: "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'Who is your master, and where are you going, and whose are these animals with you?' you are to say to him, 'Your servant Jacob sends these as a gift to my lord Esau, and he's following us.'" He gave the same instructions to those with the second and third and all the subsequent herds, telling them, "This is what you are to say to Esau when he meets you. You must also tell him, 'Your servant Jacob is right behind us.'"

Jacob said to himself, "Maybe by sending these gifts on ahead Esau won't be angry with me and when I meet him he'll be kind to me." So the gifts went on ahead while Jacob spent the night at the camp.

He got up during the night and took his two wives and the two personal maids and his eleven sons and crossed the Jabbok River at the ford. After helping them cross he also sent over everything that belonged to him. But Jacob stayed there alone. A man came and wrestled with him until dawn. When the man realized he couldn't beat Jacob, he hit Jacob's hip socket and put it out of joint as he wrestled with him.

Then the man said, "Let me go because it's almost dawn."

"I won't let you go unless you bless me," Jacob replied.

"What's your name?" the man asked.

"Jacob," he replied.

"Jacob will no longer be your name," said the man. "Instead you will be called Israel, because you fought with God and with men and you won."

"Please tell me your name," Jacob asked.

"Why do you ask me my name?" the man replied. Then he blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel, saying, "I saw God face to face and I'm still alive!" The sun came up as Jacob left Peniel, limping along because of his damaged hip. (That's why, even today, Israelites don't eat the thigh tendon attached to the hip socket, because that's where the man hit Jacob's hip socket.)

Jacob saw Esau in the distance, coming towards him with four hundred men. So he split up the children between Leah, Rachel and the two personal maids. He

placed the two personal maids with their children first, then Leah and her children, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then Jacob went ahead of them and bowed low to the ground seven times before approaching his brother. Esau ran over to him and hugged him. He put his arms around his neck and kissed him. The two of them wept.

Then Esau looked around at the women and children. “Who are these people with you?” he asked.

“They are the children God graciously gave your servant,” Jacob replied.

The personal maids and their children came over and bowed down. Then Leah and her children came over and bowed down. Lastly Joseph and Rachel came over and bowed down.

“What were all the livestock for that I met on the way?” Esau asked.

“They're a gift to you my lord so you'd treat me well,” Jacob answered.

“I have more than enough, my brother! You keep what you have,” said Esau.

“No, please!” Jacob insisted. “If you're happy with me, then please accept the gift I'm giving you. Now I've seen your face again it's like seeing the face of God, and you have welcomed me so kindly! Please take the gift I've brought to you because God has treated me so well and I have so much.” So Esau accepted it.

“Let's get on our way,” Esau said. “I'll go ahead of you.”

“My lord can see that the children are weak,” Jacob responded. “Also, the goats, sheep, and cattle are nursing their young, and if I push them too hard, they'll all die. You go on, my lord, and your servant will come along slowly, walking with the children, and I'll meet you at Seir.”

“Fine, but let me leave some of my men with you,” said Esau.

“You're very kind, but there's no need to do that,” Jacob replied.

So Esau started on his way back to Seir that day. But Jacob headed to Succoth, where he built himself a house and shelters for the livestock. That's why the place is called Succoth.

Later Jacob continued his journey from Paddan-aram. He arrived safely at Shechem in the country of Canaan where he camped outside the town. He bought the plot of ground where he was camping from the sons of Hamor, the founder of Shechem, for 100 pieces of money. He built an altar there and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Dinah, Jacob and Leah's daughter, went to visit some of the local women. Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of that area, saw her. He grabbed hold of her and raped her. However, then he fell deeply in love with Dinah and tried to get her to love him too. He went and asked his father, “Get this young girl for me so I can marry her.”

Jacob found out that Shechem had violated his daughter Dinah, but as his sons were away looking after the flocks in the fields he didn't say anything until they came home. In the meantime Hamor, Shechem's father, arrived to talk with Jacob. When Jacob's sons returned from the fields they were very upset when they heard the news and became extremely angry because Shechem had done something outrageous in Israel by having sex with Jacob's daughter—something that should never be done.

Hamor told them, “My son Shechem is very much in love with your daughter and your sister Dinah. Please allow him to marry her. In fact we can have more marriages—you can give us your daughters and you can have our daughters. You can live among us and settle down wherever you like. You can go where you want and buy land for yourselves.”

Then Shechem himself spoke up, and said to Dinah's father and brothers, “Please accept me and my proposal, and I'll do whatever you ask. You can set the bride price as high as you like, and I'll pay it along with all the gifts I'll give. Just let me have the girl so I can marry her.”

Jacob's sons weren't honest when they answered him and his father Hamor because Shechem had violated their sister Dinah. They told them, “We can't do this! We can't allow our sister to marry a man who's not circumcised. That would bring disgrace on us. We will only agree to it with this condition: all of you must be circumcised like us. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters, and we will live among you and become one family. But if you don't agree with us that you should be circumcised, then we'll take our sister and leave.”

Hamor and his son Shechem agreed to what was proposed. The young man Shechem didn't waste any time in arranging this because he was infatuated with Jacob's daughter, and he was viewed as the most important person in his father's family. Hamor and Shechem went to the town gate and spoke to the other leaders there.

“These men are our friends,” they told them. “Let's have them live here in our country and allow them to go wherever they want—it's big enough for all of them too. We can take their daughters as wives, and we can give our daughters to them to marry. But they will only agree to this on one condition: they will only join us and become one family if every male among us is circumcised like they are. If that happens, won't all their livestock and property—all their animals—end up belonging to us? We just have to agree to this and they will come and live among us.”

Everyone there at the town gate agreed with Hamor and Shechem so every male in the town was circumcised. Three days later while they were still suffering pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons and Dinah's brothers, came with their swords into the town. Unopposed, they slaughtered every male. They killed Hamor and Shechem with their swords, took Dinah from Shechem's house, and left.

Jacob's other sons arrived, robbed the dead bodies, and looted the town where their sister had been violated. They took their sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. They took whatever was in the town, and in the fields — all their possessions. They captured all their women and children, and plundered everything in their homes.

But Jacob criticized Simeon and Levi, telling them, “You've just caused me a lot of trouble! You've made me like a bad smell among the people in this country, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I only have a

few men, and if these people gather to attack me, I and my whole family will be wiped out."

But they replied, "Should we have let him treat our sister like a prostitute?"

Then God told Jacob, "Get ready to go to Bethel and live there. Build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were running away from your brother Esau." So Jacob told his family and everyone who was with him, "Get rid of the pagan idols you have with you. Purify yourselves and change your clothes. We have to get ready and go to Bethel so I can build an altar to God who answered me in my time of trouble. He has been with me wherever I went."

They handed over to Jacob all the pagan idols they had, as well as their earrings, and he buried them under the oak tree at Shechem. As they left on their journey, the terror of God spread over all the surrounding towns, so nobody tried to retaliate against Jacob's sons.

Jacob and everyone with him arrived at Luz (also known as Bethel) in the country of Canaan. He built an altar there and called the place El-Bethel, because that was where God had appeared to him when he was running away from his brother Esau.

Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak near Bethel. So it was named "the oak of weeping."

God appeared to Jacob again and blessed him after his return from Paddan-aram. God told him, "Jacob will not be your name any longer. Instead of Jacob your name will be Israel." So God called him Israel.

Then God said, "I am God Almighty! Reproduce, increase, and you will become a nation—in fact a group of nations—and kings will be among your descendants. I will give to you and to your descendants the land I also gave to Abraham and Isaac." Then God left the place where he had been speaking to Jacob. Afterwards Jacob set up a stone pillar where God had spoken with him. He poured out a drink offering on it, and also olive oil. Jacob called the place Bethel, because he had spoken with God there.

Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor and had great difficulty giving birth. When she was in the worst birth-pains, the midwife told her, "Don't give up—you have another son!" But she was dying, and with her last breath she named him Benoni. But his father named him Benjamin. Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (also known as Bethlehem). Jacob set up a stone memorial over Rachel's grave, and it's still there to this day.

Israel moved on and camped beyond the watch tower at Eder. During the time he was living there, Reuben went and slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel found out about it.

These were the twelve sons of Jacob:

The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

The sons of Rachel's personal maid Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.

The sons of Leah's personal maid Zilpah: Gad and Asher.

These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him while in Paddan-aram.

Jacob returned home to his father Isaac at Mamre, near Kiriath-arba (also known as Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had lived. Isaac lived to be 180 when he breathed his last and died at an old age. He had lived a full life, and now he joined his forefathers in death. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

The following is the genealogy of Esau (also known as Edom). Esau married two Canaanite women: Adah, daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite. In addition he married Basemath, daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.

Adah had a son for Esau named Eliphaz. Basemath had Reul. Oholibamah had Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan.

Esau took his wives, sons and daughters, and everyone in his household, together with his livestock, all his other animals, and all the possessions he had gained while in Canaan, and went to live in a country far away from his brother Jacob. He did this because the land they were living in couldn't support both of them with all their livestock. Esau settled down in the hill country of Seir.

The following is the genealogy of Esau, father of the Edomites, who lived in the hill country of Seir:

These were the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, son of Esau's wife Adah, and Reuel, son of Esau's wife Basemath. The sons of Eliphaz were: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. Timna, the concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz, had Amalek for Eliphaz. These were the descendants of Esau's wife Adah.

These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. They were the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath.

These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she had for Esau: Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

These were the tribal leaders of Esau's sons. The tribal leaders of the sons of Eliphaz (Esau's firstborn) were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. They were the tribal leaders of Eliphaz in the country of Edom, and they were the descendants of Adah.

These were the sons of Esau's son Reuel: tribal leaders Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. They were the tribal leaders descended from Reuel in the country of Edom, and they were the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath.

These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: tribal leaders Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. They were the tribal leaders descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah. All these were the sons of Esau (also called Edom), and they were their tribal leaders.

These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the country: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. They were the tribal leaders of the Horites, the descendants of Seir in the land of Edom.

The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam. Timna was Lotan's sister.

These were the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

These were the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. (This was the Anah who discovered the hot springs in

the desert while he was looking after the donkeys of his father Zibeon.)

These were the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah, daughter of Anah.

These were the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran.

These were the sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.

These were the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

These were the tribal leaders of the Horites: tribal leaders Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. They were the tribal leaders of the Horites listed according to their tribes in the country of Seir.

These were the kings who ruled in the land of Edom before there was any king who ruled over the Israelites:

Bela, son of Beor, ruled in Edom and the name of his town was Dinhabah.

When Bela died, Jobab, son of Zerah from Bozrah, took over as king.

When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites took over as king.

When Husham died, Hadad, son of Bedad, took over as king. He was the one who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, and the name of his town was Avith.

When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah took over as king.

When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the Euphrates took over as king.

When Shaul died, Baal-hanan, son of Achbor, took over as king.

When Baal-hanan, son of Achbor, died, Hadad took over as king. The name of his town was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, daughter of Me-zahab.

These were the names of the tribal leaders descended from Esau, according to their families and where they lived, listed by name: tribal leaders Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, and Iram. These were the tribal leaders of Edom, listed according to the places where they lived in the country. Esau was the ancestor of the Edomites.

Jacob settled down and lived in Canaan as his father had done.

This is the story of Jacob and his family. Joseph was seventeen, and helped look after the flock with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph told his father about some of the bad things his brothers were doing.

Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because Joseph had been born to him when he was already old. He made a colorful robe with long sleeves for Joseph. When his brothers noticed that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and had nothing good to say about him.

Joseph had a dream, and when he told his brothers about it, they hated him even more. “Listen to this dream I had,” he told them. “We were tying up bundles of grain out in the fields when all of a sudden my bundle stood up, and your bundles came over and bowed down to it.”

“Do you really think you're going to be our king?” they asked. “Do you honestly believe you're going to rule over us?” They hated him even more because of his dream and how he described it.

Then he had another dream and told his brothers about it. “Listen, I had another dream,” he explained. “The sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down before me.”

He also told his father as well as his brothers, and his father told him off, saying, “What's this dream that you've had? Are we—I and your mother and brothers—really going to come and bow down to the ground before you?” Joseph's brothers became jealous of him, but his father puzzled over the meaning of the dream.

One day Joseph's brothers took their father's flocks to graze near Shechem. Israel told Joseph, “Your brothers are looking after the sheep near Shechem. Get ready because I want you to go and see them.”

“I'll do it,” Joseph replied.

So he told him, “Off you go and see how your brothers and the flocks are doing, and come back and let me know.” So he sent him off.

Joseph set out from the Hebron Valley, and arrived in Shechem. A man there found him wandering about in the field, so he asked him, “What are you looking for?”

“I'm looking for my brothers,” Joseph replied. “Can you please tell me where they're looking after the flock?”

“They've already left,” the man replied. “I heard them say, ‘Let's go to Dothan.’” So Joseph followed his brothers and caught up with them at Dothan.

But they saw him coming way off in the distance, and before he got to them, they made plans to kill him. “Look, here comes the Lord of Dreams!” they said to each other. “Come on, let's kill him and throw him into one of the pits. We'll say that some wild animal has eaten him. Then we'll see what happens to his dreams!”

When Reuben heard all this, he tried to save Joseph from them. “Let's not attack and kill him,” he suggested. “Don't murder him, just throw him into this pit here in the desert. You don't need to be guilty of violence.” Reuben said this so that he could come back later and rescue Joseph from them and take him home to his father.

So when Joseph arrived, his brothers ripped off his robe—the colorful long-sleeved robe he was wearing — grabbed him and threw him into a pit. (The pit was empty—it didn't have any water in it.) They were just sitting down to have a meal when they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were carrying aromatic spices, balm, and myrrh to take to Egypt.

“What's the point of killing our brother?” Judah asked his brothers. “Then we'd have to cover up his death! Instead, why don't we sell him to these Ishmaelites? We don't have to kill him. After all he's our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His brothers agreed.

So when the Ishmaelites (who were traders from Midian) came by, they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. The Ishmaelites took him to Egypt.

When Reuben came back later and looked into the pit, Joseph was gone. He tore his clothes in grief. He returned to his brothers. “The boy's gone!” he moaned. “What am I going to do now?”

They slaughtered a goat and dipped Joseph's robe in the blood. Then they sent the colorful robe to their father with the message, “We found this. Please examine it and see if it's your son's robe or not.”

His father recognized it right away and said, “This is my son's robe! Some wild animal must have eaten him. Poor Joseph has been ripped to pieces, no doubt about it!”

Jacob tore his clothes in grief and dressed in sackcloth. He mourned the death of his son for a long time. All his sons and daughters tried to console him, but he rejected their attempts. “No,” he said, “I will go down into my grave mourning for my son.” So Joseph's father went on weeping for him.

In the meantime the Ishmaelites had arrived in Egypt and had sold Joseph to Potiphar. Potiphar was one of Pharaoh's officers, the captain of the guard.

Around this time, Judah left his brothers and set up his tents at Adullam, near to a local man named Hirah. There Judah happened to see the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua and married her. He slept with her, and she became pregnant and had a son he named Er. She became pregnant again and had a son she named Onan. Then she had another son she named Shelah who was born in Kezib.

Much later, Judah arranged for Er, his firstborn son, to marry a woman named Tamar. But Er did what was evil in the Lord's sight, so the Lord put him to death. Judah told Onan, “Go and sleep with your brother's wife to fulfill the requirements of a brother-in-law to have children on behalf of your brother.”

Onan realized that any children he had wouldn't be his own, so whenever he slept with his brother's wife he made sure she wouldn't become pregnant by withdrawing and spilling his semen on the ground. In this way he prevented any children being born on behalf of his brother. But what he did was evil in the Lord's sight, so he also put Onan to death.

Then Judah told his daughter-in-law Tamar, “Go to your father's house and live there as a widow until my son Shelah grows up.” For he thought, “Maybe he'll die too, just like his brothers.” So Tamar went and stayed in her father's house.

A long time later Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. After Judah had finished the time of mourning, he went to visit his sheepshearers at Timnah with his friend Hirah from Adullam. Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is going to Timnah to shear his sheep.” So she took off her widow's clothes and covered herself with a veil, disguising herself. She sat down beside the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah. She had realized that even though Shelah had now grown up, nothing had been done about her marrying him.

Judah saw her and thought she must be a prostitute because she had veiled her face. He went over to her at the side of the road and said, “I want to sleep with you.” He didn't know she was his daughter-in-law.

“What will you give me if I let you sleep with me?” she asked.

“I'll send you a young goat from my flock,” he replied.

“What guarantee will you give me to make sure you'll send it?” she asked.

“What guarantee do I have to give you?” he asked.

“Your signet seal and its cord, and your walking stick that you're holding,” she replied. He handed them over to her. He slept with her and she became pregnant. She left, went home, took off her veil, and put on her widow's clothes.

Judah sent his friend Hirah from Adullam with a young goat to get back his belongings he'd left as a guarantee from the woman, but he couldn't find her. Hirah asked the men there, “Where's the cult prostitute that sits by the entrance road to Enaim?”

“There's no cult prostitute here,” they answered.

Hirah went back to Judah and told him, “I couldn't find her, and the men there said, ‘There's no cult prostitute here.’”

“Let her keep what I gave her,” Judah replied. “We'll look ridiculous to people if we go on searching. In any case I did try to send her the young goat as promised but you couldn't find her.”

Then about three months later Judah was told, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has had sex like a prostitute and now as a result she's pregnant!”

“Bring her out and burn her to death!” Judah ordered.

As she was brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law, saying, “I'm pregnant by the man who owns these things.” Then she added, “Please look carefully at this signet seal and its cord and walking stick. Who do they belong to?”

Judah recognized them right away and said, “She has honored the law more than I have, because I didn't give her in marriage to my son Shelah.” He didn't sleep with Tamar again.

When the time came for Tamar to give birth, she was found to be carrying twins. One baby put out his hand, and the midwife tied a scarlet thread around his wrist and said, “This one came out first.” But then he pulled back his hand and his brother was born, she said, “How did you burst out?” So he was named Perez. Then his brother with the scarlet thread on his wrist was born. He was named Zerah.

Joseph had been taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, who had sold him to Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officers, the commander of the royal guard.

The Lord was with Joseph and made him successful. He lived in his Egyptian master's house. His master noticed that the Lord was with him and made him successful in everything he did. Potiphar appreciated Joseph and his service, and put him in charge of his household and made him responsible for everything he owned. From the time he put Joseph in charge and trusted him with all he had, the Lord blessed Potiphar's household because of Joseph. The Lord blessed everything he had, whether in his house or in his fields. So Potiphar left Joseph to care for everything he owned. He didn't bother with anything except to decide what food he was going to eat.

Now Joseph was handsome, having a good physique, so some time later he caught the eye of his master's wife. She propositioned him, saying, “Come here! Sleep with me!”

But he turned her down, telling his master's wife, “Look, my master trusts me so much he doesn't even bother to find out how his household is running. He's

put me in charge of everything he owns— no one in this house has more authority than me! He hasn't held back anything from me except you, because you are his wife. So how could I do such an evil thing as this, and sin against God?"

Day after day she persisted in asking him, but he refused to sleep with her and tried to avoid her. But one day he went into the house to do his work and none of the other servants were there. She grabbed him by his clothing, and demanded, "Sleep with me!" But leaving his clothing in her hand, he ran out of the house.

Seeing that he'd left his clothing in her hand, and had run out of the house, she shouted out to her servants, "Look at this! He brought this Hebrew slave here to dishonor us! This man came to try and rape me, but I screamed at the top of my voice. When he heard me scream for help, he left his clothing beside me and ran outside."

She kept his clothing with her until her husband came home. Then she told him her story. It went like this: "That Hebrew slave you brought here tried to come and dishonor me. But as soon as I screamed and called for help, he left his clothing beside me and ran outside."

When Potiphar heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is what your servant did to me," he became angry. He took Joseph and put him in the prison where the king's prisoners were kept, and there he stayed. But the Lord was with Joseph, showing him trustworthy love, and made the chief jailer pleased with him. So the chief jailer put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners there and gave him the responsibility for running the prison. The chief jailer didn't bother with anything for Joseph took care of it all, for the Lord was with him and made him successful.

Later on the cupbearer and the baker committed some offense against their master, the king of Egypt. Pharaoh was angry with these two royal officials— the chief cupbearer and chief baker— and imprisoned them in the house of the commander of the guard, the same prison where Joseph was. The commander of the guard assigned Joseph to them as their personal attendant. They were kept in prison for some time.

One night while they were in prison the cupbearer and the baker for the king of Egypt each had a dream. They were different dreams, each with its own meaning. When Joseph arrived the next morning he noticed they both looked depressed. So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were imprisoned with him in his master's house, "Why are you looking so depressed?"

"We've both had dreams but can't find anyone to explain what they mean," they said.

So Joseph told them, "Isn't God the one who can interpret the meaning of dreams? Tell me your dreams."

So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. "In my dream there was a vine right in front of me," he explained. "The vine had three branches. As soon as it budded, it flowered, and produced clusters of ripe grapes. I was holding Pharaoh's wine cup, so I picked the grapes and squeezed them into the cup and gave it to Pharaoh."

"This is the meaning," Joseph told him. "The three branches represent three days. In three days' time Pharaoh will take you out of prison and give you back your job, and you will hand Pharaoh his cup as you used to. But when things go well for you, please remember me with kindness and speak to Pharaoh on my behalf, and please get me out of this prison. I was cruelly kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews, and now I'm here in this pit even though I've done nothing wrong."

When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was positive, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream. I had three baskets of cakes on my head. In the top basket were all the cakes and pastries for Pharaoh to eat, and the birds were eating them from the basket on my head."

"This is the meaning," Joseph told him. "The three baskets represent three days. In three days' time Pharaoh will take you out of prison and hang you on a pole, and birds will eat your flesh."

Three days later it happened to be Pharaoh's birthday, and he arranged a banquet for all his officials. He had the chief cupbearer and the chief baker released from prison and brought there before his officials. He gave the chief cupbearer his job back, and he returned to his duties of handing Pharaoh his cup. But he hanged the chief baker just as Joseph had said when he interpreted their dreams. But the chief cupbearer didn't remember to say anything about Joseph—in fact he forgot all about him.

A full two years later, Pharaoh had a dream that he was standing beside the River Nile. He saw seven cows coming up from the river. They looked well-fed and healthy as they grazed among the reeds. Then he saw another seven cows that came up behind them. They looked ugly and skinny as they stood beside the other cows on the bank of the Nile. Then the ugly, skinny cows ate the well-fed, healthy cows. Then Pharaoh woke up.

Pharaoh fell asleep again and had a second dream. Seven heads of grain were growing on one stalk, ripe and healthy. Then seven heads of grain grew up after them, thin and dried by the east wind. The seven thin and dried heads of grain swallowed up the ripe and healthy ones. Then Pharaoh woke up and realized he'd been dreaming.

The next morning Pharaoh was worried by his dreams, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men in Egypt. Pharaoh told them about his dreams, but no one could interpret their meaning for him.

But then the chief cupbearer spoke up. "Today I've just remembered a bad mistake I've made," he explained. "Your Majesty was angry with some of your officials and you imprisoned me in the house of the commander of the guard, along with the chief baker. We each had a dream. They were different dreams, each with its own meaning. A young Hebrew was there with us, a slave of the commander of the guard. When we told him our dreams, he interpreted for us the meaning of our different dreams. Everything happened just as he said it would—I was given back my job and the baker was hanged."

Pharaoh summoned Joseph, and they quickly brought him from the prison. After he'd shaved and changed his clothes, he was presented to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, but no one can interpret its meaning. But I've heard that when

someone tells you a dream you know how to interpret it."

"It's not me who can do this," Joseph replied. "But God will explain its meaning to set Your Majesty's mind at rest."

Pharaoh explained to Joseph, "In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile. I saw seven cows coming up from the river. They looked well-fed and healthy as they grazed among the reeds. Then I saw another seven cows that came up behind them. They looked sickly and ugly and skinny—I've never seen such ugly cows in the whole of Egypt! These skinny, ugly cows ate the first seven healthy-looking cows. But afterwards you couldn't tell they'd eaten them because they looked just as skinny and ugly as before. Then I woke up.

Then I fell asleep again. In my second dream I saw seven heads of grain growing on one stalk, ripe and healthy. Then seven heads of grain grew up after them, withered and thin and dried by the east wind. The seven thin heads of grain swallowed up the healthy ones. I told all this to the magicians, but none of them could explain its meaning to me."

"Pharaoh's dreams mean the same thing," Joseph responded. "God is telling Pharaoh what he is going to do. The seven good cows and the seven good heads of grain represent seven good years of harvest. The dreams mean the same thing. The seven skinny and ugly cows that came after them and the seven thin heads of grain dried by the east wind represent seven years of famine. It's just as I told Your Majesty—God has shown Pharaoh what he is going to do. There are going to be seven years with plenty of food produced throughout the whole country of Egypt. But after them will come seven years of famine. People will forget the time when there was plenty of food throughout Egypt. Famine will ruin the country. The time of plenty will be completely forgotten because the famine that follows it will be so terrible. The fact that the dream was repeated twice means that it has definitely been decided by God, and that God is going to do this soon.

So Your Majesty should choose a man with insight and wisdom, and put him in charge of the whole country of Egypt. Your Majesty should also appoint officials to be in charge of the land, and have them collect one-fifth of the produce of the country during the seven years of plenty. They should collect all the food during the good years that are soon coming, and store the grain under Pharaoh's authority, keeping it under guard to provide food for the towns. This will be a food reserve for the country during the seven years of famine so that the people won't die of starvation."

Pharaoh and all his officials thought Joseph's proposal was a good idea. So Pharaoh asked them, "Where can we find a man like this who has the spirit of God in him?" Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, telling him, "Since God has revealed to you all this, and there's no one like you with such insight and wisdom, you will be in charge of all my affairs, and all my people will obey your orders. Only I with my status as king will be greater than you."

Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Look, I'm putting you in charge of the whole country of Egypt." Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in fine linen clothes and placed a golden chain around his neck. He had Joseph ride in the chariot designated for his second-in-command while his attendants went ahead, shouting, "Bow down!" This is how Pharaoh gave Joseph authority over all of Egypt.

Then Pharaoh told Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, but without your permission nobody will lift a hand or a foot anywhere in the whole country." Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-paneah, and arranged for him to marry Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. This is how Joseph rose to power over the whole of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty when he started working for Pharaoh, king of Egypt. After he had left Pharaoh, Joseph traveled on an inspection tour throughout Egypt. During the seven years of good harvests, the land produced plenty of food. He collected all the food during the seven good years, and he stored the grain produced in the local fields in each town. Joseph piled up so much grain that it was like the sand of the seashore. Eventually he stopped keeping records because there was just so much!

It was during this time, before the years of famine came, that Joseph had two sons by Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. Joseph named his first-born Manasseh, because he said, "The Lord has made me forget all my troubles and all my father's family." His second son he named Ephraim, because he said, "God has made me fruitful in the country of my misery."

The seven years of plenty in Egypt came to an end, and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other countries but the whole of Egypt had food. When all of Egypt was hungry, the people cried out to Pharaoh for food, and he told everyone, "Go and see Joseph and do whatever he tells you." The famine had spread all over the country so Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the people of Egypt. The famine was very bad in Egypt, in fact the famine was very bad everywhere, so people from other countries all around came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph.

When Jacob found out grain was available in Egypt, he asked his sons, "Why do you keep on looking at each other to do something? I've heard there's grain in Egypt. Go there and buy some for us so we can stay alive—if not, we're going to die!"

So ten of Joseph's brothers went to Egypt to buy grain. But Jacob did not send Joseph's brother Benjamin with his other brothers, for he said, "I'm afraid something bad might happen to him." So Israel's sons went to buy grain along with everyone else, because there was famine in Canaan too.

Joseph was the governor of the country and he sold grain to all the people there. So Joseph's brothers went to him, and bowed low before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph recognized them as soon as he saw them, but he acted like a stranger towards them and spoke to them in a severe way, saying, "Where are you from?"

"From the country of Canaan," they replied. "We've come to buy food."

Even though Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him. Joseph thought back to the dreams he'd had about them, and told them, “No! You're spies! You've come to discover our country's weaknesses!”

“That's not true, my lord!” they responded. “We, your servants, have just come to buy food. We're all the sons of one man and we're honest. We're not spies!”

“No! You've come to find our country's weaknesses!” he insisted.

“Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man living in the country of Canaan,” they explained. “The youngest is right now with our father, and one has passed away.”

“As I said before, you're spies!” Joseph declared. “This is how your story will be checked. I swear on Pharaoh's life that you'll never leave this country unless your younger brother comes here. One of you go back and bring your other brother here. The others of you will be kept here in prison until it's clear that you're telling the truth. If not, then I swear on Pharaoh's life it proves you're spies!”

So Joseph put all of them in prison for three days. On the third day he told them, “Since I'm someone who respects God, do as I tell you and you'll live. If you're truly honest, choose one of your brothers to stay here in prison. The rest of you can go back home with grain for your hungry families. But you must bring your youngest brother here to me to prove what you're saying is true. If not, you will all die.” They agreed to do this.

“Clearly we're being punished for what we did to our brother,” they said to each other. “We watched him in agony pleading with us for mercy, but we refused to listen to him. That's why we're in all this trouble.”

Reuben said to them, “Didn't I tell you, ‘Don't harm the boy!’ But you didn't listen to me. Now we're paying the price for what we did to him.” They didn't realize that Joseph understood what they were saying because they were talking to him through an interpreter. Joseph stepped away from them because he started crying. He came back when he was able to speak to them again. He chose Simeon and had him tied up as they watched.

Joseph gave the order to fill up their sacks with grain, and also to return the money they had paid by placing it in the sacks as well. He also ordered that they should be provided with food for their journey home. All this was done. The brothers loaded the grain onto their donkeys and then set off.

On their way they stopped for the night, and one of them opened up his sack to give his donkey something to eat and saw his money there at the top of the sack. He told his brothers, “My money's been returned to me. It's right here at the top of my sack!” They were horrified! Trembling with fear they asked each other, “What is this that God's done to us?”

When they arrived home in Canaan, they told their father Jacob everything that had happened. “The man who is the country's governor spoke to us in a severe way, and accused us of spying on the land,” they explained. “We told him, ‘We are honest men. We're not spies! We are twelve brothers, the sons of one father. One has passed away and the youngest is right now with our father in the country of Canaan.’ Then the man who is the country's governor said to us, ‘This is how I'll find out if you're telling the truth: you are to leave one of your brothers here with me while the rest take grain home for your hungry families. Then bring your youngest brother to me. That way I'll know you're not spies but you're telling the truth. I'll release your brother to you, and you can stay in the country and trade.’”

As they emptied their sacks, each one's money bag was there in his sack! When they and their father saw the money bags, they were horrified. Jacob their father accused them, “You have taken Joseph from me —he's gone! Simeon is gone too! Now you want to take Benjamin away! I'm the one who's suffering from all of this!”

“You can kill my two sons if I don't bring him back to you,” Reuben assured him. “Trust me with him, and I will bring him home to you myself.”

“My son won't go there with you!” Jacob declared. “His brother is dead, and he's the only one I have left. If anything bad happens to him on the journey you're planning, you'll send this old man to his grave in grief.”

The famine continued to be really bad in Canaan, so once they had finished the grain they'd brought from Egypt, their father told them, “You have to go back and buy some more grain for us.”

But Judah responded, “The man was adamant when he warned us, ‘I won't even see you unless your brother is with you.’ If you send our brother Benjamin with us then we'll go and buy food for you. But if you won't send him, then we won't go, because the man was very clear, ‘I won't even see you unless your brother is with you.’”

“Why have you made things so bad for me by telling the man you had another brother?” Israel asked.

“The man kept on asking direct questions about us and our family like ‘Is your father still alive?’ and ‘Do you have another brother?’” they replied. “We just answered his questions. How were we to know he'd say, ‘Bring your brother here!’?”

Judah said to his father Israel, “Send the boy in my care, and we'll leave immediately, so that we can stay alive and not die—and that includes you and us and our children! I promise to take care of him—I'll be personally responsible for bringing him back to you. If I don't, then I will always carry the blame! Now let's go, because if we hadn't hesitated, we could have gone there and come back twice by now.”

“If it has to be, then this is what you'll do,” Israel replied. “Take with you the best our country produces. Pack your bags with gifts for the man—balm, a little honey, spices, myrrh, pistachios, and almonds. Take double the money that was returned to you in your sacks—maybe it was a mistake. Take your brother and go back to the man right away. May God Almighty make the man treat you kindly so when you come before him he'll release your other brother and send Benjamin back. As for me, if I am to lose all my children, then so be it.”

So they packed the gifts, took double the money, and set off, accompanied by Benjamin. They arrived in Egypt and went to have an audience with Joseph.

When Joseph saw Benjamin was with them, he told his household supervisor, “Take these men to my house. Slaughter an animal and make a meal, for they are going to eat with me at noon.”

The man did as Joseph ordered and took them to Joseph's house. They were really worried that they were being taken to Joseph's house. “It's because of the money that was put in our sacks the first time we came,” they said to each other. “That's why we're being brought in—so he can accuse us and attack us! He'll make us his slaves and take our donkeys!”

So they went and spoke to Joseph's household supervisor at the entrance to the house. “Please excuse us, my lord,” they said. “We came down the first time to buy food, and when we stopped for the night, we opened our sacks and each of us found our money—the exact amount—at the top of our sacks. So we've brought it back with us. We've also brought more money to buy food. We've no idea who put our money in our sacks!”

“Everything's fine!” he told them. “Don't worry! Your God, the God of your father, must have given you the treasure hidden in your sacks. I got your money.” Then he brought Simeon out to meet them. The steward took them inside Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet, and supplied food for their donkeys. They got their gifts ready for when Joseph would come at noon, because they had found out that they were going to eat there.

When Joseph arrived at the house they gave him the gifts they had brought for him, and bowed low to the ground before him. He asked how they were, and then he asked, “How is your elderly father doing that you spoke of? Is he still alive?”

“Yes, your servant our father is still alive, and is well,” they replied and bowed low in respect.

Then Joseph looked over at his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother. “Is this your youngest brother that you told me about?” he asked. “God be gracious to you, my son,” he said.

Joseph had to run out quickly because he was becoming so emotional at seeing his brother. He looked for a place to cry, and went to his room to weep there. Then he washed his face, got his emotions under control, and went back out. “Serve the food,” he ordered.

Joseph was served at a table by himself, and his brothers were served at a separate table. The Egyptians were also served at another table, because Egyptians cannot eat with Hebrews because they find this repulsive. The brothers had been seated in front of him in order by age, from the firstborn, the oldest, down to the youngest, and they looked at each other in complete surprise. The food was served to them from Joseph's table, and Benjamin received five times as much as anyone else. So they ate and drank plenty with him.

Joseph ordered his household supervisor, “Fill the men's sacks with as much grain as they can hold and put each man's money at the top of his sack. Then put my special silver cup at the top of the sack of the youngest, along with the money for his grain.” He did as Joseph told him. At sunrise they were sent on their way with their donkeys. They had hardly left the city when Joseph told his household supervisor, “Go after those men, and when you catch up with them, ask them, ‘Why have you paid back good with evil by stealing my master's silver cup? This is the cup he personally drinks from, and which he uses for divination. What you've done is really evil!’”

When he caught up with them, he told them what Joseph had said.

“My lord, what are you saying?” they replied. “We your servants wouldn't do anything like that! Remember that we brought back the money we found at the top of our sacks when we returned from Canaan. Why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? If any one of us is found with it, he shall die, and all of us will become your slaves.”

“Whatever you say,” the man replied, “but only the one found with it will become my slave since the rest of you will be free of any blame.” They all unloaded their sacks and put them on the ground. They each opened their own sacks. The household supervisor searched the sacks, beginning with the oldest and working his way down to the youngest. The cup was found in Benjamin's sack. The brothers tore their clothes in grief. Then they loaded their sacks back on their donkeys and headed back to the city.

Joseph was still at home when Judah and his brothers arrived, and they fell to the ground before him. “Why did you do this?” Joseph asked. “Don't you know a man like me can find out things through divination?”

“My lord, what can we say?” Judah replied. “How can we explain this to you? In what way can we prove our innocence? God has exposed the guilt of your servants. My lord, we are your slaves—all of us, including the one who was found with the cup.”

“I wouldn't do anything like that!” Joseph replied. “Only the man who was found with the cup will become my slave. The rest of you are free to return to your father.”

Judah came closer and said to him, “If you please, my lord, let your servant just say a word. Please don't become angry with your servant, even though you are as powerful as Pharaoh himself. My lord, previously you asked us, ‘Do you have a father or a brother?’ We told you, my lord, ‘We have an elderly father, and a younger brother, born when our father was already old. The boy's brother is dead. He is the only one of his mother's children left, and his father loves him dearly.’

Then you ordered us, ‘Bring him here to me so I can see him.’ We told you, ‘The boy can't leave his father; if he did, his father would die.’ But you told us, ‘If your youngest brother doesn't come with you, you won't see me again.’

So when we went back to your servant, our father, we explained to him everything you had told us. However, later on, our father told us, ‘Go back and buy some more food.’ But we said, ‘There's no way we can go back unless Benjamin our youngest brother goes with us, because we won't be able to see the man if Benjamin isn't with us.’

Then my father said to us, ‘You realize that my wife had two sons for me. One is no more, ripped to pieces no doubt, for I've never seen him since. If you take this one away from me too, and something bad happens to him, you'll send this old man to his grave in grief.’

So if the boy isn't with us when I go back to my father, whose life depends on the life of the boy, as soon as he sees the boy isn't there he'll die, and we will really send this old man, our father, to his grave in grief. In fact I gave myself as the guarantee for the boy to my father. I told him, 'If I don't bring him back to you, then I will always carry the blame!'

So please let me stay here as my lord's slave instead of the boy. Let him go back home with his brothers. For how could I ever go back to my father if the boy wasn't with me? I couldn't stand seeing the anguish that would cause my father."

Joseph couldn't control his emotions any longer while all his attendants were there, so he shouted out, "Everybody leave me!" So there was nobody else there when Joseph revealed who he was to his brothers. But he cried so loudly that the Egyptians could hear him, and they told Pharaoh's household about it.

"I'm Joseph!" he announced to his brothers. "Is my father still alive?" They couldn't answer him as they were so surprised to see him face to face.

"Please come closer to me," he told his brothers. They came over to him. "I'm your brother Joseph who you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don't be worried or get angry with yourselves that you sold me to be a slave here, because it was God who sent me ahead of you to save lives. The country has suffered from famine for two years already, but there will be five more years with no plowing or reaping. God sent me ahead of you to make sure you would still have descendants, to save your lives in this miraculous way. So it wasn't you who sent me here, but God. He was the one who made me Pharaoh's chief advisor in charge of all his affairs, and ruler of the whole country of Egypt.

Now hurry! Go back to my father and tell him, 'This message comes from your son Joseph: God has made me the ruler of the whole of Egypt. Come to me now; don't wait. You'll live in the land of Goshen so you can be close to me with your children and grandchildren, and with your flocks and herds and everything that belongs to you. I'll make sure you have food, because there are still five more years of famine to come. Otherwise you and your family and your animals are going to starve.'"

Then Joseph told his brothers, "You can all see for yourselves—including my brother Benjamin—that it's really me talking to you! Tell my father how much I'm respected in Egypt. Tell him everything that you've seen. Hurry! Bring my father here quickly!" He hugged Benjamin, and Benjamin hugged him back. They both wept for joy. He kissed all his brothers and wept over them, and after that his brothers were able to start talking with him.

Word soon reached Pharaoh's palace that Joseph's brothers had arrived. Pharaoh and his officials were glad to hear the news.

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Tell your brothers, 'This is what you are to do: Load your donkeys with grain and go back to the country of Canaan. Then bring your father and your families and return here to me. I will give you the best land in Egypt, and you shall eat the best food the country has to offer.'

Tell them to do this as well: 'Take some wagons from Egypt for your children and your wives. Bring them and your father here. Don't worry about bringing your possessions because the best of all Egypt is yours.'"

So that's what the sons of Israel did. Joseph provided them with wagons, as Pharaoh had ordered. He also gave them supplies for their journey. He gave each of them new clothes. But to Benjamin he gave five sets of clothes and 300 pieces of silver. Joseph also sent to his father the following: ten donkeys carrying the best things from Egypt, and ten female donkeys carrying grain and bread and supplies needed for his father's journey.

Then he saw his brothers off, and as they left he told them, "Don't argue on the way!" So they left Egypt and went back home to their father Jacob in the country of Canaan.

"Joseph's still alive!" they told him. "It's true, and he's the ruler of the whole country of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned at the news—he just couldn't believe it! But when they told him everything that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to take him to Egypt, Jacob came back to his senses. Israel said, "All right, I believe you! My son Joseph is still alive! I'm going to go and see him before I die."

So Israel left for Egypt with everything he had. When he arrived at Beersheba he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. During the night God spoke to Israel in a vision. "Jacob! Jacob!" he called.

"I'm here," he replied.

"I am God, the God of your father! Don't be afraid to go to Egypt, because I will turn you and your descendants into a great nation. I will go to Egypt with you, and I promise to bring you back again. And Joseph will personally close your eyes when you die."

Then Jacob left Beersheba. His sons took him, their children, and their wives to Egypt using the wagons Pharaoh had sent. They also took with them all their livestock and all the personal belongings they had accumulated in the country of Canaan.

So Jacob and everyone in his extended family went to Egypt, including all his sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters.

The following is the genealogy of Israel and his sons who went to Egypt: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn.

The sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a woman from Canaan.

The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah. However, Er and Onan died in Canaan.

The sons of Perez: Hezron and Hamul.

The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Job, and Shimron.

The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel.

These are the sons Leah had for Jacob in Paddan-aram, as well as his daughter Dinah. The total number of sons and daughters and grandchildren was thirty-three.

The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.

The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah.

The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel.

These are the sons of Jacob Zilpah had, the servant given by Laban to his daughter Leah, a total of sixteen children and grandchildren.

The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

The sons Joseph had in the land of Egypt by Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On: Manasseh and Ephraim.

The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. These are the sons that Rachel had for Jacob, a total of fourteen children and grandchildren.

The son of Dan: Hushim.

The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.

These are the sons of Jacob that Bilhah had, the servant given by Laban to his daughter Rachel, a total of seven children and grandchildren.

All those who were part of Jacob's family who came to Egypt (his blood relatives, apart from wives of Jacob's sons) totaled sixty-six. Including the two sons Joseph had in Egypt, the total number of Jacob's family who were in Egypt was seventy.

Jacob sent Judah on ahead to meet Joseph and find out the way to Goshen. When they arrived in Goshen, Joseph ordered his chariot made ready and went to meet his father Israel there. As soon as he arrived, he hugged his father and wept for a long time.

"Now I can die in peace because I have seen your face again and know you're still alive," Israel told Joseph.

Joseph told his brothers and his father's household, "I'm going to go and report to Pharaoh and tell him, 'My brothers and my father's household have arrived from the country of Canaan to join me. They are shepherds and keep livestock. They have brought with them their flocks and herds and all their possessions.'

When Pharaoh calls for you and asks you, 'What work do you do?' tell him, 'Your servants have looked after livestock since we were children, both us and our fathers before us.' That way you'll be able to live here in Goshen, because Egyptians look down on shepherds."

Joseph went to report to Pharaoh and told him, "My father and brothers, along with their flocks and herds and all their possessions, have arrived from the land of Canaan and now they're here in Goshen." Joseph took five of his brothers to go with him and introduced them to Pharaoh.

Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What work do you do?"

"Your servants are shepherds, just like our fathers before us," they replied.

"We have come to live in Egypt because there's no grass left in Canaan for our flocks to eat," they explained. "The famine is really bad in Canaan. So we would like to please ask permission to live in Goshen."

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Now that your father and brothers have arrived to join you, you can choose wherever you like in Egypt, the best place, for them to live. Let them live in Goshen. If you know any of them who are good at what they do, put them in charge of my livestock as well."

Then Joseph went with his father Jacob and introduced him to Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, Pharaoh asked him, "So how long have you lived?"

"I have been wandering for 130 years," Jacob replied. "My life has been short and difficult—I have not lived as long as my forefathers who also wandered from place to place." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh again before leaving him.

So Joseph arranged for his father and brothers to live in Egypt and gave them land in the best part near Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered. He also provided food for all of them—his father, his brothers, and his father's whole household—depending on family size.

No food was left in the whole country because the famine had become so bad. Throughout Egypt and Canaan people were starving. By selling grain Joseph collected all the money in Egypt and Canaan, and placed it in Pharaoh's treasury. Once the money from Egypt and Canaan had run out, the Egyptians all came to Joseph and demanded, "Give us food! Do you want us to die right in front of you? All our money is gone!"

"Bring me your livestock," Joseph told them. "I'll give you grain in exchange for your livestock if you've run out of money."

So they brought Joseph their livestock, and he provided them with grain in exchange for their horses, sheep, goats, cattle, and donkeys. He gave them grain in return for their livestock during that year.

But when that year was over, they came to him the next year and said, "My lord, we can't hide from you the fact that our money is gone and that you now own our livestock. All we have left to give you are our bodies and our land. Do you want us to die right in front of you? So buy us and our land in return for food. Then our land will belong to Pharaoh, and we'll be his slaves. Just give us grain so we can live and won't die, and so the land won't be abandoned."

So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. Each and every Egyptian sold their fields, because the famine was hurting them so badly. The land ended up being owned by Pharaoh, and all the people became his slaves, from one end of Egypt to the other. The only land he didn't buy belonged to the priests because they had a food allowance provided to them by Pharaoh, so they didn't have to sell their land.

Then Joseph told the people, "Listen to me! Now that I have bought you and your land for Pharaoh, I'm giving you some seed for you to sow the fields. However, when it's harvested, you have to give one-fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you can keep as seed for the fields and as food for you, your households, and your children."

"You've saved our lives," they declared. "May you continue to treat us well, my lord, and we'll be Pharaoh's slaves."

So Joseph made it a law for Egypt which is still is in effect today that one-fifth of all produce from the land belongs to Pharaoh. Only the priests' land was exempt since it did not belong to Pharaoh.

The Israelites settled in Goshen in Egypt where they became prosperous landowners and rapidly increased in number. Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years, so he lived in total 147 years.

When the time came for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If you think well of me, place your hand under my thigh and promise to treat me with trustworthy love and faithfulness. Don't bury me here in Egypt. When I die, bury me with my forefathers. You must take my body from Egypt to the family tomb and bury me with them.”

“I will do as you say,” Joseph promised.

“Swear to me that you will,” he said. Joseph swore that he would. Israel bowed in worship at the head of his bed.

Sometime after this, Joseph was told, “Your father is sick.” So Joseph went to see him, taking with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim.

When Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to you,” he gathered his strength and sat up in bed. Jacob said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in Canaan, and he blessed me there. He told me, ‘Listen! I will make you prosperous and make your descendants so numerous that you will become the ancestor of many nations, and I will give this land to your descendants to own forever.’

I am counting as mine your two sons Ephraim and Manasseh who were born here in Egypt before I arrived, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any other children you have after them will be yours, and will share their inheritance within the land of their older brothers. I'm doing this because tragically for me when I was returning from Paddan-aram, Rachel died in Canaan some distance from Ephrath. I buried her there on the way to Ephrath” (also known as Bethlehem).

Israel saw Joseph's sons and said, “So these are your sons?”

“Yes, these are the sons God gave me here,” Joseph told his father.

“Bring them over here so I can bless them,” he said.

Israel's eyesight was failing because of his age and he couldn't see well, so Joseph brought them close to his father, and he kissed and hugged them. Israel said to Joseph, “I never thought I'd see your face again, and now God has even let me see your children!”

Joseph took his sons from between Israel's knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground. Then Joseph placed Ephraim on his right so he would be on Israel's left, and Manasseh on his left so he would be on Israel's right, and then brought them over to Israel. But when Israel reached out his hands, he crossed them over and placed his right hand on Ephraim the younger son, and placed his left on Manasseh, the firstborn. He blessed Joseph, saying,

“May the God my grandfather Abraham and my father worshiped—the God who has taken care of me like a shepherd throughout my life until now, the Angel who has saved me from all kinds of trouble—may he bless these boys. May my name and the names of my grandfather Abraham and father Isaac continue through them, and may they have many descendants that spread throughout the earth.”

Joseph was unhappy when he saw his father had put his right hand on Ephraim, so he took his father's hand to try and move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. “Not like that, father, this is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head,” Joseph told him.

But his father refused, saying, “I know what I'm doing. Manasseh will also become an important people, but his younger brother will be greater than him, and his descendants will become a large nation.”

So Israel blessed them that day and said: “In the future the people of Israel will use your names to give a blessing, saying, ‘May God bless you like he did Ephraim and Manasseh.’” In saying this he placed Ephraim before Manasseh.

Then Israel said to Joseph, “I'm going to die soon, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. I'm also giving you something in addition to what I'm giving your brothers—the piece of land on the mountain slope of Shechem that I took from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”

Jacob called his sons together, and said, “Gather round so I can tell you what's going to happen to you in the future. Come here, sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father.

Reuben, you are my firstborn, conceived when I was strong, born when I was vigorous! You were above all others in position, above all others in power. But you boil over like water, so you won't be above anyone anymore, because you went and slept with my concubine; you violated my marriage bed.

Simeon and Levi are two of the same kind—they use their weapons for destructive violence. I refuse to be part of their decisions; I refuse to participate in what they do. For they killed men in their anger; they crippled cattle just for fun. I curse their anger because it is too harsh; I curse their fury because it is too cruel! I will separate their descendants throughout Jacob; I will scatter them throughout Israel.

Judah, your brothers will praise you. You will defeat your enemies. Your father's sons shall bow down to you in respect. My son Judah is a young lion coming back from eating its prey. He crouches and lies down like a lion. Like a lion, who would dare to disturb him? Judah will always hold the scepter, and the staff of authority will always be at his feet until Shiloh comes; the nations will obey him. He ties his donkey to the vine, his donkey's colt to the best vine. He washes his clothes in wine, his robes in the red juice of grapes. His eyes sparkle more than wine, and his teeth are whiter than milk.

Zebulun will live on the seashore and provide a harbor for ships; his territory will extend towards Sidon.

Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two saddle bags. He sees that the place where he's resting is good, and the land is lovely, so he's willing to lower his back to accept the burden and to work as a slave.

Dan will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan will be as dangerous as a snake beside the road, a viper by the path that bites the horse's heel, throwing its rider off backwards.

I trust in you to save me, Lord.

Raiders will attack Gad, but he will attack their heels.

Asher will have delicious food—he'll produce fancy food for royalty.

Naphtali is a deer that's free to run; it gives birth to beautiful fawns.

Joseph is a fruitful tree, a fruitful tree beside a spring, whose branches climb over the wall. The archers viciously attacked him; they shot their arrows at him with hate. But he held his bow steady, and his arms and hands moved quickly in the strength of the Mighty One of Jacob, who is called the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel. The God of your father will help you and the Almighty will bless you with blessings from the heavens above, with blessings from the depths below, with blessings for many children. The blessings your father received were greater than the blessings of his forefathers, more than the blessings of the eternal mountains. May they be upon the head of Joseph, on the forehead of the one set apart as a leader from his brothers.

Benjamin is a vicious wolf. In the morning he destroys his enemies, in the evening he divides the loot."

These are all of the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father told them as he blessed them, each according to their respective blessings.

Then he gave them the following instructions: "I'm going to die soon. Bury me with my forefathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite. This is the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, that Abraham bought together with the field from Ephron the Hittite to own as a burial site. Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried there, Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried there, and I buried Leah there. The field and the cave were bought from the Hittites."

When Jacob finished giving these instructions he pulled up his feet into the bed, breathed his last, and joined his forefathers in death.

Joseph went and hugged his father, weeping over him and kissing him. Then Joseph instructed the physicians who worked for him to embalm his father's body. So the physicians embalmed Israel. This took a full 40 days, the normal time for the process, and the Egyptians mourned for him for 70 days.

Once the time of mourning was over, Joseph said to Pharaoh's officials, "If you'd be so kind, please speak to Pharaoh on my behalf, and explain to him that my father made me swear an oath, telling me, 'You must bury me in the tomb I've prepared for myself in Canaan. Please allow me to go and bury my father and then I'll return.'"

Pharaoh replied, "Go and bury your father as he made you swear to do."

Joseph went to bury his father, and all Pharaoh's officials went with him—all Pharaoh's senior advisors and all the leaders of Egypt— as well as Joseph's family, his brothers, and his father's family. They only left the small children and their flocks and herds back in Goshen. They were accompanied by chariots and horsemen—a really large procession.

When they got to the threshing floor of Atad, on the other side of the Jordan, they wept loudly in sorrow. Joseph held a seven-day ceremony of mourning for his father there. The Canaanites who lived there watched the ceremony of mourning at the threshing floor of Atad. They said, "This is a very sad time of mourning for the Egyptians," so they renamed the place Abel-mizraim, which is on the other side of the Jordan.

Jacob's sons did what he had instructed them to do. They carried his body to Canaan and buried him in the cave at Machpelah in the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site.

After they had buried their father, Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt along with all those who had gone with them. However, now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became worried, saying, "Maybe Joseph is holding a grudge against us, and he'll pay us back for all the bad things we did to him."

So they sent a message to Joseph to tell him, "Before your father died, he gave this order: 'This is what you are to tell Joseph: Forgive your brothers their sins, the bad things they did to you, treating you in such a nasty way.' Now please forgive us our sins, we who are servants of the God of your father." When Joseph received their message, he cried.

Then his brothers themselves came and fell down before Joseph and said, "We are your slaves!"

"You don't need to be afraid!" he told them. "I don't stand in the place of God, do I? While you planned bad things for me, God planned it for good so that in the end many lives could be saved. So don't worry. I'll go on taking care of you and your children." Speaking kindly like this he calmed them down.

Joseph remained in Egypt, together with his father's whole family. He lived to be 110, and saw three generations of his son Ephraim, and the sons of Makir, Manasseh's son, were placed in his lap when they were born.

"I'm going to die soon," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will be with you, and he will lead you out of this country to the land that he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, saying, "When God comes to be with you, you must take my bones with you when you leave." Joseph died when he was 110. After his body was embalmed, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Exodus

Book of Exodus

These were the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob) who came with him to Egypt along with their families: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. Jacob had 70 descendants there, including Joseph who was already in Egypt.

Eventually Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died. However, the Israelites had many children and their numbers increased rapidly. In fact there were so many of them that they became very powerful—the country was full of them.

Then a new king came to power who didn't know anything about Joseph. He conferred with his fellow Egyptians and said, “Look at these Israelites—there are more of them than us, and they're more powerful than us. Let's deal wisely with them before they become so many that if there's a war they'll side with our enemies and fight us, and flee the country.”

So the Egyptians made them do forced labor and put taskmasters in charge of them. They used them to build the storage towns of Pithom and Rameses. But the more the Israelites were mistreated, the more they grew in numbers and spread out—and the more the Egyptians detested them. The Egyptians worked the Israelites brutally, making their lives a misery. They made them do hard labor, building with mortar and brick, and all kinds of heavy work in the fields. In all of this hard labor they treated them brutally.

Then the king gave orders to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. He told them, “When you assist the Hebrew women during childbirth, if you see it's a boy, kill him; but if it's a girl, let her live.” But because the midwives revered God, they didn't do what the king of Egypt had ordered. They let the boys live as well.

The king of Egypt called the midwives in and demanded to know, “Why have you done this— letting the male children live?”

“Hebrew women aren't like Egyptian women,” the midwives told Pharaoh. “They give birth more easily—they have them before we midwives arrive.”

God treated the midwives well, and the people increased in number so there were even more of them. Because the midwives revered God, he gave them families of their own.

Then Pharaoh issued this order to all his people: “Throw every Hebrew boy that's born into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

It was around this time that a man from the tribe of Levi married a woman, also a Levite. She became pregnant and had a son. She saw he was a lovely baby, and she hid him for three months. But when she couldn't hide him anymore, she got a papyrus basket and covered it with tar and pitch. Then she put her baby in the basket and placed it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister waited some distance away, keeping an eye on him.

Then Pharaoh's daughter arrived to bathe in the Nile. Her ladies-in-waiting were walking along the bank of the river. When she saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it and bring it to her. When she opened it she saw the baby boy. He was crying and she felt sorry for him. “This must be one of the Hebrew boys,” she said.

His sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, “Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse him for you?”

“Yes, go and do that,” she replied. So the girl went and called the baby's mother to come.

“Take this baby boy and nurse him for me,” Pharaoh's daughter told his mother. “I will pay you myself.” So his mother took him home and nursed him.

When the boy was older she took him to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son. She called him Moses, because she said, “I pulled him out of the water.”

Later, when Moses had grown up, he went to visit his people, the Hebrews. He saw them doing hard labor. He also saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. He looked all around to make sure no one was watching, and then he killed the Egyptian and buried his body in the sand.

The following day he went back and he saw two Hebrews fighting with each other. He said to the one at fault, “Why are you beating one of your own people?”

“Who put you in charge to judge us?” the man replied. “Are you going to kill me like you did the Egyptian?” Moses became frightened at this, and said to himself, “People know what I've done!”

When Pharaoh found out, he tried to have Moses killed, but Moses ran away from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian.

One day as he was sitting by a well, the Midianite priest's seven daughters came to fetch water to fill up the troughs so their father's flock could drink. Some shepherds arrived and chased them off, but Moses intervened and rescued them, and watered their flock.

When they got home, their father Reuel asked them, “How did you get back so quickly today?”

“An Egyptian rescued us from some shepherds who attacked us,” they replied. “Then he even fetched water for us so the flock could drink.”

“So where is he?” Reuel asked his daughters. “You didn't just leave him there, did you? Go and invite him to eat with us!”

Moses agreed to stay with the man, who arranged for his daughter Zipporah to marry Moses. She had a son, and Moses named him Gershom, for he said, “I'm an exile living in a foreign country.”

Years later, the king of Egypt died. But the Israelites were still groaning under their hard labor. Their cries for help because of their hardship reached God. God heard their groans, and recalled his agreement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God also looked sympathetically on the Israelites, and was concerned for them.

Moses was a shepherd, looking after the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, the Midianite priest. He led the flock far into the wilderness until he came to God's mountain, Mount Horeb. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from inside a bush. Moses looked carefully and saw that though the bush was on fire, it wasn't being burned up.

"Let me go over and take a look," Moses said to himself. "It's very odd to see a bush that's not burning up."

When the Lord saw that Moses was coming to take a look, God called to him from inside the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"I'm here," Moses replied.

"Don't come any closer!" God told him. "Take off your sandals because you're standing on holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses covered his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

"I'm completely aware of the misery of my people in Egypt," the Lord told him. "I have heard them crying out because of their taskmasters. I know how much they're suffering. That's why I have come down to rescue them from Egyptian oppression and to take them up from that country to a productive, wide-open land—a land flowing with milk and honey—where currently the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites are living. Listen! The cries of the Israelites have reached me, and I have seen how badly the Egyptians are mistreating them. Now you must leave, because I'm sending you to Pharaoh to lead my people Israel out of Egypt."

But Moses said to God, "Why me? I'm a nobody! I couldn't go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt!"

"I'll be with you," the Lord replied, "and this will be the sign that it is really me who is sending you: when you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God at this very mountain."

Then Moses said to God, "Look! If I were to go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' — then what should I tell them?"

God replied to Moses, "'I Am' is who I am. Tell the Israelites this: 'I Am' has sent me to you."

Then God said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'The Lord—the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you. This is my name forever, the name you are to call me for all generations to come.'

Go, and call all the elders of Israel to meet with you. Tell them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, has appeared to me—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He said, "I have paid close attention to what's been happening to you in Egypt. I have decided to take you away from the misery you're having in Egypt and bring you to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey."

"The elders of Israel will accept what you say. Then you must go with them to the king of Egypt and tell him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us. So please let us go three days journey into the desert so we can offer sacrifices to the Lord our God there.' But I know that the king of Egypt won't let you go unless he's forced to do so by a power stronger than him. So I will use my power to inflict on Egypt all the terrifying things that I'm about to do to them. After that he'll let you go. I will make the Egyptians treat you well as a people, so when you go you won't leave empty-handed. Every woman will ask her neighbor as well as any woman living in her house for silver and gold jewelry and clothing, and put them on your sons and daughters. In this way you will take the wealth of the Egyptians with you."

"But what if they don't believe me or listen to what I say?" Moses asked. "They could say, 'The Lord didn't appear to you.'"

The Lord asked him, "What are you holding in your hand?"

"A walking stick," Moses replied.

"Throw it on the ground," he told Moses. So Moses did. It turned into a snake and Moses ran away from it.

"Reach out and grab hold of it by its tail," the Lord told Moses. Moses did so and it turned back into a walking stick in his hand.

"You are to do this so that they will believe that I the Lord did appear to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Then the Lord told him, "Put your hand inside your clothes close to your chest." So Moses did as he was told. When he took his hand out, it was white like snow with a skin disease.

"Now put your hand back inside your clothes," the Lord said. Moses did so. When he took it out again, his hand had returned to normal.

"If they don't believe you and they're not convinced by the first sign, they'll believe because of the second sign," the Lord explained. "But if they still don't believe you or listen to you because of these two signs, then you are to take some water from the Nile and pour it out on the ground. The Nile water will turn into blood on the ground."

Then Moses said to the Lord, "Please excuse me, but I'm not someone who is good with words—not in the past, and not from the time you have been speaking with me, your servant. My speech is slow and I don't say things well."

"Who gave people mouths?" the Lord asked him. "Who makes people deaf or dumb, able to see or blind? It's I, the Lord, who does that. Now go, and I myself will be your mouth, and I will tell you what you are to say."

"Please, Lord, send someone else!" Moses responded.

The Lord got angry with Moses, and told him, "There's your brother Aaron, the Levite. I know he speaks well. He's on his way to meet you, and he'll be very happy to see you. Speak to him and tell him what to say. I will be your mouth and his mouth, and I will tell you what you are to do. Aaron will speak on your behalf to the people, as if he was your mouth, and you will be in the place of God to him. Make sure to take your walking stick with you so you can use it to do the signs."

Then Moses returned to Jethro his father-in-law and told him, "Please allow me to go back to my own people in Egypt so I can see if any of them are still alive."

"Go with my blessing," Jethro replied.

While Moses was in Midian, the Lord told him, "Go back to Egypt because all those who wanted to kill you have died."

Moses put his wife and sons on a donkey and went back to Egypt, carrying the walking stick that God had used to perform miracles.

The Lord told Moses, “When you get back to Egypt, make sure to go to Pharaoh and carry out the miracles I've given you to do. I will make him stubborn and he will not let the people go. This is what you are to tell Pharaoh, ‘This is what the Lord says. Israel is my firstborn son. I ordered you to let my son go so he can worship me. But you refused to release him, so I will now kill your firstborn son.’”

But while they were on their way the Lord came to the place where they were staying, wanting to kill Moses. However, Zipporah used a flint knife to cut off her son's foreskin. She touched his feet with it, and said to him, “You are a blood-husband to me.” (Calling him a blood-husband referred to circumcision.) After this the Lord left Moses alone.

The Lord had told Aaron, “Go and meet Moses in the desert.” So Aaron went and met Moses at the mountain of God and greeted him with a kiss. Then Moses explained to Aaron everything the Lord had sent him to say and all the miracles he had ordered him to do. Moses and Aaron traveled to Egypt. There they had all the Israelite elders gather together. Aaron shared with them everything the Lord had told Moses, and Moses carried out the miracles so they could see them. The Israelites were convinced. When they heard that the Lord had come to them, and that he had been touched by their suffering, they bowed their heads and worshiped.

After this Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, ‘Let my people go so they can hold a religious festival for me in the desert.’”

“Who is this ‘Lord’ that I should listen to his request to let Israel go?” Pharaoh replied. “I don't know the Lord and I certainly won't let Israel leave!”

“The God of the Hebrews came to us,” they added. “Please allow us to go a three-day journey into the desert and offer sacrifices to the Lord our God. Otherwise he'll kill us by disease or by the sword.”

“Moses and Aaron, why are you trying to take people away from their assigned labor?” Pharaoh asked. “Get back to work!” he ordered.

“Look here,” he went on. “There are many of your people here in our country and you are preventing them from doing their assigned labor.” That very day he ordered the slave drivers and those in charge of the people: “Don't give them any more straw to make bricks like before. Have them go and collect the straw themselves. But still make them produce the same quantity of bricks as before. They're lazy people—that's why they're calling out, asking, ‘Please let us go and offer sacrifices to our god.’ Make their work harder so they can get on with it and not pay any attention to all these lies!”

So the slave drivers and those in charge went out and told the people, “This is what Pharaoh has ordered: ‘I won't give you any more straw. Go and get straw for yourselves wherever you can find it, because your work quota won't be reduced.’” So the people went all over Egypt collecting stubble for straw.

The slave drivers kept on forcing them, saying, “You still have to do the same work as you did when you had straw provided!” They beat the Israelite supervisors they had put in charge, shouting at them, “Why haven't you met your quota of bricks as you did before?”

The Israelite supervisors went to Pharaoh to complain, saying, “Why are you treating us your servants like this? You don't give us any straw but your slave drivers demand that we make bricks, and they beat us! Your people are treating us badly!”

“No, you're just lazy, lazy people!” Pharaoh replied. “That's why you keep on asking, ‘Please let us go and offer sacrifices to the Lord.’ Now get out of here and go back to work! You won't be given any straw but you'll still have to produce the full quota of bricks!”

The Israelite supervisors realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You must not reduce the daily production of bricks.”

They went over to Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them after their meeting with Pharaoh, and said, “May the Lord see what you have done and judge you accordingly! You have made us like a bad smell to Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword in their hands to kill us!”

Moses went back to the Lord and complained, “Why have you caused all this trouble for your own people, Lord? Was this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak for you, he has been even harder on your people, and you haven't done anything to save them!”

But the Lord told Moses, “Now you'll see what I'm going to do to Pharaoh. Using my great strength I will force him to let them go; because of my power he will send them out from his country.”

God spoke to Moses and told him, “I am Yahweh! I revealed myself as God Almighty to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, but they didn't know my name, ‘Yahweh.’ I also confirmed my solemn agreement with them to give them the land of Canaan, the country where they were living as foreigners. In addition I've heard the groans of the Israelites that the Egyptians are treating as slaves, and I haven't forgotten the agreement I promised them.

So tell the Israelites, ‘I am the Lord and I will save you from the forced labor the Egyptians are making you do; I will set you free from being their slaves. I will rescue you using my power and imposing heavy punishments. I will make you my own people. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. I will take you to the land that I solemnly promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you to own. I am the Lord!’”

Moses explained this to the Israelites but they did not listen to him, because they were so discouraged and because of the hard labor they were forced to do.

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go and speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Tell him to let the Israelites leave his country.”

But Moses replied, “Even my own people don't listen to me. Why would Pharaoh listen to me, especially since I'm such a poor speaker?”

But the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, and told them what to do regarding the people of Israel and

Pharaoh, king of Egypt, in order to bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

These were the Israelite family heads. The sons of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel, were Hanok and Pallu, Hezron and Karmi. These were the families of Reuben.

The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul (the son of a Canaanite woman). These were the families of Simeon.

These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogical records: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Levi lived for 137 years.

The sons of Gershon, by families, were Libni and Shimei.

The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Kohath lived for 133 years.

The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. These were the families of the Levites according to their genealogical records.

Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, and she had their sons Aaron and Moses. Amram lived for 137 years.

The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri.

The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri.

Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon. She had their sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These were the Korahite families.

Eleazar, son of Aaron, married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she had their son Phinehas. These are the ancestors of the Levite families, listed according to their clans. Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she gave birth to his son, Phinehas. These are the heads of the Levite families, listed by family.

Aaron and Moses mentioned here are the ones the Lord told, "Lead the Israelites out of Egypt, divided up in their respective tribes." Moses and Aaron were also the ones who went to speak with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, about the Israelites leaving Egypt. When the Lord spoke to Moses in Egypt, he said to him, "I am the Lord. Tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I tell you." But Moses replied, "I'm not a good speaker—why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

The Lord told Moses, "Look, I will make you seem like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. You are to repeat everything that I tell you to say, and your brother Aaron must repeat it to Pharaoh so that he will let the Israelites leave his country. But I will give Pharaoh a stubborn attitude, and though I will perform many signs and wonders in Egypt, he won't listen to you. Then I will attack Egypt, imposing heavy punishments on them, and I will lead out by their tribes my people the Israelites. In this way the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord—when I take action against Egypt and lead the Israelites out of the country."

Moses and Aaron did exactly as the Lord had ordered. Moses was eighty and Aaron was eighty-three when they went and spoke to Pharaoh.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "When Pharaoh asks you, 'Why don't you perform a miracle, then?' tell Aaron, 'Take your walking stick and throw it down in front of Pharaoh,' and it will turn into a snake."

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did what the Lord had ordered. Aaron threw down his staff in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it turned into a snake. But Pharaoh called in wise men and sorcerers, and these Egyptian magicians did the same thing using their magic arts. Each of them threw down their walking sticks and they also turned into snakes, but Aaron's walking stick swallowed up all their walking sticks. But Pharaoh had a hard, stubborn attitude, and he wouldn't listen to them, as the Lord had predicted.

The Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh has a stubborn attitude—he's refusing to let the people go. So tomorrow morning go to Pharaoh as he walks down to the river. Wait to meet him on the bank of the Nile. Take with you the walking stick that turned into a snake. Tell him: The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you, 'Let my people go, so that they can worship me in the desert. But you have not listened up until now. This is what the Lord is now telling you: This is how you will know that I am the Lord.'"

"Watch! Using the walking stick I'm holding, I'm going to hit the water of the Nile, and it will turn to blood. The fish in the Nile will die, the river will smell, and the Egyptians won't be able to drink any of its water."

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your walking stick in your hand and hold it out over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers and canals and ponds and pools, so that they will turn to blood. There will be blood through all of Egypt, even in containers made of wood and stone.'"

Moses and Aaron did exactly as the Lord had ordered. While Pharaoh and all his officials watched, Aaron lifted up his walking stick and hit the water of the Nile. Immediately the whole river turned to blood! The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so awful that the Egyptians could not drink its water. There was blood through all of Egypt! But the Egyptian magicians did the same thing using their magic arts. Pharaoh maintained his stubborn attitude and he wouldn't listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted. Pharaoh went back to his palace and didn't pay any attention to what had happened. All the Egyptians dug alongside the Nile because they couldn't drink its water. Seven days went by after the Lord hit the Nile.

Then the Lord told Moses, "Go and see Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they can worship me. If you refuse to let them leave, I will send a plague of frogs all over your country. They will swarm out of the Nile, and they will enter your palace and get into your bedroom and jump onto your bed. They will get into the houses of your officials and jump around your people—even into your ovens and breadmaking bowls. Frogs will jump all over you, your people, and all your officials.'"

The Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Hold out your walking stick in your hand over the rivers and canals and ponds, and make frogs spread over Egypt.'" So Aaron held out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and frogs came up and covered the land. But the Egyptian

magicians did the same thing using their magic arts. They brought up frogs in Egypt.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and pleaded with them, “Pray to the Lord, and ask him to take away the frogs from me and my people. Then I will let your people go so they can offer sacrifices to the Lord.”

“You may have the honor of deciding when I'll pray for you, your officials, and your people that the frogs will be removed from you and your houses. They will remain only in the Nile.”

“Do it tomorrow,” Pharaoh replied.

Moses said, “It will happen as you have requested so you will know that there is no one like the Lord our God. The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people, and they will remain only in the Nile.”

Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, and Moses pleaded with the Lord about the frogs he had sent against Pharaoh. The Lord did as Moses asked. The frogs in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields died. The people collected them in pile upon pile, and the whole country smelled terrible. But when Pharaoh realized the plague had passed, he chose to become hard and stubborn again, and wouldn't listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted.

The Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Pick up your walking stick and hit the dust of the ground. The dust will become gnats swarming all over Egypt.’”

They did what the Lord said. When Aaron lifted up his walking stick and hit the dust of the earth, gnats swarmed over both people and animals. The dust in the whole of Egypt turned into gnats. The magicians also tried to make gnats using their magic arts, but they couldn't. The gnats stayed on both people and animals.

“This is an act of God,” the magicians told Pharaoh. But Pharaoh chose to be stubbornly hard-hearted, and he wouldn't listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had predicted.

The Lord told Moses, “Tomorrow morning get up early and block Pharaoh's way as he walks down to the river. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they can worship me. If you don't let my people leave, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, and on your people and your houses. Every Egyptian house and even the ground on which they stand will be filled with swarms of flies. However, on this occasion I will treat the land of Goshen differently—that's where my people live—there won't be any swarms of flies there. This is how you will know that I, the Lord, am here in your country. I will distinguish my people from your people. You will see this sign that confirms it tomorrow.’”

The Lord did what he had said. Huge swarms of flies swept into Pharaoh's palace and into the houses of his officials. The whole of Egypt was devastated because of these swarms of flies.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and told them, “Go and offer sacrifices to your God here in this country.”

“No, that wouldn't be the right thing to do,” Moses replied. “The sacrifices we offer to the Lord our God would be offensive to Egyptians. If we went ahead and offered sacrifices offensive to Egyptians, they'd stone us! We must make a three-day journey into the wilderness and offer sacrifices there to the Lord our God as he has told us.”

“I'll let you go and offer sacrifices to the Lord your God in the desert, but don't go very far,” Pharaoh answered. “Now pray for me that this plague ends.”

“As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the Lord,” Moses replied, “and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. But Pharaoh should be sure not to be deceitful again and refuse to let the people go and offer sacrifices to the Lord.”

Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord, and the Lord did as Moses asked, and removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Not a single fly remained. But once again Pharaoh chose to be stubbornly hard-hearted and would not let the people leave.

The Lord told Moses, “Go and speak to Pharaoh. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord says: Let my people go, so that they can worship me. If you refuse to let them go and keep holding on to them, I will punish you by bringing a very severe plague on your livestock —on your horses, donkeys, camels, herds, and flocks. But the Lord will distinguish between the livestock of the Israelites and the Egyptians, so that none of those belonging to the Israelites will die. The Lord has set a time, saying, Tomorrow this is what is going to happen here in the country.’”

The following day the Lord did what he had said. All the Egyptians' livestock died, but not a single animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent out officials and discovered that not a single one of the Israelites' livestock had died. But Pharaoh was stubborn, and he would not let the people leave.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Go and get some handfuls of soot from a furnace. Then have Moses throw it into the air in front of Pharaoh. It will spread like fine dust over the whole country of Egypt, and open sores will break out on people and animals throughout the land.” They got soot from a furnace, and went to see Pharaoh. Moses threw it into the air, and open sores broke out on people and animals. The magicians were unable to come and appear before Moses, because they and all the other Egyptians were covered in sores. But the Lord gave Pharaoh a stubborn attitude, and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had told Moses.

The Lord told Moses, “Tomorrow morning get up early and go to Pharaoh, and tell him that this is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘Let my people go, so that they can worship me. This time I will direct all my plagues against you and your officials and your people, so you will realize that there is no one like me in all the earth. By now I could have reached out to strike you and your people with a plague that would have completely destroyed you. However, I have let you live so you can see my power, and that my reputation may be spread throughout the earth. But in your pride you are still tyrannizing my people, and refuse to let them leave. So watch out! About this time tomorrow I will send down the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt, from the beginning of its history until now. So order your livestock and everything you have in

the field to be brought inside. Every person and every animal that stays outside and is not brought inside will die when the hail falls on them.'"

Those of Pharaoh's officials who took seriously what the Lord said rushed to bring their servants and livestock inside. But those who didn't care what the Lord said left their servants and livestock outside.

The Lord told Moses, "Lift your hand towards the sky so that a hailstorm will fall over the whole of Egypt, on people and on animals, and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt."

Moses held up his staff toward heaven, and the Lord sent thunder and hail, and made lightning hit the ground. This is how the Lord rained hail down on Egypt. As the hail fell it was accompanied by lightning flashing back and forth. The hail that fell was so severe that nothing like it had ever been seen in the whole of Egypt since the beginning of its history. All across Egypt hail hit everything in the fields, both people and animals. It knocked down everything growing in the fields, and stripped every tree bare. Only in the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived was there no hail.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and told them, "I admit that I sinned this time! The Lord is right, and I and my people are wrong! Pray to the Lord for us, because there's been more than enough of God's thunder and hail. I will let you leave. You don't need to stay here any longer."

"Once I've left the city, I will pray to the Lord for you," Moses told him. "The thunder will stop, and there'll be no more hail, so that you will realize that the earth belongs to the Lord. But I know you and your officials still do not really respect the Lord our God."

(The flax and barley were destroyed, because the barley was ripe and the flax was flowering. However, the wheat and the spelt were not destroyed because they grow later.)

Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city, and prayed to the Lord. The thunder and hail stopped, and the rainstorm finished. When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again, and he chose to become stubborn again, along with his officials. Because of his stubborn attitude, Pharaoh would not let the Israelites leave, just as the Lord had predicted through Moses.

The Lord told Moses, "Go and see Pharaoh, because it was me who gave him and his officials a stubborn attitude so that I may perform my miracles before them. This is so you can tell your children and grandchildren how I made the Egyptians look foolish by doing these miracles among them, and so that you may know that I am the Lord."

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and told him, "This is what the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, says: 'How long are you going to refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they can worship me. If you refuse to let my people leave, tomorrow I will send a plague of locusts into your country. There will be so many of them that they'll cover the ground so no one can see it. They will eat whatever crops were left by the hail, as well as every tree growing in your fields. They will swarm into your houses and into the houses of all your officials—in fact into the houses of every Egyptian. This is something that none of your forefathers ever saw from the time they arrived in this country.'" Then Moses and Aaron turned and left Pharaoh.

Pharaoh's officials came to him and asked, "How long are you going to let this man cause us trouble? Let these people go so they can worship the Lord their God. Don't you realize that Egypt has been destroyed?"

Moses and Aaron were brought back to see Pharaoh. "Go and worship the Lord your God," he told them. "But who of you will be going?"

"We will all go," Moses replied. "Young and old, sons and daughters—and we'll take our flocks and herds with us, for we're going to have a religious festival for the Lord."

"The Lord really would have to be with you if I let your children go with you!" Pharaoh answered. "Clearly you're planning some kind of evil trick! So no! Only the men can go and worship the Lord, because that's what you've been asking for." Then he had Moses and Aaron thrown out.

The Lord told Moses, "Lift up your hand over Egypt, so that the locusts may swarm over it and eat every plant in the country—everything that was left by the hail."

Moses held out his staff over Egypt, and all through that day and night the Lord sent an east wind blowing over the land. By the time morning came the east wind had brought in the locusts.

The locusts swarmed across the land and settled in every part of the country. There had never been such a swarm of locusts ever before, and there won't be ever again. They covered the ground until it looked black, and they ate up all the plants in the fields and all the fruit on the trees that had been left by the hail. Not a single green leaf was left on any tree or plant anywhere in Egypt.

Pharaoh called urgently for Moses and Aaron and said, "I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. So please forgive my sin just this one time and plead with the Lord your God, asking him to at least take away this deathly plague from me."

Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the Lord. The Lord changed the direction of the wind so that a strong westerly wind blew the locusts into the Red Sea. There wasn't a single locust left anywhere in Egypt. But the Lord made Pharaoh stubborn, and he would not let the Israelites go.

The Lord told Moses, "Lift your hand toward the sky so that darkness will fall over Egypt, darkness so thick that it can be felt."

Moses lifted up his hand toward heaven, and the whole of Egypt went completely dark for three days. No one could see anyone else, and no one moved from where they were for three days. But there was still light where all the Israelites lived.

Eventually Pharaoh called for Moses. "Go and worship the Lord," he said. "Just leave your flocks and herds here. You can even take your children with you."

But Moses replied, "You must also let us have animals for sacrifices and burnt offerings, so we can offer them to the Lord our God. Our livestock have to go with us too—not a single animal will be left behind. We'll need some of them to worship the Lord our God, and

we won't know how we are to worship the Lord until we get there."

But the Lord made Pharaoh stubborn, and he would not let them go. Pharaoh shouted at Moses, "Get out of here! I don't want to see you ever again! If I ever do see you again you'll die!"

"May it be as you say," Moses replied. "I won't see you again."

The Lord told Moses, "There's one last plague I will bring down on Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that he will let you go, but when he does, he'll expel every one of you from the country. Now go and tell the Israelites, both men and women, to ask their Egyptian neighbors for silver and gold objects." The Lord made the Egyptians look favorably on the Israelites. In fact, Moses himself was highly respected in Egypt by both Pharaoh's officials and the ordinary people.

Moses said, "This is what the Lord says: Around midnight I will go through the whole of Egypt. Every firstborn son in the land of Egypt will die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh sitting on his throne to the firstborn of the servant girl working with a handmill, as well as all the firstborn of the cattle. There will be loud cries of mourning all over Egypt, such as have never been before, and will never be again. But among all the Israelites there won't even be the sound of a dog barking at them or their animals. That way you will know that the Lord distinguishes between Egypt and Israel. All your officials will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Leave, and take everyone who follows you with you!' After that I will leave." Moses was very angry, and left Pharaoh.

The Lord said to Moses, "Pharaoh is refusing to listen to you so I can do even more miracles in Egypt." Moses and Aaron did these miracles before Pharaoh, but the Lord gave Pharaoh a stubborn attitude, and he wouldn't let the Israelites leave his country.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron while they were still in Egypt, "This month will be for you the first month, the first month of your year. Tell all the Israelites that on the tenth day of this month, every man must choose a lamb for his family, one for each household. However, if the household is too small for a whole lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor may choose a lamb according to the total number of people. Divide up the lamb depending on what everybody can eat. Your lamb must be a year-old male without any defects, and you can take it either from the sheep or the goats.

Keep it until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the Israelites will slaughter the animals after sunset and before it gets dark. They are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they have the meal. They are to roast the meat over a fire and eat it that night, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. You are not to eat the meat raw or boiled in water. All of it must be roasted over a fire, including the head, legs, and its insides. Make sure nothing is left until the morning. If there is anything left over, burn it by morning.

This is how you are to eat the meal. You should be dressed ready to travel, with your sandals on your feet and your walking stick in your hand. You are to eat quickly—it is the Lord's Passover. That very night I will go all through Egypt and kill every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring condemnation on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. The blood on the houses where you live will mark them out. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. No deathly plague will fall on you to destroy you when I attack Egypt.

This will be a day to remember for you. You are to celebrate it as a festival to the Lord for generations to come. You will observe this for all time to come. For seven days you must eat only bread made without yeast. On the first day you are to get rid of the yeast from your houses. Anyone who eats anything with yeast from the first day to the seventh day must be excluded from the Israelite community. On both the first day and on the seventh day you are to have a holy meeting. You must not work on those days, except to prepare food. That is all you are allowed to do.

You are to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread because on this very day I led your tribes by their respective divisions out of Egypt. You are to observe this day for all time to come. In the first month you are to eat bread without yeast from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day. For seven days there must be no yeast in your houses. If anyone eats something with yeast in it, then they must be excluded from the Israelite community, whether they are a foreigner or a native of the land. You must not eat anything with yeast in it. Eat only bread without yeast in all your homes."

Then Moses called together all the elders of Israel and told them, "Go immediately and choose a lamb for each of your families, and kill the Passover lamb. Get a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin, and put some on the top and sides of the doorframe. None of you are to go out through door of the house until morning.

When the Lord passes through to punish the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe. He will pass over the door, and he will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses and kill you. You and your descendants are to remember to observe these instructions for all time to come. When you enter the land that the Lord promised to give you, you are to observe this ceremony. When your children come and ask you, 'Why is this ceremony important to you?' you are to tell them, 'This is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord. He was the one who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt when he killed the Egyptians but spared our households.'" The people bowed down in worship.

Then the Israelites went and did just as the Lord had told Moses and Aaron. At midnight the Lord killed every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on his throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner in the jail, and also all the firstborn of the livestock. Pharaoh got up during the night, as well as all his officials and all the Egyptians. There were loud cries of agony throughout Egypt, because there wasn't a single house where someone hadn't died. Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron during the night and told them, "Get out of here! Leave my people, the two of you and the Israelites! Go, so you can worship the Lord as

you have asked. Take your flocks and herds as well, just like you've said, and leave! Oh, and bless me too."

The Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave their country as quickly as possible, saying, "Otherwise we'll all die!" So the Israelites picked up their dough before it had risen, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading bowls wrapped in clothing. In addition, the Israelites did what Moses had told them and asked the Egyptians for objects of silver and gold, and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians look so favorably on the Israelites that they agreed to their request. In this way they took the wealth of the Egyptians.

The Israelites set out on foot from Rameses for Succoth and numbered about 600,000 men, as well as women and children. In addition many foreigners joined them. They also took with them large herds and flocks of livestock. Since their bread dough didn't have any yeast, the Israelites baked what they had brought out of Egypt into loaves without yeast. This was because when they were driven out of Egypt they had to leave in a hurry and didn't have time to prepare food for themselves.

The Israelites had lived in Egypt for 430 years. On the very day the 430 years ended, all the tribes of the Lord by their respective divisions left Egypt. Because the Lord kept watch that night to lead them out of the land of Egypt, this same night you are to keep watch as an observance to honor the Lord, and this to be kept by all Israelites for generations to come.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "This is the Passover ceremony. No foreigner is allowed to eat it. But any slave who has been bought can eat it once you have circumcised him. Foreign visitors or those hired from other nations shall not eat the Passover. It has to be eaten inside the house. You are not allowed to take any of the meat outside the house, or to break any of the bones. All Israelites are to celebrate it. If there's a foreigner who lives with you and wants to celebrate the Lord's Passover, all the males in their household have to be circumcised. Then he may come and celebrate it, and he shall be treated like a native of the land. But no man who is not circumcised may eat it. The same rule applies to both the native and the foreigner who lives among you."

Then all the Israelites followed these instructions. They did exactly what the Lord had commanded Moses and Aaron. That very day the Lord led the Israelite tribes out of Egypt by their respective tribal divisions.

The Lord told Moses, "Every firstborn male is to be dedicated to me. The firstborn from every Israelite family belongs to me, and also every firstborn animal."

So Moses told the people, "Remember this is the day you left Egypt, the land of your slavery, for the Lord led you out of it by his amazing power. (Nothing with yeast in it shall be eaten.) Today you are on your way, this day in the month of Abib. The Lord is going to take you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites, and Jebusites, the land he promised your forefathers he would give you, a land flowing with milk and honey. So you are to observe this ceremony in this month. For seven days you are to only eat bread without yeast, and on the seventh day hold a religious festival to honor the Lord. Only bread without yeast is to be eaten during those seven days. You are not to have any yeast, in fact there is to be no yeast in any place where you live.

On that day tell your children, 'This is because of what the Lord did for me when I left Egypt.' When you celebrate this ceremony it will be like a sign on your hand and a reminder between your eyes that this teaching of the Lord should be spoken about regularly. For the Lord led you out of Egypt with his great power. That's why you are to observe this ceremony at the proper time every year. Once the Lord takes you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised you and your forefathers, you are to present to the Lord all firstborn males, human or animal. The firstborn males of your livestock all belong to the Lord. You must buy back every firstborn donkey with a lamb, and if you don't do so, you have to break its neck. You must buy back every firstborn of your sons.

When in the future your children come to you and ask, 'Why is this ceremony important to you?' you are to tell them, 'The Lord led us out of Egypt, the land of our slavery, by his amazing power. Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us leave, so the Lord killed every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human and animal. That's the reason why I sacrifice to the Lord the firstborn male of every animal, and I buy back all the firstborn of my sons.' In this way it will be like a sign on your hand and a reminder between your eyes, for the Lord led us out of Egypt by his amazing power."

When Pharaoh let the Israelites leave, God did not lead them along the road through the land of the Philistines, even though that was a shorter way. For God said, "If they are forced to fight, they might change their minds and go back to Egypt." So God led the people by the longer way through the desert towards the Red Sea. When the Israelites left the land of Egypt they were like an army ready for battle.

Moses carried Joseph's bones with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear a solemn promise, saying, "God will definitely take care of you, and then you must take my bones with you when you leave here."

They traveled on from Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. The Lord went ahead of them as a pillar of cloud to show them the way during the day, and as a pillar of fire to provide them with light at night. Like this they could travel by day or night. The pillar of cloud during the day and the pillar of fire at night were always in front of the people.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites to turn back and set up camp near Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. You are to camp beside the sea, opposite Baal-zephon. Pharaoh will conclude about the Israelites: 'They're wandering about the country in confusion—the desert has blocked them from leaving.' I will give Pharaoh a stubborn attitude so that he will chase after them to get them back. But I will gain respect through what happens to Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord." So the Israelites did as they were instructed.

When the king of Egypt found out that the Israelites had left in a hurry, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about what had happened and said, "What have we done? We have let all these Israelite slaves

go!" So Pharaoh had his chariot made ready and set out with his army. He took 600 of his best chariots along with all the other chariots of Egypt, each with their officer-in-charge. The Lord gave Pharaoh, king of Egypt, a stubborn attitude so he chased after the Israelites, who were leaving with their fists raised in triumph. The Egyptians set out in pursuit—all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and soldiers. They caught up with the Israelites while they were camped beside the sea near Pi-hahiroth, opposite Baal-zephon.

The Israelites looked back and saw Pharaoh and the Egyptian army approaching. They were absolutely terrified and cried out to the Lord for help. They complained to Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here in the desert to die? What have you done to us by making us leave Egypt? Didn't we tell you back in Egypt, 'Leave us alone so that we can go on being slaves to the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to be Egyptian slaves than to die here in the desert!"

But Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand where you are and you will see how the Lord will save you today. The Egyptians you see right now, you will never see again! The Lord is going to fight for you—you don't need to do anything."

The Lord told Moses, "Why are you crying out to me for help? Tell the Israelites to move forward. You are to pick up your walking stick and hold it out in your hand over the sea. Divide it so the Israelites can walk through the sea on dry ground. I will give the Egyptians a stubborn, hard-hearted attitude so that they will chase in after them. Then I will gain respect through what happens to Pharaoh and all his army, chariots, and horsemen. The Egyptians will know that I am the Lord when I gain respect through Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

The angel of God, who had been leading the Israelites, moved behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front of them and stood behind them, so that it was positioned between the Egyptian and Israelite camps. The cloud was in darkness on one side, but it lit up the night on the other. No one from either camp went near the other during the night.

Then Moses held out his hand over the sea, and all through the night the Lord forced the sea back with a strong east wind, and turned the bottom of the sea into dry land. So the water was divided, and the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water to their right and left.

The Egyptians chased after them—all Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen. They followed the Israelites into the sea. But at the end of the night the Lord looked down on the Egyptian army from the pillar of fire and cloud, and he threw them into a panic. He made their chariot wheels get stuck so it was hard for them to drive. The Egyptians shouted out, "Retreat! We must run from the Israelites because the Lord is fighting for them against us!"

Then the Lord told Moses, "Hold out your hand over the sea, so that the water will pour back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." So Moses held out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to normal. As the Egyptians retreated, the Lord swept them into the sea. The water poured back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the whole of Pharaoh's army that had chased after the Israelites into the sea. Not a single one of them survived.

But the Israelites had walked through the sea on dry ground, with walls of water to their right and left. The Lord saved the Israelites from the threat of the Egyptians—the Israelites saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. When the Israelites saw the great power that the Lord had used against the Egyptians, they were in awe of the Lord, and they trusted in him and in his servant Moses.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:

I will sing to the Lord, for he is supreme! He has thrown the horses and their riders into the sea.

The Lord gives me strength. He is the theme of my song. He saves me. He is my God, and I will praise him. He is my father's God, and I will honor him.

The Lord is like a warrior. His name is the Lord.

He threw Pharaoh's chariots and his army into the sea. Pharaoh's best officers were drowned in the Red Sea.

The flooding water covered them. They dropped down into the depths like a stone.

Your power, Lord, is truly amazing! Your power, Lord, crushed the enemy.

By your majestic power you destroyed those who opposed you. Your anger blazed out and burned them up like stubble.

You blew and the sea piled up. The waves stood straight like a wall. The depths of the ocean turned solid.

The enemy bragged, "I will chase them and catch up with them. I will divide the plunder. I will eat them alive. I will swing my sword. By my hand I will destroy them."

But you blew with your breath and the sea swept over them. They sank down like lead in the swirling waters.

Who is like you among the gods, Lord? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, awesome in wonder, doing miracles?

You acted, and the earth swallowed the Egyptians.

You led the people you saved with your trustworthy love. You will guide them in your strength to your holy home.

The nations will hear what has happened and will shake with fear. The people who live in Philistia will experience agonizing distress.

The Edomite chiefs will be terrified. The Moabite leaders will tremble. The people living in Canaan will melt away in panic.

Terror and fright will fall on them. Lord, because of your great power, they will be as still as stone until your people pass by, until the people you bought pass by.

You will take your people and plant them on the mountain that you own, the place that you, Lord, have prepared as your home, the sanctuary that your hands have built, Lord.

The Lord will reign forever and ever!

When Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the water rushing

back over them. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, picked up a tambourine, and all the women followed her dancing and playing tambourines. Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he is supreme! He has thrown the horses and their riders into the sea.”

Then Moses led Israel away from the Red Sea and into the Desert of Shur. For three days they walked in the desert but couldn't find any water. When they arrived at Marah, the water there was too bitter to drink. (That's why the place is called Marah.)

So the people complained to Moses, asking, “What are we going to drink?” Moses called out to the Lord for help, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. When he threw it into the water, it became sweet.

There the Lord gave them rules and instructions and also tested their loyalty to him. He told them, “If you pay attention to what the Lord your God says, do what is right in his sight, obey his commands, and keep all his regulations, then I will not make you suffer from any of the diseases I gave the Egyptians because I am the Lord who heals you.”

Then they traveled on to Elim, which had twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. They set up camp there beside the water.

The whole Israelite community left Elim and went to the Desert of Sin, between Elim and Sinai. This was on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had left the land of Egypt. There in the desert they complained to Moses and Aaron.

“The Lord should've killed us back in Egypt!” the Israelites told them. “At least there we could sit down beside stewpots of meat and eat bread until we were full. But you had to bring all of us out here in the desert to starve us all to death!”

The Lord told Moses, “Just watch! I'm going to rain down bread from heaven for you! Each day the people are to go out and collect enough for that day. I'm going to test them by this to find out whether they'll follow my instructions or not. On the sixth day they are to collect twice as much as usual and prepare it.”

So Moses and Aaron explained to all the Israelites, “This evening you will have the proof that it was the Lord who led you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord displayed as he responds to the complaints he's heard you making against him. For why should you be complaining to us? We're nobodies!”

Then Moses continued, “The Lord is going to give you meat to eat this evening and as much bread as you want in the morning, for he has heard your complaints against him. Why are you complaining to us nobodies? Your complaints aren't directed against us, but against the Lord.”

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Tell the whole Israelite community, ‘Present yourselves before the Lord, because he has heard your complaints.’”

While Aaron was still speaking to all the Israelites, they looked toward the desert and saw the glory of the Lord appear in a cloud.

The Lord told Moses, “I have heard the complaints of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘In the evening you will eat meat, and in the morning you will have as much bread as you want. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God.’”

That evening quail flew in and landed, filling the camp. In the morning dew covered the ground all around the camp. Once the dew had gone, there was something thin and flaky on the desert, looking like frost crystals on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they asked each another, “What is it?” because they had no idea what it was.

So Moses explained to them, “It's the bread the Lord has provided for you to eat. This is what the Lord has ordered you to do: ‘All of you shall collect as much as is needed. Take an omer for each person in your tent.’”

So the Israelites did as they were told. Some collected more, while others collected less. But when they measured it out in omers, those who had collected a lot didn't have any left over, while those who had only collected a little still had enough. Each person collected as much as they needed to eat.

Then Moses said to them, “No one is to leave any of it until the morning.” But some didn't listen to Moses. They did leave some of it until the morning, and it was full of maggots and smelled bad. Moses became angry with them.

So each morning everyone collected as much as they needed, and when the sun became hot, it melted away to nothing. However, on the sixth day, they collected twice as much of this food, two omers for each person. All the Israelite leaders came and told Moses what they had done. Moses replied, “These are the Lord's instructions: ‘Tomorrow is a special day of rest, a holy Sabbath to honor the Lord. So bake what you want, and boil what you want. Then put to one side what's left and keep it until morning.’”

So they kept it until morning as Moses had ordered, and it didn't smell bad or have any maggots. Moses told them, “Eat it today, because today is a Sabbath to honor the Lord. Today you won't find anything out there. You can go out collecting for six days, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, it won't be there.” However, on the seventh day some people still went out collecting, but they did not find anything.

The Lord told Moses, “How long are you going to refuse to obey my commands and instructions? You need to understand that the Lord has given you the Sabbath, so on the sixth day he will provide you with food for two days. On the seventh day, everyone has to stay where they are—no one needs to go out.” So the people did no work on the seventh day.

The Israelites called the food manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers with honey. Moses said, “This is what the Lord has ordered: ‘Keep an omer of manna as a reminder for future generations, so that they can see the food I used to feed you in the desert when I led you out of Egypt.’” So Moses told Aaron, “Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept as a reminder for future generations.” Aaron did so and placed the jar in front of the Testimony, to be preserved just as the Lord had ordered Moses. The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to the land where they would settle down—they ate manna until they arrived at the border of Canaan. (An omer is a tenth of an ephah.)

Then all the Israelites left the Desert of Sin, going from place to place as they followed the Lord's commands. They camped at Rephidim, but there wasn't any water for the people to drink. Some of them came and complained to Moses, saying, “Give us water to drink!”

“Why are you complaining to me?” Moses asked. “Why are you trying to challenge the Lord?”

But the people were so thirsty for water there that they went on complaining to Moses, saying, “Why did you have to bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us and our children and livestock by thirst?”

Moses cried out to the Lord, “What am I going to do with these people? A bit more of this and they're going to stone me!”

The Lord told Moses, “Go ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you. Take with you the walking stick you used to hit the Nile, and just go on ahead. Look, I will stand there beside you by the rock at Horeb. When you hit the rock water will pour out for the people to drink.” So Moses did this as the elders of Israel watched. He called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites argued there, and because they challenged the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord with us, or not?”

Then some Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. Moses told Joshua, “Choose some men and go out and fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I'll stand on the top of this hill holding the walking stick of God.”

Joshua did what Moses told him and fought the Amalekites, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur climbed to the top of the hill. As long as Moses held up the walking stick in his hands, the Israelites were the ones winning, but when he lowered them, it was the Amalekites. So when Moses' hands became heavy, the others took a stone and put it under him for him to sit on. Aaron and Hur stood on each side of Moses and held his hands up. In this way his hands were kept firmly up until the sun went down. As a result Joshua defeated the Amalekite army.

The Lord told Moses, “Write all this down on a scroll as a reminder and read it out loud to Joshua, because I'm going to completely wipe out the Amalekites so nobody on earth will remember them.”

Moses built an altar and called it “The Lord is my Banner of Victory.” “Hold up the victory banner of the Lord!” Moses declared. “The Lord will go on fighting the Amalekites for all generations!”

Moses' father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, heard about everything God had done for Moses and his people the Israelites, and how the Lord had led them out of Egypt. When Moses had sent home his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro had welcomed her, together with her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses had said, “I have been a foreigner in a foreign land.” The other son was named Eliezer, because Moses had said, “The God of my father was my helper, and saved me from death at Pharaoh's hand.”

Moses' father-in-law Jethro, together with Moses' wife and sons, came to see him in the desert at the camp near the mountain of God. Moses was told beforehand, “I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to see you together with your wife and her two sons.”

Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him. They asked each other how they were and then went into the tent. Moses told his father-in-law about everything the Lord had done to Pharaoh and the Egyptians on behalf of the Israelites, about all the troubles they had experienced on the way, and about how the Lord had saved them.

Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the Lord had done for Israel when he'd saved them from the Egyptians. Jethro announced, “May the Lord be blessed, who saved you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. This is so convincing to me that the Lord is greater than all other gods, for he saved the people from the Egyptians when they acted so arrogantly towards the Israelites.”

Then Jethro presented a burnt offering and sacrifices to God, and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat a meal with him in God's presence.

The following day Moses sat as a judge for the people, and they presented their cases to him from morning to evening. When his father-in-law saw everything that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, “What's all this you're doing for the people? Why are you sitting alone as judge, with everyone presenting their cases to you from morning to evening?”

“Because the people come to me to ask God for his decision,” Moses replied. “When they argue over something, the case is brought before me to decide between them, and I explain to them God's laws and regulations.”

Jethro told him, “What you're doing is not the best. You, and these people who come to you, are all going to wear yourselves out, because the workload is far too heavy. You can't handle it alone. So please listen to me. I'm going to give you some advice, and God will be with you. Yes, you must continue to be the people's representative before God, and take their cases to him. Go on teaching them the laws and regulations. Show them how to live and the work they are to do. But now you should choose men who are competent from among the people, men who respect God and who are trustworthy and not corrupt. Put them in charge of the people as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. These men are to judge the people on a continuing basis. Major issues they can bring to you, but they can decide all the small matters themselves. In this way your burden will be made lighter as they share it with you. If you follow my advice, and if it's what God tells you to do, then you will be able to survive, and all these people can go home satisfied that their cases have been heard.”

Moses listened to what his father-in-law said and followed all his advice. So Moses chose competent men from all of Israel and put them in charge of the people as leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. They acted as judges for the people on a continuing basis. They brought the difficult cases to Moses, but they would judge the small matters themselves.

Then Moses sent Jethro on his way, and he went back to his own country.

Two months to the day after they left Egypt, the Israelites arrived at the Sinai desert. They had set out

from Rephidim, and after they entered the Sinai desert they camped there in front of the mountain.

Moses went up the mountain to God. The Lord spoke to Moses from the mountain, and told him, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob, the Israelites: ‘You saw for yourselves what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, how I brought you to myself. Now if you really obey what I say and keep the agreement with me, then out of all the nations you will be a special people that belong to me. While the whole world is mine, for me you will be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.’ This is what you are to tell the Israelites.”

So Moses went back down and summoned the elders of the people, and presented to them everything the Lord had ordered him to say. Everyone answered, “We promise to do everything the Lord says.” Then Moses took the people's answer back to the Lord.

The Lord told Moses, “Look! I'm going to come to you in a thick cloud so the people will hear me speaking with you and as a result they will always trust you.” Then Moses reported to the Lord what the people had said.

The Lord told Moses, “Go back down and prepare them spiritually today and tomorrow. They must wash their clothes and be ready on the third day because that is when the Lord will descend upon Mount Sinai in the full view of everyone. Set up a boundary for the people all around and warn them, ‘Watch out! Don't try to go up the mountain—don't even touch it! For anyone who touches the mountain will most certainly be killed. Don't touch any person or any animal that has touched the mountain. Make sure they are stoned or shot with arrows—they must not be allowed to live.’ Only when there is a long blast on the ram's horn can the people come up the mountain.”

Moses went down the mountain and prepared the people spiritually and they washed their clothes. He instructed the people, “Get ready for the third day, and don't be intimate with a woman.”

When morning came on the third day there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud covered the mountain. There was the very loud sound of a ram's horn, and everyone in the camp shook with fear. Moses led the people out from the camp to meet God. They stood at the foot of the mountain. Smoke poured out over the whole of Mount Sinai because the Lord's presence had come down like fire. The smoke rose up like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain shook furiously. As the sound of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in a loud, thunderous voice. The Lord descended on the top of Mount Sinai, and he called Moses to come up there. So Moses went up, and the Lord told him, “Go back down, and warn the people not to force their way across the boundary to try to come to the Lord or they will die. Even the priests, who come before the Lord, must prepare themselves spiritually, so that the Lord does not punish them.”

But Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai. You yourself warned us, ‘Set up a boundary around the mountain, and treat it as holy.’”

The Lord told him, “Go down and bring Aaron back up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way to come up to the Lord, or he will punish them.”

So Moses went down and explained to the people what the Lord had said.

God spoke all the following words:

“I am the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt, out of the land of your slavery.

You must not have any other gods except me.

You must not make for yourself any kind of idol, whether in the form of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You must not bow down before them or worship them; for I am the Lord your God and I am passionately exclusive. I lay the consequences of the sin of those who hate me on their sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons; but I show trustworthy love to the thousands of generations who love me and keep my commandments.

You must not use the name of the Lord your God in a wrong way, for the Lord will not forgive anyone who uses his name in a wrong way.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. You have six days to work and earn your living, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to honor the Lord your God. On this day you must not do any work—not you, not your son or daughter, not your male slave or female slave or livestock, and not the foreigner who is staying with you. For the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them in six days, and then rested on the seventh day. That's why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You must not kill.

You must not commit adultery.

You must not steal.

You must not give false evidence against others.

You must not desire to have anyone else's house. You must not desire to have their wife, or their male slave or female slave, or their ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to them.”

When all the people heard the thunder and the sound of the trumpet, and saw the lightning and the smoke from the mountain, they trembled with fear and stood a long way off. “You speak to us, and we'll listen,” they said to Moses. “But don't let God speak to us, or we'll die.”

Moses told them, “Do not be afraid, for God has only come to test you. He wants you to be in awe of him so that you don't sin.” The people stood a long way off as Moses went over to the thick, dark cloud where God was.

The Lord told Moses, “This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘You saw for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven. You must not make any idols of silver or gold to worship in addition to me. Make me an altar of earth, and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and peace offerings, your sheep, goats, and cattle. Wherever I decide to be worshiped, I will come to you and bless you. Now if you make an altar out of stones for me, you must not build it with cut stones, because if you use a chisel to cut the stone, you make it unholy. Also, you

must not go up to my altar using steps, so your private parts are not seen.'"

"These are the regulations you are to present to them:

If you buy a Hebrew slave, he is to work for you for six years. But in the seventh year, he is to be freed without having to pay anything. If he was single when he came, he is to leave single. If he had a wife when he came, she is to leave with him. If his master provides him a wife and she has children with him, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall be freed.

However, if the slave formally states, 'I love my master and my wife and children; I do not want to be freed,' then his master is to take him before the judges. Then he shall have him stand against the door or doorpost and use a metal tool to make a hole in his ear. Then he shall work for his master for life.

If a man sells his daughter as a slave, she is not to be freed in the same way as male slaves. If the man who chose her for himself is not pleased with her, he must let her be bought back. He is not permitted to sell her to foreigners, since he has been unfair to her. If he chooses to give her to his son, he must treat her as a daughter. If he takes another woman, he must not reduce the food and clothing allowances and marital rights of the first. If he doesn't give her these three things, she is free to leave without paying anything.

Anyone who hits and kills someone else must be executed. However, if it wasn't intentional and God let it happen, then I will arrange a place for you where they can run to and be safe. But if someone deliberately plans and purposely kills another, you must take them away from my altar and execute them.

Anyone who hits their father or mother must be executed. Anyone who kidnaps someone else must be executed, whether the victim is sold or is still in their possession.

Anyone who despises their father or mother must be executed.

If men are fighting and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist, and the injured man doesn't die but has to stay in bed, and then gets up and walks around outside with his walking stick, then the one who hit him won't be punished. Even so, he must still compensate the man for the time lost from his work and make sure that he's completely healed.

Anyone who hits their male or female slave with a rod, and the slave dies as a result, must be punished. However, if after a day or two the slave gets better, the owner won't be punished because the slave is their property.

If men who are fighting happen to hit a pregnant woman so she gives birth prematurely, but no serious injury occurs, he must be fined whatever amount the woman's husband demands and as permitted by the judges. But if a serious injury does occur, then you must pay a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot, a burn for a burn, a wound for a wound, and a bruise for a bruise.

Anyone who hits their male or female slave in the eye and blinds them must free the slave as compensation for the eye. Anyone who knocks out the tooth of their male or female slave must free the slave as compensation for the tooth.

If an ox uses its horns to kill a man or woman, the ox must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the ox won't be punished. But if the ox has repeatedly hurt people with its horns, and its owner has been warned but still doesn't keep it under control, and it kills a man or woman, then the ox must be stoned to death and its owner must also be executed. But if instead the payment of compensation is required, the owner may buy back his or her life by paying the full amount of compensation demanded. If the ox uses its horns and kills a son or a daughter the same rule is applicable. If the ox uses its horns and kills a male or female slave, the owner of the ox must pay thirty shekels of silver to the slave's master, and the ox must be stoned to death.

If someone removes the cover of a cistern or digs one and doesn't cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit must pay compensation to the animal's owner and keep the dead animal.

If someone's ox injures another's ox and it dies, they must sell the live one and share money received; they must also share the dead animal. But if it was known that the ox had repeatedly hurt people with its horns, and its owner had been warned but still didn't keep it under control, full compensation must be paid, ox for ox, but the owner can keep the dead animal."

"Anyone who steals an ox or a sheep and kills or sells it must pay back five oxen for one ox and four sheep for one sheep.

If a thief is discovered breaking into someone's house and is beaten to death, no one shall be guilty of murder. But if it happens during daylight, then someone is guilty of murder. A thief must pay everything back that's stolen. If he doesn't have anything, then he must be sold to pay for what was stolen. If what was stolen is a live animal he still has, whether it's an ox, donkey, or sheep, he must pay back double.

If livestock are grazing in a field or vineyard and their owner lets them stray so that they graze in someone else's field, their owner must pay compensation from the best of their own fields or vineyards.

If a fire is started and it spreads to thorn bushes and then burns stacked or standing grain, or even the whole field, the person who started the fire must pay full compensation.

If someone gives his neighbor money or possessions to be kept safe and they are stolen from the neighbor's house, if the thief is caught they must pay back double. If the thief isn't caught the owner of the house must appear before the judges to find out whether he took his neighbor's property.

If there's an argument over the ownership of an ox, a donkey, a sheep, a garment, or anything that was lost that someone says, 'This is mine,' both parties are to bring their case before the judges. The one whom the judges find in the wrong must pay the other back double.

If someone asks a neighbor to look after a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any other animal, but it dies or is injured or is stolen without anybody noticing, then an oath must be taken before the Lord to decide if the

neighbor has taken the owner's property. The owner must accept the oath and not demand compensation.

However, if the animal really was stolen from the neighbor, he must compensate the owner. If it was killed and torn to pieces by a wild animal, the neighbor shall present the carcass as evidence and does not need to pay compensation.

If someone borrows a neighbor's animal and it's injured or dies while its owner is not present, they must pay compensation in full. If the owner was present, no compensation is to be paid. If the animal was hired, only the hire charge needs to be paid.

If a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the full bride-price for her to become his wife. If her father adamantly refuses to give her to him, the man still must pay the same amount as the bride-price for a virgin.

You must not allow a woman who practices witchcraft to live.

Anyone who has sex with an animal must be executed.

Anyone who sacrifices to any other god than the Lord must be set apart and executed.

You must not exploit or mistreat a foreigner. Remember that you yourselves were once foreigners in Egypt.

You must not take advantage of any widow or orphan. If you mistreat them, and they call out to me for help, I will definitely respond to their cry. I will become angry, and I will kill you with the sword. Your wives will become widows and your children will be fatherless.

If you lend money to any of my people because they're poor, you must not behave as a moneylender to them. You must not charge them any interest.

If you require your neighbor's cloak as security for a loan, you must return it to him by sunset, because it's the only clothing he has for his body. What would he sleep in otherwise? If he calls out to me for help, I will listen, for I am considerate.

You must not despise God or curse your people's leader.

You must not hold on to the required offerings of your produce, olive oil, and wine. You must give me the firstborn of your sons. You must also give me the firstborn of your cattle, sheep, and goats. They can stay with their mothers for their first seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day.

You are to be holy people to me. You must not eat any animal carcass that you find in the countryside that has been killed by wild animals. Throw it to the dogs to eat."

"You must not spread stories that are lies. You must not help bad people by giving evidence that's malicious.

Don't follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give evidence in a lawsuit, don't corrupt justice by siding with the majority. Don't show favoritism to poor people in their legal cases either.

If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey that has wandered off, take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you that has fallen under its load, don't just leave it there. You must stop and help.

You must not prevent the poor from getting justice in their lawsuits. Don't have anything to do with making false accusations. Don't kill the innocent or those who do right, for I won't let the guilty go unpunished.

Don't accept bribes, for a bribe blinds those who can see, and undermines the evidence of the honest.

Don't abuse foreigners living among you, since you know very well what it's like to be foreigners, for you were once foreigners in Egypt.

Six years you are to sow your land and harvest crops, but in the seventh year you are to let it rest and leave it uncultivated, so that poor people may eat what grows naturally from the field and the wild animals can finish what's left. Follow the same procedure for your vineyards and olive groves.

You have six days to do your work, but on the seventh day you must stop working, so that your ox and your donkey can rest, and your slaves' families can catch their breath, as well as the foreigners living among you.

Make sure to pay attention to everything I've told you. Don't think to call on the names of other gods—you must not even mention them.

Three times every year you are to celebrate a feast dedicated to me. You are to observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread as I instructed you. You are to eat bread without yeast for seven days at the appropriate time in the month of Abib, because that was the month you left Egypt. No one can come before me without bringing an offering.

You are also to observe the Festival of Harvest when you present the firstfruits of the produce from what you've sown in the fields. Lastly you are to observe the Festival of Gathering-In the Harvest at the end of the year, when you gather in the harvest of the rest of your crops from the field. Every Israelite male is to come before the Lord God at these three times every year.

You must not offer the blood of my sacrifices together with anything that contains yeast, and the fat from the offerings presented at my festival must not be left until morning.

Bring the best firstfruits of your crops to the house of the Lord your God. Don't cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

Look, I'm sending an angel ahead of you to protect you on the way and to take you to the place I've prepared for you. Make sure you pay attention to him and do what he says. Don't oppose him, because he won't forgive rebellion, for he carries my authority.

However, if you listen to him carefully, and do everything that I tell you, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and I will fight those who fight against you. For my angel will go ahead of you and take you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. You must not bow down to their gods or worship them or follow their pagan practices. No, you must demolish their idols and smash their sacred pillars into pieces.

You are to worship the Lord your God, and he will bless your food and water. I will make sure none of you fall sick. No woman will have a miscarriage or be without children. I will make sure you live long lives.

I will send terror about me ahead of you which will throw every nation you meet into panic. I will make all your enemies turn and run away. I will send hornets

ahead of you to drive out before you the Hivites and Canaanites and Hittites. I will not drive them out in just one year, because the land would become desolate and you would have to deal with increased numbers of wild animals. Bit by bit I will drive them out ahead of you, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land.

I will fix your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the desert to the Euphrates River. I will hand the inhabitants of the land over to you, and you will drive them out. You must not make any agreement with them or with their gods. They must not be allowed to stay in your land, otherwise they will lead you to sin against me. For if you worship their gods, they will definitely become a trap for you."

The Lord told Moses, "Come up to the Lord—you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders. You are to worship at a distance. Only Moses may approach the Lord—the others must not come near. The people may not go up the mountain with him."

Moses went and told the people all the Lord's instructions and regulations. They all responded together: "We will do everything the Lord says!"

Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the following morning and built an altar at the bottom of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars for each of the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent out some young Israelite men who went and offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. Moses put half of the blood into bowls, and sprinkled the other half on the altar.

Then he picked up the Book of the Agreement and read it to the people. They replied, "We will do everything the Lord says. We will obey."

So Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Look, this is the blood of the agreement that the Lord has made with you following these terms."

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of Israel's elders climbed up the mountain, and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a tiled pavement made of lapis lazuli, as clear blue as the sky itself. But God did not harm the leaders of Israel—they saw him, and they ate and drank a sacred meal.

Then the Lord told Moses, "Come up the mountain to me, and stay here, so I can give you the stone tablets, with the instructions and commands I have written for them to learn."

So Moses left with Joshua his attendant and climbed up the mountain of God. He told the elders, "Stay here and wait for us to return. Aaron and Hur are with you. If anyone has a problem, they can talk with them."

As Moses climbed up on the mountain, the cloud covered it. The Lord's glory came down on Mount Sinai, covering it for six days. On the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from inside the cloud. To the Israelites the Lord's glory looked like a burning fire on the top of the mountain. Moses went into the cloud as he climbed up on the mountain, and he stayed on the mountain for forty days and nights.

The Lord told Moses, "Instruct the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive my offering from everyone who willingly wants to give.

These are the items you are to accept from them as contributions: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and crimson thread; finely-spun linen and goat hair; ram skins that have been tanned, and fine leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the lamps; spices for the olive oil used in anointing and for the fragrant incense; and onyx stones and other gemstones to be used in making the ephod and breastpiece.

They are to make me a sanctuary so I can live among them. You must make the Tabernacle and all its furnishings according to the design I'm going to show you.

They are to make an Ark of acacia wood that measures two and a half cubits long by a cubit and a half wide by one and a half cubits high. Cover it with pure gold on the inside and the outside, and make a gold trim to go around it. Cast four gold rings and attach them to its four feet, two on one side and two on the other. Make poles of acacia wood and cover them with gold. Place the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark, so it can be carried. The poles are to stay in the rings of the Ark; don't take them out. Place inside the Ark the Testimony which I'm going to give you.

You are to make an atonement cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long by a cubit and a half wide. Make two cherubim of hammered gold for the ends of the atonement cover, and put one cherub on each end. All of this is to be made from one piece of gold. The cherubim are to be designed with spread wings pointing upward, covering the atonement cover. The cherubim are to be placed facing each another, looking down towards the atonement cover. Place the atonement cover on top of the Ark, and put the Testimony that I'm going to give you inside the Ark. I will meet with you there as arranged above the atonement cover, between the two cherubim that stand over the Ark of the Testimony, and I will talk with you about all the commands I will give the Israelites.

Then you are to make a table of acacia wood two cubits long by a cubit wide by a cubit and a half high. Cover it with pure gold and make a gold trim to go around it. Make a border around it the width of a hand and put a gold trim on the border. Make four gold rings for the table and attach them to the four corners of the table by the legs. The rings are to be close to the border to hold the poles used to carry the table. Make the poles of acacia wood for carrying the table and cover them with gold. Make plates and dishes for the table, as well as pitchers and bowls for pouring out drink offerings. Make all of them out of pure gold. Place the Bread of the Presence on the table so it is always in my presence.

Make a lampstand of pure, hammered gold. The whole of it is to be made of one piece—its base, shaft, cups, buds, and flowers. It is to have six branches coming out of the sides of the lampstand, three on each side. Have three cups shaped like almond flowers on the first branch, each with buds and petals, three on the next branch. Each of six branches that come out will have three cups shaped like almond flowers, all complete with buds and petals.

On the main shaft of the lampstand make four cups shaped like almond flowers, complete with buds and petals. On the six branches that come out from the lampstand, place a bud under the first pair of branches, a bud under the second pair, and a bud under the third pair. The buds and branches are to be made with the lampstand as one piece, hammered out of pure gold. Make seven lamps and place them on the lampstand so they can light up the area in front of it. The wick tongs and their trays are to be made of pure gold. The lampstand and all these utensils will require a talent of pure gold.

Be sure to make everything according to the design you were shown on the mountain."

Make ten curtains for the Tabernacle of finely-spun linen, using blue, purple, and crimson threads. Have them embroidered with cherubim by someone who is skilled. Each curtain is to measure twenty-eight cubits long by four cubits wide, and all the curtains are to be the same size.

Join five of the curtains together, and then do the same to the other five. Use blue material to make loops on the edge of the last curtain of both sets. Make fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the last curtain of the second set, lining up the loops with each other. Then make fifty gold clips and join the curtains together with the clips, so that the Tabernacle will be a single structure.

Make eleven curtains of goat hair as a tent to cover the Tabernacle. Each of the eleven curtains is to be the same size—thirty cubits long by four cubits wide. Join five of the curtains together as one set and the other six as another set. Then fold the sixth curtain in two at the front of the tent. Make fifty loops on the edge of the last curtain in the first set, and fifty loops along the edge of the last curtain in the second set. Make fifty bronze clips and put them in the loops to join the tent together as a single cover. The extra half-curtain of this tent covering will be left to hang over the back of the Tabernacle. The tent curtains will be a cubit longer on every side, and the extra length will hang over the sides of the Tabernacle so it is all covered. Make a covering for the goat hair tent from tanned ram skins, and place an extra covering of fine leather over that.

Make an upright framework of acacia wood for the Tabernacle. Each frame is to be ten cubits long by one and a half cubits wide. Each frame will have two pegs so the frames can be connected to each other. Make all the frames of the Tabernacle like this. Make twenty frames for the south side of the Tabernacle. Make forty silver stands as supports for the twenty frames using two stands per frame, one under every frame peg. Similarly for the north side of the Tabernacle, make twenty frames and forty silver stands, two stands per frame. Make six frames for the back (west side) of the Tabernacle, along with two frames for its two back corners. Join these corner frames at the bottom and at the top near to the first ring. This is how you are to make the two corner frames. In total there will be eight frames and sixteen silver stands, two under each frame.

Make five crossbars of acacia wood to hold together the frames on the south side of the Tabernacle, five for those on the north, and five for those at the back of the Tabernacle, to the west. The central crossbar which is placed halfway up the frames will run from one end to the other. Cover the frames with gold, and make gold rings to hold the crossbars in place. Cover the crossbars with gold too. Assemble the Tabernacle following the design you were shown on the mountain.

Make a veil out of blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen, embroidered with cherubim by someone who is skilled. Using gold hooks hang it from four posts of acacia wood covered with gold, held up by four silver stands. Place the veil under the clips and take the Ark of the Testimony inside behind the veil. The veil will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.

Put the atonement cover on the Ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. Place the table outside the veil on the north side of the Tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side. Make a screen for the entrance to the tent using blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen. Have it embroidered. Make five posts of acacia wood with gold hooks to hang the screen, and cast five bronze stands to hold them.

Make an altar of acacia wood. It is to be square and measure five cubits long by five cubits wide by three cubits high. Make horns for each of its corners, all one piece with the altar, and cover the whole altar with bronze.

Make all its utensils of bronze: buckets for removing ashes, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks, and firepans. Make a bronze mesh grate for it with a bronze ring on each of its corners. Put the grate under the ledge of the altar, so that the mesh comes halfway down the altar. Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and cover them with bronze. The poles are to be placed in the rings so that the poles are on either side of the altar when it is carried. Make the altar hollow, using boards, just as you were shown on the mountain.

Make a courtyard for the Tabernacle. For the south side of the courtyard make curtains of finely-spun linen, a hundred cubits long on one side, with twenty posts and twenty bronze stands, with silver hooks and bands on the posts. Similarly there are to be curtains placed on the north side in an identical arrangement. The curtains for the west side of the courtyard are to be fifty cubits wide, with ten posts and ten stands. The east side of the courtyard that faces the sunrise is to be fifty cubits wide. Make the curtains on one side fifteen cubits long, with three posts and three stands, and the curtains on the other side just the same.

The entrance to the courtyard is to be twenty cubits wide, with a curtain embroidered with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen, held up by four posts and four stands. All the posts around the courtyard are to have silver bands, silver hooks, and bronze stands. The whole courtyard is to be a hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide, with curtains made of finely-spun linen five cubits high, and with bronze stands. All the rest of the equipment used in the Tabernacle, including its tent pegs and those for the courtyard, are to be made of bronze.

You are to order the Israelites to bring you pure, hand-pressed olive oil for the lamps so they can go on

burning, giving light. In the Tent of Meeting, outside the veil in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning in the Lord's presence from evening until morning. This requirement is to be observed by the Israelites for all generations.

Have your brother Aaron come to you, along with his sons Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. They of all the Israelites are to serve me as priests. You are to have holy clothing made for your brother Aaron to make him look splendid and dignified. You are to give instructions to all the skilful workers, to those who have received from me their abilities, as to how to make clothing for Aaron's dedication, so that he can serve me as priest. These are the clothes for them to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a pleated tunic, a turban, and a sash. These are the holy clothes they shall make for your brother Aaron and his sons so that they can serve me as priests. The workers are to use gold thread, together with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen.

They are to make the ephod of finely-woven linen embroidered with gold, and with blue, purple, and crimson thread, skillfully worked. Two shoulder pieces are to be attached to the front and back pieces. The waistband of the ephod is to be one piece made in the same way, using gold thread, with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and with finely-woven linen.

Engrave on two onyx stones the names of the Israelite tribes, six names on one stone and six on the other, in birth order. Engrave the names on the two stones the same way a jeweler engraves a personal seal. Then place the stones in ornamental gold settings. Attach both stones to the shoulder pieces of the ephod as reminders for the Israelite tribes. Aaron is to wear their names on his two shoulders to remind the Israelites that he represents them when he goes in to the Lord's presence. Make ornamental gold settings and two braided chains of pure gold, and fasten these chains to the settings.

You are also to make a breastpiece for decisions in the same skilful way as the ephod, to be used in determining the Lord's will. Make it using gold thread, with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and with finely-woven linen. It has to be square when folded, measuring around nine inches in length and width. Attach an arrangement of precious stones in four rows as follows. In the first row carnelian, peridot, and emerald. In the second row turquoise, lapis lazuli, and sardonyx. In the third row jacinth, agate, and amethyst. In the fourth row topaz, beryl, and jasper. Place these stones in ornamental gold settings. Each of the twelve stones will be engraved like a personal seal with the name of one of the twelve Israelite tribes and will represent them.

Make cords of braided chains from pure gold to attach the breastpiece. Make two gold rings and fasten them to the two top corners of the breastpiece. Attach the two gold chains to the two gold rings on the corners of the breastpiece, and then fasten the opposite ends of the two chains to the ornamental gold settings on the shoulder pieces of the front side of the ephod. Make two more gold rings and attach them to the two lower corners of the breastpiece, on the inside edge next to the ephod. Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the front side of the ephod, near where it joins its woven waistband. Tie the rings of the breastpiece to the rings of the ephod with a cord of blue thread, so that the breastpiece won't come loose from the ephod.

Like this, whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will wear the names of the Israelite tribes over his heart on the breastpiece, as a constant reminder before the Lord. Place the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece of decision, so that they too will be over Aaron's heart whenever he comes into the Lord's presence. Aaron will continually carry the means of gaining decisions over his heart before the Lord.

Make the robe that goes with the ephod exclusively from blue cloth, with an opening in the middle at the top. Stitch a woven collar around the opening to strengthen it so it won't tear.

Make pomegranates using blue, purple, and crimson thread and attach them all the way around its hem, with gold bells between them, having the gold bells and the pomegranates alternate.

Aaron is to wear the robe whenever he serves, and the sound it makes will be heard when he enters or leaves the sanctuary as he goes into the Lord's presence, so that he won't die.

Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it like a seal, “Holy to the Lord.” Attach it to the front of the turban using a blue cord. Aaron will wear it on his forehead, so that he may take responsibility for the guilt of the offerings the Israelites make, and this applies to all their holy gifts. It must always remain on his forehead in order that the people are accepted in the Lord's presence.

Weave the tunic with finely-spun linen and make the turban of the same material, and also make a sash and have it embroidered. Make tunics, sashes, and headdresses for Aaron's sons, so that they will look splendid and dignified.

Put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons and then anoint them and ordain them. Dedicate them so that they can serve me as priests. Make linen undershorts to cover their bare bodies, reaching from waist to thigh. Aaron and his sons are to wear them when they enter the Tent of Meeting or when they approach the altar to serve in the Holy Place, so that they will not bring guilt on themselves and die. This is a law for Aaron and his descendants forever.

Now this is how you are to proceed to dedicate them to serve me as priests. Take a young bull and two rams with no defects. Then using the best wheat flour, make the following without yeast: bread, cakes mixed with olive oil, and wafers sprinkled with olive oil. Put them all in a basket, and bring them as an offering, along with the bull and the two rams.

Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water. Take the clothes and put them on Aaron: the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself, and the breastpiece. Tie the ephod on him with its waistband. Wrap the turban on his head and attach the holy crown to the turban. Then use the anointing oil to anoint him by pouring it over his head.

Then have his sons come and put the tunics on them. Tie the sashes around Aaron and his sons and put headdresses on them. The priesthood belongs to them forever.

This is how you are to ordain Aaron and his sons. Take the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons are to place their hands on its head. Then slaughter the bull in the Lord's presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Take some of the bull's blood and smear it on the horns of the altar with your finger. Then pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. Take all the fat that covers the intestines, the best parts of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and burn them on the altar. But burn the bull's meat, its hide, and its excrement outside the camp—it is an offering for sin.

Next have Aaron and his sons place their hands on the head of one of the rams. Slaughter the ram, take its blood, and splash it all around the altar. Cut the ram in pieces, wash the intestines and legs, and put them with the other pieces and the head. Then burn all of the ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord to be accepted by him.

Then have Aaron and his sons place their hands on the head of the other ram. Slaughter the ram, and put some of its blood on the right earlobes of Aaron and his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Splash the rest of its blood all around the altar. Take some of the blood from the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his clothes, and on his sons and their clothes. Then he and his clothes will be made holy, likewise his sons and their clothes.

Take the fat from the ram, including the fat of its broad tail, the fat covering the intestines, the best parts of the liver, the two kidneys with their fat, as well as the right thigh (because this is a ram for ordination). Also take one loaf of bread, one cake of bread made with olive oil, and one wafer from the basket of bread made without yeast that is in the Lord's presence. Give all of them to Aaron and his sons to wave before the Lord as a wave offering. Then take the different breads back and burn them on the altar on top of the burnt offering to the Lord to be accepted by him.

Take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and wave it before the Lord as a wave offering. This is the part you can keep. Set apart for Aaron and his sons the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the offering that is lifted up, both taken from the ram of ordination. From now on whenever the Israelites lift up peace offerings to the Lord, these parts will belong to Aaron and his sons forever as a regular share from the Israelites.

The holy garments that Aaron has will be passed down to his descendants, so they can wear them when they're anointed and ordained. The descendant who succeeds him as priest and enters the Tent of Meeting to serve in the Holy Place must wear them for the seven days of his ordination.

Take the ram of ordination and boil its meat in a holy place. Aaron and his sons are to eat the ram's meat, and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. They are to eat the meat and the bread that were part of the offerings that symbolized the forgiveness required for their ordination and dedication. No one else may eat them, because they are holy. If any of the meat of ordination or any bread remains until the morning, burn what's left. It must not be eaten, because it's holy.

This is the process you are to follow for Aaron and his sons, observing all the instructions I have given you. It will take seven days to ordain them. Every day you are to sacrifice a bull as a sin offering for forgiveness. When you do this the altar needs to be purified. Anoint it to make it holy. For seven days you shall purify the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will become completely holy, and everything that touches the altar will become holy.

You are to offer two lambs that are a year old on the altar, daily and continually. In the morning offer one lamb, and offer the other one in the evening before it gets dark. With the first lamb also offer a tenth of an ephah of best quality flour, mixed with a quarter of a hin of olive oil, and a drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. Then offer the second lamb in the evening, with the same grain and drink offerings as in the morning, a burnt offering to the Lord and accepted by him.

These burnt offerings will be made continually for all generations at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting in the Lord's presence. I will meet you there to speak with you. I will meet with the Israelites there, and that place will be made holy by my glory. In this way I will dedicate the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will dedicate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests.

Then I will live with the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who led them out of Egypt, so that I could live with them. I am the Lord their God.

“Make from acacia wood an altar for burning incense. It shall be square, measuring a cubit by a cubit, by two cubits high, with horns on its corners that are all one piece with the altar. Cover its top, its side, and its horns with pure gold, and make a gold trim to go all around it. On two of the altar's sides make two gold rings and attach them below the trim to hold the poles that carry it. Make the poles of acacia wood and cover them with gold. Put the altar in front of the veil that hangs before the Ark of the Testimony and the atonement cover that is over the Testimony where I will meet with you.

Aaron is to burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he takes care of the lamps. When he lights the lamps in the evening he must burn incense again so that incense will always be burned in the Lord's presence for generations to come. Don't offer on this altar any unapproved incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour out a drink offering upon it.

Once a year Aaron must perform the atonement ritual by placing blood on the horns of the altar from the sin offering for atonement. This yearly atonement ritual must be carried out for generations to come. This is the Lord's holy altar.”

The Lord told Moses, “When you take a census of the Israelites, each man must pay the Lord to buy back

his life when he's counted. Then they won't suffer from the plague when they're counted. Each one who crosses over to those counted must give a half shekel (using the sanctuary shekel standard, which weighs twenty gerahs). This half shekel is an offering to the Lord. This offering to the Lord is required from everyone twenty years old and more. When you give this offering to buy back your lives the rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less. Take this money paid by the Israelites and use it for the expenses involved in the services of the Tent of Meeting. It will serve as a reminder for the Israelites to buy back your lives in the presence of the Lord."

The Lord told Moses, "Make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it. Aaron and his sons will use it to wash their hands and feet. Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they are to wash with water so that they will not die. When they approach the altar to present burnt offerings to the Lord, they must also wash so that they will not die. This requirement is to be observed by them and their descendants for all generations."

The Lord told Moses, "Take the best quality spices: 500 shekels of liquid myrrh, 250 shekels of sweet-smelling cinnamon, 250 shekels of aromatic reed, 500 shekels of cassia (weights using the sanctuary shekel standard), and a hin of olive oil. Mix these together into holy anointing oil, an aromatic blend like the product of an expert perfumer. Use it as holy anointing oil. Use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony, the table and all its equipment, the lampstand and its equipment, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin plus its stand. Dedicate them so that they will be especially holy. Whatever touches them will become holy.

Anoint Aaron and his sons too and dedicate them to serve as priests for me. Tell the Israelites, 'This is to be my holy anointing oil for all generations to come. Don't use it on ordinary people and don't make anything like it using the same formula. It is holy, and you must treat it as being holy. Anyone who mixes anointing oil like it, or puts it on someone other than a priest, will be expelled from their people.'"

The Lord told Moses, "Take equal amounts of these aromatic spices: balsam resin, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense. Add some salt and make pure and holy incense blended like the product of an expert perfumer. Grind some of it into powder and place it in front of the Ark of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be especially holy to you. Don't make for yourselves any incense like it using the same formula. You are to consider this incense as holy to the Lord. Anyone who makes incense like this for themselves to enjoy will be expelled from their people."

The Lord told Moses, "I have chosen by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God giving him ability, creativity, and expertise in all kinds of craftsmanship. He can produce designs in gold, silver, and bronze, he can cut gemstones to place in settings, and he can carve wood. He is a master of every craft.

I have also chosen Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan, to help him. I have also given all the craftsmen the skills needed to make everything that I have ordered you to make:

the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Testimony and its atonement cover, and all the other furniture in the Tent, the table with its equipment, the pure gold lampstand with all its equipment, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin plus its stand; as well as the woven clothes for both Aaron the priest and for his sons to serve as priests, as well as anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to make them following all the instructions I have given you."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'It's absolutely essential that you keep my Sabbaths. The Sabbath will be a sign between me and you for generations to come, so that you'll know that I am the Lord who makes you holy. You shall keep the Sabbath because it is holy to you. Anyone who dishonors it must be killed. Anyone who works on that day must be cut off from their people. Six days you can work, but the seventh day is to be a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Anyone who does any work on the Sabbath day must be killed. The Israelites must keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath as an everlasting agreement for generations to come. It's a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for the Lord made the heavens and the earth in six days, but on the seventh day he stopped and he rested.'"

When the Lord finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, stone tablets written on by the finger of God.

When the people realized how long Moses was taking before he came back down the mountain, they went together to see Aaron. They told him, "Get up! Make some gods for us who can lead us because this man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt—we don't know what's happened to him!"

"Bring to me the gold earrings that your wives, sons, and daughters are wearing," Aaron replied.

So everyone took off the gold earrings they were wearing and brought them to Aaron. He took what they gave him and using a molding tool cast an idol in the shape of a bull calf. They shouted out, "Israel, these are the gods that brought you out of the land of Egypt."

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the golden calf and shouted out, "Tomorrow will be a festival to honor the Lord!"

Early the next day they sacrificed burnt offerings and presented peace offerings. Then they sat down to celebrate with eating and drinking. Then they got up to dance, and it became like an orgy.

Then the Lord told Moses, "Get back down, because your people that you brought out of Egypt are acting immorally. They have been so quick to abandon the way I ordered them to follow. They have made a metal bull calf idol for themselves, bowing before it in worship and offering sacrifices to it. They're saying, 'These are the gods that brought you out of the land of Egypt.'"

"I know what these people are like," the Lord continued saying to Moses. "They are so rebellious! Now leave me! I am angry with them—let me finish them off! I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, saying, “Why are you angry with the people you brought out of the land of Egypt with tremendous power and great strength? Why should the Egyptians be able to say, ‘He brought them out with the evil purpose of killing them in the mountains, wiping them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger. Please change your mind over the threat against your people. Remember you swore a promise your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, telling them, ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, and give you all the land I promised to them, and they shall own it forever.’”

The Lord changed his mind over the disaster he threatened to cause his people. Moses turned and went down the mountain, carrying the two stone tablets of the Law written on both sides. God had made the tablets, and God had engraved the writing himself.

When Joshua heard all the shouting from the camp, he said to Moses, “It sounds like fighting in the camp!”

But Moses replied, “These are not the shouts of victory or of defeat. What I'm hearing is people partying!” As he approached the camp he saw the bull calf idol and the dancing. He got so angry that he threw down the stone tablets and smashed them there at the foot of the mountain. He took the bull calf and burned it, and ground it into powder. Then he mixed this with water and made the Israelites drink it.

Then Moses asked Aaron, “What did these people do to you that you made them sin so badly?”

“Please don't get angry with me, my lord,” Aaron replied, “You yourself know how liable these people are to do evil. They told me, ‘Make some gods for us who can lead us because this man Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt—we don't know what's happened to him!’ So I said to them, ‘Anybody who has gold jewelry, take it off and give it to me.’ I threw the gold into the furnace and out came this bull calf.”

Moses saw the people going completely wild because Aaron had let them, and that this had brought ridicule on them from their enemies. So he went and stood at the entrance to the camp, and shouted out, “Whoever is on the Lord's side, come and join me!” All the Levites gathered around him.

Moses told them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: Each of you strap on a sword. Then go all through the camp from one end to the other and kill your brothers, friends, and neighbors.”

The Levites did what Moses had told them, and that day around 3,000 men were killed.

Moses told the Levites, “Today you have dedicated yourselves to the Lord because you took action against your sons and brothers. Today you have gained a blessing for yourselves.”

The following day Moses spoke to the people, saying, “You have sinned very badly. But now I will go up to the Lord. Maybe I can get him to forgive your sin.”

So Moses went back to the Lord. He said, “Please—the people have sinned very badly by making gods of gold for themselves. But now, if you will, forgive their sin. Otherwise just blot me out of the scroll in which you keep your records.”

But the Lord replied to Moses, “It's those who sinned against me who will be blotted out of my scroll. Now go and lead the people to the place I told you about. Look, my angel will go before you, but at the time I decide to punish, I will punish them for their sin.”

The Lord brought a plague on the people because they made Aaron make the bull calf.

Then the Lord told Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you led out of Egypt, and go to the land I promised with an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, telling them, ‘I will give this land to your descendants.’ I will send an angel out in front of you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Enter a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not accompany you because you are a rebellious people. Otherwise I would destroy you on the way.”

When the people heard these words of criticism, they mourned and didn't put on their jewelry. For the Lord had previously told Moses, “Tell the people of Israel, ‘You are a rebellious people. If I was with you for just a moment, I would wipe you out. Now remove your jewelry, and I'll decide what to do with you.’” So the Israelites took off their jewelry from the time they left Mount Sinai.

Moses used to set up the Tent of Meeting some way outside the camp. Anyone who wanted to ask the Lord anything could go out there to the Tent of Meeting. Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, all the people would go and stand at the entrance of their tents. They would watch him until he had gone inside. As soon as Moses went into the Tent, the cloud column would descend and stand in the doorway as the Lord spoke with Moses. When the people saw the cloud column standing in the doorway to the Tent, everyone would stand up and bow in worship at the entrance of their tents. Moses would speak to the Lord face to face as you would talk to a friend, and then return to the camp. However, his young assistant Joshua, son of Nun, stayed in the Tent.

Moses said to the Lord, “Look, you've been telling me, ‘Go and lead these people,’ but you haven't let me know who you're going to send with me. And yet you have stated, ‘I know you personally, and I'm happy with you.’ Now if it's true that you're happy with me, please teach me your ways so I can get to know you, and go on pleasing you. Remember that the people of this nation are yours.”

The Lord replied, “I myself will go with you, and I will support you.”

“If you don't go with us yourself, then please don't take us away from here,” Moses responded. “How will others know that you are happy with me, and with your people, if you don't accompany us? How would anyone tell us apart—me and your people—from every other people who live on the earth?”

The Lord told Moses, “I promise to do what you've asked, because I'm happy with you and I know you personally.”

“Now please reveal to me your glory,” Moses asked.

“I will make all the goodness of my character pass in front of you, I will call out the name ‘Yahweh,’ I will show grace to those I want to show grace, and I will show mercy to those I want to show mercy. But you won't be able to see my face, because no one can see my face and live.”

"Come here and stand by me on this rock," the Lord went on, "and as my glory goes by I'll put you in a crevice of the rock, and I'll cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I'll take my hand away and you'll see my back; but you won't see my face."

The Lord told Moses, "Cut out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them again the same words that were on the first tablets—the ones you broke. Get ready in the morning, and then come up Mount Sinai. Stand before me there on the mountain top. Nobody else can come up with you—I don't want to see anyone anywhere on the mountain, and no flocks or herds should graze at the foot of the mountain."

So Moses cut out two stone tablets like the previous ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord had ordered him, taking with him the two stone tablets. The Lord descended in a cloud, stood there with him, and called out the name "Yahweh."

The Lord passed in front of him, calling out, "Yahweh! Yahweh! I am the God of grace and mercy! I am slow to become angry, full of trustworthy love and always faithful. I go on showing my trustworthy love to thousands, forgiving guilt, rebellion, and sin. But I will definitely not clear the wicked—the impact of sin will affect not only the parents, but also their children and grandchildren, up until the third and fourth generation."

Moses quickly bowed down to the ground, and worshiped. He said, "Lord, if it's true that you're happy with me, please accompany us. Admittedly this is a rebellious people, but please forgive our guilt and sin. Accept us as specially belonging to you."

The Lord said, "Look, I'm making an agreement with you. Right in front of all of you I will do miracles that have never been done before—not among anyone anywhere on earth. Everyone here and those around will see the Lord at work, for what I'm going to do for you will be incredible. But you must carefully follow what I tell you to do today. Pay attention! I'm going to drive out ahead of you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Make sure you don't agree to a peace treaty with the people living in the land where you are going. Otherwise they will become a trap for you. For you must tear down their altars, knock down their idolatrous pillars, and cut down their Asherah poles, because you must not worship any other gods than the Lord. His name stands for being exclusive, because he is a God who demands an exclusive relationship.

Make sure you don't agree to a peace treaty with the people living in the land, for when they prostitute themselves by worshiping and sacrificing to their gods, they will invite you to join them, and you will eat from their pagan sacrifices. When you have their daughters marry your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will make your sons worship their gods in the same way. Don't make any idols for yourselves.

Observe the Festival of Unleavened Bread. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast, as I ordered you to do. You are to do this at the specified time in the month of Abib, because that was the month when you left Egypt. Every firstborn is mine. That includes all the firstborn males of your livestock from your cattle herds, and flocks. You can redeem the firstborn of a donkey with a lamb, but if you don't, you must break its neck. All your firstborn sons must be redeemed. No one is to come before me without an offering. You shall work for six days, but you shall rest on the seventh day. Even during the times of sowing and harvest you shall rest.

Observe the Festival of Weeks when you offer the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Harvest Festival at the end of the agricultural year. Three times every year all your males must appear before the Lord Yahweh, the God of Israel. I will drive out the nations ahead of you and expand your borders, and no one will come and take your land when you go three times a year to appear before the Lord your God. Don't offer bread made with yeast when you present a sacrifice to me, don't keep any sacrifice from the Passover Feast until the morning. When you harvest your crops, bring the firstfruits to the house of the Lord your God.

Don't cook a young goat in milk from its mother."

Then the Lord told Moses, "Write down these words, because these are the basis for the agreement I have made with you and with Israel."

Moses spent forty days and forty nights there with the Lord without eating bread or drinking water. He wrote down on the tablets the words of the agreement, the Ten Commandments. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai carrying the two tablets of the Law, he didn't realize that his face was shining brightly because he had been speaking with the Lord. When Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses with his face shining so brightly they were frightened to approach him.

But Moses called out to them, so Aaron and all the community leaders went over to him, and he talked with them. Afterwards all the Israelites came over and he gave them all the Lord's instructions he'd received on Mount Sinai. After Moses finished talking with them, he put a veil over his face. However, whenever Moses went in to talk with the Lord, he would take off the veil until he came out again. Then he would tell the Israelites the Lord's instructions, and the Israelites would see his face shining brightly. So he would put the veil over his face until the next time he went to talk with the Lord.

Moses summoned all the Israelites and told them, "This is what the Lord has ordered you to do: Six days you can work, but the seventh day is to be a holy Sabbath of rest to the Lord. Anyone who does any work on the Sabbath day must be killed. Don't even light a fire in any of your homes on the Sabbath day."

Moses also told all the Israelites, "This is what the Lord has commanded: Collect an offering to the Lord from what you have. Everyone who wants to should bring an offering to the Lord: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and crimson thread; finely-woven linen and goat hair; tanned ram skins and fine leather; acacia wood; olive oil for the lamps; spices for the anointing oil and for the aromatic incense; and onyx stones and gemstones for making the ephod and breastpiece.

All your skilled craftsmen are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded: the Tabernacle with its tent and covering, its clips and frames, its

crossbars, posts, and stands; the Ark with its poles and atonement cover, and the veil to hang over it; the table with its poles, all its equipment, and the Bread of the Presence; the lampstand of light with its equipment and lamps and olive oil to provide lighting; the altar of incense with its poles; the anointing oil and aromatic incense; the screen for the Tabernacle entrance and all its accessories; the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grate, its poles and all its utensils; the basin plus its stand; the curtains of the courtyard with its posts and bases, and the curtain for the courtyard entrance; the tent pegs for the Tabernacle and for the courtyard, as well as their ropes; and the woven clothes for serving in the holy place: the sacred clothing for Aaron the priest and for his sons to serve as priests."

The Israelites left Moses, and all those who felt moved to do so and who had a willing spirit came and brought an offering to the Lord for the work making the Tent of Meeting, for everything required for its services, and for the sacred clothing.

So everyone who was willing, both men and women, came and presented their gold as a thanks offering to the Lord, including brooches, earrings, rings, and necklaces—all kinds of gold jewelry. Everyone who had blue, purple, and crimson thread, finely-woven linen, goat hair, tanned ram skins, and fine leather, contributed them. Those who could present an offering of silver or bronze brought it as a gift to the Lord. Everyone who had acacia wood for any part of the work donated it.

Every woman skilled in spinning with her hands brought what she had spun: blue, purple, or crimson thread, or finely-woven linen. All the women who were willing to use their skills spun the goat hair. The leaders brought onyx stones and gemstones to make the ephod and breastpiece, as well as spices and olive oil for lighting, for the anointing oil, and for the aromatic incense. All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought a freewill offering to the Lord for all the work in making what the Lord through Moses had ordered them to do.

Then Moses told the Israelites, "The Lord has chosen by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah. He has filled him with the Spirit of God giving him ability, creativity, and expertise in all kinds of craftsmanship. He can produce designs in gold, silver, and bronze, he can cut gemstones to place in settings, and he can carve wood. He is a master of every craft. The Lord has also given him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. He has equipped them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers in blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-woven linen, and as weavers—in fact as skilled designers in all kinds of different crafts."

"So Bezalel, Oholiab, and all the other craftsmen with the necessary expertise, given skill and ability by the Lord, are to work out how to accomplish all the work of constructing the sanctuary as commanded by the Lord."

Moses summoned Bezalel, Oholiab, and all the skilled people who had been given special abilities by the Lord, everyone willing to come and do the work. Moses gave them everything the Israelites had contributed to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. In the meantime the people went on bringing freewill offerings every morning, so much so that all the craftsmen who were working on the sanctuary stopped what they were doing and went and told Moses, "The people have already brought enough to complete the work the Lord has ordered us to do."

Moses gave the order, and an announcement was made throughout the camp: "Men and women, don't bring anything more as an offering for the sanctuary." So the people were stopped from bringing anything more, since there was already more than enough to do all the work necessary.

The skilled craftsmen among the workers made the ten curtains for the Tabernacle. They were made of finely-spun linen together with blue, purple, and crimson thread, embroidered with cherubim. Each curtain was twenty-eight cubits long by four cubits wide, and they were all the same size. They joined together five of the curtains as one set, and the other five as a second set. They used blue material to make loops on the edge of the last curtain of both sets. They made fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the last curtain of the second set, lining up the loops with each another. They also made fifty gold clips and joined the curtains together with the clips, so that the Tabernacle was a single structure.

They made eleven curtains of goat hair as a tent to cover the Tabernacle. Each of the eleven curtains was the same size—thirty cubits long by four cubits wide. They joined five of the curtains together as one set and the other six as another set. They made fifty loops on the edge of the last curtain in the first set, and fifty loops on the edge of the last curtain in the second set. They made fifty bronze clips to join the tent together as a single cover. They made a covering for the goat hair tent from tanned ram skins, and placed an extra covering of fine leather over that.

They made an upright framework of acacia wood for the Tabernacle. Each frame was ten cubits long by one and a half cubits wide. Each frame had two pegs so the frames could be connected to each other. They made all the frames of the Tabernacle like this. They made twenty frames for the south side of the Tabernacle. They made forty silver stands as supports for the twenty frames using two stands per frame, one under every frame peg. Similarly for the north side of the Tabernacle, they made twenty frames and forty silver stands, two stands per frame. They made six frames for the back (west side) of the Tabernacle, along with two frames for its two back corners. They joined these corner frames at the bottom and at the top near to the first ring. This is how they made the two corner frames. In total there were eight frames and sixteen silver stands, two under each frame.

They made five crossbars of acacia wood to hold together the frames on the south side of the Tabernacle, five for those on the north, and five for those at the back of the Tabernacle, to the west. They made the central crossbar which was placed halfway up the frames and ran from one end to the other. They covered the frames

with gold, and made gold rings to hold the crossbars in place. They covered the crossbars with gold too.

They made a veil out of blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen, embroidered with cherubim by someone who was skilled. They made four posts of acacia wood for it and covered them with gold. They made gold hooks for the posts and cast their four silver stands. They made a screen for the entrance to the tent using blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen, and had it embroidered. They also made five posts of acacia wood with hooks to hang the screen. They covered the tops of the posts and their bands with gold, and their five stands were made of bronze.

Bezalel made the Ark of acacia wood measuring two and a half cubits long by a cubit and a half wide by one and a half cubits high. He covered it with pure gold on the inside and the outside, and made a gold trim to go around it. He cast four gold rings and attached them to its four feet, two on one side and two on the other. He made poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold. He placed the poles into the rings on the sides of the Ark, so it could be carried.

He made the atonement cover of pure gold, two and a half cubits long by a cubit and a half wide. He made two cherubim of hammered gold for the ends of the atonement cover, and put one cherub on each end. All of this was made from one piece of gold. The cherubim were designed with spread wings pointing upward, covering the atonement cover. The cherubim were placed facing each other, looking down towards the atonement cover.

Then he made the table of acacia wood two cubits long by a cubit wide by a cubit and a half high. He covered it with pure gold and made a gold trim to go around it. He made a border around it the width of a hand and put a gold trim on the border. He cast four gold rings for the table and attached them to the four corners of the table by the legs. The rings were close to the border to hold the poles used to carry the table. He made the poles of acacia wood for carrying the table and covered them with gold. He made utensils for the table from pure gold: plates and dishes, bowls and pitchers for pouring out drink offerings.

He made the lampstand of pure, hammered gold. The whole of it was made of one piece—its base, shaft, cups, buds, and flowers. It had six branches coming out of the sides of the lampstand, three on each side. It had three cups shaped like almond flowers on the first branch, each with buds and petals, and three on the next branch. Each of the six branches that came out had three cups shaped like almond flowers, all complete with buds and petals.

On the main shaft of the lampstand he made four cups shaped like almond flowers, complete with buds and petals. On the six branches that came out of it, he placed a bud under the first pair of branches, a bud under the second pair, and a bud under the third pair. The buds and branches were made with the lampstand as one piece, hammered out of pure gold. He made seven lamps, as well as wick tongs and their trays of pure gold. The lampstand and all these utensils required a talent of pure gold.

He made the altar for burning incense from acacia wood. It was square, measuring a cubit by a cubit, by two cubits high, with horns on its corners that were all one piece with the altar. He covered its top, its side, and its horns with pure gold, and made a gold trim to go all around it. He made two gold rings for the altar and attached them below the trim, two on either side, to hold the poles to carry it. He made the poles of acacia wood and covered them with gold. He made the holy anointing oil and the pure, aromatic incense like the product of an expert perfumer.

Bezalel made the altar of burnt offering from acacia wood. It was square, and measured five cubits long by five cubits wide by three cubits high. He made horns for each of its corners, all one piece with the altar, and covered the whole altar with bronze.

He made all its utensils: buckets for removing ashes, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks, and firepans. He made all its utensils of bronze. He made a bronze mesh grate for the altar and placed it under the ledge of the altar, so that the mesh came halfway down the altar. He cast four bronze rings for the four corners of the grate as holders for the poles. He made poles of acacia wood for the altar and covered them with bronze. He put the poles through the rings on either side of the altar so it could be carried. He made the altar hollow, using boards.

He made the bronze basin with its stand with bronze from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

Then he made a courtyard. For the south side of the courtyard he made curtains of finely-spun linen, a hundred cubits long on one side, with twenty posts and twenty bronze stands, with silver hooks and bands on the posts. Similarly he made curtains placed on the north side in an identical arrangement. He made curtains for the west side of the courtyard fifty cubits wide, with ten posts and ten stands. The east side of the courtyard that faces the sunrise was fifty cubits wide. He made the curtains on one side fifteen cubits long, with three posts and three stands, and the curtains on the other side just the same. All the curtains around the courtyard were of finely-woven linen. The stands for the posts were bronze, the hooks and bands were silver, and the tops of the posts were covered with silver. All the posts around the courtyard had silver bands.

The curtain for the entrance to the courtyard was embroidered with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and finely-spun linen. It was twenty cubits long by five cubits high, the same height as the courtyard curtains. It was held up by four posts and four stands. The posts had silver hooks, tops, and bands. All the tent pegs for the Tabernacle and for the surrounding courtyard were made of bronze.

The following is what was used for the Tabernacle, the Tabernacle of the Testimony, recorded at Moses' direction by the Levites under the supervision of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest. Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, from the tribe of Judah, made everything that the Lord had ordered Moses to make. He was assisted by Oholiab, son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan, an engraver, designer, and embroiderer using blue, purple, and crimson thread and finely-woven linen.

The total amount of gold from the offering that was used for the work on the sanctuary was 29 talents and 730 shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard).

The total amount of silver from those who had been counted in the census was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). This represents a beka per person, or half a shekel (using the sanctuary shekel standard) from everyone twenty years of age or older who had been censused, a total of 603,550 men. The hundred talents of silver were used to cast the sanctuary stands and the curtain stands, 100 bases from the 100 talents, or one talent per base. Bezalel used the 1,775 shekels of silver to make the hooks for the posts, cover their tops, and make bands for them.

The total amount of bronze from the offering was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels. Bezalel used it to make the stands for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the bronze altar and its bronze grate, all the utensils for the altar, the stands for the courtyard and its entrance, and all the tent pegs for the Tabernacle and the courtyard.

They made woven clothing from blue, purple, and crimson thread for serving in the sanctuary. They also made holy garments for Aaron, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do. They made the ephod of finely-woven linen embroidered with gold, and with blue, purple, and crimson thread. They hammered out thin sheets of gold and cut threads from them to weave in with the blue, purple, and scarlet thread, together with fine linen, all skillfully worked. Two shoulder pieces were attached to the front and back pieces. The waistband of the ephod was one piece made in the same way, using gold thread, with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and with finely-woven linen, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do. They placed the onyx stones in ornamental gold settings, engraved with the names of the Israelite tribes in the same way a jeweler engraves a personal seal. They attached both stones to the shoulder pieces of the ephod as reminders for the Israelite tribes, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

They also made a breastpiece for decisions in the same skilful way as the ephod, to be used in determining the Lord's will. They made it using gold thread, with blue, purple, and crimson thread, and with finely-woven linen. It was square when folded, measuring around nine inches in length and width. They attached an arrangement of precious stones in four rows as follows. In the first row carnelian, peridot, and emerald. In the second row turquoise, lapis lazuli, and sardonyx. In the third row jacinth, agate, and amethyst. In the fourth row topaz, beryl, and jasper. They were all placed in ornamental gold settings. Each of the twelve stones were engraved like a personal seal with the name of one of the twelve Israelites tribes and represented them.

They made cords of braided chains from pure gold to attach the breastpiece. They made two gold settings and two gold rings and fastened the rings to the two top corners of the breastpiece. They attached the two gold chains to the two gold rings on the corners of the breastpiece, and then fastened the opposite ends of the two chains to the ornamental gold settings on the shoulder pieces of the front side of the ephod. They made two more gold rings and attached them to the two lower corners of the breastpiece, on the inside edge next to the ephod. They made two more gold rings and attached them to the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the front side of the ephod, near where it joins its woven waistband. They tied the rings of the breastpiece to the rings of the ephod with a cord of blue thread, so that the breastpiece wouldn't come loose from the ephod, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

They made the robe that goes with the ephod exclusively from woven blue cloth, with an opening in the middle at the top. They stitched a woven collar around the opening to strengthen it so it wouldn't tear. They made pomegranates using blue, purple, and crimson thread and finely-woven linen and attached them all the way around its hem. They made pure gold bells and attached them between the pomegranates all the way around its hem, having the bells and the pomegranates alternate. The robe was to be used for priestly service, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

They made tunics with finely-spun linen made by a weaver for Aaron and his sons. They also made turbans, headdresses, and headbands of fine linen, and finely-woven linen undershorts, as well as sashes of finely-woven linen embroidered with blue, purple, and crimson thread, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

They made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold and wrote on it, engraved like a seal, “Holy to the Lord.” They tied a blue cord to it to attach it to the front of the turban, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

So all the work for the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was finished. The Israelites did everything as the Lord had ordered Moses to do. Then they presented the Tabernacle to Moses: the tent with all its furniture, its clips, its frames, its crossbars, and its posts and stands; the covering of tanned ram skins, the covering of fine leather, and the veil; the Ark of the Testimony with its poles and the atonement cover; the table with all its equipment and the Bread of the Presence; the pure gold lampstand with its lamps placed in a row, and all its equipment, as well as the olive oil for the lamps; the gold altar, the anointing oil, the aromatic incense, and the screen for the tent's entrance; the bronze altar with its bronze grate, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin plus its stand; the curtains of the courtyard and its posts and stands; the curtain for the courtyard entrance, its ropes and tent pegs, and all the equipment for the services of the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting; and the woven garments for serving in the sanctuary, the holy clothes for Aaron the priest and for his sons to serve as priests.

The Israelites did all the work that the Lord had ordered Moses to do. Moses inspected all the work and made sure they had done it as the Lord had ordered. Then Moses blessed them.

The Lord told Moses, “Put up the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the first month of the year. Place the Ark of the Testimony inside it. Make sure the Ark is behind the veil. Bring in the table and put on it what's necessary. Bring in the lampstand too, and set up its lamps. Place the gold altar of incense in front of the Ark of the Testimony, and put up the screen at the entrance to the Tabernacle. Set up the altar of burnt offering opposite the entrance to the Tabernacle,

the Tent of Meeting. Place the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water in it.

Set up the courtyard that's around it, and put up the curtain for the courtyard entrance.

Use the anointing oil to anoint the Tabernacle and everything in it. Dedicate it and all its furniture to make it holy. Anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils. Dedicate the altar and it will be especially holy. Anoint and dedicate the basin with its stand.

Take Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting and wash them there with water. Then you are to put on Aaron the holy clothes, anoint him, and dedicate him, so that he may serve me as a priest. Have his sons come forward and dress them with tunics. Anoint them in the same way as you anointed their father, so that they can also serve me as priests. Their anointing makes their line priests forever, for generations to come."

Moses carried out all the Lord's instructions. The Tabernacle was put up on the first day of the first month of the second year. When Moses put up the Tabernacle, he placed its stands, attached its frames, connected its crossbars, and erected its posts. Then he spread the tent over the Tabernacle and placed the covering over the tent, as the Lord had ordered him to do.

Moses took the Testimony and put it in the Ark. He attached the poles to the Ark, and he placed the atonement cover on the top of the Ark. Then he carried the Ark into the Tabernacle. He put up the veil, and made sure the Ark of the Testimony was behind it, as the Lord had ordered him to do.

Moses placed the table inside the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the Tabernacle, outside the veil. He laid out the bread on it in the presence of the Lord, as the Lord had ordered him to do. He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table on the south side of the Tabernacle and put up the lamps in the presence of the Lord, as the Lord had ordered him to do.

Moses set up the gold altar in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the veil, and he burned aromatic incense on it, as the Lord had ordered him to do. Then he put up the screen at the entrance to the Tabernacle. He set up the altar of burnt offering near the entrance to the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, and presented the burnt offering and the grain offering, as the Lord had ordered him to do. He placed the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing. Moses, Aaron, and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet They washed whenever they went into the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

Moses set up the courtyard around the Tabernacle and the altar, and he put up the curtain for the courtyard entrance. This marked the end of the work done by Moses.

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud remained on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Whenever the cloud rose from the Tabernacle, the Israelites would set off again on their journey. If the cloud did not rise, they wouldn't set out until it did. The cloud of the Lord stayed over the Tabernacle by day, and fire burned inside the cloud by night, so that it could be seen by every Israelite wherever they traveled.

Leviticus

Book of Leviticus

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying, “Go and speak to the Israelites and tell them: When you present an offering to the Lord, you may bring as your offering an animal from the herd of cattle or the flock of sheep or goats.

If your offering is a burnt offering from a herd of cattle, you must offer a male without any defects. Bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting so it can be accepted before the Lord. Put your hand on the head of the burnt offering, so it can be accepted on your behalf to make you right. You are to kill the bull in the Lord's presence, and Aaron's sons, the priests, are to take the blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then you are to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. The sons of Aaron the priest shall start a fire on the altar and put wood on it. Then the priests shall carefully place the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the wood burning on the altar. You shall wash the insides and legs with water, and the priest shall burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord.

If your offering is a burnt offering from a flock, either sheep or goats, you must offer a male without any defects. You are to kill it on the north side of the altar in the Lord's presence, and Aaron's sons, the priests, are to take the blood and sprinkle it on all sides of the altar. Then you are to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall carefully place the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the wood burning on the altar. You shall wash the insides and legs with water, and the priest shall burn all of it on the altar as a burnt offering, a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord.

If your offering to the Lord is a burnt offering of birds, you are to offer a turtledove or a young pigeon. The priest shall take it to the altar, twist off its head, and burn it on the altar. Its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar. He must remove the crop and the feathers, and throw them to the east side of the altar into the ash pile. He shall tear it open by its wings, but not completely apart. The priest is to burn it on the altar on the burning wood. It is a burnt offering, a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord.”

“When you bring a grain offering to the Lord, your offering must be of the best flour. Pour olive oil on it and put frankincense on it, and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the flour and olive oil mixture, as well as all the frankincense, and burn this as a ‘reminder part’ on the altar, a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord. The rest of the grain offering is for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings given to the Lord as food offerings.

If your offering is of grain baked in an oven, it must be made from fine flour without using yeast. It can be cakes mixed with olive oil or wafers with olive oil spread on them. If your offering is a grain offering cooked on a griddle, it must be made of fine flour mixed with olive oil without using yeast. Break it up and pour olive oil over it; it is a grain offering. If your offering is a grain offering cooked in a pan, it must be made of fine flour with olive oil.

Bring to the Lord the grain offering in whatever way it has been prepared. Present it to the priest, who will take it to the altar. The priest is to take the ‘reminder part’ from the grain offering and burn it on the altar as a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord. The rest of the grain offering is for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the food offerings given to the Lord.

No grain offering that you give to the Lord may be made using yeast. Don't burn any yeast or honey as a food offering to the Lord. You may give them to the Lord when you present your offerings of firstfruits, but they must not be offered on the altar to be accepted by the Lord. All of your grain offerings are to be seasoned with salt. Don't leave the salt of God's agreement out of your grain offering. Add salt to all of your offerings.

When you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the Lord, offer crushed heads of new grain roasted on the fire. Put olive oil and frankincense on it; it is a grain offering. The priest will burn the ‘reminder part’ of the crushed grain and olive oil, as well as all its frankincense, as a food offering to the Lord.”

“When you want to give a peace offering and you offer an animal from a herd of cattle, whether male or female, you must present one without any defects before the Lord. Put your hand on the head of the offering and kill it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons the priests will sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. From the peace offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord: all the fat that covers the insides, both kidneys with the fat on them by the loins, and the best part of the liver, which you are to remove together with the kidneys. Aaron's sons are to burn this on the altar on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as a food offering, to be accepted by the Lord.

When you want to give a peace offering and you offer an animal from a flock of sheep or goats, either male or female, you must present one without any defects before the Lord. If you are giving a lamb as your offering, you must present it before the Lord. Put your hand on the head of the offering and kill it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons the priests will sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. From the peace offering you are to bring a food offering to the Lord made up of its fat: the whole fat tail removed from close to the tailbone, all the fat that covers the insides, both kidneys with the fat on them by the loins, and the best part of the liver, which you are to remove together with the kidneys. Then the priest is to burn this on the altar as a food offering, a food offering to the Lord.

If your offering is a goat, you are to present it before the Lord. Put your hand on its head and kill it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron's sons the priests will sprinkle the blood on all sides of the altar. From your offering you are to present a food offering to the Lord made up of all the fat that covers the insides, both kidneys with the fat on them by the loins, and the best

part of the liver, which you are to remove together with the kidneys. Then the priest is to burn this on the altar as a food offering, an offering to the Lord using fire. All the fat is for the Lord. You must not eat any fat or any blood. This regulation is for all time and for all future generations everywhere you live."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that these are the rules to handle cases of those who sin unintentionally against any of the Lord's commandments and do what is not permitted.

If it is the high priest who sins and brings guilt on everyone, he must present to the Lord a young bull without defects as a sin offering for his sin. He must take the bull to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord, put his hand on its head and kill it before the Lord. Then the high priest shall take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting. The high priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the Lord in front of the veil of the sanctuary. The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of aromatic incense that stands before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he is to pour out at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then he shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering: all the fat that covers the insides, both kidneys with the fat on them by the loins, and the best part of the liver, which he is to remove together with the kidneys in the same way as the fat is removed from the bull of the peace offering. Then the priest shall burn this on the altar of burnt offering.

But the skin of the bull, all its flesh, head, legs, insides and waste— all the rest of it—he has to take outside the camp to a place that is ceremonially clean, where the ashes are dumped, and he must burn it on a wood fire there on the ash heap.

If the whole Israelite community goes astray unintentionally, and even though they are unaware of doing what is not permitted by any of the Lord's commandments, they are all still guilty. When they realize their sin, then they must bring a young bull as a sin offering and present it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of Israel are to put their hands on its head and kill it before the Lord. Then the high priest shall take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting. He shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord in front of the veil. He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that stands before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. Then he is to pour out the rest of the bull's blood at the bottom of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then he shall remove all the fat from the bull and burn it on the altar. He shall offer this bull in the same way he did for the sin offering. This is how the priest will make them right, and they will be forgiven. Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it, just as he burned the bull previously mentioned. It is the sin offering for the whole community.

If a leader sins unintentionally and does what is not permitted by any of the commandments of the Lord his God, he is guilty. When he realizes his sin, he must bring a male goat without defects as his offering. He must put his hand on the head of the goat and kill it at the place where the burnt offering is killed before the Lord. It is a sin offering. Then the priest is to take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. He shall burn all its fat on the altar like the fat of the peace offerings. In this way the priest will make the man's sin right, and he will be forgiven.

If any other Israelite sins unintentionally and does what is not permitted by any of the commandments of the Lord his God, he is guilty. When he realizes his sin, he must bring a female goat without defects as his offering for that sin. He must put his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it at the place of the burnt offering. Then the priest is to take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. He shall remove all its fat like the fat of the peace offerings and burn it on the altar and it will be accepted by the Lord. In this way the priest will make the man's sin right, and he will be forgiven.

If he brings a lamb as a sin offering, he is to bring a female without defects. He must put his hand on the head of the sin offering and kill it as a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is killed. Then the priest is to take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. He shall remove all its fat like the fat of the lamb is removed from the peace offerings and burn it on the altar to be accepted by the Lord. In this way the priest will make the man's sin right, and he will be forgiven."

"If you sin by not giving the evidence you have about a legal case, whether you saw something yourself or heard about it, you bear responsibility for your guilt. If you touch anything unclean such as the dead body of any unclean wild animal or farm animal or vermin, even if you're unaware of it, you become unclean and guilty. If you touch something unclean from someone else who is unclean, even if you're unaware of it, you become guilty. If you foolishly swear to do something (whether good or bad, and in whatever way people impulsively swear an oath), even if you're unaware of it being wrong, when you eventually realize it, you are guilty.

If you become guilty in one of these ways, you must confess your sin, and you must take your guilt offering of a female lamb or goat to the Lord as a sin offering for your sin. The priest will make your sin right.

If you can't afford a lamb, you may offer to the Lord as compensation for your sin two turtledoves or two young pigeons, one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering. You are to take them to the priest, who shall present the first one as the sin offering. He is to wring its head from the neck without removing it completely. Then he is to sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar while the rest of the blood is poured out at the bottom of the altar. It is a sin offering. The priest must then prepare the second bird as a burnt offering according to the regulations. In this way the priest will make you right for your sin, and you will be forgiven.

If you can't afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons you may bring a tenth of an ephah of the best flour as a sin offering. Don't put olive oil or frankincense on it, because it is a sin offering. Take it to the priest, who shall take a handful as a 'reminder part' and burn it on the altar on top of the burnt offerings to the Lord. It is a sin offering. This is how the priest will make right any of these sins you have committed, and you will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, just like the grain offering."

The Lord told Moses, "If any of you neglects unintentionally anything that the Lord has declared belong to him and are holy, you must bring your guilt offering to the Lord: a ram without defects from your herd or the equivalent value in silver shekels (according to the sanctuary shekel standard). It is a guilt offering. As regards any holy requirement you failed to contribute, you must pay compensation by adding a fifth of its value to it and then give it to the priest, who will make it right for you with the ram as a guilt offering, and you will be forgiven.

If you sin and break any of the Lord's commandments, even if you are unaware of it, you are still guilty and bear responsibility for your guilt. You must take to the priest a ram without defects of the appropriate value from the flock as a guilt offering. Then the priest will make right for you the wrong you did in ignorance, and you will be forgiven. It is a guilt offering because you were guilty as far as the Lord was concerned."

The Lord told Moses, "If you sin against the Lord, breaking your commitment to him, then this is what must happen. You may have lied to your neighbor about something you entrusted to them, about some deposit paid, about something that was stolen, or maybe you were trying to cheat them. You may have found property someone lost, and you lied and made false statements about it, or you have sinned in other ways that people do in such situations. If you have sinned and become guilty you must return what you have stolen or cheated from your victims, the deposit you took, the lost property you found, or anything else that must be given back that you lied about. You must pay full compensation plus a fifth of the value, and give it to the owner as soon as you accept that you are guilty of sin. Then you must take to the priest your guilt offering for the Lord: a ram without defects of the appropriate value from the flock. This is how the priest will make you right before the Lord, and you will be forgiven whatever sins you may have done that you are guilty of."

The Lord told Moses, "Give Aaron and his sons these instructions regarding the burnt offering. The burnt offering is to be left on the fireplace of the altar throughout night until morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar. The priest shall put on his linen clothes and underwear, and he shall take from the altar the greasy ashes of the burnt offering that the fire has burned up and set them down beside the altar. Then he has to change his clothes, and take the ashes outside the camp to a place that's ceremonially clean. The fire on the altar must be kept burning—don't let it go out. Each morning the priest is to add wood to the fire, carefully place the burnt offering on it, and burn the fat parts of the peace offerings on it. The fire must be kept burning on the altar continually—don't let it go out.

These are the regulations for the grain offering: Aaron's sons are to present it before the Lord, in front of the altar. The priest shall remove a handful of the best flour mixed with olive oil, as well as all the frankincense from the grain offering, and burn the 'reminder part' on the altar to be to be accepted by the Lord. The rest is for Aaron and his sons to eat. It must be eaten without yeast in a holy place—the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. It must not be baked with yeast. I have provided it as their share of my food offerings. It is most holy, just like the sin offering and the guilt offering. Any of Aaron's male descendants may eat it. This is a permanent allowance from the food offerings to the Lord for future generations. Whatever touches them shall become holy."

The Lord told Moses, "This is the offering that Aaron and his sons are to present to the Lord when they're anointed: a tenth of an ephah of the best flour as a usual grain offering, half in the morning and half in the evening. Cook it with olive oil on a griddle. Bring it well-kneaded and present it as a grain offering broken into pieces, to be accepted by the Lord. It is to be cooked by the priest who is one of Aaron's descendants and who is to be anointed to take his place. In this case since it is permanently allocated to the Lord, it must be burned completely. Every grain offering for a priest is to be burned completely. It must not be eaten."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons that these are the regulations for the sin offering. The sin offering is to be killed where the burnt offering is killed before the Lord, and it is most holy. The priest who offers the sin offering is to eat it. It must be eaten without yeast in a holy place—the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. Whatever touches it shall become holy and if any of the blood is splashed on clothing, you must wash it in a holy place. The clay pot used to boil the sin offering must be broken. If it's boiled in a bronze pot, the pot must be thoroughly cleaned and washed out with water. Any male among the priests may eat it, it is most holy. But no sin offering may be eaten if its blood has been taken into the Tent of Meeting as a means to make things right in the Holy Place. In that case it must be burned."

"These are the regulations for the guilt offering, it is most holy. The guilt offering is to be killed where the burnt offering is killed, and the priest shall sprinkle its blood on all sides of the altar. All the fat from it shall be offered: the fat tail, the fat that covers the insides, both kidneys with the fat on them by the loins, and the best part of the liver, which the priest is to remove together with the kidneys. He shall burn them on the altar as a food offering to the Lord; it is a guilt offering. Any male among the priests may eat it. It must be eaten in a holy place, it is most holy. The guilt offering is like the sin offering; the regulations are the same for both. The priest who presents the offering that 'makes things right' is to have it. In the case of ordinary burnt offerings, the priest shall have the animal's skin. In the same way all grain offerings that are baked in an oven or cooked in a pan or on a griddle is for the priest who presents it, and

all grain offerings, whether they are mixed with olive oil or dry, they are for all of Aaron descendants.

These are the regulations for the peace offering that you may present to the Lord. If you offer it in a spirit of thanks, then along with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, you must offer bread, wafers, and well-kneaded cakes of the best flour all made without yeast and mixed or coated with olive oil. In addition to your peace offering of thanksgiving of breads made without yeast, you shall present an offering of breads made with yeast. Present one of each kind of bread of the offering as a contribution to the Lord. It is for the priest who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering. The meat of the sacrifice of your peace offering of thanksgiving must be eaten the same day you offer it. Don't leave any of it until the morning. If the sacrifice you're offering is to pay a vow or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day you present your sacrifice, but what's left can be eaten the next day. However, any meat of the sacrifice still remaining on the third day must be burned. If you eat any of the meat from your peace offering on the third day, it won't be accepted. You won't receive credit for offering it. In fact it will be treated as something disgusting, and anyone who eats it will bear responsibility for their guilt.

If this meat touches anything unclean it must not be eaten; it must be burned. This meat may be eaten by those who are ceremonially clean. If anyone who is unclean eats meat from the peace offering given to the Lord, they must be expelled from their people. Anyone who touches anything unclean, whether it's from a person, an unclean animal, or an unclean revolting thing, and then eats meat from the peace offering given to the Lord, they must be expelled from their people."

The Lord told Moses, "Give these instructions to the Israelites. Tell them, 'You must not eat any of the fat of a bull, a sheep, or a goat. You can use the fat of an animal found dead or killed by wild beasts for whatever purpose you want, but you must not eat it. Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from a food offering presented to the Lord must be expelled from their people. You must not eat the blood of any bird or animal in any of your homes. Anyone who eats blood must be expelled from their people.'"

The Lord told Moses, "Give these instructions to the Israelites. Tell them that if you present a peace offering to the Lord you must bring part of it as a special gift to the Lord. You must personally bring the food offerings to the Lord; bring the fat as well as the breast, and wave the breast as a wave offering before the Lord. The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast is for Aaron and his sons. Give the right thigh to the priest as a contribution from your peace offering. The priest as a descendant of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the peace offering has the right thigh as his share. I have required from the Israelites the breast of the wave offering and the contribution of the thigh from their peace offerings, and I have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their share from the Israelites for all time."

This is the share of the food offerings given to the Lord that belongs to Aaron and his sons since the day they were appointed to serve the Lord as priests. From the time they were anointed, the Lord ordered that this be given them by the sons of Israel. It is their share for future generations.

These are the regulations regarding the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering, and the peace offering. The Lord gave these to Moses on Mount Sinai at the time he ordered the Israelites to give their offerings to him in the Wilderness of Sinai.

The Lord told Moses, "Go with Aaron and his sons, and take their priestly clothes, anointing oil, the bull of the sin offering, two rams, and the basket of bread made without yeast, and have everyone assemble at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting." Moses did as the Lord instructed him, and everyone gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Moses told them, "The following is what the Lord has ordered to be done."

Moses had Aaron and his sons come forward, and he washed them with water. He dressed Aaron with the tunic, tied the sash around him, put the robe on him and then the ephod. He tied the waistband of the ephod around him, fastening it to him. Then Moses attached the breastpiece to Aaron and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. He put the turban on Aaron's head and placed the gold plate, the holy crown, on the front of the turban, as the Lord had instructed him to do.

Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and everything in it to dedicate it all. He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times to anoint it and all its utensils, as well as the basin with its stand to dedicate them.

Moses poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head to anoint him and to dedicate him.

Then Moses had Aaron's sons come forward. He dressed them in tunics, tied sashes around them, and wrapped headbands on them, as the Lord had ordered him to do. Moses brought the bull over for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. Moses killed the bull and took some of the blood. He used his finger to put the blood on all four horns of the altar to dedicate it and purify it. He poured out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar, and consecrated the altar so that it could be used to make people right.

Moses took all the fat that covers the insides, the best part of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them, burned all of it on the altar. But the rest of the bull—the skin, the meat, and the waste he burned outside the camp, as the Lord had ordered him to do.

Moses brought the ram for the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. Moses killed the ram and sprinkled the blood on all sides of the altar. He divided the ram into pieces and burned the head, the pieces, and the fat. He washed the insides and legs with water and burned the whole ram on the altar as a burnt offering, a food offering to be accepted by the Lord, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do.

Moses brought the second ram, the ram of ordination, and Aaron and his sons put their hands on its head. Moses killed the ram and took some of its blood. He put it on Aaron's right earlobe, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot. Then Moses had Aaron and his sons come forward and put some of

the blood on their right earlobes, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood on all sides of the altar.

Moses took the fat, including the fat tail, all the fat on the insides, the best part of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them. Moses took the fat, together with the right thigh. He took one loaf of bread without yeast, one loaf made with olive oil, and one wafer from the basket of bread without yeast that was in the presence of the Lord. He placed them on top of the portions of fat and on the right thigh. Then he gave them to Aaron and his sons, and waved them before the Lord as a wave offering. After this Moses took them back and burned them on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering, a food offering to be accepted by the Lord. Moses then took the breast, his share of the ordination ram, and waved it before the Lord as a wave offering, as the Lord had ordered him to do.

Moses then took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood from the altar. He sprinkled them both on the clothes of Aaron and his sons. This is how he dedicated the clothes of Aaron and his sons.

Moses told Aaron and his sons, “You are to boil the meat at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and then eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of offerings for the ordination, as I ordered: ‘It is for Aaron and his sons to eat.’ Afterwards you must burn what's left over of the meat and bread.

You are not to leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days until the ordination ceremony is completed, because your ordination will take seven days. What was done today was ordered by the Lord as a means of making you right. You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, day and night, and follow the Lord's commands so that you will not die, for this is what I have been ordered to do.”

Aaron and his sons did everything that the Lord had ordered through Moses.

On the eighth day after the ordination Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel, to meet with him. He told Aaron, “You need to bring a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, both without defects, and present them before the Lord. Then tell the Israelites, ‘Bring the following offerings: a male goat as a sin offering; a calf and a lamb (both a year old and without defects), for a burnt offering; a bull and a ram as a peace offering to sacrifice before the Lord; and a grain offering mixed with olive oil. Do this because the Lord is going to reveal himself to you today.’”

Following Moses' orders they brought what he'd said to the front of the Tent of Meeting. Everyone came and stood before the Lord. Moses said, “This is what the Lord ordered me to tell you to do, so that you may see his glory.”

Then Moses told Aaron, “Go to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering to make you and the people right. Then sacrifice the offerings brought by the people as a means to make them right, as the Lord ordered.”

So Aaron went to the altar and killed the calf as a sin offering for himself. His sons brought the blood to him. He dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the bottom of the altar. He burned the fat, the kidneys, and the best part of the liver from the sin offering on the altar, as the Lord had ordered Moses to do. However, he burned up the meat and the skin outside the camp.

Aaron killed the burnt offering. His sons brought him the blood, and he sprinkled it on the sides of the altar. They brought him the head and all the other pieces of the burnt offering, and he burned them on the altar. He washed the insides and the legs and burned them with the rest of the burnt offering on the altar.

Then Aaron presented the offerings of the people. He killed the male goat as the sin offering for the people, and offered it in the same way as his own sin offering. He presented the burnt offering, doing so in accordance with the regulations. He presented the grain offering. He took a handful from it and burned it on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering presented earlier that morning.

Aaron killed the bull and the ram as the peace offering for the people. His sons brought him the blood, and he sprinkled it on the sides of the altar. They also brought him the fat portions from the bull, and from the ram—the fat tail, the fat covering the insides, the kidneys, and the best part of the liver— and put them on the breasts. Aaron burned the fat portions on the altar, but he waved the breasts and the right thigh as a wave offering before the Lord, as Moses had ordered him to do.

Then Aaron held up his hands towards the people and blessed them. After that he came down from the altar, having completed the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering.

Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people, and the glory of the Lord was revealed to everyone. Fire came from the presence of the Lord and burned up the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. When everyone saw this, they shouted for joy and fell down with their faces to the ground.

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, set light to their incense burners using ordinary fire and put in incense, and in this way offered forbidden fire in the Lord's presence, something he had not authorized. Fire came out from the Lord's presence and burned them up. They died in the Lord's presence. Moses explained to Aaron, “This is what the Lord was talking about when he said: ‘I will show my holiness to those who approach me; I will reveal my glory so everyone can see.” But Aaron didn't reply.

Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel, and told them, “Come and carry away the bodies of your cousins and take them outside the camp, away from the front of the sanctuary.” They came and picked them up by their clothes, and took them outside the camp, as Moses had ordered.

Then Moses told Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Don't leave your hair uncombed, and don't tear your clothes, otherwise you will die, and the Lord will be angry with everyone. But your relatives and all the other Israelites may mourn for those the Lord killed by fire. Don't go outside the entrance to the Tent

of Meeting, or you will die, because you have been anointed by the Lord." They did what Moses said.

The Lord told Aaron, "You and your descendants must not drink wine or any other alcohol when you go in to the Tent of Meeting, otherwise you will die. This regulation is for all time and for all future generations. You must realize the difference between the holy and the ordinary, between clean and unclean, so you can teach the Israelites all the regulations that the Lord has given to them through Moses."

Moses told Aaron and his two sons who were left, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Take the grain offering that is left over from the food offerings given to the Lord and eat it without yeast beside the altar, because it is most holy. You must eat it in a holy place, because it is the share for you and your descendants from the food offerings given to the Lord. This is what I have been ordered.

You and your male and female descendants can eat the breast of the wave offering and the thigh contribution anywhere that is ceremonially clean, because you and your descendants have been given these as your share from the peace offerings of the Israelites. The thigh contribution and the breast of the wave offering, as well as the fat portions of the food offerings made, they are to bring and wave as a wave offering before the Lord. They belong to you and your children forever as the Lord has ordered."

Moses checked what had happened to the goat of the sin offering, and found out that it had been burned. He got angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons Aaron had left, and asked them, "Why didn't you take the sin offering and eat it in the holy place, because it is most holy and it was given to you to take away the people's guilt by making them right before the Lord. As its blood was not taken into the holy place, you should have eaten it in the sanctuary area, as I ordered."

So Aaron explained to Moses, "Look, it was today that they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord. After all that's just happened to me, would the Lord have been pleased if I'd eaten the sin offering today?"

When Moses heard what Aaron had to say, he accepted the explanation.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "Give these instructions to the Israelites. These are the animals you are allowed to eat: any animal that both has a divided hoof and also chews the cud. However, if it either chews the cud, or has a divided hoof, then you may not eat it. These include: the camel, which though it chews the cud doesn't have a divided hoof, so it is unclean for you. The rock hyrax, which though it chews the cud doesn't have a divided hoof, so it is unclean for you. The hare, which though it chews the cud doesn't have a divided hoof, so it is unclean for you. The pig, which though it has a divided hoof doesn't chew the cud, so it is unclean for you. You are not to eat their meat or touch their dead bodies. They are unclean for you.

You are allowed to eat any creature with fins and scales that lives in the water, whether in the sea or in fresh water. But you are not allowed to eat any of the many creatures that don't have fins and scales that live in the water, whether in the sea or in fresh water. They are repulsive. You must not eat their meat, and you must treat their dead bodies as repulsive. All such water creatures that don't have fins and scales are to be repulsive to you.

As for the birds, these must not be eaten because they are repulsive: eagle, griffon vulture, bearded vulture, buzzard, kite and similar birds of prey, any raven or crow, tawny owl, long-eared owl, gulls, any kind of hawk, little owl, fish owl, eagle owl, barn owl, desert owl, Egyptian vulture, storks and any kind of heron, hoopoe, and bats.

All flying insects that crawl are repulsive to you. But you can eat the following kinds of flying insects that crawl: those that have jointed legs they use to jump. So in this category you can eat any kind of locust, bald locust, cricket, or grasshopper. All other flying insects that crawl are repulsive to you, and will make you unclean. If you touch their dead bodies you will be unclean until the evening, and if you pick up one of their dead bodies you must wash your clothes, and you will be unclean until the evening.

Every animal with hooves that are not divided, or that does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. If you touch any of them you will be unclean. Any four-legged animal that walks on its paws are unclean for you. If you touch their dead bodies you will be unclean until the evening, and if you pick up one of their dead bodies you must wash your clothes, and you will be unclean until the evening. They are unclean for you.

The following animals that run along the ground are unclean for you: rats, mice, any kind of large lizards, geckos, monitor lizards, wall lizards, skinks, and chameleons. These animals that run along the ground are unclean for you. If you touch a dead one of them you will be unclean until the evening.

Anything that one of them dies and lands on becomes unclean. Whatever it is—something made of wood, clothing, leather, sackcloth, or any work tool—it must be washed with water and will be unclean until the evening. Then it will become clean. If one of them falls into a clay pot, all that's in it becomes unclean. You must smash the pot. If water from that pot touches any food, that food becomes unclean, and any drink from a pot like that also becomes unclean. Anything that one of their dead bodies falls on becomes unclean. If it's an oven or a stove, it must be smashed. It is permanently unclean for you. On the other hand, if it's a spring or cistern containing water then it will remain clean, but if you touch one of these dead bodies in it you will be unclean. Similarly, if one of their dead bodies falls on any seed used for sowing, the seed remains clean; but if the seed has been soaked in water and one of their dead bodies falls on it, it is unclean for you.

If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the dead body will be unclean until the evening. If you eat anything from the dead body you must wash your clothes and you will be unclean until the evening. If you pick up the dead body you must wash your clothes and you will be unclean until the evening.

Every animal that crawls along the ground is repulsive—you must not eat it. Don't eat any animal that crawls along the ground, whether it moves on its belly or walks on four feet or many feet. All such animals are

repulsive. Don't defile yourselves by any such crawling animal. Don't make yourselves unclean or defiled by them, because I am the Lord your God; so dedicate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. Don't defile yourselves by any animal that crawls along the ground. I am the Lord who led you out of Egypt so that I could be your God. So be holy, because I am holy.

These are the regulations about animals, birds, everything that lives in the water, and all animals that crawl along the ground. You must recognize the difference between unclean and clean, between those animals that can be eaten and those that can't."

The Lord told Moses, "Give these instructions to the Israelites. Any woman who becomes pregnant and has a boy, she will be unclean for one week, in the same way that she is unclean during her period. The boy's foreskin must be circumcised on the eighth day. The woman must wait a further thirty-three days for the purification of her bleeding. She is not allowed to touch anything holy, and she is not allowed to enter the sanctuary until her time of purification is finished. If a woman has a daughter, she will be unclean for two weeks, in the same way that she is unclean during her menstrual period. The woman must wait a further sixty-six days for the purification of her blood. Once the time of purification is finished for either a son or a daughter, the woman must bring a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove as a purification offering. She is to bring her offerings to the priest at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The priest will then present them to the Lord to purify her so she will be clean from her bleeding. These are the regulations for a woman after she's had a son or a daughter.

If a woman can't afford to bring a lamb, she is to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. One is for the burnt offering and the other for the purification offering. The priest will offer them to purify her, and she will be clean."

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "Anyone who has a swelling, a rash, or a spot on the skin that may be an infectious skin disease must be taken to Aaron the priest or to one of his descendants. The priest will inspect whatever is on the skin. If the hair there has turned white and if the issue seems to be more than something on the surface, it is a serious skin disease, and the priest who inspects it will declare the person unclean.

But if the spot is only a white discoloration and doesn't seem to be more than superficial, and if the hair on the spot has not turned white, the priest will place the person in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest will conduct another inspection, and if he discovers that the spot hasn't changed and hasn't spread on the skin, the priest must place the person in isolation for another seven days. On the seventh day after this the priest will inspect it again. If the spot has faded and has not spread on the skin, the priest will declare the person clean since it was a rash. They must wash their clothes and will be clean. However, if the rash does spread after the person has been inspected by the priest and has been declared clean, the person must go back to be inspected again. If the priest discovers that the rash has spread, he must declare the person unclean because it is certainly a skin disease.

Anyone who develops an infectious skin disease must be taken to the priest. The priest will inspect them, and if there is a white swelling on the skin and the hair there has turned white, and there is an open wound in the swelling, it is a serious skin disease and the priest must declare them unclean. He doesn't need to place the person in isolation because they are unclean.

However, if the skin disease affects all their skin so that it covers their skin from head to toe, everywhere the priest can see, the priest shall inspect them, and if the disease has covered their entire body, he will declare the person clean. As it has all turned white, they are clean. But if when someone's inspected an open wound is found, they will be unclean. When the priest discovers an open wound, he must declare the person unclean. The open wound is unclean; it is an infectious skin disease. But if the open wound heals and becomes white, the person must go back to the priest. The priest will inspect them again, and if the wound has turned white, the priest is to declare the person clean; then they are clean.

When a boil comes up on someone's skin and then it heals, and a white swelling or a reddish-white spot appears in its place, they must show themselves to the priest. The priest shall inspect it, and if it seems to be more than something on the surface, and if the hair there has turned white, the priest shall declare him unclean. It is a serious skin disease that has infected the boil. However, if when the priest inspects it, it doesn't have white hair in it and doesn't seem to be more than superficial, and has faded, the priest is to place the person in isolation for seven days. If then the spot has spread further on the skin, the priest will declare them unclean; it is a disease. But if the spot stays the same and doesn't spread, it's just the scar from the boil, and the priest will declare them clean.

If someone has a burn on their skin and the place where it's raw changes into a reddish-white or white spot, the priest must inspect it. If the hair in the spot has turned white and the spot seems to be more than something on the surface, it is a serious skin disease that has infected the burn, and the priest who inspects it will declare the person unclean. It is an infectious skin disease. However, if when the priest inspects it, it doesn't have white hair in it and doesn't seem to be more than superficial, and has faded, the priest is to place the person in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest will inspect the person again. If then the spot has spread further on the skin, the priest will declare them unclean; it is a serious skin disease. But if the spot stays the same and hasn't spread on the skin, but has faded, it's the swelling from the burn, and the priest will declare them clean because it's just the scar from the burn.

If someone, man or woman, has a sore on the head or chin, the priest shall inspect it, and if it appears to be more than superficial and the hair in it has become pale and thin, the priest must declare them unclean; it is an infection producing scabs, a serious disease of the head or chin. However, if the priest inspects the scabby infection and it doesn't seem to be more than superficial and

has no pale hair in it, the priest is to place the person in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest will inspect the person again and if the scabby infection has not spread and there is no pale hair in it, and it doesn't seem to be more than superficial, then the person must shave themselves except for the scaly area. The priest is to place the person in isolation for another seven days. On the seventh day the priest will inspect the scabby infection, and if it has not spread on the skin and doesn't seem to be more than superficial, the priest is to pronounce the person clean. They must wash their clothes and will be clean. However, if the scabby infection has spread on the skin after having been declared clean, the priest must inspect them, and if the scabby infection has indeed spread on the skin, the priest doesn't need to check for pale hair; the person is unclean. But if the priest sees that the scabby infection hasn't changed, and black hair has grown in it, then it has healed. The person is clean, and the priest must declare it.

If someone, man or woman, has white spots on the skin, the priest shall inspect them, and if the spots appear a dull white, it's just a rash that has developed on the skin; the person is clean.

If a man loses his hair and goes bald, he is still clean. If he has a receding hairline and he goes bald on his forehead, he is still clean. But if a reddish-white sore appears on his bald head or forehead, it is an infectious disease developing. The priest must inspect him, and if the swelling of the sore on his bald head or forehead looks reddish-white like a skin disease, then he has an infectious disease; he is unclean. The priest must declare him unclean because of the infection on his head.

Anyone who has such diseases must wear clothes that are torn and let their hair remain uncombed. They must cover their faces and shout out, 'Unclean, unclean!' They remain unclean as long as the infection lasts. They have to live alone somewhere outside the camp.

The following regulations relate to any material that becomes affected by mold, such as wool or linen clothing, anything woven or knitted made from linen or wool, or anything made of leather: If the spot is green or red on the material, whether it's leather, woven, or knitted or some other leather item, then it is infected with mold and must be shown to the priest. The priest must inspect the mold and place the item in isolation for seven days. On the seventh day the priest shall inspect it again, and if the patch of mold has spread in the material, whether it's leather, woven, or knitted or some other leather item, then it is a harmful mold; the article is unclean, whatever it is being used for. The priest is to burn it, whether the affected item is wool or linen or leather. Because the mold is harmful, the article must be burned. However, if when the priest inspects it again, the patch of mold has not spread, then the priest shall order that the affected item be washed and placed in isolation for another seven days. Once it has been washed, the priest is to inspect it again, and if the item with the mold hasn't changed how it looks, it is unclean. Though the mold hasn't spread, you must burn the item, whether the mold damage is on the inside or the outside. If the priest inspects it and the patch of mold has faded after it has been washed, he is to cut out the affected part of the material, whether it's leather, woven, or knitted. However, if the mold comes back then it is spreading. In that case you must burn the affected item. If the mold disappears after washing, then have it washed again, and it will be clean.

These are the regulations regarding what needs to be done when mold contaminates wool or linen material, whether woven or knitted, or any leather item, as to declaring it clean or unclean."

The Lord told Moses, "These are the regulations regarding those who have had a skin disease when having been brought to the priest they are declared clean. The priest must go outside the camp and inspect the person. If the skin disease has healed, the priest shall have two ceremonially clean birds brought to him, with some cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop, on behalf of the person to be made clean.

The priest will order one of the birds to be killed over a clay pot filled with fresh water. He will take the live bird together with the cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop, and dip them in the blood of the bird that was killed over the fresh water. He will use the blood to sprinkle seven times the person being made clean of the skin disease. Then the priest will declare them clean and let the live bird fly away.

The one being made clean must wash their clothes, shave off all their hair, and wash themselves with water; then they will be ceremonially clean. After that they can enter the camp, but they must stay outside their tent for seven days. On the seventh day they must shave off all their hair: their head, beard, eyebrows, and the rest of their hair. They must wash their clothes and wash themselves with water, and they will be clean.

On the eighth day they are to bring two male lambs and one female lamb, all a year old and without defects; a grain offering consisting of three-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil, and one 'log' of olive oil. The priest who conducts the ceremony will present the person to be made clean to the Lord, along with these offerings, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest will take one of the male lambs and present it as a guilt offering, together with the log of olive oil; and he will wave them before the Lord as a wave offering.

Then he will kill the lamb near the sanctuary where the sin offering and burnt offering are killed. The sin offering and the guilt offering belong to the priest; they are most holy. The priest will put some of the blood from the guilt offering on their right earlobe, on their right thumb, and on the big toe of their right foot of the person being made clean. The priest will pour some of the log of olive oil into his left palm, dip his right index finger in it, and using his finger, sprinkle some of the olive oil seven times before the Lord. The priest will then use some of the rest of the olive oil remaining in his palm on the person being made clean, and put it on top of the blood of the guilt offering. This will be on their right earlobe, on their right thumb, and on the big toe of their right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. What is left of the olive oil in his palm, the priest will put on the head of the person being made clean and

then make them right before the Lord. The priest will sacrifice the sin offering to make the person right, so that they are now clean from their uncleanness. After that, the priest will kill the burnt offering and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, to make them right, and they will be clean.

But those who are poor and can't afford these offerings must bring one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make them right, as well as a tenth of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil for a grain offering, a log of olive oil, and two turtledoves or two young pigeons, whichever they can afford. One is to be used as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering.

On the eighth day they are to take them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the Lord so they can be made clean. The priest will take the lamb for the guilt offering, together with the log of olive oil, and wave them as a wave offering before the Lord. After he kills the lamb for the guilt offering, the priest will take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the right earlobe of the one being made clean, on their right thumb, and on the big toe of their right foot.

Then the priest will pour some of the olive oil into his left palm and using his right index finger, will sprinkle some of the oil from his left palm seven times before the Lord. The priest shall also put some of the olive oil in his palm on the right earlobe of the person being made clean, on their right thumb, and on the big toe of their right foot, in the same places as the blood of the guilt offering. What is left of the olive oil in his palm, the priest will put on the head of the person being made clean and then make them right before the Lord. Then they must sacrifice one of the turtledoves or young pigeons, whichever they can afford, one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, along with the grain offering. This is how the priest will make the person right and clean before the Lord. These are the regulations for those who have a skin disease and can't afford the usual offerings to make people clean."

Then the Lord told Moses and Aaron, "When you get to Canaan, the land I'm giving you to own, if I put some mold into a house there and contaminate it, the owner of the house must come and tell the priest, 'It seems my house has something like mold.' The priest must order the house to be emptied before he goes in to inspect the mold, so that nothing in the house will be declared unclean. Once that's done, the priest is to go in and inspect the house. He will examine the house and see if the mold on the walls is made up of green or red indentations that go under the surface, the priest shall go out of the door and seal the house for seven days. On the seventh day the priest will return and inspect the house again. If the mold has spread on the walls, he will order the affected stones to be removed and disposed of in an unclean area outside the town. Then he will order all the plaster inside of the house to be scraped off and dumped in an unclean area outside the town. Different stones must be used to replace the ones removed, and new plaster will be needed to replaster the house. If the mold returns and affects the house again even after the stones have been removed and the house has been scraped and replastered, the priest must come and inspect it. If he sees the mold has spread in the house, it is a harmful mold; the house is unclean. It must be demolished, and all its stones, timbers, and plaster must be taken and dumped in an unclean area outside the town. Anyone who goes into the house during any time that it is sealed will be unclean until the evening. Anyone who sleeps or eats in the house must wash their clothes.

However, if when the priest comes and inspects it and finds that the mold hasn't reappeared after the house was replastered, he shall declare the house clean because the mold is gone. He will bring two birds, cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop to make the house clean. He will kill one of the birds over a clay pot filled with fresh water. He will dip the live bird, the cedar wood, crimson thread, and hyssop, in the blood of the bird that was killed and the fresh water, and sprinkle the house seven times. He will make the house clean with the bird's blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop, and the crimson thread. Then he will let the live bird fly away outside the town. This is how he will make the house right, and it will be clean.

These are the regulations for any infectious skin disease, for a scabby infection, for mold on clothing and in a house, as well as for a swelling, rash, or spot. They are used to decide whether something is clean or unclean. These are the regulations regarding skin diseases and mold."

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "Tell the Israelites, When any man has a discharge from his genitals, the discharge is unclean. The uncleanness comes from his discharge, whether his body allows it to flow out or blocks it. It makes him unclean. Any bed the man with the discharge lies on will be unclean, and anything he sits on will be unclean. Anyone who touches his bed has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Anyone who sits on whatever the man was sitting on has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Anyone who touches the man's body has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. If the man with the discharge spits on anyone who is clean, they have to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Whatever the man sits on when he's riding will be unclean. Anyone who touches whatever was under him will be unclean until the evening. Anyone who picks these things up has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. If the man with the discharge touches anyone without washing his hands with water first, the person who was touched has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Any clay item touched by the man must be broken, and any wooden item must be washed with water.

Once the discharge has healed, the man must allocate seven days for his cleaning process, wash his clothes, and wash himself in fresh water, and he will be clean. On the eighth day he must take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, come before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and give them to the priest. The priest will sacrifice them, one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. This is how the

priest will make the man right before the Lord because of his discharge.

When a man has a release of semen, he must wash his whole body with water, and he will be unclean until the evening. Any clothing or leather that the release of semen falls on must be washed with water, and it will remain unclean until the evening. If a man sleeps with a woman and there is a release of semen, both of them must wash with water, and they will remain unclean until the evening.

When a woman has a discharge of blood from her body, she will be unclean because of her period for seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean until the evening. Anything she lies or sits on during her period will be unclean, and anyone who touches her bed must wash their clothes and wash themselves with water, and will be unclean until the evening. Anyone who touches what she was sitting on has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Whether it's a bed or something she was sitting on, anyone who touches it will be unclean until the evening. If a man sleeps with her and the blood from her period touches him, he will be unclean for seven days, and any bed he lies on will be unclean.

When a woman has a discharge of blood for several days when it's not the time for her period, or if it continues past her period, she will be unclean for the whole time she is bleeding, not just for the days of her period. Any bed she lies on or anything she sits on while she has her discharge will be unclean, just as her bed is during her period. Anyone who touches them has to wash their clothes, and wash themselves with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Once the woman's discharge has healed, she must allocate seven days for her cleaning process, wash her clothes, and wash herself in fresh water, and she shall be clean. On the eighth day she must take two turtledoves or two young pigeons, come before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and give them to the priest. The priest will sacrifice them, one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. This is how the priest will make her right before the Lord because of her discharge.

This is how you must stop the Israelites from becoming ceremonially unclean, so that they don't die by making my Tabernacle unclean, the place where I live with them.

These are the regulations regarding a man who has a discharge, a man who has a release of semen that makes him unclean, a woman during her period, any male or female who has a discharge, and a man who sleeps with an unclean woman."

The Lord spoke to Moses after the death of two of Aaron's sons when they went into the Lord's presence. The Lord told Moses: "Warn your brother Aaron not to come into the Most Holy Place whenever he wants, otherwise he'll die. For that's where I appear in the cloud above the atonement cover of the Ark, behind the veil.

These are the instructions as to how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary. He is to come with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. He is to be wearing the holy linen tunic, with linen underwear. He has to tie a linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are holy clothes. He must wash himself with water before he puts them on. From the people of Israel he is to bring two male goats for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. Aaron will present the bull as his own sin offering to make himself and his household right. Then he will bring the two goats and present them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Aaron will cast lots to choose between the goats, one for the Lord and the other for the scapegoat. He will present the goat that was chosen by lot for the Lord and sacrifice it as a sin offering. The goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat is to be presented alive before the Lord to make things right by sending it away into the wilderness as the scapegoat.

Aaron is to present the bull for his sin offering to make things right for himself and his household by killing the bull as his own sin offering. Then he will fill up an incense burner with burning coals from the altar that is before the Lord, and with his hands full of finely ground sweet-smelling incense, take them behind the veil. In the presence of the Lord he will put the incense on the burning coals, and the smoke from the incense will cover the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. He will take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the east side of the atonement cover. He shall also sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times in front of the atonement cover.

Then Aaron will slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and bring its blood behind the veil, and with its blood he must do as he did with the bull's blood. He is to sprinkle it against the atonement cover and in front of it. This is how he will set right the Most Holy Place and purify it from the uncleanness of the Israelites, their acts of rebellion, and all their sins. He will do the same for the Tent of Meeting which is in the middle of their camp, surrounded by their unclean lives. No one can be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron enters to purify the Most Holy Place until he leaves, after he has made things right for himself, his household, and all the Israelites.

Then he shall go to the altar that is before the Lord and purify it. He is to take some of the blood from the bull and the goat and put it on all the horns of the altar. He is to sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to dedicate it and purify it from the uncleanness of the Israelites. Once Aaron has finished purifying the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, he is to present the live goat. Then he will put both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wrongs of the Israelites, all their acts of rebellion, and all their sins. He is to put them on the goat's head and send it away into the desert, taken there by a man chosen to do it. The goat will take upon itself all their sins and go into a distant place, and the man will send it away into the desert.

Aaron is to return to the Tent of Meeting, take off the linen clothes he put on before he went into the Most Holy Place, and leave them there. He is to wash himself with water in the sanctuary and put on his own clothes. Then he will go out and sacrifice his burnt offering and the people's burnt offering that makes him and the people right. He also must burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

The man who went and sent away the scapegoat must wash his clothes and wash himself with water; then he may come back into the camp.

The remains of the bull used for the sin offering and the goat for the sin offering, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to purify it, must be taken outside the camp. Their skin, meat, and waste must be burned. The person who burns them must wash his clothes and wash himself with water; then he may come back into the camp.

This regulation applies to you for all time. The tenth day of the seventh month is a day of self-denial for you. You are not to do any work. This applies to all who are native-born and also any foreigner living among you, for on this day the process of making you right will be done, to make you clean from all your sins, clean before the Lord. It is a Sabbath of Sabbaths, a day of rest and self-denial. This regulation applies for all time. The priest who is anointed and dedicated to succeed his father as high priest shall carry out the ceremony of making things right, and put on the holy linen clothes. He will carry out the purification of the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, also making right the priests and all the people. This regulation applies to you for all time: once a year the Israelites have all their sins made right." Moses did everything as the Lord had ordered.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron, his sons, and all the Israelites that this is what the Lord commands: Any Israelite who kills a bull, a lamb, or a goat, whether inside the camp or outside of it, instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the Lord there, that person shall be held guilty of illegal killing. They have shed blood and must be expelled from their people.

This is why the Israelites have to bring to the Lord the sacrifices they currently offer out in the fields. They must bring them to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and offer them as peace offerings to the Lord. The priest will sprinkle the blood on the altar of the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and burn the fat to be accepted by the Lord.

They must not continue to offer their sacrifices to the goat devils with whom they have acted like prostitutes. This is a regulation for all time and for all future generations.

Warn them that any Israelite or any foreigner living among them who offers a burnt offering or a sacrifice without bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the Lord must be expelled from their people. I will disown any Israelite or any foreigner living among them who eats any blood and I will expel them from their people. Life is in the body's blood. I have given it to you so that by putting it on the altar your lives can be made right, for it is the lifeblood that makes people's lives right. That's why I'm warning the Israelites: None of you is allowed to eat blood, and no foreigner living among you is allowed to eat blood.

Any Israelite or foreigner living among them who hunts and kills a wild animal or a bird which are allowed be eaten must drain the blood from its body and cover it with earth, for life is in the body's blood. That's why I have warned the Israelites: You are not allowed to eat the blood of anything living, for life is in the body's blood. Anyone who eats it must be expelled.

Anyone, Israelite or foreigner, who eats anything found dead or killed by wild animals must wash their clothes and wash with water, and they will be unclean until the evening. Then they will be clean. But if they don't wash their clothes and wash themselves with water, then they bear responsibility for their guilt."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites: I am the Lord your God. Don't follow the ways of Egypt where you used to live, and don't follow the ways of Canaan where I'm going to take you. Don't adopt their practices. Do what I tell you and keep my rules. I am the Lord your God. If you keep my rules and do what I tell you, you will live. I am the Lord.

Don't have sex with a close relative. Don't shame your father by having sex with your mother. She is your mother; don't have sex with her. Don't have sex with any of your father's wives and shame your father. Don't have sex with your sister, whether she's your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, or whether she was born in the same house as you or somewhere else. Don't have sex with your granddaughter, your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, because that would be a shameful thing for you. Don't have sex with the daughter of any of your father's wives or the daughter of your father. She is your sister. Don't have sex with your father's sister. She is a close relative of your father. Don't have sex with your mother's sister. She is a close relative of your mother. Don't bring shame on your uncle by having sex with his wife. She is your aunt. Don't have sex with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife. Don't have sex with her. Don't have sex with your brother's wife and bring shame on your brother. Don't have sex with both a woman and her daughter. Don't have sex with her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter. They are her close relatives. That is something I loathe. Don't marry your wife's sister and have sex with her while your wife is still alive. They will be hostile wives to one other. Don't have sex with a woman during the time she is unclean because of her period. Don't commit any sex act with any other man's wife. This would pollute you and make you unclean.

Don't give any of your children as a human sacrifice to Molech, for you must not disgrace the character of your God. I am the Lord.

Don't have sex with a man as with a woman. That is something disgusting. Don't have sex with any animal. This would pollute you and make you unclean. A woman must not give herself to an animal to have sex with it. That is something disgusting. Don't pollute yourselves and make yourselves unclean by doing anything like this. That's the reason I'm expelling these nations from the land—they polluted themselves because of all these practices. Even the land has become polluted, so I am punishing it for the sins committed by the people who live there, and the land will vomit them out.

You, however, must do what I tell you and keep my rules. You must not do any of these disgusting acts, whether an Israelite or a foreigner living among you. The people who lived in the land before you practiced all these disgusting things, and the land became

polluted. If you pollute the land, it will vomit you out just like it did the nations before you.

Consequently anyone who does any of these disgusting things must be expelled from their people. You must accept my demand that you don't follow any of these disgusting practices done before you arrived. Don't pollute yourselves and make yourselves unclean. I am the Lord your God."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell all the Israelites: You must be holy because I am holy; I am the Lord your God.

Show respect for your mother and father, and keep my Sabbaths. I am the Lord your God.

Don't turn to idols for help or make metal images of gods. I am the Lord your God.

When you sacrifice a peace offering to the Lord, make sure you do it correctly so God will accept you. It needs to be eaten the day you sacrifice it, or the next day. Whatever is left over on the third day must be burned. If you do eat some of it on the third day, the sacrifice becomes repulsive and won't be accepted. Anyone who eats it will bear responsibility for their guilt, for they have made unclean what is holy to the Lord. They must be expelled from their people.

When you harvest the crops grown on your land, don't harvest right up to the edges of your field, or collect what has been missed. Don't take every last grape from your vineyard or pick up the ones that have fallen. Leave them for the poor people and foreigners. I am the Lord your God.

Don't steal. Don't lie. Don't deceive each other.

Don't swear oaths in my name that are not true, otherwise you defame the character of your God. I am the Lord.

Don't cheat others or rob them. Don't refuse to pay wages due to workers until the morning.

Don't speak badly about deaf people. Don't put objects in the way of blind people to trip them up. Instead show respect to your God. I am the Lord.

Don't be a corrupt judge. Don't show favoritism to the poor or to the rich. Judge others fairly.

Don't go around spreading false rumors about people. Don't keep quiet when the lives of others are at risk. I am the Lord.

Don't hold onto hateful feelings towards others. Talk honestly with your neighbors, so that you don't sin because of them. Don't look for revenge or hold a grudge against anybody, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Do what I tell you! Don't make different kinds of livestock breed together. Don't sow your fields with two different kinds of seed. Don't wear clothes made of two different kinds of material.

If a man has sex with a servant girl promised to become another man's wife, but who hasn't yet been bought or set free, then compensation has to be paid. However, they are not to be killed, because she hadn't been set free. But the man must bring a ram as his guilt offering to the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The priest will set things right for him before the Lord using the ram of the guilt offering for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.

When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, treat the fruit at first as unclean. For three years you are forbidden to eat it. The fourth year all the fruit must be dedicated to the Lord as a praise offering. However, the fifth year you may eat the fruit and in this way you will have an even greater harvest. I am the Lord your God.

Don't eat meat with blood in it. Don't use fortune-telling or witchcraft.

Don't cut your hair on the sides of your head or trim the sides of your beard, don't cut your bodies in some pagan ritual for the dead, and don't get yourselves tattoos. I am the Lord.

Don't bring shame on your daughter by making her a prostitute, otherwise the land will become morally and spiritually depraved.

Keep my Sabbaths and show respect for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.

Don't try and find help from mediums or spiritists —don't even go looking for them, otherwise they will corrupt you. I am the Lord your God.

Stand up and be respectful of older people. Show reverence for your God. I am the Lord.

Don't mistreat foreigners who live in your country. Treat them in the same way as a fellow citizen, and love them as you love yourself, because you were once foreigners living in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Don't use dishonest weights and measures. Make sure your scales and weights are accurate, that your measures of ephah and hin are correct. I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt.

Keep all my rules and regulations, and make sure you follow them. I am the Lord."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites: These regulations are for both Israelites and foreigners living among them. Anyone who sacrifices their children to Molech must be executed. The community must stone them to death. I will disown them and expel them from their people, because by sacrificing their children to Molech they have polluted my sanctuary and disgraced my reputation. If the community decides to look the other way and not execute those who sacrifice their children to Molech, then I will take action against them myself. I will disown them and their family, and expel them from their people—and not just them, but everyone who follows them in spiritually prostituting themselves with Molech.

I will also disown and expel from their people anyone who goes to mediums or spiritists and in this way commits spiritual prostitution with them.

So dedicate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my rules and put them into practice. I am the Lord who makes you holy.

Anyone who curses their father or mother must be executed. They have cursed their father or mother; they bear the responsibility for their punishment.

Any man who commits adultery with someone else's wife must be executed, as well as the woman.

A man who has sex with his father's wife has brought shame on his father. Both the man and the woman must be executed. Both must surely be put to death; they bear the responsibility for their punishment.

A man who has sex with his daughter-in-law must be executed, as well as the woman. They have done something perverse; they bear the responsibility for their punishment.

Men who have sex with other men as with a woman have done something disgusting. They must be executed; they bear the responsibility for their punishment.

A man who marries both a woman and her mother has acted perversely. They must all be burned to death so that there will be no such wickedness among you.

A man who has sex with an animal must be executed, and the animal must be killed too.

A woman who gives herself to an animal to have sex with it must be executed, along with the animal. They must both be killed; they bear the responsibility for their punishment.

A man who marries his sister, whether she's his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and they have sex, has done something shameful. They must be expelled from their people in front of everybody. He has brought shame on his sister; he bears the responsibility for his punishment.

A man who has sex with a woman having her period has exposed where her blood flow comes from, and she has too. They must both be expelled from their people.

Don't have sex with your aunt, whether on your father's or your mother's side, because it brings shame on your own family. Both will bear responsibility for their sin.

A man who has sex with his uncle's wife brings shame on his uncle. They will bear responsibility for their sin; they shall die without having children.

A man who marries his brother's wife does something that is unclean. He has brought shame on his brother; the couple will have no children.

So keep all my rules and regulations, so that the land where I'm taking you to live won't vomit you out. Don't follow the practices of the nations I'm expelling for you. I detested them because they did all these evil things. But I have promised you that you will take over their land. I'm going to give it to you to own, a land that flows with milk and honey. I am the Lord your God, who has made you a distinctive people different from all others.

So make sure you observe the difference between clean and unclean animals and birds. Don't make yourselves unclean because of any animal or bird, or by anything that runs along the ground. I have made the difference clear: they are unclean for you. You shall be holy to me because I am holy. I am the Lord, and I have made you a distinctive people different from all other nations. You belong to me.

Anyone, man or woman, who is a medium or a spiritist must be executed. They are to be stoned to death; they bear the responsibility for their punishment."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron's sons, the priests: A priest is not to make himself unclean by touching the dead body of any of his relatives. The only exceptions are for his immediate family. This includes his mother, father, son, daughter, or brother, or his unmarried sister since she is a close relative because she doesn't have a husband. He must not make himself unclean for those only related to him by marriage—he is not to make himself ceremonially impure.

Priests are not to shave bald spots on their heads, trim the sides of their beards, or cut their bodies. They must be holy to their God and not disgrace their God's reputation. They are the ones who present the food offerings to the Lord, the food of their God. Consequently they must be holy.

A priest is not to marry a woman made unclean through prostitution or who is divorced by her husband, for the priest must be holy to his God. You shall consider him holy because he presents the food offerings to your God. He shall be holy to you, because I am holy. I am the Lord, and I chose you as my special people. A priest's daughter who makes herself unclean through prostitution makes her father unclean. She must be executed by burning.

The high priest has the highest place among the other priests. He has been anointed with olive oil poured on his head and has been ordained to wear the priestly clothing. He must not leave his hair uncombed or tear his clothes. He is not to go near any dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even if it is for his own father or mother. He must not leave to deal with someone who has died or make the sanctuary of his God unclean because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the Lord.

He can only marry a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or one made unclean through prostitution. He has to marry a virgin from his own people, so that he doesn't make his children unclean among his people, for I am the Lord who makes him holy."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron: These rules apply for all future generations. If any of your descendants has a physical defect, he is not allowed to come and present the food offerings of his God. No man is allowed to do this if he has any defects, including anyone who is blind, crippled, facially disfigured, or has deformities, anyone who has a broken foot or arm, anyone who is a hunchback or dwarf, or who has cataracts, skin sores or scabs, or a damaged testicle.

No descendant of Aaron the priest who has a defect is allowed to come and present the food offerings to the Lord. Because he has a defect, he must not come and offer the food of his God. He is still allowed to eat the food from the Most Holy Place of his God and also from the sanctuary, but because he has a defect, he is not allowed to go near the curtain or the altar, so that my sanctuary and everything in it are not made unclean, because I am the Lord who makes them holy." Moses repeated this to Aaron and his sons, and to all the Israelites.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons to be dedicated when dealing with the holy offerings that the Israelites have dedicated to me, so that they don't dishonor my holy character. I am the Lord.

Tell them: These rules apply for all future generations. If any of your descendants in an unclean state comes close to the holy offerings that the Israelites dedicate to honor the Lord, that person must be expelled from my presence. I am the Lord.

If one of Aaron's descendants has a skin disease or a discharge, he is not allowed to eat the holy offerings until he is clean. Anyone who touches anything made

unclean by a dead body or by a man who has had a release of semen, or anyone who touches an unclean animal or an unclean person (whatever the uncleanness is), anyone who touches anything like this will remain unclean until evening. He is not allowed to eat from the holy offerings unless he has washed himself with water. At sunset he will become clean, and then he is allowed to eat from the holy offerings because they provide his food. He must not eat anything that has died, or has been killed by wild animals, because that would make him unclean. I am the Lord. The priests must do as I demand, so that they don't become guilty and die because they have not done so, treating my requirements with contempt. I am the Lord who makes them holy.

Anyone who isn't part of a priest's family is not allowed to eat the holy offerings. This also applies to a priest's guest or his paid worker. However, if a priest uses his own money to buy a slave, or if a slave is born in the priest's household, then that slave is allowed to eat his food. If the priest's daughter gets married to a man who isn't a priest, she is not allowed to eat the holy offerings. But if a priest's daughter without children is widowed or divorced and goes back to her father's house, she is allowed to eat her father's food as she did when she was growing up. But no one outside the priest's family can eat it.

Anyone who eats a holy offering by mistake must pay compensation by adding a fifth to its value, and give it all to the priest. The priests must not make the holy offerings the Israelites present to the Lord unclean by allowing the people to eat them and in so doing take upon themselves the punishment for guilt. For I am the Lord who makes them holy."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron, his sons and all the Israelites: If you or a foreigner living with you wants to make a gift as a burnt offering to the Lord, whether it's to fulfill a promise or as a freewill offering, this is what you are to do. If it is to be accepted on your behalf you must offer a male without defects from the herds of cattle, sheep, or goats. Don't present anything with a defect because it won't be accepted on your behalf.

If you want to present a peace offering to the Lord from the herd or flock to fulfill a promise or as a freewill offering, in order to be acceptable the animal must be perfect, completely without defects. Don't present to the Lord an animal that is blind, injured, or damaged in some way, or has warts, skin sores, or scabs. Don't place any animal that has these on the altar as a food offering to the Lord.

However, you can present a freewill offering of a bull or sheep that has a leg that is too long or too short, but not if it is a sacrifice to fulfill a promise. Don't present to the Lord an animal with testicles that are accidentally or deliberately damaged. You are not allowed to sacrifice any of these damaged animals in your land. Nor are you allowed to accept such animals from a foreigner that are damaged and defective."

The Lord told Moses, "When a bull, a sheep, or a goat is born, it must stay with its mother for seven days. After eight days it can be accepted as a food offering to the Lord. However, don't kill a bull or a sheep and its young on the same day. When you present a thank offering to the Lord, make sure to do so in a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. It has to be eaten on the same day. Don't leave any of it until morning. I am the Lord. Keep my rules and put them into practice. I am the Lord. Don't disgrace my holy character. I must be accepted as holy by you. I am the Lord who makes you holy. I am the one who led you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that these are my religious festivals, the festivals of the Lord that you are to call as the holy times when we meet together. You have six days to work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy day of meeting together. Don't do any work. It is the Lord's Sabbath everywhere you live.

These are the Lord's religious festivals, the holy meetings that you are to announce at their specific times. The Lord's Passover starts on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. The Lord's Festival of Unleavened Bread begins on the fifteenth day of the first month. For seven days the bread you eat must be made without yeast. On the first day you are to hold a holy meeting. You must not do any of your usual work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. There is to be a holy meeting on the seventh day. You must not do any of your usual work."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that when you enter the land that I'm giving you and you harvest your crops, take a stack of grain from the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest. He will wave the stack of grain before the Lord so that it may be accepted on your behalf. The priest is to do this the day following the Sabbath. When you wave the stack of grain, you are to present a one-year-old lamb without defects as a burnt offering to the Lord, together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil (a food offering to the Lord to be accepted by him) and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. Don't eat any bread, roasted grain, or new grain until the time you bring this offering to your God. This regulation is for all time and for future generations everywhere you live.

Count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath—the day you brought the stack of grain as a wave offering. Count fifty days until the day after the seventh Sabbath, and on that day present an offering of new grain to the Lord. Bring two loaves of bread from your homes as a wave offering. Make them from two-tenths of an ephah of the best flour, baked with yeast, as the firstfruits to the Lord. As well as the bread, present seven one-year-old male lambs without defects, one young bull, and two rams. They will be a burnt offering to the Lord, as well as their grain offerings and drink offerings, a food offering to the Lord to be accepted by him. Present one male goat as a sin offering and two one-year-old male lambs as a peace offering. The priest will wave the lambs as a wave offering before the Lord, along with the bread of the firstfruits. The bread and the two lambs are holy to the Lord and belong to the priest. That same day you are to announce a holy meeting, and you must not do any of your usual work.

This regulation is for all time and for future generations everywhere you live.

When you harvest the crops grown on your land, don't harvest right up to the edges of your field, or collect what has been missed. Leave them for the poor people and foreigners. I am the Lord your God."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that on the first day of the seventh month you are to have a special Sabbath of complete rest, a holy meeting that is announced by the sound of trumpets. Don't do any of your usual work; instead you are to present a food offering to the Lord."

The Lord told Moses, "The Day of Atonement is on the tenth day of this seventh month. You are to have a holy meeting, deny yourselves, and present a food offering to the Lord On this day you must not do any of your usual work because it is the Day of Atonement, when things are made right for you before the Lord your God. Anyone who does not practice self-denial on this day must be expelled from their people. I will destroy anyone of you who does any work on this day. Don't do any kind of work at all. This regulation is for all time and for future generations everywhere you live. It is to be a Sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial. You are to observe your Sabbath from the evening of the ninth day of the month until evening the next day."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that the Feast of Tabernacles to honor the Lord begins on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and lasts for seven days. On the first day have a holy meeting. You must not do any of your usual work. For seven days you shall present food offerings to the Lord. On the eighth day you are to have another holy meeting and present a food offering to the Lord. It is a meeting for worship. You must not do any of your usual work.

These are the Lord's holy festivals, which you are to announce as holy meetings for presenting food offerings to the Lord. These include burnt offerings, grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings, each according to the specific day. All of these offerings are in addition to those for the Lord's Sabbaths. They are also in addition to your gifts, to all your offerings to fulfill promises, and to all the freewill offerings you present to the Lord.

You shall celebrate a feast to honor the Lord for seven days on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, once you have harvested your crops. The first day and the eighth day are Sabbaths of complete rest. On the first day you are to gather branches from large trees, from palm trees, from leafy trees and of river willows, and celebrate before the Lord your God for seven days. You are to hold this festival to honor the Lord for seven days every year. This regulation is for all time and for all future generations.

You are to live in temporary shelters for seven days. Every Israelite born in the country must live in shelters, so that your descendants will remember that I made the Israelites live in shelters when I led them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

So Moses told the Israelites all about the Lord's festivals.

The Lord told Moses, "Order the Israelites to bring you pure, pressed olive oil for the lamps, so they will always stay lit. From evening until morning Aaron is to constantly look after the lamps before the Lord, outside the veil of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting. This regulation is for all time and for all future generations. He is to constantly look after the lamps placed on the pure gold lampstand before the Lord.

Using the best flour bake twelve loaves, with two-tenths of an ephah of flour per loaf. Place them in two piles, six in each pile, on the table made of pure gold that stands before the Lord. Place pure frankincense beside each pile to go with the bread to act as the 'reminder part,' a food offering to the Lord. Every Sabbath day the bread shall be placed before the Lord, given by the Israelites as an ongoing sign of the eternal agreement. It is for Aaron and his descendants. They are to eat it in a holy place; for they must treat it as a most holy part of the food offerings given to the Lord. It is their share of the food offerings for all time."

One day a man who had an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went into the Israelite camp and had a fight with an Israelite. The Israelite woman's son cursed the name of the Lord. So they took him before Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri, from the tribe of Dan.) They detained him until it was clear what the Lord wanted them to do about it.

The Lord told Moses, "Take the man who cursed me outside the camp. Have all who heard him curse put their hands on his head; then have everyone stone him to death. Tell the Israelites that anyone who curses their God will be punished for their sin. Anyone who curses the name of the Lord must be executed. All of you must stone them to death, whether they are a foreigner who lives with you or an Israelite. If they curse my name, they must be executed.

Anyone who kills someone else must be executed. Anyone who kills an animal has to replace it—a life for a life. If anyone injures someone else, whatever they've done must be done to them: a broken bone for a broken bone, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. Whatever way they injured the victim, the same must be done to them. Anyone who kills an animal has to replace it, but anyone who kills someone else must be executed. The same laws apply to foreigners who live with you as to Israelites, for I am the Lord your God."

Moses told this to the Israelites, and they took the man who cursed the Lord outside the camp and stoned him to death. The Israelites did what the Lord ordered Moses to do.

The Lord told Moses on Mount Sinai, "Tell the Israelites: When you enter the land that I'm giving you, the land itself must also observe a Sabbath rest in honor of the Lord. Six years you can cultivate your fields, take care of your vineyards, and harvest your crops. But the seventh year is to be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath in honor of the Lord. Don't plant your fields or care for your vineyards. Don't harvest what may have grown up in your fields, or collect the grapes from your vineyards that you haven't cared for. The land is to have a year of complete rest. You can eat whatever the land produces during the Sabbath year. This applies to yourself, your male and female slaves, paid workers and foreigners who live with you, and to

your livestock and the wild animals living in your land. Whatever grows can be used for food.

Count seven ‘sabbaths’ of years, in other words, seven times seven years, so that the seven sabbaths of years come to forty-nine years. Then blow the trumpet all through the country on the tenth day of the seventh month, which is the Day of Atonement. Make sure this signal is heard throughout your whole country. You are to dedicate the fiftieth year and announce freedom everywhere in the country for all who live there. This is to be your Jubilee, when each of you is to return to reclaim your property and to be part of your family once more. The fiftieth year will be a Jubilee for you. Don't sow the land; don't harvest what may have grown up in your fields, or collect the grapes from your vineyards that you haven't cared for. It is a Jubilee and it is to be holy to you. You can eat whatever the land produces. In this Jubilee Year, every one of you shall return to your own property.

If you sell land to your neighbor, or buy land from him, don't exploit one another. When you buy from your neighbor work out how many years have passed since the last Jubilee, for he is to sell to you depending on how many years of harvest remain. The more years that are left, the more you shall pay; the fewer years that are left, the less you shall pay, because he is actually selling you a specific number of harvests. Don't exploit one another, but have respect for your God, because I am the Lord your God.

Keep my rules and observe my regulations, so you can live in safety in the land. Then the land will produce good harvests, so you will have plenty to eat and live in safety there. But if you ask, ‘What are we going to do in the seventh year if we do not sow or harvest our crops?’ I will bless you in the sixth year, so that the land will produce a crop that will be enough for three years. As you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating from that harvest, which will last until your harvest in the ninth year.

Land must not be permanently sold, because it really belongs to me. To me you are only foreigners and travelers passing through. So whatever land you buy to own, you must make arrangements so it can be returned to its original owner. If one of your people becomes poor and sells you some of their land, their close family can come and buy back what they have sold. However, if they don't have anyone who can buy it back, but in the meantime their financial situation improves and they have enough to buy back the land, they will work however many years it has been since the sale, and pay back the balance to the person who bought it, and go back to their property If they can't raise enough to pay the person back for the land, the buyer will remain its owner until the Jubilee Year. But in the Jubilee Year the land will be returned so that the original owners can go back to their property.

If someone sells a house located in a walled town, they have the right to buy it back for a full year after selling it. It can be bought back any time during that year. If it isn't bought back by the end of a full year, then ownership of the house in the walled town is permanently transferred to the one who bought it and their descendants. It won't be returned in the Jubilee. But houses in villages that don't have walls around them are to be treated as located in the fields. They can be bought back, and will be returned in the Jubilee.

However, the Levites always have the right to buy back their houses in the towns that belong to them. Whatever the Levites own can be bought back, even houses sold in their towns, and must be returned in the Jubilee. That's because the houses in the towns of the Levites are what they were given to own as their share among the Israelites. However, the fields surrounding their towns must not be sold because they belong to the Levites permanently.

If any of your people become poor and can't survive, you must help them in the same way you would help a foreigner or a stranger, so that they can go on living in your neighborhood. Don't make them pay you any interest or demand more than they borrowed, but respect your God so that they can remain living in your area. Don't lend them silver with interest or sell them food at an inflated price. Remember, I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.

If any of your people become poor and have to sell themselves to work for you, don't force them to work as a slave. Have them live with you like a paid worker who is staying with you for a while. They are to work for you until the Jubilee Year. Then they and their children must be freed, and they can go back to their family and to their family's property. Israelites are not to be sold as slaves because they belong to me as my slaves—I led them out of Egypt. Don't treat them with brutality. Have respect for your God.

Buy your male and female slaves from the surrounding nations. You can also buy them from foreigners who have come to live among you, or from their descendants born in your land. You can treat them as your property. You can pass them on to your children to inherit as property after you die. You can make them slaves for life, but you must not brutally treat any of your own people, the Israelites, as a slave.

If a foreigner among you becomes successful, and one of your people living nearby becomes poor and sells themselves to the foreigner or to a member of the foreigner's family, they still have the right of being bought back after the sale. A member of their family can buy them back— an uncle or cousin or any close relative from their family can buy them back. If they become successful, they can buy themselves back. The person concerned and their buyer will work out the time from the year of the sale up to the Jubilee Year. The price will depend on the number of years, calculated using the daily rate for a paid worker. If there are many years left, they must pay a larger percentage of the purchase price. If there are only a few years remaining before the Jubilee Year, then they only have to pay a percentage depending on the number of years still left. They are to live with their foreign owner just like a paid worker, hired from year to year, but see to it that the owner doesn't treat him brutally. If they are not bought back in any of the ways described, they and their children shall be freed in the Jubilee Year. For the Israelites belong to me as my slaves. They are my slaves—I led them out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.”

“Don't make yourselves idols anywhere in your land and bow down to worship them, whether they are images or sacred pillars or stone sculptures. For I am the Lord your God.

Keep my Sabbaths and show respect for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.

If you follow my rules and keep my regulations, I will make sure it rains at the right time so that the ground will grow good crops and the fruit trees will be productive. Your time of threshing will last right up to the grape harvest, and the grape harvest until the time you have to sow again. You will have more than enough to eat and you will live in safety in your land. I will make sure your land is at peace. You will be able to sleep without being afraid of anything. I will get rid of dangerous animals from the land, and you will not suffer from any violent enemy attacks. You will chase your enemies, and kill them with the sword. Five of you will kill one hundred, and one hundred of you will kill ten thousand. You will destroy your enemies.

I will come to help you, so you will reproduce and increase in numbers, and I will confirm my agreement with you. You'll still be eating your old stock of grain when you need to get rid of it so you can store the new grain. I will come and live with you—I certainly won't reject you. I shall always be right there with you. I will be your God, and you will be my people. I am the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt so you wouldn't have to be slaves to the Egyptians any longer. I smashed the yoke that kept you bent down and helped you to stand up straight.

But if you don't pay attention to me and do what I tell you; if you reject my laws, hate my regulations, and refuse to follow my commandments, and consequently break my agreement, then this is what I am going to do to you: I will make you panic, and suffer from diseases like tuberculosis and fever that make you blind and drain your life away. It will be pointless for you to sow seed in your fields because your enemies will eat the harvest. I will turn against you, and you'll be defeated by your enemies. People who hate you will rule over you, and you'll run away even when there's no one chasing you!

If after all this you still refuse to obey me, I will move to punishing you seven times over for your sins. I will break your self-reliant strength you're so proud of, and make your sky hard as iron and your land hard as bronze. Your strength will be completely wasted because your land won't produce crops, and your trees won't produce fruit.

If you go on opposing me and refusing to do what I tell you, I will make your punishments seven times worse, based on your sins. I will send wild animals to kill your children, wipe out your livestock, and make you so few in number that there won't be anyone on your roads.

However, if in spite of all this correction you still don't change but go on opposing me, then I will take action against you. I will punish you seven times over for your sins. I will send enemies with swords to attack you in retaliation for breaking the agreement. Even though you retreat into your towns for defense, I will plague you with disease, and you will be handed over to your enemies. I will send a famine so bread is in short supply. One oven will serve the needs of ten women baking bread. It will be distributed by weight so that you'll eat but won't have enough.

However, if in spite of all this you don't obey me, but go on opposing me, then I will take action against you in a rage of fury, and I will punish you myself seven times over for your sins. You will eat the bodies of your own sons and daughters. I will destroy your high places of worship, smash your altars of incense, and pile up your dead bodies on what remains of your idols, which also have no life at all. I will really despise you. I will demolish your towns and destroy your pagan sanctuaries, and I will refuse to accept your sacrifices. I will devastate your land myself, so that your enemies who come and live in it will be horrified at what has happened. I'm going to scatter you among the nations. You will be chased out by armies with swords as your land is ruined and your towns are destroyed. At least then the land will be able to enjoy its Sabbaths all the time it's abandoned while you are in exile in the land of your enemies. The land will finally be able to rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. The whole time it's abandoned the land will observe the Sabbaths of rest that it wasn't able to do while you were living there.

I will make those of you who survive so discouraged that as you live in the lands of your enemies even the sound of a leaf blowing in the wind will scare you into running away! You'll run away like you're being chased by someone with a sword, and fall down even though no one is after you. You'll trip over each other as you run away from the attack, even though no one's there. You'll have no power to resist your enemies. You'll die in exile and you'll be buried in a foreign country. Those of you who do manage to survive in the countries of your enemies will wither away because of their guilt, decaying as they share the sins of their fathers.

They need to confess their sins and those of their fathers, acting in such an unfaithful way towards me, opposing me. Because of this I took action against them and exiled them in the countries of their enemies. However, if they humbly give up their stubborn attitude and accept their punishment for their sins, then I will fulfill the agreement I made with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, and I will not forget my promise about the land. For the land will be left empty by them, and it will enjoy its Sabbaths being abandoned. They will pay for their sins, because they rejected my rules and regulations.

But despite all this, even while they are living in land of their enemies, I will not reject or hate them so much as to destroy them and break my agreement with them, because I am the Lord their God. Because of them I will renew the agreement I made with their fathers, those I led out of Egypt as the other nations watched, in order that I might be their God. I am the Lord.”

These are the rules, regulations, and laws that the Lord set up between himself and the Israelites through Moses on Mount Sinai.

The Lord told Moses, “Tell the Israelites: When you make a special promise to dedicate someone to the Lord, these are the values you are to use. The value of a man aged twenty to sixty is fifty shekels of silver

(using the sanctuary shekel standard). The value of a woman is thirty shekels. The value of someone aged five to twenty is twenty shekels for a male and ten shekels for a female. The value of someone aged one month to five years is five shekels of silver for a male and three shekels of silver for a female. The value of someone aged sixty or older is fifteen shekels for a male and ten shekels of silver for a female. However, if when you fulfill your promise you are poorer than the fixed value, you are to present the person before the priest, who will then set the value depending on what you can afford.

If when you fulfill your promise you bring an animal that is permitted as an offering to the Lord, the animal given to the Lord shall be considered holy. You are not allowed to replace it or swap it, either for one that is better or one that is worse. However, if you do replace it then both animals become holy.

If when you fulfill your promise you bring any unclean animal that is not permitted as an offering to the Lord, then you must show the animal to the priest. The priest will decide its value, whether high or low. Whatever value the priest places on it is final. If you then decide to buy the animal back, you have to add one-fifth to its value in payment.

If you dedicate your house as holy to the Lord, then the priest will decide its value, whether high or low. Whatever value the priest places on it remains final. But if you want to buy back your house, you have to add one-fifth to its value in payment. Then it will belong to you again.

If you dedicate some of your land to the Lord, then its value shall be determined by the amount of seed required to sow it: fifty shekels of silver for every homer of barley seed used. If you dedicate your field during the Jubilee Year, the value will be the full amount calculated. But if you dedicate your field after the Jubilee, the priest will work out the value depending on the number of years left until the next Jubilee Year, so reducing the value. But if you want to buy your field back, you have to add one-fifth to its value in payment. Then it will belong to you again. But if you don't buy the field back, or if you've already sold it to someone else, it can't ever be bought back. When the Jubilee comes, the field will become holy, in the same way as a field devoted to the Lord. It will become the property of the priests.

If you dedicate to the Lord a field you've bought that was not part of your original property, the priest will work out the value until the next Jubilee Year. You will pay on that day the exact value, giving it as a holy offering to the Lord. In the Jubilee Year, ownership of the field shall revert back to the person you bought it from—to the original owner of the land. (All values will use the sanctuary shekel standard of twenty gerahs to the shekel.)

No one is allowed to dedicate the firstborn of the livestock, because the firstborn belongs to the Lord. Whether they are cattle, sheep, or goats, they are the Lord's. But if it is an unclean animal, then you can buy it back according to its value, adding on one-fifth extra. If it's not bought back, then it is to be sold according to its value.

Anything that you specially dedicate to the Lord from what you own, whether it's a person, an animal, or your land, can't be sold or bought back. Anything specially dedicated is most holy to the Lord.

No one who is specially dedicated to destruction can be bought back. They must be killed.

Tithe from your crops or fruit belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord. If you want to buy back some of your tithe, you must add on one-fifth to its value.

When you count your herds and flocks, every tenth animal that passes under the shepherd's rod is holy to the Lord. You must not examine it to see if it's good or bad, and you must not replace it. However, if you do replace it then both animals become holy; they can't be bought back."

These are the laws the Lord gave to Moses for the Israelites on Mount Sinai.

Numbers

Book of Numbers

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting while they were in the Sinai desert. This was on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites had left Egypt. He told him, “Census all the Israelites according to their tribe and family. Count every man and keep a record of each individual's name. Those aged twenty or older who can do military service are to be registered by you and Aaron in their Israelite army divisions. A representative from each tribe, the head of a family, must be there with you.

These are the names of the men who will work with you:

From the tribe of Reuben, Elizur, son of Shedeur;

from the tribe of Simeon, Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai;

from the tribe of Judah, Nahshon, son of Amminadab;

from the tribe of Issachar, Nethanel, son of Zuar;

from the tribe of Zebulun, Eliab, son of Helon;

from the sons of Joseph: from the tribe of Ephraim, Elishama, son of Ammihud, and from the tribe of Manasseh, Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur;

from the tribe of Benjamin, Abidan, son of Gideoni;

from the tribe of Dan, Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai;

from the tribe of Asher, Pagiel, son of Ocran;

from the tribe of Gad, Eliasaph, son of Deuel;

and from the tribe of Naphtali, Ahira, son of Enan.”

These were the men chosen from the Israelite community. They were the leaders of their fathers' tribes; the heads of the families of Israel. Moses and Aaron summoned these men who had been selected by name. They had all the Israelites gather together on the first day of the second month, and recorded the people's genealogy according to their tribe and family, and counted up the names of all those aged twenty or older, as the Lord had told Moses to do. Moses conducted this census in the Sinai desert.

The descendants of Reuben (he was Israel's firstborn son), men aged twenty or over, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Reuben totaled 46,500.

The descendants of Simeon, men aged twenty or over, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Simeon totaled 59,300.

The descendants of Gad, men aged twenty or over, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Gad totaled 45,650.

The descendants of Judah, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Judah, totaled 74,600.

The descendants of Issachar, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Issachar, totaled 54,400.

The descendants of Zebulun, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Zebulun, totaled 57,400.

The descendants of Joseph: the descendants of Ephraim, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Ephraim, totaled 40,500.

And the descendants of Manasseh, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Manasseh, totaled 32,200.

The descendants of Benjamin, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Benjamin, totaled 35,400.

The descendants of Dan, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Dan, totaled 62,700.

The descendants of Asher, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Asher, totaled 41,500.

The descendants of Naphtali, men aged twenty or older, were recorded by name according to the genealogical records of their tribe and families. All those registered who could serve in the army from the tribe of Naphtali, totaled 53,400.

These were the totals of the men counted and registered by Moses and Aaron, with the help of the twelve leaders of Israel, who each represented their family. In this way all the Israelite men aged twenty or older who were able to serve in Israel's army were registered according to their families. The sum total of those registered was 603,550.

However, the Levites were not registered with the others according to their tribe and families. This was because the Lord had told Moses, “Don't register the tribe of Levi; don't count them in the census with the other Israelites. Put the Levites in charge of the Tabernacle and of the Testimony, as well as all its furniture and everything it contains. They are the ones responsible for carrying the Tabernacle and all its items. They are to care for it, and to make their camp around it. When it's time to move the Tabernacle, the Levites shall take it down, and when it's time to make camp, the Levites shall put it up. Any outsider who goes near it must be put to death. The Israelites are to make camp according to their tribal divisions, each person in their own camp under their own flag. But the Levites are to

set up their camp around the Tabernacle of the Testimony to prevent anyone from making me angry with the Israelites. The Levites are responsible for looking after the Tabernacle of the Testimony."

The Israelites did everything that the Lord ordered Moses that they should do.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "The Israelites are to set up their camp around the Tent of Meeting but some distance from it. Every member of each tribe will camp under their own flag and family banner. The tribal division of Judah is to camp under their flag on the east side. Their leader is Nahshon, son of Amminadab, and he has 74,600 men. The tribe of Issachar will camp next to them. Their leader is Nethanel, son of Zuar, and he has 54,400 men. Next is the tribe of Zebulun. Their leader is Eliab, son of Helon, and he has 57,400 men. So the total number of men in the area of the camp of Judah is 186,400. When it's time to march out, they are the ones who will lead.

The tribal division of Reuben is to camp under their flag on the south side. Their leader is Elizur, son of Shedeur, and he has 46,500 men. The tribe of Simeon will camp next to them. Their leader is Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai, and he has 59,300 men. Next is the tribe of Gad. Their leader is Eliasaph, son of Deuel, and he has 45,650 men. So the total number of men in the area of the camp of Reuben is 151,450. They shall march out in second place.

The Tent of Meeting which stands at the center of the camp is to accompany the Levites. They are to march out in the same order as they set up camp, each in their rightful place under their flag.

The tribal division of Ephraim is to camp under their flag on the west side. Their leader is Elishama, son of Ammihud, and he has 40,500 men. The tribe of Manasseh will camp next to them. Their leader is Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur, and he has 32,200 men. Next is the tribe of Benjamin. Their leader is Abidan, son of Gideoni, and he has 35,400 men. So the total number of men in the area of the camp of Ephraim is 108,100. They shall march out in third place

The tribal division of Dan is to camp under their flag on the north side. Their leader is Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai, and he has 62,700 men. The tribe of Asher will camp next to them. Their leader is Pagiel, son of Ocran, and he has 41,500 men. Next is the tribe of Naphtali. Their leader is Ahira son of Enan, and he has 53,400 men. So the total number of men in the area of the camp of Dan is 157,600;. They shall march out last, with their flags."

This sums up the registration of the Israelites, carried out by family. The final total of those counted in the camps by their tribal division was 603,550. However, the Levites were not counted among the other Israelites, following the Lord's instructions to Moses.

The Israelites did everything the Lord had ordered Moses. They set up their camps under their flags in their assigned positions, and marched out in the same order, each with their own tribe and family.

This is the account concerning Aaron and Moses when the Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. The names of the sons of Aaron were: Nadab (firstborn), Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These were the names of Aaron's sons who were anointed and ordained to serve as priests.

Nadab and Abihu died in the Lord's presence when they offered forbidden fire before the Lord in the Sinai desert. Since they didn't have any sons, Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests while their father Aaron was alive.

The Lord told Moses, "Gather the tribe of Levi together and present them to Aaron the priest to help him with the ministry. They are to carry out duties on his behalf and for all the Israelites at the Tent of Meeting, looking after the service of the Tabernacle. They are responsible for caring for all the furniture of the Tent of Meeting, serving the Israelites through what they do in the Tabernacle. The Levites are to work exclusively for Aaron and his sons because this is their assignment among the Israelites. You are to appoint Aaron and his sons to have the responsibility of the priesthood. Anyone else who tries to act as a priest must be executed."

The Lord told Moses, "I've taken the Levites from the Israelites in place of every one of their firstborn. The Levites belong to me because all the firstborn are mine. When I killed every firstborn in Egypt I set apart as holy to me all the firstborn of Israel, human and animal. They are mine. I am the Lord."

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert. He told him, "Register the Levites by their father's line and family. Count every male aged one month or older." So Moses registered them following the Lord's instructions, just as he had been told.

These were the names of Levi's sons: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. These were the names of Gershon's sons by family: Libni and Shimei. Kohath's sons by family were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Merari's sons by family were Mahli and Mushi. These were the families of the Levites, according to their father's line.

The family of Libni and the family of Shimei came from Gershon. These were the families of Gershon. The total of all males aged one month or older was 7,500. The camp of families of Gershon was to the west, behind the Tabernacle. The leader of the Gershon families was Eliasaph, son of Lael. Their assigned responsibility for the Tent of Meeting was to take care of the Tabernacle and tent, its covering, the curtain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, the courtyard curtains, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the Tabernacle and altar, the ropes, and everything connected with their use.

The families of Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel came from Kohath. These were the families of Kohath. The total of all males aged one month or older was 8,600. Their assigned responsibility was to take care of the sanctuary. The camp of families of Kohath was on the south side of the Tabernacle. The leader of the Kohath families was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. Their assigned responsibility was to care for the Ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the articles of the sanctuary used with them, the veil, and everything connected with these items. The chief of the leaders of the Levites was Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest. He was in charge of those responsible for serving in the sanctuary.

The family of Mahli and the family of Mushi came from Merari. These were the families of Merari. The

total of all males aged one month or older was 6,200. The leader of the Merari families was Zuriel, son of Abihail. Their camp was on the north side of the Tabernacle. Their assigned responsibility was to take care of the Tabernacle's frames, crossbars, posts, stands, all its equipment, and everything connected with their use, as well as the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their stands, tent pegs, and ropes.

The camp of Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons was to the east of the Tabernacle, in the direction of the sunrise, in front of the Tent of Meeting. They were responsible for the sanctuary on behalf of the Israelites. Anyone else who tried to act as a priest was to be executed. The sum total of Levites registered by Moses and Aaron as the Lord ordered was 22,000. This included all males aged one month or older.

The Lord told Moses, “Conduct a census of all the firstborn Israelite males aged one month or older, and register their names. Assign the Levites to me. I am the Lord. They are in place of all of the Israelites' firstborn children. The livestock of the Levites are in place of all the Israelites' firstborn livestock.”

Moses conducted a census of all the firstborn of the Israelites, as the Lord had instructed him. The sum total of the firstborn males a month old or more, registered by name, was 22,273.

The Lord spoke to Moses and told him, “You are to take the Levites in place of all the firstborn children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock, because the Levites belong to me. I am the Lord. In order to buy back the 273 firstborn Israelites who are more than the number of Levites, collect five shekels for each of them (using the sanctuary shekel standard of twenty gerahs). He handed the money over to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for the extra Israelites.” Moses collected the redemption money for those extra Israelites that were more than the number redeemed by the Levites. He collected the money given on behalf of the Israelites' firstborn children. It came to 1,365 shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). Moses gave this redemption money to Aaron and his sons as the Lord had told him to, following the Lord's instructions.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Register the descendants of Kohath from the tribe of Levi, according to their family and father's line. Count men aged thirty to fifty—all who are entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. This work that they are to do in the Tent of Meetings involves the things that are most holy. Whenever you move camp, Aaron and his sons will go in, take down the veil, and place it over the Ark of the Testimony. On top of this they are to put a fine leather covering, spread a cloth of solid blue over it, and then insert its carrying poles. Have them spread a blue cloth over the table of the Presence as well, and put the plates and cups on it, as well as the bowls and jugs for the drink offering. The current bread offering is to stay on it. Over everything they are to spread a crimson cloth, next a fine leather covering, and then insert its carrying poles.

Using a blue cloth, they are to cover the lampstand of light, together with its lamps, wick tongs, and trays, as well as the jars of olive oil used to fill them. Then have them wrap it together with all its utensils inside a fine leather covering and place it on the carrying frame. They are to spread a blue cloth over the gold altar, cover it with fine leather, and then insert its carrying poles. They are to place all the utensils used for the service in the sanctuary in a blue cloth, cover them with fine leather, and place them on the carrying frame.

Have them clean the ashes from the bronze altar and spread a purple cloth over it, and put on it all the equipment used in the services on the altar: the firepans, meat forks, shovels, and sprinkling bowls. Spread over it a fine leather covering and then insert its carrying poles.

Once Aaron and his sons have finished covering these holy things and all the equipment connected with them, when the camp is ready to move, the priests of the Kohath family are to come and carry them. But they are forbidden to touch anything holy, otherwise they'll die. These are their responsibilities for moving the Tent of Meeting.

Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, is to supervise obtaining olive oil for the lamps, the aromatic incense, the daily grain offering, and the anointing oil. He is in charge of the whole Tabernacle and everything in it—all the holy things and equipment.”

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Make sure the families of Kohath are not wiped out from the Levites. This is what you have to do so that they'll live and won't die by getting too close to something holy. Aaron and his sons must go in and tell each of them what they have to do and what they have to carry. But they must not go in and look at the things that are most holy, even for just a moment, otherwise they'll die.”

The Lord told Moses, “Register the descendants of Gershon, according to their family and father's line Count men aged thirty to fifty—all who are entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. This is how the families of Gershon will serve in terms of working and carrying: Have them carry the Tabernacle curtains, the Tent of Meeting with its fine leather covering, the curtains for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the courtyard curtains, the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard surrounding the Tabernacle and altar, the ropes, and everything connected with their use. The families of Gershon are responsible for everything required involving these items. All that they do is to be under the supervision of Aaron and his sons—all their work and carrying assignments. You are to tell them all they are required to carry. These are their responsibilities for moving the Tent of Meeting, carried out under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.

Register the descendants of Merari, according to their family and father's line. Count men aged thirty to fifty—all who are entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. This is how they will serve in handling the Tent of Meeting: they are to carry the frames of the Tabernacle with its crossbars, posts, and stands, the posts of the surrounding courtyard with their stands, tent pegs, and ropes, all their equipment and everything connected with their use. You are to tell them by name what they are responsible for carrying. These are their responsibilities for all their work

in moving the Tent of Meeting, carried out under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest."

Moses, Aaron, and the Israelite leaders registered the families of Kohath according to their family and father's line. They counted men aged thirty to fifty—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. The total by families was 2,750. This was the total of the families of Kohath—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. Moses and Aaron registered them in accordance with the Lord's instructions to Moses.

The families of Gershon were counted, according to their family and father's line, men aged thirty to fifty—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. The total by families and father's line was 2,630. This was the total of the families of Gershon—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. They were registered by Moses and Aaron in accordance with the Lord's instructions.

The families of Merari were counted, according to their family and father's line, men aged thirty to fifty—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting. The total by families was 3,200. This was the total of the families of Merari registered by Moses and Aaron in accordance with the Lord's instructions.

This is how Moses, Aaron, and the Israelite leaders registered all the Levites according to their family and father's line. They counted men aged thirty to fifty—all who were entitled to do the work of serving in the Tent of Meeting and carrying it. The sum total was 8,580. It was in response to the Lord's instructions that they were registered by Moses. Each of those registered were told what to do and what to carry, as the Lord had ordered Moses.

The Lord told Moses, "Order the Israelites to expel from the camp anyone who has a skin disease, or who has a discharge, or who is unclean from touching a dead body. Whether male or female, you must expel them so they won't make their camp unclean, for that is where I live with them."

The Israelites followed these instructions, and expelled such people from the camp. They did what the Lord had told Moses they should do.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that when a man or woman is unfaithful to the Lord by sinning against someone else, they are guilty and must confess their sin. They have to pay the full amount of compensation plus one-fifth of its value, and give this to the person they have wronged. However, if that person doesn't have a relative who can be paid the compensation, it belongs to the Lord and shall be given to the priest, together with a sacrificial ram by which the guilty person is set right. All holy offerings that the Israelites bring to the priest belong to him. Your holy offerings belong to you, but once you give them to the priest they belong to him."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that these are the instructions to follow if a man's wife has an affair, being unfaithful to him by sleeping with someone else. It may be that her husband doesn't find out and her unclean act wasn't witnessed—she wasn't caught out. But if her husband becomes jealous and suspicious of his wife, whether she's guilty or not, he is to take her before the priest. He is also to take with him on her behalf an offering of one tenth of an ephath of barley flour. He must also bring for her an offering of an ephath of barley flour. He's not to pour olive oil over it or put frankincense on it, since it's a grain offering for jealousy, a reminder offering to remind people about sin.

The priest is to lead the wife forward and have her stand before the Lord. Then he shall fill a clay jar with holy water in a clay jar and sprinkle on it some dust from the floor of the Tabernacle. Once the priest has had the woman stand before the Lord, he shall let her hair loose and have her hold the reminder grain offering—the grain offering used in cases of jealousy. The priest shall hold the bitter water that curses. He shall place the woman under oath and tell her, 'If no one else has slept with you and you have not been unfaithful and become unclean while married to your husband, may you not be harmed by this bitter water that curses. But if you have been unfaithful while married to your husband and have become unclean and have had sex with someone else…'" (Here the priest shall place the woman under the oath of the curse as follows.) "May the Lord place a curse on you that everyone knows about by having your thighs shrink and your belly swell up. May this water that curses go into your stomach and make your belly swell up and your thighs shrink.

The woman is to answer, 'I agree, I agree.'

The priest is to write these curses on a scroll and then wash them off into the bitter water. He shall make the woman drink the bitter water that curses, and it will cause her bitter pain if she is guilty. The priest shall take back from her the grain offering for jealousy, wave it before the Lord, and take it to the altar. Then the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as a reminder portion and burn it on the altar, and make the woman drink the water.

After he has made her drink the water, if she has made herself unclean and has been unfaithful to her husband, then the water that curses will cause her bitter pain. Her belly will swell up and her thighs will shrink. She will become a cursed woman among her people. But if the woman has not made herself unclean by being unfaithful and is clean, she will not experience this punishment and she will still be able to have children.

This is the rule to follow in cases of jealousy when a wife has an affair and makes herself unclean while married to her husband, or when a husband starts feeling jealous and becomes suspicious of his wife. He shall have his wife stand before the Lord, and the priest is to carry out every part of this rule. If she is found guilty, her husband will not be held responsible. But the woman will bear the consequences of her sin."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites: If a man or a woman makes a special promise to become a Nazirite, to dedicate themselves to the Lord, they must not drink any wine or other alcoholic drink. They must not even drink vinegar made from wine or other alcoholic drink, or any grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. The whole time they are dedicated to the Lord they must not eat

anything from a grapevine, not even grape seeds or skins.

They must not use a razor on their heads during the whole time of this promise of dedication. They must remain holy until their time of dedication to the Lord is finished. They must let their hair grow long.

During this time of dedication to the Lord they must not go near a dead body. Even if it's their father, mother, brother or sister who has died, they are not to make themselves unclean, because their uncut hair announces their dedication to God. Through the whole time of their dedication they are to be holy to the Lord.

However, if someone dies suddenly close to them, making them unclean, they must wait seven days, and on the seventh day when they are made clean again they are to shave their heads. On the eighth day they shall take two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priest will offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make them right, because they became guilty by being near the dead body. On that day they must re-dedicate themselves and let their hair grow again. They must re-dedicate themselves to the Lord for the full time they originally promised and bring a one-year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days don't count towards the time of dedication because they became unclean.

These are the rules to be observed when the Nazirite's time of dedication is finished. They are to be taken to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. There they are to present an offering to the Lord of a one-year-old male lamb without defects as a burnt offering, a one-year-old female lamb without defects as a sin offering, and a ram without defects as a peace offering. In addition they are to bring a basket of bread without yeast made from the best flour mixed with olive oil and wafers without yeast coated with olive oil as well as their grain offerings and drink offerings. The priest will present all these before the Lord as well as sacrificing the sin offering and the burnt offering. He will also sacrifice a ram as a peace offering to the Lord, together with the basket of bread made without yeast. In addition the priest will present the grain offering and drink offering.

Then the Nazirites are to shave their heads at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. They shall take the hair from their heads that were dedicated, and place it on the fire under the peace offering. Once the Nazirites have shaved, the priest will take the boiled shoulder from the ram, one bread without yeast from the basket, and one wafer without yeast, and place them in their hands. The priest will wave them as a wave offering before the Lord. These items are holy and belong to the priest, as well as the breast of the wave offering and the thigh that was offered. Once this is finished, Nazirites may drink wine. These are the rules to be observed when a Nazirite promises to give offerings to the Lord regarding their dedication. They can also bring additional offerings if they can afford it. Every Nazirite must fulfill whatever promises they have made when they dedicated themselves."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons: This is how you are to bless the Israelites. This is what they are to say:

'May the Lord bless you and take care of you. May the Lord smile on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord watch over you and give you peace.' Whenever the priests bless the Israelites in my name, I will bless them."

On the same day that Moses finished putting up the Tabernacle, he anointed it and dedicated it, along with all its furniture, the altar, and all its utensils. The Israelite leaders who were the heads of their families came and gave an offering. They were the same leaders of the tribes who had worked on the registration of the Israelites. They brought to the Lord an offering of six covered wagons and twelve oxen. Each leader gave an ox, and two leaders shared in giving a wagon. They presented them in front of the Tabernacle.

The Lord told Moses, "Accept what they're giving you and use them in the work of the Tent of Meeting. Give them to the Levites to use as required."

Moses accepted the wagons and oxen and handed them over to the Levites. He gave two wagons and four oxen to the families of Gershon to use as they required. He gave four wagons and eight oxen to the families of Merari, to use as they required. The work was all to be done under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest. He didn't give any wagons or oxen to the Kohathites because their responsibility was to carry on their shoulders the holy objects assigned to their care.

The day the altar was anointed, the leaders came forward with their dedicatory offerings, presenting them in front of it. The Lord told Moses, "Have one leader come every day and present his offering for the dedication of the altar."

The first day Nahshon, son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah came forward with his offering. His offering was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Nahshon, son of Amminadab.

The second day Nethanel, son of Zuar, the leader of the tribe of Issachar, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Nethanel, son of Zuar.

The third day Eliab, son of Helon, the leader of the tribe of Zebulun, came forward. The offering he pre-

sented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Eliab, son of Helon.

The fourth day Elizur, son of Shedeur, the leader of the tribe of Reuben, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Elizur, son of Shedeur.

The fifth day Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai, the leader of the tribe of Simeon, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai.

The sixth day Eliasaph, son of Deuel, the leader of the tribe of Gad, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Eliasaph, son of Deuel.

The seventh day Elishama, son of Ammihud, the leader of the tribe of Ephraim, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Elishama, son of Ammihud.

The eighth day Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur, the leader of the tribe of Manasseh, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur.

The ninth day Abidan, son of Gideoni, the leader of the tribe of Benjamin, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Abidan, son of Gideoni.

The tenth day Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai, the leader of the tribe of Dan, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai.

The eleventh day Pagiel, son of Ocran, the leader of the tribe of Asher, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering, and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Pagiel, son of Ocran.

The twelfth day Ahira, son of Enan, the leader of the tribe of Naphtali, came forward. The offering he presented was a silver plate that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and a silver bowl that weighed seventy shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). They were both filled with the best flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering. He also presented a gold dish that weighed ten shekels filled with incense. As sacrifices he brought a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering, a male goat as a sin offering,

and a peace offering of two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs. This was the offering of Ahira, son of Enan.

So on the day the altar was anointed, the dedicatory offerings brought by the Israelite leaders were twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold dishes. Each silver platter weighed a hundred and thirty shekels, and each bowl weighed seventy shekels. The total weight of the silver was two thousand four hundred shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). The twelve gold dishes filled with incense each weighed ten shekels (using the sanctuary shekel standard). The total weight of the gold was a hundred and twenty shekels. The animals presented as a burnt offering were twelve bulls, twelve rams, and twelve one-year-old male lambs, as well as their grain offerings, and twelve male goats as the sin offering. The animals presented as a peace offering were twenty-four bulls, sixty rams, sixty male goats, and sixty one-year-old male lambs. This was the dedicatory offering for the altar once it had been anointed.

Whenever Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he would hear the voice speaking to him from the atonement cover on the Ark of the Testimony between the two cherubim. This is how the Lord spoke to him.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'When you place the seven lamps on the lampstand, make sure they shine towards the front.'" So that's what Aaron did. He placed the lamps facing towards the front of the lampstand, as the Lord had ordered Moses.

The lampstand was made of hammered gold from its base to the flower decorations on the top, in accordance with the design that the Lord had shown Moses.

The Lord told Moses, "Separate the Levites from the other Israelites and purify them. This is how you will purify them. Sprinkle on them the water of purification. They are to shave off all the hair from their bodies and wash their clothes so they will be clean. Have them bring a young bull with its grain offering of the best flour mixed with olive oil, and you are to bring a second young bull as a sin offering. Take the Levites and have them stand in front of the Tent of Meeting and have all the Israelites gather there. When you bring the Levites to the Lord the Israelites are to place their hands upon them. Aaron shall present the Levites to the Lord as a wave offering from the Israelites so that they can do the Lord's work. The Levites are to place their hands on the heads of the bulls. One is to be sacrificed as a sin offering to the Lord, and the other as a burnt offering to set the Levites right with the Lord. Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons and present them to the Lord as a wave offering. This is how you are to separate the Levites from the rest of the Israelites, and the Levites will belong to me. They can come and serve at the Tent of Meeting once you've purified them and presented them as a wave offering.

The Levites have been completely given over to me by the Israelites. I have accepted them as mine in place of all the firstborn sons of the Israelites. Every firstborn male in Israel belongs to me, both human and animal. I reserved them for myself at the time when I killed all the firstborn in Egypt. I have taken the Levites in place of all the firstborn sons of the Israelites. Of all the Israelites, the Levites are a gift from me to Aaron and his sons to serve the Israelites at the Tent of Meeting, and on their behalf to set them right, so that nothing bad will happen to them when they come to the sanctuary."

Moses, Aaron, and all the Israelites did everything that the Lord had ordered Moses that they should do regarding the Levites. The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes. Then Aaron presented them as a wave offering to the Lord. Aaron also presented the sacrifice to make them right with the Lord so they would be clean. Afterwards the Levites came to perform their service at the Tent of Meeting under the direction of Aaron and his sons. They followed all the instructions regarding the Levites that the Lord had given to Moses.

The Lord told Moses, "This rule applies to the Levites. Those twenty-five or older shall serve at the Tent of Meeting. However, once they reach the age of fifty they need to retire from the work and won't serve any longer. They can still help their fellow Levites in their assignments, but they are not to do the actual work themselves. These are the arrangements in the case of the Levites."

The Lord spoke to Moses in the Sinai desert in the first month of the second year after Israel had left Egypt. He told him, "The Israelites are to keep the Passover at its designated time. Observe it at the time required—in the evening after sunset on the fourteenth day of this month, and do so in accordance with its rules and regulations."

Moses told the Israelites to observe the Passover. So they kept the Passover in the Sinai desert, beginning in the evening after sunset on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites followed all the instructions the Lord had given to Moses.

However, there were some men who were unclean because they had been in contact with a dead body, so they could not keep the Passover on that day. They went to see Moses and Aaron the same day, and explained to Moses, "We are unclean because of a dead body, but why should that mean we're prevented from giving our offering to the Lord with the other Israelites at the appropriate time?"

"Stay here while I find out what the Lord's instructions are concerning you," Moses responded.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites: 'If you or your descendants are unclean because of a dead body, or are away traveling, you can still keep the Lord's Passover. You are to observe it in the evening after sunset on the fourteenth day of the second month. You are to eat the lamb with the bread made without yeast, and the bitter herbs. You must not leave any of it until the following morning and you must not break any of its bones. You must observe the Passover according to all the regulations.

However, anyone ceremonially clean and not away traveling who neglects to observe the Passover must be expelled from their people, because they didn't present the Lord's offering at the appropriate time. They will bear the responsibility for the consequences of their sin. Any foreigners living among you who want to

observe the Lord's Passover can do so following the Passover rules and regulations. The same rules apply to the foreigners as they do to you.'"

The cloud covered the Tent of the Testimony (the Tabernacle) on the day that it was set up, and looked like fire above it from evening until the morning. It was always like this. The cloud covered the Tabernacle during the day and at night it looked like fire. When the cloud rose from over the Tent, the Israelites would move on, and where the cloud stopped, the Israelites would set up camp there. The Israelites moved on when the Lord told them to, and set up camp when the Lord told them to. While the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle, they remained camped there. Even if the cloud didn't move for a long time, the Israelites did what the Lord told them and didn't move on. Sometimes the cloud only stayed over the Tabernacle for a few days. As always they followed the Lord's command as to whether to camp or to move on. Sometimes the cloud only stayed overnight, so when it rose in the morning they would move on. Whenever the cloud rose, day or night, they would leave. If the cloud stayed in one place for two days, or a month, or longer, the Israelites stayed where they were and didn't leave as long as the cloud remained over the Tabernacle. However, once it rose, they would leave. They camped when the Lord told them to, and left when he told them to. They followed the Lord's instructions that he gave to Moses.

The Lord told Moses, "Make two trumpets out of hammered silver. They are to be used for summoning the Israelites and to have the camp move out. When both trumpets are blown, all the Israelites are to gather before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. But if only one is blown, then only the tribal leaders are to gather before you.

When you blow the trumpet loudly, which is the alarm signal to move out, the camps on the east side are to march out first. When you blow the trumpet loudly the second time, the camps on the south side are to march out. That's their signal to start moving. To summon the people, blow the trumpets normally, not the loud alarm signal. Aaron's descendants are to blow the trumpets. This regulation is for all time and for all future generations.

When you're in your own land and have to go into battle against an enemy who has attacked you, blow the alarm signal and the Lord your God won't forget you—he will save you from your enemies. Blow the trumpets when you celebrate too, at your regular feasts and at the beginning of each month. This is when you give your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings which act as a reminder for you before your God. I am the Lord your God."

The cloud rose up from the Tabernacle of the Testimony on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year. The Israelites left the Desert of Sinai and moved from place to place until the cloud stopped in the Desert of Paran. This was the first time they moved out following the Lord's command through Moses.

The tribal divisions of Judah went first, marching out under their flag, with Nahshon, son of Amminadab, in charge. Nethanel, son of Zuar, was in charge of the tribal division of Issachar, and Eliab, son of Helon, was in charge of the tribal division of Zebulun. Then the Tabernacle was dismantled, and the Gershonites and the Merarites set off, carrying it.

Then came the divisions of Reuben who marched out under their flag, with Elizur, son of Shedeur, in charge. Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai, was in charge of the tribal division of Simeon, and Eliasaph, son of Deuel, was in charge of the tribal division of Gad. Then the Kohathites set off, carrying the holy objects. The Tabernacle would be put up before they arrived.

Then came the divisions of Ephraim who marched out under their flag, with Elishama, son of Ammihud in charge. Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur, was in charge of the tribal division of Manasseh, and Abidan, son of Gideoni, was in charge of the tribal division of Benjamin.

Lastly came the divisions of Dan who marched out under their flag, defending the rear of all the tribal groups, with Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai, in charge. Pagiel, son of Ocran, was in charge of the tribal division of Asher, and Ahira, son of Enan, was in charge of the tribal division of Naphtali. This was the order in which the Israelite tribal divisions moved out.

Moses explained to Hobab, the son of Moses' father-in-law Reuel the Midianite, "We're leaving for the place of which the Lord promised, 'I'm going to give it to you.' Come with us, and we'll be good to you, because the Lord has promised good things to Israel."

"No, I won't go—I'll return to my own country and my own people," Hobab replied.

"Please don't abandon us now," Moses said, "because you're the one who knows where we should camp in the desert and you can guide us. If you come with us, whatever good things the Lord blesses us with we'll share with you."

They left the mountain of the Lord to go on a three-day journey. The Ark of the Lord's Agreement led the way for them during these three days to find a place for them to camp. The cloud of the Lord was above them during day as they moved on from the camp.

Whenever the Ark was carried out, Moses would call out, "Stand up, Lord, and may your enemies be scattered, and may those who hate you run away from you."

Whenever it was set down, he would call out, "Return, Lord, to the thousands and thousands of the people of Israel."

It wasn't long before the people started to complain about how much they were suffering. When the Lord heard what they were saying, he became angry. Fire from the Lord burned them, destroying some on the edge of the camp. The people cried to Moses for help. He prayed to the Lord and the fire subsided. So that place was named Taberah, because the fire from the Lord burned them.

A group of troublemakers among them had such intense food cravings they affected the Israelites who started crying again, asking "Who's going to get us some meat to eat? We think back to all the fish we ate in Egypt that didn't cost us anything, as well as the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. We're fading away here! The only thing we ever see is this manna!"

Manna looked like coriander seeds, light in color like gum resin. The people would go out and collect it,

grind it up in a mill or crush it in a mortar. Then they would boil it in a pot and make it into flatbread. It tasted like pastries made with the best olive oil. When the dew came down on the camp at night the manna would come down with it.

Moses heard all the families crying at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became very angry, and Moses was also upset. He asked the Lord, “Why have you made things so tough for me, your servant? Why are you so unhappy with me that you have placed on me the heavy responsibility for all these people? Are they my children? Did I give birth to them, so you could tell me, ‘Hold them close to your chest like a nurse carrying a baby’ and take them to the land you promised to give to their forefathers? Where am I supposed to get meat for all of them? They keep on complaining to me, ‘Get us some meat to eat!’ I can't go on carrying all these people by myself—it's just too much. If this is the way you're going to treat me, then please just kill me now so I don't have to face how depressed I've become. Please grant me this one request.”

The Lord told Moses, “Bring before me seventy Israelite elders who you know are respected as leaders by the people. Take them to the Tent of Meeting. They will stand there with you. I will come down and talk with you there. I will take some of the Spirit you have and give it to them. They will take some of the responsibility for the people so you won't have to bear it alone.

Tell the people: Purify yourselves, for tomorrow you'll have meat to eat, because you were complaining and the Lord heard you saying, ‘Who's going to get us some meat to eat? We were better off in Egypt!’ So the Lord is going to provide you with meat to eat. You're going to eat it, not for just a day or two, and not for five or ten or twenty days. You're going to eat it for a whole month until it makes you vomit and it comes out through your nostrils, because you have rejected the Lord who is right here with you, complaining to him by saying, ‘Why on earth did we ever leave Egypt?’”

But Moses replied, “Here I am with 600,000 people and you're telling me, ‘I'm going to give them meat and they'll eat it for a month’? Even if all our flocks and herds were slaughtered, would that be enough for them? Even if all the fish in the sea were caught, would that be enough for them?”

“Doesn't the Lord have the power to do that?” the Lord responded. “Now you're going to find out whether what I've said will happen or not!”

Moses went and shared with the people what the Lord said. He summoned seventy elders of the people and had them stand around the tent. Then the Lord came down and talked to him. The Lord took some of the Spirit Moses had and gave it to them. They prophesied, but this didn't ever happen again.

However, two men named Eldad and Medad had stayed behind in the camp. The Spirit came on them too. (They had been put on the list of the seventy elders, but they hadn't gone to the tent. But they prophesied where they were in the camp anyway.) A young lad ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

Joshua, son of Nun, who had been Moses' assistant since he was young, reacted, saying, “Moses, my lord, you have to stop them!”

“Are you jealous for my reputation?” Moses replied. “I wish that every one of the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would give his Spirit to all of them!” Then Moses went back to the camp with the elders of Israel.

The Lord sent a wind that blew quail in from the sea and deposited them near the camp. They covered the ground to a depth of about two cubits and extended for a day's journey in every direction from the camp. All through that day and night, and all through the next day, the people went on collecting the quail. Everyone collected at least ten homers, and they spread them out to dry all around the camp.

But while the people were still biting into the meat, before they even chewed it down, the Lord showed his burning anger against them, killing some of them with a severe disease. They named that place Kibroth-hattaavah, because that was where they buried the people who had these intense food cravings.

Then they moved on from Kibroth-hattaavah to Hazeroth, where they stayed for some time.

Miriam and Aaron were critical of Moses because of his Ethiopian wife—he'd married an Ethiopian woman. “Is it only through Moses that the Lord speaks?” they asked. “Doesn't he speak through us too?” The Lord heard all this.

Moses was a very humble man, more than anyone else on earth.

All of a sudden the Lord called for Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, telling them, “The three of you, come to the Tent of Meeting.” The three of them did so.

The Lord came down in a pillar of cloud and stood in the entrance to the Tent. He called Aaron and Miriam and they came forward. “Now listen to my words, he told them. If you had prophets, I the Lord would reveal myself to them in visions; I would communicate with them in dreams. But it's not like this with my servant Moses, who of all my people is the one who is faithful. I talk to him personally, face to face. I speak plainly, not in riddles. He sees the likeness of the Lord. So why weren't you afraid when you criticized my servant Moses?” The Lord was angry with them, and he left.

As the cloud rose above the Tent, Miriam's skin suddenly turned white with leprosy. Aaron turned to look and saw that she had leprosy. He said to Moses, “My lord, please don't punish us for this sin that we've so stupidly committed. Please don't let her become like a stillborn baby whose flesh is already decaying when they're born!”

Moses called out to the Lord, “God, please heal her!”

But the Lord replied to Moses, “If her father had spit in her face wouldn't she have been disgraced for seven days? Keep her in isolation outside the camp for seven days, and then she can be taken back in.”

Miriam was kept in isolation outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until she was taken back in. Then the people left Hazeroth and set up camp in the Desert of Paran.

The Lord told Moses, “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, the country I'm giving to the

Israelites. Choose one of the leaders from each of the tribes to go and do this."

Moses did as the Lord had ordered and sent the men out from the Desert of Paran. They were all leaders of the Israelites. Their names were:

Shammua son of Zaccur, from the tribe of Reuben.
Shaphat, son of Hori, from the tribe of Simeon.
Caleb, son of Jephunneh, from the tribe of Judah.
Igal, son of Joseph, from the tribe of Issachar.
Hoshea, son of Nun, from the tribe of Ephraim.
Palti son of Raphu, from the tribe of Benjamin.
Gaddiel, son of Sodi, from the tribe of Zebulun.
Gaddi, son of Susi, from the tribe of Manasseh (a tribe of Joseph).
Ammiel, son of Gemalli, from the tribe of Dan.
Sethur, son of Michael, from the tribe of Asher.
Nahbi, son of Vophsi, from the tribe of Naphtali.
Geuel, son of Machi, from the tribe of Gad.

These were the names of the men that Moses sent to explore the country. Moses called Hoshea Joshua.

Moses sent them out to explore the land of Canaan, telling them, "Go through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the place looks like, and find out about the people living there—are they strong or weak? Are there many of them or only a few? Is the land where they're living good or bad? Are their towns like open camps, or do they have defensive walls? Is the soil productive or not? Is it forested? Be brave, and bring back some of the country's fruit." (It was the beginning of the grape harvest.)

So the men went and explored the land all the way from the Desert of Zin to Rehob, bear Lebo-hamath. They went through the Negev and arrived in Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak, lived. This town was built seven years before the Egyptian town of Zoan.

When they arrived at the Valley of Eshcol they chopped down a branch that had just one bunch of grapes. They had to carry it on a pole held between two men. They also collected some pomegranates and figs. (The place was named the Valley of Eshcol because of the bunch of grapes they took from there.)

Forty days later the men returned from exploring the country. They went to see Moses and Aaron, and all the Israelites gathered there at their camp in Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. They gave a report before everyone and showed them the fruit they had brought back from the country.

This is the report they gave to Moses: "We went and explored the country you sent us to, and it is definitely very productive, as if it was flowing with milk and honey. Just look at some of its fruit! But the people living there are strong, and their towns are big and have defensive walls. We also saw some descendants of Anak there. The Amalekites live in the Negev. The Hittites, Jebusites, and the Amorites live in the hill country. The Canaanites live on the sea coast and also beside the Jordan."

Then Caleb asked for quiet as the people stood before Moses and told them, "Let's go and take over the land. We can conquer the country, no doubt about it!"

But the men who had gone with him disagreed. "We can't go and fight these people! They're much stronger than us!" They spread a negative report among the Israelites about the country they had explored. They told people, "The country we explored destroys the people that live there. Plus everyone we saw was really big! We even saw giants there—people descended from Anak the giant! Compared to them we looked like grasshoppers, and we must have looked like that to them too!"

Then everybody there cried out loud all night. All the Israelites went and complained to Moses and Aaron, telling them, "If only we'd died in Egypt, or here in this desert! Why is the Lord taking us to this country only to get us killed? Our wives and children will be captured and taken away as slaves! Wouldn't we be better off going back to Egypt?"

They said to one another, "Let's choose a new leader and go back to Egypt."

Moses and Aaron fell facedown on the ground in front of all the assembled Israelites. Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, were there. They had been part of the group who had gone to spy out the land. They ripped their clothes, and told the Israelites, "The country we traveled through and explored has very good land. If the Lord is happy with us, he will take us there and give it to us, a land that's so productive it's like flowing with milk and honey. Don't rebel and fight against the Lord. You don't need to be afraid of the people living there in the country—we can take them easily! They're defenseless and the Lord is with us. Don't be frightened of them!"

In reply all the people shouted out, "Stone them!" But the glory of the Lord suddenly appeared in the Tent of Meeting, right in the middle of the Israelites.

The Lord told Moses, "How long are these people going to reject me? How long are these people going to refuse to trust in me despite all the miracles I have done right in front of them? I'm going to make them sick with a disease and kill them. Then I will make you into a nation that's greater and stronger than they are."

But Moses told the Lord, "The Egyptians will find out about it! It was by your power that you led the Israelites out from among them. They will tell the people living in this country all about it. They've already heard that you, Lord, are with us Israelites, that you, Lord, are seen face to face, that your cloud stands guard over them, and that you lead them by a pillar of cloud during day and a pillar of fire at night. If you kill all these people in one go, the nations who have heard about you will say, 'The Lord killed these people in the desert because he wasn't able to take them to the country he promised to give them. He's killed them all in desert!'

Now, Lord, please demonstrate the extent of your power just as you have said: The Lord is slow to become angry and is full of trustworthy love, forgiving sin and rebellion. However, he will not allow the guilty to go unpunished, bringing the consequences of the parents' sin on their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Please forgive the sin of these people since your trustworthy love is so great, in the same way that you have forgiven them from the time they left Egypt until now."

"I have forgiven them as you asked," the Lord replied. "But even so, as I live and as the whole earth is filled with the Lord's glory, not a single one of the those

who saw my glory and the miracles I did in Egypt and in the desert—but provoked me and refused to obey me time and time again— not a single one of them is ever going to see the country I promised to give their forefathers. None of those who rejected me will see it.

But because my servant Caleb has a totally different spirit and is fully committed to me, I will lead him to the country he visited, and his descendants will own it. Since the Amalekites and Canaanites are living in the valleys, tomorrow you are to turn around and head back into the desert, taking the route towards the Red Sea."

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "How much longer are these wicked people going to criticize me? I've heard what they're saying, making complaints against me. Go and tell them, 'As I live, declares the Lord, I'll do just what I heard you say you wanted, believe me! All of you will die in this desert, everyone who was registered in the census that counted those aged twenty or over, because you made complaints against me. Absolutely none of you will enter the country I promised to give you to live in, except for Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun. However, I will take your children —those you said would be taken away as plunder— into the country you rejected, and they will appreciate it. But you—you are all going to die in this desert. Your children will wander in the desert for forty years, suffering because of your lack of trust until all your bodies lie buried in the desert.

Just as you explored the country for forty days, so shall your punishment for your sins be forty years, a year for every day, and you will see what happens when I oppose you. I, the Lord, have spoken! Just see if I won't do this to all these wicked Israelites who have worked together to oppose me! They will end their lives in the desert—they will die there.'"

The men that Moses had sent to explore the country —those who came back and because they gave a bad report they made all the Israelites complain against the Lord— those men who gave the bad report died before the Lord from plague. The only ones who lived were Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh of those who went to explore the country.

When Moses told the Israelites what the Lord had said they were very, very sad. They got up early the next morning planning to go into the hill country. "Yes we really did sin," they said, "but now we're here and we'll go where the Lord told us."

But Moses objected. "Why are you disobeying the Lord's command? You won't succeed in your plan! Don't try and go, otherwise you will be killed by your enemies, because the Lord isn't with you. The Amalekites and Canaanites living there will attack you, and you will die by the sword. Because you rejected the Lord, he won't help you."

But they were arrogant and went up into the hill country, even though Moses and the Ark of the Lord's Agreement didn't move from the camp. The Amalekites and Canaanites who lived there in the hill country came down and attacked the Israelites and defeated them, and chased them all the way to Hormah.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'These are instructions about what you are to do once you arrive in the country I'm giving you to live in. When you bring an offering to the Lord from your herd or flock (whether it's a burnt offering, a sacrifice to fulfill a promise you made, or a freewill or festival offering) that will be acceptable to the Lord, then you shall also present a grain offering of one tenth of an ephah of the best flour mixed with a quarter hin of olive oil. Add a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering to the burnt offering or the sacrifice of a lamb.

When it comes to a ram, present a grain offering of two tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with a third of a hin of olive oil, along with a third of a hin of wine as a drink offering, all of them to be acceptable to the Lord.

When you bring a young bull as a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a promise you made or as a peace offering to the Lord, then you shall also bring with the bull a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with half a hin of olive oil. Add a half a hin of wine as a drink offering. All this is an offering to be acceptable to the Lord.

This is to be done for every bull, ram, lamb, or goat brought as an offering. This is what you need to do for each one, however many. Every Israelite is to follow these instructions when they present an offering that is accepted by the Lord. This also applies for all future generations that if a foreigner living among you or anyone else among you wishes to present an offering acceptable to the Lord: they are to do exactly what you do. The whole congregation must have the same rules for you and for the foreigner living among you. This is a permanent law for all future generations You and the foreigner are to be treated the same way before the law. The same rules and regulations apply to you and the foreigner living among you.'"

Then the Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'When you get to the country where I'm leading you and you eat the food produced there, you shall give some of it as an offering to the Lord. You are to give some of the flour you make into loaves as a gift—present it just like an offering from the threshing floor. For all future generations, you are to give the Lord an offering from the first of your flour.

Now if you collectively sin without meaning to and don't follow all these instructions that the Lord has given Moses— everything that the Lord has ordered you to do through Moses from the time that the Lord gave them and for all future generations— and if it was done unintentionally without everyone knowing about it, then the whole congregation is to present a young bull as a burnt offering to be accepted by the Lord, along with its grain offering and drink offering presented according to the rules, as well as a male goat as a sin offering. In this way the priest is to make the whole congregation of Israel right with the Lord so that they can be forgiven, because the sin was unintentional and they have presented the Lord with a burnt offering and a sin offering, offered before the Lord for their unintentional sin. Then the whole congregation of Israel and the foreigners living among them will be forgiven, because the people sinned unintentionally.

In the case of an individual who sins without meaning to—they are to present a one-year-old female

goat as a sin offering. The priest will make the person who sinned unintentionally right before the Lord on their behalf. Once they have been made right, they will be forgiven. You shall apply the same law for the one who mistakenly sins to an Israelite or a foreigner living among you.

But the person who sins in defiance, whether an Israelite or foreigner, is blaspheming the Lord. They shall be expelled from their people. They have to be expelled, because they have treated the word of the Lord with contempt and broken his commandment. They are responsible for the consequences of their own guilt.'"

During the time the Israelites were wandering in the desert, a man was caught collecting firewood on the Sabbath. The people who found him collecting wood brought him before Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the Israelites. They placed him under guard because it wasn't clear what should happen to him. The Lord told Moses, "This man has to be executed. All the Israelites are to stone him outside the camp." So they all took the man outside the camp and stoned him to death as the Lord had ordered Moses.

Sometime later the Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites that for all future generations you must make tassels for the hems of your clothes and attach them with blue cord. When you look at these tassels you will be reminded to keep all the commandments of the Lord and not be unfaithful, following your own thoughts and desires. In this way you'll remember to keep all my commandments and you will be holy to your God. I am the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the Lord your God!"

Korah, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi tried to take over leadership, along with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On, son of Peleth, who were from the tribe of Reuben. They rebelled against Moses, and were joined by 250 well-respected Israelite leaders and members of the assembly. They joined together in opposition to Moses and Aaron, telling them, "You've taken too much power for yourselves! Every one of the Israelites is holy, and the Lord is among them. So why do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

When Moses heard what they were saying, he fell facedown on the ground. Then he told Korah and all those with him, "In the morning the Lord is going to make it clear who is his and who is holy, and allow that person to approach him. He will only allow whoever he chooses to approach him. This is what you, Korah, and everyone with you are going to do. Take some incense burners, and tomorrow put incense in them and set it on fire in the presence of the Lord. Then the man the Lord chooses is the one who is holy. It is you Levites who are taking too much power for yourselves!"

Moses also told Korah, "Listen, you Levites! Do you think it's something insignificant that the God of Israel chose you from all the other Israelites and allowed you to approach him and carry out the work in the Lord's Tabernacle, to stand before the Israelites and serve them? He has allowed you the privilege of approaching him, Korah, you and all the other Levites, but now you want to have the priesthood as well! So in reality you and those who have joined you are fighting against the Lord—because who is Aaron that you should complain about him?"

Moses summoned Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they replied, "We're not going to appear before you! Haven't you done enough by taking us away from a land flowing with milk and honey in order to kill us out here in the desert? Do you have to make yourself a dictator as well, someone to rule us? On top of that you haven't taken us to a land flowing with milk and honey or given us fields and vineyards to own. Do you really think you can fool everyone? No, we will not attend!"

Moses got really angry and said to the Lord, "Don't accept their offerings. I have never taken even a donkey from them or treated any of them badly."

Moses told Korah, "You and all those who have joined you must appear before the Lord tomorrow—all of you and Aaron too. Each one will take his incense burner, put incense in it, and offer it before the Lord. All 250 of you will use your incense burners and Aaron will as well."

So each one took his incense burner, put incense in it, set it on fire, and stood together with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. When Korah had gathered all his rebellious group at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the Lord's glory appeared before the whole congregation.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "Step away from these Israelites and I will destroy them right away."

But Moses and Aaron fell facedown on the ground said, "God—God of everything that lives—when it's only one man who sins, must you be angry with everybody?"

Then the Lord told Moses, "Tell the people to move away from the homes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram."

So Moses went over to Dathan and Abiram, and the Israelite elders of Israel followed him. He ordered the people, "Move away from the tents of these wicked men and don't touch anything that belongs to them, otherwise you will be destroyed along with them in all their sins."

The people moved away from the homes of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram came out and stood at the entrances to their tents along with their wives, children and little ones.

Moses said, "This is how you will know that the Lord did send me to carry out everything I've done, for it wasn't anything I thought up. If these men die a natural death, experiencing the destiny of every human being, then the Lord didn't send me. But if the Lord does something totally different, and the earth opens up and swallows them down along with everything that belongs to them so that they go down alive into Sheol, then you will know that these men have acted with contempt to the Lord."

Immediately after Moses had finished saying all this, the ground under the rebels split apart, and the earth opened up and swallowed them and their households down, as well as everyone who was there with Korah and everything that belonged to them. They went down alive into Sheol with all that they had. The earth closed over them, and they were no more.

When they heard their cries, all the Israelites nearby ran away, shouting, "Watch out! The earth could

swallow us too!" Fire burst out from the Lord and burned up the 250 men who were offering incense.

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, to collect the holy incense burners from among those who have been burned up, and scatter the coals used for the incense well away from the camp. Have the incense burners of those who sinned at the expense of their own lives hammered into metal sheets as a covering for the altar, because they were offered before the Lord, and so have become holy. They will be a reminder to Israelites of what happened."

So Eleazar the priest collected the bronze incense burners used by those who had been burned up, and had them hammered out as a covering for the altar, following the instructions given to him from the Lord through Moses. This was to remind the Israelites that no one who is not a descendant of Aaron should come and offer incense before the Lord, otherwise they could end up like Korah and those with him.

The next day all the Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron, saying, "You have killed the Lord's people!" But as the people gathered to confront them, Moses and Aaron went over to the Tent of Meeting, and suddenly the cloud covered it and the Lord's glory appeared. Moses and Aaron went and stood at the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the Lord said to Moses, "Get away from these people and I will finish them off immediately." Moses and Aaron fell facedown on the ground.

Moses told Aaron, "Put some coals from the altar and some incense in your incense burner. Then run to the people and make them right before the Lord, for the Lord is angry with them and a plague has started."

Aaron took the incense burner just as Moses had told him and ran into the middle of the assembly. He saw that the plague had started to affect the people so he offered the incense and made the people right with the Lord. He stood between those who had died and those who were still alive, and the plague was stopped. However, 14,700 died from the plague in addition to those who'd died because of Korah.

Then Aaron went back to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting because the plague had been stopped.

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites to bring twelve walking sticks, one from the leader of each tribe. Write the name of each man on the walking stick, and write Aaron's name on the walking stick of the tribe of Levi, because there has to be a walking stick for the head of each tribe. Place the walking sticks in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony where I meet with you. The walking stick that belongs to the man I choose will sprout buds, and I will put a stop to the Israelites' constant complaints against you."

Moses explained this to the Israelites, and each of their leaders gave him a walking stick, one for each of the leaders of their tribes. So there were twelve walking sticks including the one belonging to Aaron. Moses placed the walking sticks before the Lord in the Tent of the Testimony.

The next day Moses went into the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron's walking stick that represented the tribe of Levi, had sprouted and developed buds, flowered and produced almonds. Moses took all the walking sticks from the presence of the Lord and showed them to all the Israelites. They saw them, and each man collected his own walking stick.

The Lord told Moses, "Put Aaron's walking stick back in front of the Testimony, to be kept there as a reminder to warn anyone who wants to rebel, so that you may stop their complaining against me. Otherwise they'll die." Moses did what the Lord ordered him to do.

Then the Israelites came and told Moses, "Can't you see we're all going to die? We'll be destroyed! We're all going to be killed! Anyone who dares to approach the Tabernacle of the Lord will die. Are we all going to be completely wiped out?"

The Lord told Aaron, "You and your sons and the other Levites bear the responsibility for sins relating to the sanctuary. You and your sons alone bear the responsibility for sins relating to your priesthood. Have your brothers from the tribe of Levi, your father's tribe, join you to help you and your sons with your service in the Tent of the Testimony. They will take care of your responsibilities and those relating to the Tent, but they must not come too close to the sacred objects of the sanctuary or the altar, otherwise they will die, and you will too. They are to help you and take care of the responsibilities of the Tent of Meeting, doing all the work at the Tent, but they are not allowed to be with you during your priestly ministry.

You are to carry out the responsibilities relating to the sanctuary and the altar, so that my anger will not fall on the Israelites again. Look, I myself have chosen your brothers the Levites from the Israelites as my gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to do the work that relates to the Tent of Meeting. But only you and your sons are responsible for your priesthood, doing all that concerns the altar and is behind the veil. Only you are to perform that service. I am giving you the gift of your priesthood, but anyone else who approaches the sanctuary must be executed."

The Lord told Aaron, "Listen, I have put you in charge of officiating at my offerings. All the holy contributions of the Israelites that they bring are reserved for you, and this is a permanent rule. Part of the most holy offerings taken from the burnt offerings are yours. Part of all the offerings they give me as most holy offerings, whether it's grain offerings or sin offerings or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your sons. You shall eat it in a most holy place. Every male is allowed to eat it. You are to regard it as something holy.

The following also belongs to you: the voluntary gifts as well as all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I have given this to you and your sons and daughters as a permanent rule. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean is allowed to eat it. I am giving you all the best olive oil and all the best new wine and grain that the Israelites give as firstfruits to the Lord. The firstfruits of all the crops they produce in their land that they bring to the Lord are yours. Everyone in your family who is ceremonially clean is allowed to eat them.

Everything in Israel that is dedicated to the Lord is yours. Every firstborn, whether human or animal, that is offered to the Lord is yours. But you must buy back every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. When they are one month old you shall pay

the redemption price of five shekels of silver (using the sanctuary shekel standard), equivalent to twenty gerahs.

But you are not allowed to redeem the firstborn of an ox, a sheep, or a goat because they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar, and burn their fat as a burnt offering accepted by the Lord. Their meat is yours, in the same way that the breast and right thigh of the wave offering are yours.

I am giving all the voluntary gifts that the Israelites present to the Lord to you and to your sons and daughters as a permanent rule. It is a permanent agreement of salt before the Lord for you and your descendants.

You won't possess property in their country, and you won't have a share in their land. I am your share and your possession among the Israelites. Instead I have given the Levites all the tithes in Israel as compensation for the service they provide in doing the work in the Tent of Meeting.

The Israelites are no longer allowed to approach the Tent of Meeting, or they will commit an offense and die. The Levites are to carry out the work in the Tent of Meeting, and they must take responsibility for any sins involved. This is a permanent rule for all future generations. The Levites won't receive a share of land among the Israelites. Instead I have given to the Levites as their compensation the tithe that the Israelites give to the Lord as a contribution. That's why I told them that they wouldn't receive a share of land among the Israelites."

The Lord told Moses, "Talk to the Levites and explain to them, 'When you receive from the Israelites the tithe that I have given you as your compensation, you must return part of it as an offering to the Lord: a tithe of the tithe. Your offering will be considered as if it were the firstfruits of grain from your threshing floor or grape juice from the winepress. In this way you are to contribute an offering to the Lord from every tithe you receive from the Israelites, giving the Lord's offering to Aaron the priest. From all the gifts you receive you are to contribute as the Lord's offering the very best, the holiest part of every gift.'

So tell the Levites, 'When you have presented the best part, it will be considered as your contribution produced by your threshing floor or winepress. You and your families may eat it anywhere because it's compensation for your service in the Tent of Meeting. You will not be considered to have sinned if you have presented the best part of it. But if you treat the sacred offerings of the Israelites with disrespect you will die.'"

The Lord told Moses and Aaron, "This is a legal regulation the Lord has ordered, saying, Tell the Israelites to bring you a red cow without defects which has never been yoked. Hand it over to Eleazar the priest, and he will take it outside the camp and have it slaughtered before him. Eleazar the priest will put some of its blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times towards the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the cow must be burned as he watches. All of it is to be burned—its skin, meat, and blood, as well as its excrement. The priest shall throw cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson thread on the burning cow.

Then the priest shall wash his clothes and his body in water, and after that he may enter the camp, but he will remain unclean until the evening. The person who burned the cow shall also wash his clothes and his body in water, and he too will remain unclean until the evening.

Then a man who is clean shall collect the ashes of the cow and keep them in a clean place outside the camp. They are to be kept by the Israelites to prepare the water of purification which is for purifying from sin. The man who collected the ashes of the cow shall also wash his clothes, and he will remain unclean until the evening. This is a permanent rule for the Israelites and for the foreigner that lives with them.

If you touch a dead body you will be unclean for seven days. You must purify yourself with the water of purification on the third day and on the seventh day, and then you will be clean. But if you don't purify yourself on the third and seventh days, you won't be clean. If you touch a dead body and don't purify yourself, you make the Tabernacle of the Lord unclean and must be expelled from Israel. You are still unclean because the water of purification hasn't been sprinkled on you, and your uncleanness remains.

The following regulation applies when a person dies in a tent. Everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is already in the tent will be unclean for seven days. Any open container there that doesn't have a closed lid is unclean. If you're out in the open and you touch someone who has been killed by the sword or who has died naturally, or if you touch a human bone or a grave, then you'll be unclean for seven days.

This is the process for the purification if you are unclean. Take some of the ashes of the burnt offering for purification, and put them in a jar with fresh water. A man who is clean shall take some hyssop and dip it in the water. Then sprinkle the tent and everything inside it, and everybody who was there. He would also need to sprinkle you if you touched a bone, or a grave, or someone who has died or has been killed.

The man who is clean is to sprinkle you both on the third day and on the seventh day. After you are purified on the seventh day, you must wash your clothes and yourself in water, and that evening you'll be clean. But if you don't purify yourself, you will be expelled from the Israelites, because you have made the Tabernacle of the Lord unclean. The water of purification hasn't been sprinkled on you, and you remain unclean. This is a permanent rule for everyone. The man who sprinkles the water of purification must wash his clothes, and anyone who touches the water of purification will be unclean until the evening. Anything the unclean person touches will be unclean, and anyone who touches it will be unclean until the evening."

It was during the first month of the year that all the Israelites arrived in the Desert of Zin and set up camp in Kadesh. (This was where Miriam died and was buried.)

However, there was no water there for anyone to drink, so the people gathered to confront Moses and Aaron. They argued with Moses, saying, "If only we'd died with our relatives in the Lord's presence! Why have you brought the Lord's people into this desert just so we and our livestock can die here? Why did you lead

us out of Egypt to come to this awful place? Nothing grows here—no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates. And there's no water to drink!”

Moses and Aaron left the people and went to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. There they fell facedown on the ground, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. The Lord told Moses, “Take the walking stick and have the people gather around you. As they watch, you and your brother Aaron will order the rock and it will pour out water. You will bring water from the rock so the people and their livestock can drink.”

Moses picked up the walking stick that was kept in the Lord's presence, as he had been ordered. Moses and Aaron had everyone gather in front of the rock. Moses said to them, “Listen, you bunch of rebels! Do we have to bring water out of this rock for you?” Then Moses picked up the walking stick and hit the rock twice. Streams of water gushed out so that the people and their livestock could drink.

But the Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Because you didn't trust me enough to demonstrate how holy I am to the Israelites, you will not be the ones to lead them into the country I've given them.” The place where the Israelites argued with the Lord was called the waters of Meribah, and was where he revealed his holiness to them.

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, telling him, “This is what your brother Israel says. You know all about the difficulties we've faced. Our forefathers went to Egypt and we lived there for a long time. The Egyptians treated us and our forefathers badly, so we called out to the Lord for help, and he heard our cries. He sent an angel and led us out of Egypt.

Listen, now we are in Kadesh, a town on the border of your territory. Please allow us to travel through your country. We won't cross any of your fields or vineyards, or drink water from any of your wells. We will stay on the King's Highway; we won't turn off either to the right or to the left until we have passed through your country.”

But the king of Edom replied, “You are forbidden to travel through our country, otherwise we will come out and stop you by force.”

“We'll keep to the main road,” the Israelites persisted. “If we or our livestock drink your water, we'll pay you for it. That's all we want—just to pass through on foot.”

But the king of Edom insisted, “You are forbidden to travel through our country!” He came out with his large and powerful army to meet the Israelites head-on. Since the king of Edom refused to allow Israel to travel through his territory, the Israelites had to turn back.

The Israelites all left Kadesh and traveled to Mount Hor.

At Mount Hor, near the border with the country of Edom, the Lord told Moses and Aaron, “Aaron will shortly join his forefathers in death. He will not enter the country I have given the Israelites, because you both disobeyed my command at the waters of Meribah. Have Aaron and his son Eleazar join you and climb up Mount Hor together. Take off Aaron's priestly clothes and put them on his son Eleazar. Aaron is going to die there and join his forefathers in death.”

Moses did as the Lord ordered: They climbed up Mount Hor in full view of all the Israelites. Moses removed the priestly clothes that Aaron was wearing and put them on Aaron's son Eleazar. Aaron died there, on the top of the mountain. Then Moses and Eleazar went back down. When the people realized that Aaron had died, they all mourned for him for thirty days.

The Canaanite king of Arad who lived in the Negev learned that the Israelites were approaching on the road to Atharim. He went and attacked Israel and took some of them prisoners. So Israel made a solemn promise to the Lord: “If you hand these people over to us, we pledge to completely destroy their towns.”

The Lord responded to their appeal and handed over the Canaanites to them. The Israelites completely destroyed them and their towns, and named the place Hormah.

The Israelites left Mount Hor by the road leading to the Red Sea so they could avoid traveling through the country of Edom. But the people became bad-tempered on the way and made complaints against God and against Moses, saying, “Why did you lead us out of Egypt to die in the desert? We don't have bread or water, and we hate this awful food!”

So the Lord sent poisonous snakes to attack them, and many Israelites were bitten and died.

The people went to see Moses and told him, “We were wrong to make complaints against the Lord and against you. Please pray to the Lord to get rid of the snakes from us.” Moses prayed to the Lord on their behalf.

The Lord told Moses, “Make a model of a snake and put it on a pole. When anyone who has been bitten looks at it, they will live.” Moses made a snake out of bronze and put it on a pole. Those who looked at it did live.

The Israelites left and camped at Oboth. Then they moved on from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim in the desert on the east side of Moab. They left there and camped in the Valley of Zered. Then they moved on from there and camped on the far side of the Arnon River, in the desert near Amorite territory. The Arnon River is the border between the Moab and the Amorites. That's why the Book of the Wars of the Lord refers to “the town of Waheb in Suphah and the canyon of the Arnon, the canyon slopes that reach the village of Ar that lies on the border with Moab.”

From there they moved on to Beer, the well where the Lord told Moses, “Have the people gather together so I can give them water.”

Then the Israelites sang this song: “Pour out water, well! Everyone of you sing to it! The tribal chiefs dug the well; yes the leaders of the people dug the well with their rods of authority and their walking sticks.”

The Israelites left the desert and carried on to Mattanah. From Mattanah they traveled to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, and from Bamoth to the valley in the territory of Moab where the top of Mount Pisgah looks down on the wastelands.

Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, with the following request: “Please allow us

to travel through your country. We won't cross any of your fields or vineyards, or drink water from any of your wells. We will stay on the King's Highway until we have passed through your country."

But Sihon refused to allow the Israelites to travel through his territory. Instead, he called out his whole army and went out to meet the Israelites head-on in the desert. When he arrived at Jahaz, he attacked the Israelites. The Israelites defeated them, killing them with their swords. They took over his land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River —but only as far as the border of the Ammonites, because it was well defended.

The Israelites conquered all the Amorite towns and took them over, including Heshbon and its surrounding villages. Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the previous king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon River. That's why the old songwriters wrote: "Come to Heshbon and have it be rebuilt; restore the town of Sihon! For a fire blazed out from Heshbon, a flame from the town of Sihon. It burned up Ar in Moab where the rulers live on the high places of Arnon. What a disaster you face, Moab! You are all going to die, people of Chemosh! You handed over your sons as exiles and your daughters as prisoners to Sihon, king of the Amorites. But now we have defeated the Amorites! Heshbon's rule has been destroyed all the way to Dibon. We wiped them out all the way to Nophah and on to Medeba."

The Israelites occupied the country of the Amorites. Moses sent men to explore Jazer. The Israelites conquered its surrounding villages and expelled the Amorites living there. Then they continued on the road towards Bashan. Og, king of Bashan, led his whole army out to meet them head on, and fought them at Edrei. The Lord told Moses, "You don't need to be afraid of him, because I have handed him over to you, along with all his people and his land. Do to him what you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon."

So they killed Og, his sons, and all his army. Nobody survived, and the Israelites took over his country.

The Israelites moved on and camped on the plains of Moab east of the Jordan, opposite Jericho. Balak, son of Zippor, had seen all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites. The Moabites were terrified of the Israelites because there were so many of them. The Moabites dreaded the arrival of the Israelites and told the leaders of Midian, "This horde will eat up everything we have, just like an ox eats up grass in the field!" (Balak son of Zippor, was king of Moab at that time.) He sent messengers to call Balaam, son of Beor, who lived in Pethor near the Euphrates River in his own country.

"Listen, a group of people has arrived here who came from Egypt," Balak said in his message to Balaam. "There are hordes of them and they present a real threat to me. Please come immediately and curse these people for me, because they are stronger than me. Maybe then I'll be able to attack them and drive them out of my country because I know that whoever you bless is blessed, and whoever you curse is cursed."

The Moabite and Midianite leaders departed, taking payment for the fortune-telling with them. When they arrived they gave Balaam the message from Balak.

"Stay the night and I'll let you know the answer the Lord gives me," Balaam told them. So the Moabite leaders stayed there with Balaam.

God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men staying with you?"

Balaam told God, "Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab, sent me this message: 'Listen, a group of people has arrived here who came from Egypt. There are hordes of them. Please come immediately and curse these people for me. Maybe then I'll be able to fight them and drive them out of my country.'"

But God told Balaam, "You are not to go back with them. You must not curse this people, for they are blessed."

In the morning Balaam got up and said to Balak's messengers, "Go back to where you came from because the Lord has refused to allow me to go with you."

The Moabite leaders left. They returned to Balak, and told him, "Balaam refused to come back with us."

Then Balak sent even more leaders who were more prestigious than before. When they arrived they told Balaam, "This is what Balak son of Zippor says: 'Please don't let anything stop you from coming to see me, because I will pay you a great deal and follow all the advice you give me. Please come and curse these people for me!'"

But Balaam told Balak's officials, "Even if Balak gave me his whole palace full of silver and gold, I couldn't disobey the command of the Lord my God in any way. Now you should also stay the night so I can see if the Lord has anything else to tell me."

God came to Balaam during the night and told him, "Since these men have come for you, get up and go with them. But only do what I tell you." In the morning Balaam got up, put a saddle on his donkey, and left with the Moabite leaders.

God got angry because Balaam had decided to go. The angel of the Lord came and stood in the road to confront him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and he was accompanied by his two servants. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road holding a drawn sword, so it turned from the road and went into a field. So Balaam beat it to make it go back to the road.

Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow part of the road that passed between two vineyards, with walls on both sides. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord and tried to get past. It pushed up against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot against it. So he beat it again.

Then the angel of the Lord went ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to get past, either on the right or the left. The donkey saw the angel of the Lord and lay down under Balaam. He got angry and beat it with his walking stick.

The Lord gave the donkey the ability to speak and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you for you to beat me three times?"

"You made me look stupid!" Balaam told the donkey. "If I was holding a sword, I'd kill you now!"

But the donkey asked Balaam, "Aren't I the donkey you've ridden all your life right up to today? Have I ever treated you this way before?"

"No," he admitted.

Then the Lord gave Balaam the ability to see the angel of the Lord standing in the road holding a drawn

sword. Balaam bowed low and fell facedown on the ground.

The angel of the Lord asked him, “Why did you beat your donkey three times? Listen, I have come to confront you because you're being obstinate. The donkey saw me and avoided me three times. If it had not avoided me, by now I definitely would have killed you and allowed the donkey to live.”

“I have sinned because I did not realize that you were standing in the road to confront me,” Balaam said to the angel of the Lord, “So if this isn't what you want, I'll go back home.”

The angel of the Lord told Balaam, “No, you can go with the men, but only say what I tell you.” So Balaam continued on with Balak's officials.

When Balak found out that Balaam was on his way, he went out to meet him at the Moabite town on the border at the Arnon River, the farthest point of his territory. He said to Balaam, “Didn't you think my call for you to come was urgent? Why didn't you come to me straight away? Did you think I couldn't pay you enough?”

“Look, I'm here with you now, aren't I?” Balaam replied. “But do you think I can just say anything? I can only speak the words that God gives me to say.”

So Balaam went with Balak and they arrived at Kiriath-huzoth. Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and he shared the meat with Balaam and the leaders who were with him.

The next morning Balak took Balaam up to Bamoth-baal. From there he could see the extent of the Israelite camp.

Then Balaam told Balak, “Build seven altars for me here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me to sacrifice.” Balak did as Balaam had said, and together they offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Balaam said to Balak, “Wait here beside your burnt offering while I go and see if perhaps the Lord will come and meet with me. Whatever he reveals to me, I'll share with you.” Then Balaam left to climb up a rocky crag.

God met with him there, and Balaam said. “I have built seven altars and on each altar I have offered a bull and a ram.”

The Lord gave Balaam a message to share. He told him, “Go back to Balak and this is what you are to say to him.”

So he went back to Balak, who was waiting there beside his burnt offering, along with all the Moabite leaders.

This is the declaration that Balaam gave:

“Balak brought me from Aram; the king of Moab brought me from the mountains of the east. He said, ‘Come and curse Jacob for me! Come and condemn Israel!’

But how can I curse what God has not cursed? How can I condemn what the Lord has not condemned? For I'm looking down on them from the top of rocky crags; I'm watching them from the hills. I see a people who live on their own, different from the other nations.

Who can count Jacob's descendants? They are so many they're like dust! Who can count even a quarter of the Israelites?

I would like to die as a good person dies! Let the end of my life be like their end!”

Then Balak complained to Balaam, “What on earth have you done to me? I brought you here to curse my enemies, and now look! All you have done is bless them!”

But Balaam replied, “Don't you think I should say precisely what the Lord tells me?”

Then Balak said to him, “Please come with me to another place where you can see them. But you'll only see a part of their camp—you won't see all of them. You can curse them for me from there.” He took him to the field of Zophim at the top of Mount Pisgah. There he built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Balaam told Balak, “Wait here beside your burnt offering while I meet the Lord over there.” The Lord met Balaam and gave him a message to share. He told him, “Go back to Balak and this is what you are to say to him.” So he went back to Balak, who was waiting there beside his burnt offering, along with all the Moabite leaders.

“What did the Lord say?” Balak asked.

This is the prophecy that Balaam delivered:

“Stand up, Balak, and pay attention! Listen to me, son of Zippor!

God isn't a human being who would lie. He's not a mere mortal who changes his mind. Does he say he's going to do something but doesn't? Does he make promises he doesn't carry out?

Look, I have been ordered to give a blessing. God has blessed, and I can't change that. He's not expecting anything bad will happen to Jacob; he doesn't foresee any trouble for Israel. The Lord their God is with them; they celebrate him as their king. God led them out of Egypt with great power, as strong as an ox. No spell can be cast against Jacob; no magic can be used against Israel. People will talk about Jacob and Israel, saying, ‘What amazing things God has done for them!’ Look! The Israelites go out hunting like a lioness; they chase like a lion. They don't rest until they eat their prey, and drink the blood of their dead victim.”

Then Balak said to Balaam, “If you can't give them any curses then at least don't give them any blessings!”

But Balaam replied, “Didn't I explain to you that I have to do whatever the Lord tells me?”

“Please come with me and I will take you somewhere else,” Balak said. “Maybe God would let you curse them for me from there.” Balak took Balaam to the top of Mount Peor, which looks down on the wastelands.

Balaam told Balak, “Build seven altars for me here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me to sacrifice.” Balak did what Balaam told him, and he offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

When Balaam saw that the Lord wanted to bless Israel, he chose not to use divination as he had previously. Instead he turned towards the desert, and as he looked at Israel camped there according to their respective tribes, the Spirit of God came on him. He gave a declaration, saying:

“This is the prophecy of Balaam, son of Beor, the prophecy of a man who sees with eyes that are wide open, the prophecy of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision given by Almighty, who bows down in respect with open eyes.

How well set out your tents are, Jacob; the places where you live, Israel! They look like wooded valleys, like gardens beside a river, like aloe trees the Lord has planted, like cedars at the water's edge. The Israelites will pour out bucketfuls of water; their descendants will have plenty of water. Their king will be greater than King Agag; their kingdom will be glorious. God led them out of Egypt with great power, as strong as an ox, destroying enemy nations, breaking their bones, piercing them with arrows. They are like a lion that crouches and lies down. They are like a lioness that nobody dares to disturb. Those who bless you will be blessed; those who curse you will be cursed."

Balak got angry with Balaam, and beat his fists together. He told Balaam, "I brought you here to curse my enemies, and now look! You keep on blessing them, doing it three times. Leave right now! Go home! I promised to pay you well, but the Lord has made sure you wouldn't receive any payment."

But Balaam said to Balak, "Didn't I already explain to the messengers you sent that even if you gave me your whole palace full of silver and gold, I couldn't do anything I wanted or disobey the command of the Lord my God in any way? I can only say what the Lord tells me. Listen! I'm going back home now to my own people, but first let me warn you what these Israelites are going to do to your people in the future."

Then Balaam gave a declaration, saying, "This is the prophecy of Balaam, son of Beor, the prophecy of a man whose eyes are wide open the prophecy of one who hears the words of God, who receives knowledge from the Most High, who sees the vision given by Almighty, who bows down in respect with open eyes.

I see him, but this isn't now. I observe him, but this isn't close at hand. In the future a leader like a star will come from Jacob, a ruler with a scepter will come to power from Israel. He will crush the heads of the Moabites, and destroy all the people of Seth. The country of Edom will be conquered, his enemy Seir will be conquered, and the Israelites will be victorious. A ruler from Jacob will come and destroy those left in the city."

Balaam turned his attention to the Amalekites and gave this declaration about them, saying, "Amalek was first among the nations, but they will end up being destroyed."

He turned his attention to the Kenites and gave this declaration about them, saying, "Where you live is safe and secure, like a nest on a cliff-face. But Kain will be burned down when Assyria conquers you."

Then Balaam gave another declaration, saying, "It's a tragedy! Who can survive when God does this? Ships will be sent from Cyprus to attack Assyria and Eber, but they too will be permanently destroyed."

Then Balaam left and returned to his own country, and Balak left too.

When the Israelites were staying at Shittim the men started to have sex with Moabite women who invited them to the sacrifices made to their gods. The Israelites ate the pagan meals and bowed down before these gods. In this way the Israelites devoted themselves in worship to Baal of Peor, and the Lord was angry with them.

The Lord told Moses, "Arrest all the Israelite leaders and kill them before the Lord where everyone can see in order to turn the Lord's furious anger away from the people."

So Moses instructed Israel's judges, "Each of you has to kill all of your men who have devoted themselves to worshiping Baal of Peor."

Right then an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman to his family tent in full view of Moses and all the Israelites as they were crying at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. When he saw this, Phinehas, son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, left the assembly, grabbed a spear and followed the man into his tent. There Phinehas drove the spear through both of them, through the Israelite and on into the woman's stomach. This action stopped the plague that had started to kill the Israelites, but 24,000 had already died.

The Lord told Moses, "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites, because out of all of them he was passionately dedicated to me, so I did not destroy the Israelites in my passionate anger. So make an announcement that I am granting him my peace agreement. It will be an agreement that ensures a permanent priesthood for him and his descendants, because he was passionately dedicated to his God and set the Israelites right."

The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri, son of Salu, a family leader of the tribe of Simeon. The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi, daughter of Zur, a family leader of a Midianite tribe.

The Lord told Moses, "Attack the Midianites and kill them, because they attacked you deceptively, leading you astray by using Peor and their woman Cozbi, the daughter of the Midianite leader—the woman who was killed on the day the plague came because of their devotion to Peor."

After the plague was over, the Lord told Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, "Census all the Israelites by family—all those twenty years of age or older who are eligible for military service in the army of Israel."

There on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest gave the order, "Census the men twenty years of age or older, following the instructions the Lord gave to Moses."

The following is the genealogical record of those who left the land of Egypt.

These were the descendants of Reuben, Israel's firstborn:

Hanoch, ancestor of the Hanochite family; Pallu, ancestor of the Palluite family; Hezron, ancestor of the Hezronite family; and Carmi, ancestor of the Carmite family. These were the families descended from Reuben and they numbered 43,730. Pallu's son was Eliab, and Eliab's sons were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. (It was Dathan and Abiram, leaders chosen by the Israelites, who joined the rebellion against Moses and Aaron with the followers of Korah when they rebelled against the Lord. The earth opened up and swallowed them down, along with Korah. His followers died when the fire burned up 250 men. What happened to them

was a warning to the Israelites. But Korah's sons didn't die.)

These were the descendants of Simeon by family:

Nemuel, ancestor of the Nemuelite family; Jamin, ancestor of the Jaminite family; Jachin, ancestor of the Jachinite family; Zerah, ancestor of the Zerahite family; and Shaul, ancestor of the Shaulite family. These were the families descended from Simeon and they numbered 22,200.

These were the descendants of Gad by family:

Zephon, ancestor of the Zephonite family; Haggi, ancestor of the Haggite family; Shuni, ancestor of the Shunite family; Ozni, ancestor of the Oznite family; Eri, ancestor of the Erite family; Arod, ancestor of the Arodite family; Areli, ancestor of the Arelite family. These were the families descended from Gad and they numbered 40,500.

The sons of Judah who died in Canaan were Er and Onan. These were the descendants of Judah by family:

Shelah, ancestor of the Shelanite family; Perez, ancestor of the Perezite family; Zerah, ancestor of the Zerahite family.

These were the descendants of Perez: Hezron, ancestor of the Hezronite family; and Hamul, ancestor of the Hamulite family. These were the families descended from Judah and they numbered 76,500.

These were the descendants of Issachar by family:

Tola, ancestor of the Tolaite family; Puvah, ancestor of the Punite family; Jashub, ancestor of the Jashubite family; and Shimron, ancestor of the Shimronite family. These were the families descended from Isaachar and they numbered 64,300.

These were the descendants of Zebulun by family:

Sered, ancestor of the Seredite family; Elon, ancestor of the Elonite family; and Jahleel, ancestor of the Jahleelite family. These were the families descended from Zebulun, and they numbered 60,500.

These were descendants of Joseph by family through Manasseh and Ephraim: The descendants of Manasseh:

Machir (he was the father of Gilead), ancestor of the Machirite family; and Gilead, ancestor of the Gileadite family.

The descendants of Gilead: Iezer, ancestor of the Iezerite family; Helek, ancestor of the Helekite family; Asriel, ancestor of the Asrielite family; Shechem, ancestor of the Shechemite family; Shemida, ancestor of the Shemidaite family; and Hepher, ancestor of the Hepherite family. (Zelophehad, son of Hepher, didn't have any sons, only daughters. Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.) These were the families descended from Manasseh, and they numbered 52,700.

These were the descendants of Ephraim by family:

Shuthelah, ancestor of the Shuthelahite family; Becher, ancestor of the Becherite family; and Tahan, ancestor of the Tahanite family. The descendant of Shuthelah was Eran, ancestor of the Eranite family. These were the families descended from Ephraim, and they numbered 32,500. These families were the descendants of Joseph.

These were the descendants of Benjamin by family:

Bela, ancestor of the Belaite family; Ashbel, ancestor of the Ashbelite family; Ahiram, ancestor of the Ahiramite family; Shupham, ancestor of the Shuphamite family; and Hupham, ancestor of the Huphamite family. The descendants of Bela were Ard, ancestor of the Ardite family; and Naaman, ancestor of the Naamite family. These were the families descended from Benjamin, and they numbered 45,600.

These were the descendants of Dan by family:

Shuham, ancestor of the Shuhamite families. They were all Shuhamite families, and they numbered 64,400.

These were the descendants of Asher by family:

Imnah, ancestor of the Imnite family; Ishvi, ancestor of the Ishvite family; and Beriah, ancestor of the Beriite family. The descendants of Beriah were Heber, ancestor of the Heberite family; and Malchiel, ancestor of the Malchielite family. The name of Asher's daughter was Serah. These were the families descended from Asher, and they numbered 53,400.

These were the descendants of Naphtali by family:

Jahzeel, ancestor of the Jahzeelite family; Guni, ancestor of the Gunite family; Jezer, ancestor of the Jezerite family; and Shillem, ancestor of the Sheillemite family. These were the families descended from Naphtali, and they numbered 45,400.

The total of all those counted was 601,730.

The Lord told Moses, “Divide the land that is to be owned based on the number of those censused. Give a larger area of land to a larger tribe, and a smaller area to a smaller tribe. Each tribe shall receive their allotment of land depending on their number counted in the census.

The land has to be divided up by casting lots. Everyone shall receive their allotted land based on the name of their ancestor's tribe. Every allocation of land is to be divided by casting lots among the tribes, whether large or small.”

These were the Levites censused by family:

Gershon, ancestor of the Gershonite family; Kohath, ancestor of the Kohathite family; and Merari, ancestor of the Merarite family. The following were the families of the Levites: the Libnite family, the Hebronite family, the Mahlite family, the Mushite family, and the Korahite family. Kohath was the father of Amram, and the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed. She was a descendant of Levi, born while the Levites were in Egypt. She had children with Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam. Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, but Nadab and Abihu died when they offered forbidden fire in the Lord's presence.

The number of the Levites censused totaled 23,000. This included every male one month old or older. However, they were not counted with the other Israelites, because no land allotment was given to them with the other Israelites.

This is the record of those who were censused by Moses and Eleazar the priest when they counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho.

However, they did not include a single one who had previously been censused by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Sinai Desert, because the Lord had told them that they would all die in the desert. No one was left except Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun.

The daughters of Zelophehad came to present their case. Their father Zelophehad was the son of Hepher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, and was from the tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph. The names of his daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They came and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the Israelites at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. They said, “Our father died in the desert, but he wasn't one of Korah's followers who joined together to rebel against the Lord. No, he died from his own sins, and he didn't have any sons. Why should our family name be lost simply because he didn't have a son? Give us land to own alongside our uncles.”

Moses took their case before the Lord. The Lord gave him this answer, “What the daughters of Zelophehad are saying is right. You really must give them land to own alongside their uncles—give to them what would have been allocated to their father. In addition, tell the Israelites, ‘If a man dies and doesn't have a son, give his property to his daughter. If he doesn't have a daughter, give his property to his brothers. If he doesn't have brothers, give his property to his father's brothers. If his father doesn't have any brothers, give his property to his family's next of kin so that they can own it. This is a legal regulation for the Israelites, given as an order by the Lord to Moses.’”

The Lord told Moses, “Go up into the Abarim mountains so you can see the land that I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you will also join your forefathers in death, just as your brother Aaron did, because when the Israelites complained in the Desert of Zin, you both rebelled against my instructions to show my holiness before them in regard to providing water.” (These were the waters of Meribah in Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.)

Then Moses pleaded with the Lord, “May the Lord, the God who gives life to all living beings, choose a man to lead the Israelites who will tell them what to do and show them where to go, so that the people of the Lord won't be like sheep without a shepherd.”

The Lord told Moses, “Call for Joshua, son of Nun, a man who has the Spirit in him, and place your hands on him. Make him stand in front of Eleazar the priest and all the Israelites, and dedicate him while they watch. Hand over some of your authority to him so that all the Israelites will obey him. When he needs instructions, he is to go before Eleazar the priest who will ask the Lord on his behalf and find out the decision using the Urim. Joshua will give orders to all the Israelites concerning everything they are to do.”

Moses followed the Lord's instructions. He had Joshua come and stand in front of Eleazar the priest and all the Israelites. Moses placed his hands on Joshua and dedicated him, just as the Lord had told him to do.

The Lord told Moses, “Give the following regulations to the Israelites: You are to present to me at the appropriate times my food offerings for me to accept. Tell them you are to present to the Lord every day two male lambs a year old as a continual burnt offering. Offer one lamb in the morning and one in the evening before it gets dark, along with one tenth of an ephah of the best flour for a grain offering, mixed with a quarter of a hin of pressed olive oil.

This is a continual burnt offering that was begun at Mount Sinai as an offering acceptable to the Lord. The drink offering that accompanies each lamb is to be a quarter of a hin. Pour out the offering of fermented drink to the Lord in the sanctuary. Offer the second lamb in the evening before it gets dark, along with the same grain and drink offerings as in the morning. It is a burnt offering acceptable to the Lord.

On the Sabbath day, present male lambs two years old, without defects, along with a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil, and its drink offering. This burnt offering is to be presented every Sabbath in addition to the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.

At the start of every month, you are to present to the Lord a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, all of them without defects, along with grain offerings consisting of three-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil for each bull, two-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil for the ram, and one tenth of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil for each of the lambs. This is a burnt offering acceptable to the Lord.

Their respective drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for each bull, a third of a hin for the ram, and a quarter of a hin for each lamb. This is the monthly burnt offering to be presented every month during the year. As well as the continual burnt offering with its drink offering, present a male goat to the Lord as a sin offering.

The Lord's Passover is on the fourteenth day of the first month. There shall be a festival on the fifteenth day of this month, and for seven days only eat bread without yeast. Hold a holy meeting on the first day of the festival. Don't do any of your normal work. Present to the Lord the following offerings: a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. Their grain offerings shall be made of the best flour mixed with olive oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the ram, and one tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs. Also present a male goat as a sin offering to make you right. You are to present these offerings in addition to the continual morning burnt offering. Present the same offerings every day for seven days as burnt offerings to be accepted by the Lord. They are to be offered with their drink offering and the continual burnt offering. Hold a holy meeting on the seventh day of the festival. Don't do any of your normal work.

During the time you celebrate the Festival of Weeks, hold a holy meeting on the day of firstfruits when you present an offering of new grain to the Lord. Don't do any of your normal work. Present a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old to be accepted by the Lord. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings of the best flour mixed with olive oil: three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the ram, and one tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs. Also present a male goat as an offering to make you right.

Present these offerings along with their drink offerings in addition to the continual burnt offering and its grain offering. Make sure the animals sacrificed have no defects."

"Hold a holy meeting on the first day of the seventh month. Don't do any of your normal work. This is the day when you will blow the trumpets. Present a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, all of them without defects, as a sacrifice acceptable to the Lord, along with their grain offerings of the best flour mixed with olive oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the ram, and one tenth of an ephah for each of the seven male lambs. Also present a male goat as a sin offering to make you right. These offerings are in addition to the monthly and daily burnt offerings along with their required grain offerings and drink offerings. They are burnt offerings acceptable to the Lord.

Hold a holy meeting on the tenth day of this seventh month, and practice self-denial. Don't do any of your normal work. Present a burnt offering of one young bull, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old, all of them without defects, acceptable to the Lord. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings of the best flour mixed with olive oil: three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths of an ephah for the ram, and one tenth of an ephah for each of the seven lambs. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the sin offering to make you right and the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

Hold a holy meeting on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Don't do any of your normal work. You are to celebrate a festival dedicated to the Lord for seven days. Present the following as a burnt offering acceptable to the Lord: thirteen young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings of the best flour mixed with olive oil: three-tenths of an ephah of the best flour mixed with olive oil for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths of an ephah for each of the two rams, and one tenth of an ephah for each of the fourteen lambs. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the second day present twelve young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the third day present eleven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the fourth day present ten young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the fifth day present nine young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the sixth day present eight young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the seventh day present seven young bulls, two rams, and fourteen male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

On the eighth day all of you are to meet together. Don't do any of your normal work. Present the following as a burnt offering acceptable to the Lord: one bull, two rams, and seven male lambs a year old, all of them without defects. They are to be accompanied by their grain offerings and drink offerings for the bulls, rams, and lambs, all according to the number required. Also present a male goat as a sin offering in addition to the continual burnt offering with its grain offering and drink offering.

Present these offerings to the Lord at the times you are required to do so, in addition to your offerings to fulfill a promise and freewill offerings, whether they are burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings, or peace offerings."

Moses repeated all this to the Israelites as the Lord ordered him to do.

Moses told the tribal leaders of Israel, "This is what the Lord commands: If a man makes a solemn promise to the Lord, or pledges to do something by swearing an oath, he must not break his promise. He must do everything he said he would.

If a woman who's young and still living in her father's house makes a solemn promise to the Lord or pledges to do something by swearing an oath and her father finds out about her promise or pledge but doesn't say anything to her, all the promises or pledges she has sworn to do will stand. But if her father disallows them as soon as he finds out, then none of her promises or pledges remain valid. The Lord will release her from keeping them because her father has disallowed them.

If a woman marries after having made a solemn promise or sworn an oath without thinking and her husband finds out about it but doesn't say anything

to her right away, all the promises or pledges she has sworn to do will stand. But if her husband disallows them when he finds out about it, then none of her promises or oaths remain valid and the Lord will release her from keeping them.

Every solemn promise made by a widow or a woman who is divorced must be kept.

If a woman living with her husband makes a solemn promise to the Lord or pledges to do something by swearing an oath, and her husband finds out about her promise or pledge but doesn't say anything to her and doesn't disallow them, then all of her promises or pledges remain valid. But if her husband disallows them as soon as he finds out about it, then none of her promises or oaths remain valid. The Lord will release her from keeping them because her husband has disallowed them.

Her husband may also confirm or disallow any solemn promise or pledge the woman may make for self-denial. But if her husband doesn't ever say a word to her about it, then he is assumed to have confirmed all the solemn promises and pledges she has made. However, if he disallows them some time later after finding out about them, then he will bear the responsibility for her breaking them."

These are the regulations that the Lord gave to Moses regarding the relationship between a man and his wife, and between a father and a daughter who is young and still living at home.

The Lord told Moses, "Punish the Midianites because of what they did to the Israelites. After that you will join your forefathers in death."

Moses instructed the people, "Have some of your men get ready for battle, so they can go and attack the Midianites and carry out the Lord's punishment on them. You are to contribute one thousand men from each Israelite tribe."

So one thousand men were chosen from each Israelite tribe, making twelve thousand troops ready for battle. Moses sent them into battle, one thousand from each tribe, together with Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest. He carried with him the holy objects from the sanctuary and the trumpets used for giving signals. They attacked the Midianites, as the Lord had told Moses to do, and they killed all the men. Among those killed were the five kings of Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. They also killed Balaam, son of Beor, with the sword.

The Israelites captured the Midianite women and children, and they took as plunder all their herds, flocks, and possessions. They set fire to all the Midianite towns and camps where they had lived, and carried away all the plunder and loot, including people and animals.

They brought the prisoners, loot, and plunder to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the rest of the Israelites where they were camped on the plains of Moab, beside the Jordan opposite Jericho. Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the Israelite leaders went out of the camp to meet them.

Moses was angry with the army officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, who returned from the battle. "Why did you let all the women live?" he asked them. "You realize that these were the same women who seduced the Israelite men, leading them to be unfaithful to the Lord at Peor, following Balaam's advice! That's why the Lord's people suffered from the plague! So go and kill all the boys, and every woman who has slept with a man. Let all the girls who are virgins live. They are yours. All those of you who killed someone or touched a dead body must stay outside the camp for seven days. Purify yourselves and your prisoners on the third day and the seventh day. Also purify all your clothing and anything made of leather, goat's hair, or wood."

Eleazar the priest told the soldiers who had gone into battle, "These are the legal regulations that the Lord has ordered Moses to be carried out: All that's made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead— anything that doesn't burn—must be put through fire to make it clean. But it still has to be purified using water of purification. Anything that burns must be put through the water. Wash your clothes on the seventh day and you will be clean. Then you can enter the camp."

The Lord told Moses, "You, Eleazar the priest, and the Israelite family leaders are to take a record of the people and animals that were captured. Then divide them between the troops who went into battle and the rest of the Israelites. Take as a contribution to the Lord from what is allocated to the troops who went into battle one out of every five hundred people, cattle, donkeys, or sheep. Take this from their half share and give it to Eleazar the priest as an offering to the Lord.

From the Israelites half share, take one out of every fifty people, cattle, donkeys, or sheep, or other animals, and give them to the Levites who take care of the Lord's Tabernacle."

Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord had ordered Moses.

This was the list of plunder remaining that had been looted by the troops: 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys, and 32,000 virgins.

This was the half share for those who had gone to fight: 337,500 sheep, with a contribution for the Lord of 675, 36,000 cattle, with a Lord's contribution of 72, 30,500 donkeys, with a Lord's contribution of 61, and 16,000 people, with a Lord's contribution of 32. Moses gave the contribution to Eleazar the priest as an offering to the Lord as the Lord had ordered Moses.

The Israelites' half share left after Moses had given the half share to the troops who had gone to fight, consisted of: 337,500 sheep, 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys, and 16,000 people. Moses took from the Israelites' half one out of every fifty people and animals and gave them to the Levites who take care of the Lord's Tabernacle, as the Lord had ordered him.

The army officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, came to Moses and told him, "We, your servants, have checked the troops we command and not a single man is missing. So we have brought the Lord an offering of the gold objects each man received—armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces—in order that we may be right before the Lord."

Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted from them all the objects made out of gold. The gold that the commanders of thousands and of hundreds gave as an offering to the Lord weighed in total 16,750 shekels. (The men who had fought in the battle had each taken plunder for himself.) Moses and Eleazar the priest accepted the gold from the commanders of thousands and of hundreds and took it into the Tent of Meeting as a memorial offering for the Israelites in the presence of the Lord.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad had large numbers of livestock and saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead was a good place to rear them. So they came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the Israelite leaders and said, "The towns of Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, which the Lord conquered in full view of the Israelites, are well-suited for the livestock that we your servants own."

They continued, "Please respond to our request favorably: give us this land. Don't make us cross the Jordan."

In reply Moses asked the tribes of Gad and Reuben, "Are you expecting your brothers to go and fight while you just sit here? Why discourage the Israelites from crossing into the country that the Lord has given them? This is just what your fathers did when I sent them out from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land. After your fathers traveled up the valley of Eshcol and explored the land, they discouraged the Israelites, persuading them not to enter the country that the Lord had given them. As a result, they made the Lord very angry that day, and he swore this oath, 'Not a single one of those I saved from Egypt who is twenty years old or older will ever see the land I promised with an oath to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they were not completely committed to me— no one except Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua, son of Nun, because they were completely committed to me.' The Lord was angry with Israel, and made them wander around in the desert for forty years, until the whole generation who had done evil in his sight had died.

Now look at you, you brood of sinners who have come to take your fathers' place to make the Lord even angrier with Israel! If you give up following him, he will abandon these people in the desert once again, and their deaths will be your fault!"

Then the tribes of Gad and Reuben came to Moses and told him, "We would plan to build stone walls to keep our livestock safe and towns for our children. But we will still get ourselves ready for battle, and we will be prepared to lead the Israelites until they can safely occupy their land. In the meantime, our children will stay behind, living in the fortified towns to protect them from the local people. We won't return to our homes until every Israelite is in possession of their allotted land. However, we won't own any land on the other side of the Jordan because we've received this land to own on this eastern side of the Jordan."

Moses responded, "If this is what you will actually do, if you will get yourselves ready for battle under the Lord's direction, and if all your troops cross the Jordan with the Lord until he has driven out his enemies ahead of him, then once the country is conquered with the Lord's help then you may return, and you will have fulfilled your obligations to the Lord and to Israel. You will own this land, granted to you by the Lord. But if you fail to do this, you will clearly be sinning against the Lord, and the consequences of your sin will catch up with you. Go ahead and build towns for your children and stone walls for your flocks, but make sure you do what you've promised!"

The tribes of Gad and Reuben promised Moses, "Sir, we your servants will do just as you have ordered. Our wives and children, our livestock and all our animals, will all remain here in the towns of Gilead. But we your servants are ready for battle, and all our troops will cross over to fight with the Lord's help, just as you have said, sir."

Moses gave the following instructions about them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua, son of Nun, and to the family leaders of the tribes of Israel. Moses told them, "If the tribes of Gad and Reuben cross the Jordan with you, with all their troops ready for battle with the Lord's help, and the land is conquered as you advance, then give them the land of Gilead to own. But if they don't get themselves ready for battle and cross over with you, then they must accept their allotted land among you in the country of Canaan."

The tribes of Gad and Reuben responded, "We will do just as the Lord has told us, your servants. We will cross over and enter the country of Canaan ready for battle with the Lord's help, so that we may have our allotted share of land on this side of the Jordan."

So Moses gave to the tribes of Gad and Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan. This land included its towns and their surrounding area. The people of Gad rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran as fortified towns, and they built stone walls for their flocks.

The people of Reuben rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, as well as Nebo and Baal-meon (changing their names), and Sibmah. In fact they renamed those towns they rebuilt.

The descendants of Machir, son of Manasseh, attacked Gilead and captured it. They drove out the Amorites who were living there. So Moses gave Gilead to the family of Machir, son of Manasseh, and they settled there. Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, attacked their villages and captured them. He named them the Villages of Jair. Nobah attacked Kenath and captured it, along with its villages. He named it Nobah after himself.

This is a record of the journeys made by the Israelites as they left Egypt in their tribal divisions led by Moses and Aaron. Moses recorded the different parts of their journey as instructed by the Lord. These are the journeys they made listed in order from where they started:

The Israelites left Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They set out in triumph as all the Egyptians watched. The Egyptians were burying all their firstborn that the Lord had killed, for the Lord had brought down his judgments on their gods. The Israelites left Rameses and set up camp at Succoth.

They moved on from Succoth and set up camp at Etham, on the edge of the desert.

They moved on from Etham, turning back towards Pi-hahiroth, opposite Baal-zephon, and set up camp near Migdol.

They moved on from Pi-hahiroth and crossed through the middle of the sea into the desert. They traveled on for three days into the Desert of Etham and set up camp at Marah.

They moved on from Marah and arrived at Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and set up camp there.

They moved on from Elim and set up camp beside the Red Sea.

They moved on from the Red Sea and set up camp in the Desert of Sin.

They moved on from the Desert of Sin and set up camp at Dophkah.

They moved on from Dophkah and set up camp at Alush.

They moved on from Alush and set up camp at Rephidim. There wasn't any water there for the people to drink.

They moved on from Rephidim and set up camp in the Sinai Desert.

They moved on from the Sinai Desert and set up camp at Kibroth-hattaavah.

They moved on from Kibroth-hattaavah and set up camp at Hazeroth.

They moved on from Hazeroth and set up camp at Rithmah.

They moved on from Rithmah and set up camp at Rimmon-perez.

They moved on from Rimmon-perez and set up camp at Libnah.

They moved on from Libnah and set up camp at Rissah.

They moved on from Rissah and set up camp at Kehelathah.

They moved on from Kehelathah and set up camp at Mount Shepher.

They moved on from Mount Shepher and set up camp at Haradah.

They moved on from Haradah and set up camp at Makheloth.

They moved on from Makheloth and set up camp at Tahath.

They moved on from Tahath and set up camp at Terah.

They moved on from Terah and set up camp at Mithkah.

They moved on from Mithkah and set up camp at Hashmonah.

They moved on from Hashmonah and set up camp at Moseroth.

They moved on from Moseroth and set up camp at Bene-jaakan.

They moved on from Bene-jaakan and set up camp at Hor-haggidgad.

They moved on from Hor-haggidgad and set up camp at Jotbathah.

They moved on from Jotbathah and set up camp at Abronah.

They moved on from Abronah and set up camp at Ezion-geber.

They moved on from Ezion-geber and set up camp at Kadesh in the Desert of Zin.

They moved on from Kadesh and set up camp at Mount Hor, on the edge of Edom. Aaron the priest climbed Mount Hor as the Lord had directed, and he died there on the first day of the fifth month, in the fortieth year after the Israelites had left Egypt. Aaron was 123 when he died on Mount Hor.

(The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev in the country of Canaan, found out that the Israelites were on their way.)

The Israelites moved on from Mount Hor and set up camp at Zalmonah.

They moved on from Zalmonah and set up camp at Punon.

They moved on from Punon and set up camp at Oboth.

They moved on from Oboth and set up camp at Iye-abarim on the border of Moab.

They moved on from Iye-abarim and set up camp at Dibon-gad.

They moved on from Dibon-gad and set up camp at Almon-diblathaim.

They moved on from Almon-diblathaim and set up camp in the mountains of Abarim opposite Nebo.

They moved on from the mountains of Abarim and set up camp on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho.

There on the plains of Moab they set up camp beside the Jordan, from Beth-jeshimoth to Abel-shittim. This was where, on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho, that the Lord told Moses, “Tell the Israelites, Once you cross the Jordan and enter the country of Canaan, you must drive out everyone living in the land, destroy all their carved images and metal idols, and tear down all their pagan temples. You are to take over the country and settle there, because I have given you the land and it belongs to you. You are to divide the land and allocate it by lot to the different tribal families. Give a larger portion to a larger family, and a smaller portion to a smaller family. Each one's allocation is decided by lot, and you will all receive an allocation depending on your tribe.

But if you don't drive out everyone living in the land, the people you allow to remain will be like grit in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will cause you trouble where you settle in the country. Eventually the punishment I planned for them I will inflict on you.”

The Lord told Moses, “Give this command to the Israelites: When you enter the country of Canaan, it will be allocated to you to own with the following boundaries:

The southern extent of your country will be from the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom. Your southern border will run east from the end of the Dead Sea, cross south of Scorpion Pass, on to Zin, and reach its southern limit south of Kadesh-barnea. Then it will go to Hazar-addar and on to Azmon. There the boundary will turn from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, ending at the Mediterranean Sea.

Your western border will be the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This is to be your boundary to the west.

Your northern border will run from the Mediterranean Sea straight to Mount Hor. From Mount Hor the boundary will go to Lebo-hamath, then on to Zedad, to Ziphron, ending at Hazar-enan. This will be your boundary to the north.

Your eastern border will run straight from Hazar-enan to Shepham Then the boundary will go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain. It will pass down along the slopes east of the Sea of Galilee. Then the boundary will go down along the Jordan, ending at the Dead Sea. This is to be your land with its surrounding borders."

Moses gave the order to the Israelites, "Allocate ownership of this land by lot. The Lord has commanded it to be given to the nine and a half tribes. The tribes of Reuben and Gad, together with the half-tribe of Manasseh, have already received their allocation. These two and a half tribes have received their allocation on the east side of the Jordan opposite Jericho."

The Lord told Moses, "These are the names of the men who will be in charge of allocating ownership of the land for you: Eleazar the priest and Joshua, son of Nun. Have one leader from each tribe help in the distribution of the land. These are their names:

From the tribe of Judah: Caleb, son of Jephunneh. From the tribe of Simeon: Shemuel, son of Ammihud. From the tribe of Benjamin: Elidad, son of Chislon. A leader from the tribe of Dan: Bukki, son of Jogli. A leader from the tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph: Hanniel son of Ephod. A leader from the tribe of Ephraim: Kemuel, son of Shiphtan. A leader from the tribe of Zebulun: Eli-zaphan, son of Parnach. A leader from the tribe of Issachar: Paltiel, son of Azzan. A leader from the tribe of Asher: Ahihud, son of Shelomi. A leader from the tribe of Naphtali: Pedahel, son of Ammihud."

These are the names of those the Lord put in charge of allocating land ownership in the country of Canaan.

The Lord spoke to Moses on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho. He told him, "Order the Israelites to provide from their land allocation towns for the Levites to live in and pastures around the towns. The towns are for them to live in, and the pastures will be for their herds and their flocks—for all their livestock. The pastures around the towns you give to the Levites are to extend out from the wall a thousand cubits on all sides. Measure two thousand cubits outside the town on the east, two thousand on the south, two thousand on the west, and two thousand on the north, with the town in the middle. These larger areas will be their pastures around the towns.

Six of the towns you give the Levites are to be sanctuary towns, where a person who kills someone can run for protection. As well as these towns, give the Levites forty-two more. The total number of towns you are to give the Levites is forty-eight, along with their pastures. The towns that you allocate to be given to the Levites from the territory of the Israelites will be more from a larger tribe and less from a smaller one. The number will be in proportion to the size of the land allocation of each tribe."

The Lord told Moses, "Tell the Israelites: 'When you cross over the Jordan into Canaan, choose towns as your sanctuary towns, so a person who kills someone by mistake may run there. These towns will be for you places of sanctuary from those seeking revenge, so that the killer will not die until they are tried in court.

The towns you choose will be your six sanctuary towns. Choose three cities on the other side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge. These six cities will be places of sanctuary for the Israelites and for foreigners or settlers among them, so that anyone who kills a person by mistake may run there.

But if anyone deliberately hits someone with something made of iron and kills them, that person is a murderer and must be executed. If anyone picks up something made of stone that could be used as a weapon and hits someone with it, and kills them, that person is a murderer and must be executed. If anyone picks up something made of wood that could be used as a weapon and hits someone with it, and kills them, that person is a murderer and must be executed.

The avenger is to execute the murderer. When he finds the murderer, he is to kill him. Similarly, if anyone hates someone and knocks them down or deliberately throws something at them, and they're killed; or if someone hits another with his hand and they die, the one who hit him must be executed because he is a murderer. When the avenger finds the murderer, he is to kill him.

But if anyone knocks someone else down without meaning to and without hating them, or throws something at them not meaning to hurt them, or carelessly drops a heavy stone that kills them, but not as an enemy or intending to harm them, then the community must judge between the killer and the avenger following these regulations. The court is to protect the killer from being attacked by the avenger and must return him to the sanctuary town that he ran to, and he must stay there until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with holy oil.

But if the killer ever leaves the limits of the sanctuary town where he ran to, and the avenger finds him outside his sanctuary town and kills him, then the avenger will not be guilty of murder, because the killer has to stay in his sanctuary town until the death of the high priest. Only after the death of the high priest is he allowed to return to the land he owns. These regulations apply to all future generations wherever you live.

If anyone kills a person, the murderer is to be executed based on the evidence given by witnesses, plural. No one is to be executed based on the evidence given by a single witness.

You are not to accept payment instead of executing a murderer who has been found guilty—they must be executed. Also you are not allowed to accept payment for a person who runs to a sanctuary town and permit him to return and live on his own land before the death of the high priest.

Don't pollute the land where you live because bloodshed pollutes the land, and the land where blood is shed can't be purified except by the blood of the one who shed it. Don't make the land impure where you live because I live there too. I am the Lord, and I live with the Israelites.'"

The family heads of the descendants of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, one of the tribes of

Joseph, came and spoke before Moses and the Israelite leaders, the heads of families. They said, “When the Lord ordered you, my lord, to allocate land ownership to the Israelites by lot, he also ordered you to give our brother Zelophehad's share to his daughters. However, if they marry men from the other tribes of Israel, their allocation would be taken away from our fathers' share and added to the tribe of the men they marry. That part of our allocation would be lost to us. So when the Jubilee for the Israelites comes around, their allocation would be added to the tribe into which they marry, and taken away from our fathers' tribe.”

Following what the Lord told him, Moses gave these orders to the Israelites, “What the tribe of the sons of Joseph says is right. This is what the Lord has ordered in regard to Zelophehad's daughters: They can marry anyone they want as long as they marry within a family that belongs to their father's tribe. No land allocation in Israel may be passed from tribe to tribe, because every Israelite is to hold onto the allocation of his father's tribe. Every daughter who possesses an inheritance from any Israelite tribe must marry within a clan of the tribe of her father, so that every Israelite will possess the inheritance of his fathers. No land allocation may be passed from one tribe to another, for each Israelite tribe must hold onto its own allocation.”

Zelophehad's daughters followed the Lord's orders through Moses. Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, Zelophehad's daughters, married cousins on their father's side. They married within the families of the descendants of Manasseh, son of Joseph, and their land allocation stayed within their father's tribe.

These are the orders and regulations that the Lord gave the Israelites through Moses on the plains of Moab beside the Jordan opposite Jericho.

Deuteronomy

Book of Deuteronomy

This is the record of what Moses told all the Israelites during their time in the desert to the east of the Jordan. They were in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran on the one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab on the other. (It takes eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the road that passes Mount Seir.)

On the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year, Moses recounted to the Israelites everything that the Lord had instructed him to tell them. This happened after he defeated Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and then at Edrei after he defeated Og king of Bashan, who ruled in Ashtaroth.

Speaking on the east side of the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses began to explain these instructions, saying:

The Lord our God told us at Horeb: "You have remained here beside this mountain for long enough. Continue your journey and go to the hill country of the Amorites and all their neighbors, into the Jordan Valley, into the hill country, into the foothills, into the Negev, and along the coast to the country of the Canaanites up to Lebanon, as far as the great River Euphrates.

Look, I'm giving this land to you. Go and take ownership of the land that the Lord promised he would give to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to their descendants who would follow them."

That's when I told you, "I can't take responsibility for all of you by myself. The Lord your God has increased your numbers so much that today there are as many of you as there are stars in the sky. May the Lord, the God of your forefathers, multiply you a thousand times and bless you as he has promised. But how can I take on all your troubles, burdens, and arguments just by myself? You must choose for yourselves wise, experienced men with good judgment from each of your tribes, and I will put them in charge as your leaders."

You replied to me, saying, "Your proposal is a good one."

So I summoned your tribal leaders, men with good judgment, and put them in charge of you, as commanders and officials for your tribes. Some were responsible for thousands, some for hundreds, some for fifties, and some for tens.

At the same time I gave strict instructions to your judges: "Hear the cases brought between your brothers, and make sure you are fair when you judge between a man and his brother or a foreigner living among you. Don't show any favoritism when you judge—treat the powerful and the common people just the same. Don't let anyone intimidate you, because judgment is done on God's behalf. Bring me any case that is too hard for you, and I will hear it."

This was also the time I instructed you about everything you had to do.

Following the orders of the Lord our God, we left Horeb and set off towards the hill country of the Amorites, passing through the whole of the large and terrifying desert that you yourselves have experienced. When we reached Kadesh-barnea, I explained to you, "You have reached the hill country of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving to us. Look, the Lord your God has given you the land! Go and take ownership of the land as the Lord, the God of your forefathers, has told you. Don't be frightened or terrified."

Then you all came to me and suggested, "Let's send men on ahead to explore the land and report back to us about what route to take and which towns we'll come across."

It seemed like a good plan to me, so I chose twelve of your men, one from each tribe. They set off and went up into the hill country as far as the Valley of Eshcol, exploring the land. They brought back some of the country's fruit, carrying it down to us, and gave us the report: "The Lord our God is giving us good land."

But you didn't want to go. You rebelled against the instructions of the Lord your God. You complained while you were in your tents and said, "It's because the Lord hates us that he led us out of Egypt in order to hand us over to the Amorites to be wiped out. Where are we going? Our brothers terrified us because they told us: 'The people are bigger and taller than us; the towns are large, with high walls that reach the sky. We even saw the descendants of the giant Anak there!'"

So I told you, "Don't be frightened or scared of them! The Lord your God who leads your way will fight for you in the same way you saw him do for you in Egypt. He did the same in the desert—you saw how the Lord your God carried you like a father carries his son during your whole journey until you arrived here." Despite all this, you didn't trust the Lord your God, who led you on the journey, present in the fire by night and in the cloud by day, looking to find a place for you to camp and to show you the way to go.

When the Lord heard what you were saying, he got angry and swore an oath: "Not a single one of this evil generation will see the good land I promised to give your forefathers, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh. He will see it, and I will give him and his descendants the land he explored, because he was completely committed to the Lord."

The Lord also got angry with me because of you. He told me, "Even you won't enter the country. However, Joshua, son of Nun, your assistant, will enter it. Encourage him, for he will help Israel to occupy the land. Your small children that you claimed would become prisoners, your children who at the time didn't know good from evil, they will be the ones to enter the land that I will give them, and they will occupy it. But now turn around and head back into the desert on the road that leads to the Red Sea."

But you answered and told me, "We have sinned against the Lord! We will go and we will fight and we will do everything the Lord our God has ordered us to do." Then you all picked up your weapons and prepared for battle thinking it would be easy to go and fight in the hill country.

But the Lord instructed me, “Order them not to go and fight because I won't be with you to prevent you from being defeated by your enemies.”

I told you this, but you refused to listen. You defied the instructions of the Lord and arrogantly went to fight in the hill country.

Then the Amorites living there in the hills came and attacked you. They chased after you like a swarm of bees, killing you all the way from Seir to Hormah. You came back to camp and wept before the Lord, but he refused to listen to what you said or to pay attention to you. You stayed there in Kadesh for a long time.

Then we turned around and headed back into the desert on the road that leads to the Red Sea, as the Lord had told me, and we wandered around Mount Seir for a long time.

This is when the Lord told me, “You have been wandering around this mountain long enough. Go back north, and give these orders to the people: You are going to pass through the territory of your relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be frightened of you, so you need to be very careful. Don't fight them, for I'm not going to give you any of their land, not even the size of a footprint, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau and it belongs to him. Pay them with money for the food you eat and the water you drink.”

Remember that the Lord your God has blessed you in everything you've done. He has looked after you during your journey through this large desert. The Lord your God has been with you for these forty years, and you haven't lacked anything.

So we passed by our relatives, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. We didn't take the Arabah road from Elath and Ezion-geber. Instead we used the road that goes through the desert of Moab. Then the Lord told me, “Don't cause the Moabites any trouble or fight them, for I'm not going to give you any of their land, because I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot and it belongs to them.”

(A strong and numerous people called the Emim once lived there. They were as tall as the Anakim, and just like the Anakim, they were also considered as Rephaim, but the Moabites called them Emim. Previously the Horites lived in Seir, but the descendants of Esau took over their land. They killed the Horites and settled there, just like Israel did when they occupied the land that the Lord had given them.)

Then the Lord told us, “Go and cross over Zered Brook.” So we crossed over Zered Brook.

The time it took for us to travel from Kadesh-barnea to when we crossed over the Brook of Zered was thirty-eight years. By this time the entire generation of warriors had died and were no longer part of the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them would happen. In fact the Lord worked against them to remove them from the camp, until they were all dead.

Once the people's warriors had died, the Lord told me, “Today you will cross out of Moab at the border near Ar. However, when you enter Ammonite territory, don't cause them any trouble or fight with them for I'm not going to give you any Ammonite land, because I have given it to the descendants of Lot and it belongs to them.”

(This land was previously considered as the country of the Rephaim who used to live there. However, the Ammonites called them Zamzummites. They were a strong and numerous people, as tall as the Anakim. But the Lord destroyed them when the Ammonites invaded and drove them out and settled there, just as he'd done for the descendants of Esau who lived in Seir when he destroyed the Horites. They drove them out and settled where they used to live, and are still there to this day. The Avvim, living in villages as far away as Gaza, were destroyed by the Philistines, who came from Crete, and settled where they used to live.)

Then the Lord told us, “Get up, go and cross the Arnon Valley. Look, I have handed over to you Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, as well as his land. Go and start taking it over, and fight him in battle. From this day on, I'm going to make all nations on earth dread you—they will be terrified of you. Because of the news they hear about you they will tremble in terror when you appear.”

Moses told the Israelites, “From the Kedemoth Desert I sent messengers with an offer of peace to Sihon, king of Heshbon, telling him, ‘Let us pass through your land. We'll stay on the main road and won't turn off either to the right or to the left. Sell us food to eat and water to drink for money. Just let us pass through on foot, just like the descendants of Esau living in Seir and the Moabites living in Ar allowed us, until we cross over the Jordan into the country that the Lord our God is giving to us.”

But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through, for the Lord your God gave him a stubborn spirit and an obstinate attitude, so the Lord could hand him over to you, as he has now done.

Then the Lord told me, “Look, I have started handing Sihon and his land over to you. Now you can begin to conquer and take over his land.”

Sihon and his whole army came out to fight us at Jahaz. The Lord our God handed him over to us, and we killed him, his sons, and all his army. We also captured all his towns, and set apart for destruction the people of every town: men, women, and children. We didn't leave any survivors. All we took for ourselves was the livestock and plunder from the towns we'd captured. No town had walls too high for us to conquer—from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Valley, the town in the valley, all the way to Gilead. The Lord our God handed them all over to us. But you didn't go anywhere near the country of the Ammonites—the area that borders the Jabbok River or the towns of the hill country, or any other place that the Lord our God had placed off limits.

We set off and went up the road towards Bashan. Og, king of Bashan, and his whole army came out to fight us at Edrei. But the Lord told me, “Don't be afraid of him, for I have handed him over to you, together with all his people and his land. Deal with him as you did with Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon.”

So the Lord our God handed over to us Og, king of Bashan, and his whole army as well. We killed them and left no survivors. We also captured all his towns.

There wasn't a single town among all the sixty that we didn't capture. This included the whole region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All of these towns were fortified with high walls and gates with bars. There were many more villages as well, those that didn't have walls. We set them apart for destruction, just as we did to Sihon, king of Heshbon, killing all the men, women, and children of every city. But we took for ourselves all the livestock and plunder from the towns.

So in summary, at that time we took from the two Amorite kings the land east of the Jordan, from the Arnon Valley all the way to Mount Hermon. (Mount Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonians and Senir by the Amorites.) The area included all the towns of the plain, all of Gilead, and all of Bashan, up to and including the towns of Salecah and Edrei in the kingdom of Og. (Only Og, king of Bashan, was left of the race of the Rephaim. He had a bed made of iron that was nine cubits long and four cubits wide. It's still in the Ammonite town of Rabbah.)

This is when we took over the land. I assigned to the tribes of Reuben and Gad the land to the north of the town of Aroer in the Arnon Valley, and half the hill country of Gilead, together with its towns. I assigned to the half-tribe of Manasseh the rest of Gilead, and all of Bashan, the kingdom of Og. (The whole region of Argob, all the territory of Bashan, was formerly called the land of the Rephaim.) Jair, a descendant of Manasseh, took over the whole region of Argob right up to the border of the Geshurites and Maacathites and changed the name of Bashan to Havvoth-jair after himself, which is still its name to this day. I assigned the rest of Gilead to the descendants of Machir, while I assigned to the tribes of Reuben and Gad the area from Gilead to the Arnon Valley, the boundary line being the middle of the valley, all the way to the Jabbok River on the Ammonite border. The Jordan River in the Arabah bordered it to the west, from the Sea of Galilee to the Sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea). On the east lay the slopes of the Pisgah mountain range.

This was when I gave you these instructions: “The Lord your God has given you this country as yours to own. All your warriors are to cross over, ready for battle, leading your fellow Israelites. However, your wives, your children, and your livestock (I know that you have plenty of livestock) can stay behind in the towns I have given you, until the Lord gives victory to your fellow Israelites and they have peace, just as he has for you, after taking over the land that the Lord your God is giving them on the other side of the Jordan. Then you can all return to the land I have given you to own.”

This was the time I ordered Joshua: “You've seen with your own eyes seen everything the Lord your God did to these two kings. The Lord will do the same to all the kingdoms where you're going. Don't be afraid of them, for the Lord your God himself will be fighting on your side.”

This was also the time I pleaded with the Lord, saying, “Lord God, you've really only just begun to show your power and greatness to me, your servant. What god in heaven or on earth has the incredible ability to do the mighty acts you do? Please, let me cross over the Jordan and see the good land there, the beautiful hills, and the mountains of Lebanon!”

But the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he refused to listen to me. “That's enough,” he told me. “Don't talk to me about this anymore. Climb up to the top of Mount Pisgah and look west, north, south, and east. Take a long look at the land with your own eyes, because you're not going to cross this Jordan. Instead, put Joshua in charge because he's the one who will cross over, leading the people and helping them to take over the land that you see. Encourage him and support him.”

So we remained there in the valley near Beth-peor.

People of Israel, pay attention to the rules and regulations I'm teaching you to observe. That way you can stay alive, and go in and take over the country the Lord, the God of your forefathers, is giving you. You are not to add to or take away from what I'm telling you, so that you can keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I'm ordering you to follow. You've seen for yourselves what the Lord did at Baal-peor where the Lord your God killed everyone among you who worshiped Baal of Peor. Those of you who were faithful to the Lord your God are still alive today, every one of you.

Listen, I have taught you the rules and regulations just as the Lord my God ordered me to do, so you can follow them in the country that you are about to enter and take over. Be careful to observe them, because this will demonstrate your wisdom and insight to the other people living there who are watching. They will find out about all these rules and say, “The people of this great nation are very wise and have good insight.” What nation is as great as us, having a god so close to them as the Lord our God is to us whenever we call on him? What nation is as great as us, having such good rules and regulations like all these laws that I'm placing before you today?

Just make sure to be very careful, and really watch what you do, so you don't forget the things you've seen. Keep them in mind as long as you live. Teach them to your children and grandchildren. That day when you stood in the presence of the Lord your God at Horeb, the Lord told me, “Have the people come to me and to hear what I have to say, so they may learn to have respect for me throughout their lives here on earth, and so they may teach this to their children.”

You gathered and stood at the foot of the mountain. The mountain was on fire, shooting out flames into the sky and producing thick dark clouds. The Lord spoke to you from the fire. You heard the words, but you didn't see the form of anyone speaking—there was just a voice. He explained to you his agreement, the Ten Commandments, which he ordered you to follow. He wrote them down on two tablets of stone. This was the time that the Lord ordered me to teach you the rules and regulations that you are to follow when you arrive in the country you're going to own once you've crossed the Jordan.

You didn't see any form when the Lord spoke to you from the fire at Horeb, so be very careful that you don't spoil your relationship with the Lord by making an idol for yourselves in any shape or form, whether it looks like a male or female, or any land animal or bird that

flies, or of any animal that crawls on the ground or any fish in the deep sea. When you look up at the sky and see the sun, moon, and stars—all the heavenly bodies—don't be tempted to bow down to them. Don't worship them like all the other nations on earth in the way that the Lord allowed. Remember that the Lord took you and led you out of the iron furnace which was in Egypt to be his own people, just as you are today.

But the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he vowed that I wouldn't cross the Jordan to enter the good land that the Lord your God is giving you to own. So I will not be crossing the Jordan, because I have to die here in this land. But you will cross over and occupy that good land. However, be careful not to forget the agreement of the Lord your God that he made with you. Don't make an idol for yourselves in the form of anything, because he has forbidden you to do this. For the Lord your God is a fire that burns everything up. He is an exclusive God.

After you have been living in the country for a long time and have had children and grandchildren, you may then spoil the relationship you have with the Lord and make an idol in some form. The Lord your God sees this as evil and it makes him angry. If you do this, I call on heaven and earth to be witnesses against you today that you will be completely wiped out from the country that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. You will not live long there—you will be totally destroyed. The Lord will scatter you among the other nations, and not many of you will survive in the countries where the Lord has exiled you. There you will worship gods of wood and stone made by human beings. These idols can't see or hear or eat or smell.

However, if while you're there you decide to come to the Lord your God, you will find him if you come to him whole-heartedly, with complete commitment. When you are in trouble, after you've experienced all these things, then eventually you will return to the Lord your God and do what he says. The Lord your God is a merciful God. He won't abandon you or destroy you or forget the agreement he made with your forefathers, confirmed by a solemn promise.

Think about it! Examine the whole of history from the beginning of time, long before you existed, when God made human beings, right up until now. Ask this question anywhere, from one end of the earth to the other: Has anything as amazing as this ever happened before; has anyone ever heard anything like this? Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking out of the fire, like you have, and survived? Has any god tried to take a nation out of another nation and make them his own, using tests and signs and miracles and war—with his great power and incredible strength and terrifying actions—like the Lord your God did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes? You were shown all this so you could be certain that the Lord is God and there is no one like him. He made you hear his voice from heaven so you would obey him. On earth he revealed himself through blazing fire, and you heard him speak to you from the fire. Because he loved your forefathers, he chose you, their descendants. He himself led you out of Egypt by his great power, driving out ahead of you nations that were greater and stronger than you, in order to lead you to their land and give it to you as yours to own, just as you do today. So today be sure about this and never forget: the Lord is the only God in heaven above and on the earth below. Observe his rules and regulations that I'm giving you right now, so that you and your children will do well, and that you may have long lives in the country that the Lord your God is giving you for all time.

Then Moses assigned three sanctuary towns to the east of the Jordan where a person could run to after accidentally killing someone without deliberate hatred. To save their life they could run to one of these towns: Bezer in the desert plain belonging to the tribe of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the tribe of Gad, or Golan in Bashan belonging to the tribe of Manasseh.

This is the law that Moses placed before the Israelites. These are the laws, rules, and regulations Moses gave them after they had come out of Egypt. This was when they were in the valley to the east of the Jordan near Beth-peor in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites. He had ruled from Heshbon and had been defeated by Moses and the Israelites after they had left Egypt. They took over his country and the country of Og king of Bashan. (They were the two kings of the Amorites who previously ruled on the east side of the Jordan.) The territory went from the town of Aroer on the edge of the Arnon Valley all the way to Mount Sirion, otherwise known as Mount Hermon, and included all the Arabah to the east of the Jordan down as far as the Dead Sea beside the slopes of Mount Pisgah.

Then Moses called all the Israelites together and told them: Listen, people of Israel to the rules and regulations that I'm giving you today. Learn them and make sure you follow them carefully. Remember that the Lord our God made an agreement with us at Horeb.

He didn't make this agreement with our fathers, but with us, all of those who are still alive today. The Lord talked with you person to person from the fire on the mountain.

This was the time when I stood between the Lord and you to tell you what the Lord said, because you were afraid of the fire and refused to go up the mountain. He told you,

"I am the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt, out of the prison-house of slavery.

You must not have any other gods except me.

You must not make for yourself any kind of idol, whether in the form of anything in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You must not bow down before them or worship them; for I am the Lord your God and I am passionately exclusive. I lay the consequences of the sin of those who hate me on their sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons; but I show trustworthy love to the thousands of generations who love me and keep my commandments.

You must not use the name of the Lord your God in a wrong way, for the Lord will not forgive anyone who uses his name in a wrong way.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you to do. You have six days to work and earn your living, but the seventh day is the Sabbath to honor the Lord your God. On this day you must not do any work—not you, not your son or daugh-

ter, not your male slave or female slave or your ox or donkey or any of your livestock, and not the foreigner who is staying with you, so that your male slave and female slave can have the same rest as you. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, and that the Lord your God led you out from there with his great power and incredible strength. This is why the Lord your God has ordered you to keep the Sabbath day. Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you to do, so that you may live a long time and do well in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You must not kill.

You must not commit adultery.

You must not steal.

You must not give false evidence against others.

You must not desire to have anyone else's wife. You must not desire to have their house or field, or their male slave or female slave, or their ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to them."

In a loud voice the Lord gave these commandments to all of you, speaking from the fire, the cloud, and the deep darkness that covered the mountain. He didn't add anything else. He wrote them down on two tablets of stone and gave them to me. When you heard the voice that came from the darkness while the mountain was on fire, all your tribal leaders and elders came to me, and said, "Listen, the Lord our God has revealed his glory and majesty to us, and we have heard his voice that came from the fire. Today we have seen that human beings don't die even when God speaks with them. But we could still die, couldn't we? This enormous fire is going to burn us up, and we'll die if the Lord our God continues to speak to us. Has anybody else ever heard the living God speak from the fire and survived, as we have? You go and listen to everything the Lord our God tells you. Then you can repeat to us everything the Lord our God tells you. We promise to listen and obey."

The Lord heard what you told me, and he said to me, "I've heard what these people told you. All that they've said is good. I only wish they really did respect me and always kept my commandments so that they and their children would do well for all time. Go and tell them: 'You need to return to your tents.' But you are to stay here with me so that I can give you all the commandments and rules and regulations you are to teach them to follow in the country that I am giving them to take over and own."

So make sure you do what the Lord your God has ordered you to do—don't go astray in any direction. Follow all the ways the Lord your God has shown you, so that you do well and live long lives in the country that you will occupy.

These are the commandments and rules and regulations that the Lord your God has ordered me to teach you to follow in the country that you're going to enter and occupy. This is so you and your children and grandchildren will show respect to the Lord your God throughout your lives by keeping all his rules and regulations that I give you, and so that you may have a long life.

Listen, people of Israel, and be careful to observe them, so that you may do well and have many descendants in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your forefathers, promised you. Listen, people of Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is the only one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your mind and with all your being and with all your strength. The commands I'm giving you today must stay in your minds. You are to explain them carefully to your children and talk about them when you're at home and when you're traveling, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hands as reminders and put them on your foreheads as well. Write them on the doorposts of your homes and on your gates.

The Lord your God is going to take you into the country he promised to give you and your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's a country with large, prosperous towns that you didn't build, with houses full of plenty of good things that you didn't provide, that have wells you didn't dig, and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. When you eat and are full make sure you don't forget the Lord who led you out of Egypt, out of the prison-house of slavery.

Respect the Lord your God. Worship only him, and make promises only in his name. Don't worship any other gods, the gods of the peoples around you, because the Lord your God, who lives among you, is an exclusive God, and the Lord your God will become angry with you, and he will wipe you out. Don't test the Lord your God like you did at Massah. You must be careful to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and the laws and rules he's given you.

Do what's good and right in the Lord's sight so that it will go well for you and that you may enter and take over the good land that the Lord your God promised to give your forefathers. He will drive out all your enemies ahead of you, just as he said.

In the future, when your children come and ask you, "What's the point of decrees and rules and regulations that the Lord our God ordered you to follow?" then you are to tell them, "Once we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord by his power led us out of Egypt. Before our very eyes the Lord brought down incredible and terrifying signs and miracles on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his people. But he led us out of there to take us here, giving us this country that he had promised to our forefathers. The Lord ordered us to keep all these laws and to respect the Lord our God, so that we would always be safe and well, as we are today And if we carefully observe each of these commandments as we live in the presence of the Lord, as he instructed us, then we will be right with him."

The Lord your God is going to lead you into the land that you are taking over in order to own it, and will drive out ahead of you many other nations: the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations that are larger and stronger than you.

When the Lord your God has handed them over to you to defeat them, then you must set them apart for destruction. Don't make any peace treaty with them and don't show them any mercy. Don't intermarry with them. Don't let your daughters marry their sons or have their daughters marry your sons, because they will lead your children away from following me to worship

other gods. Then the Lord will be angry with you, and he will quickly come and kill you.

On the contrary, this is what you are to do to them: tear down their altars, knock down their idolatrous pillars, cut down their Asherah poles, and burn down their idols. For you are the Lord your God's holy people. The Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special people, valued above all other peoples on the earth. It wasn't because there were so many of you that the Lord loved you more than any other nation, in fact he chose you though there were so few of you.

However, because the Lord loved you and kept the promise he gave to your forefathers, He led you out by his power and rescued you from the prison-house of slavery, from the rule of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. That's why you can be sure that the Lord your God is the true God, the faithful God who keeps his agreement based on trustworthy love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. But he doesn't hesitate to pay back those who hate him by destroying them.

So keep the commandments and rules and regulations that I'm giving you to follow today. If you listen to these regulations and are careful to observe them, then the Lord your God will keep his agreement and the trustworthy love that he promised to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and give you many descendants. He will bless your children and the crops your land produces—your grain, new wine, and olive oil, the calves of your cattle herds and the lambs of your flocks—in the land that he promised your forefathers to give you.

You will be blessed more than any other nation; none of you will be childless, and none of your livestock will fail to have young. The Lord will keep you from having any kind of sickness. He will not let you have any of the terrible diseases you saw in Egypt, but he will let all who hate you suffer from them.

You are to destroy all the nations the Lord your God hands over to you. Don't look on them with sympathy. Don't worship their gods, for that will end up being a trap to you. You may say to yourselves, “These nations are stronger than us. How on earth can we drive them out?” But don't be afraid of them. Make sure you remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt: the amazing tests you witnessed, the signs and miracles, the great power and incredible strength the Lord your God used to lead you out. The Lord your God is going to deal with all the nations you're currently afraid of in the same way.

On top of this, the Lord your God will send the hornet against them until anyone who has survived and anyone hiding from you have been killed. Don't be frightened of these nations, for the Lord your God, who is with you, is a powerful and awesome God. The Lord your God will drive out these nations ahead of you in stages. You won't be able to get rid of them all at the same time, or you'd be overwhelmed by wild animals. But the Lord your God will hand them over to you and throw them into a terrible panic, until they are wiped out. He will give their defeated kings to you to be killed, and even their names will be forgotten. No one will be able to withstand you; you will completely destroy them.

You must burn the idols of their god. Don't desire the silver and gold that covers them. Don't take it or otherwise it will be a trap for you because the Lord your God detests anything to do with idols. Don't bring any detestable idol into your house, otherwise you will be treated just like it—by being set apart for destruction. You are to treat idols as totally despicable, and stay far away from them, because they are set apart for destruction.

You must take care to follow every commandment I am giving you today, so that you may live and have many descendants, and go in and take over the country the Lord promised to give to your forefathers. Remember how for these forty years the Lord your God has led you all the way through the desert, humbling you and testing you in order to find out what you were really thinking, and whether or not you would keep his commandments.

He humbled you, and when you were hungry he gave you manna to eat, which nobody, including you and your forefathers, had ever had before. This was in order to make it clear to you that human beings do not live by only eating bread, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. During these forty years your clothing didn't wear out and your feet didn't swell up.

So you should realize that just as a parent disciplines their child, so the Lord your God disciplines you. That's why you have to keep the commandments of the Lord your God, following his ways and respecting him.

For the Lord your God is taking you to a good country. It's a land of streams and pools and springs that flow through the valleys and down the hills; It's a land that produces wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey. It's a land where you won't run out of food, where you will have everything you need; a land whose rocks contain iron ore and whose hills can be mined for copper. When you eat and are full, make sure you thank the Lord your God for the good land that he's given you.

Make sure you don't forget the Lord your God by disobeying his commandments and rules and regulations that I'm giving you today. For when you eat and are full, when you build beautiful houses to live in, and when your herds and flocks grow larger, and your silver and gold accumulates, and all your possessions increase, then you will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt, out of the prison-house of slavery.

He guided you through the immense and terrifying desert with its poisonous snakes and scorpions—a dried up, waterless land. He brought water for you out of a flint rock. He fed you in the desert with manna that your forefathers had never known, humbling you and testing you, so that eventually you would do well in the future.

You might think to yourselves, “I became rich through all my hard work.” But remember it's the Lord your God who gives you the ability to become rich, in order to fulfill his agreement he promised to your forefathers that still exists today.

If you ever forget the Lord your God, and run after other gods, worshiping and bowing down to them, I assure you right now that you will definitely die! In the same way the Lord destroyed the nations as you advanced, you will also die if you don't obey the Lord your God.

Listen, people of Israel! Shortly you're going to cross the Jordan to enter and take over the country from nations that are larger and stronger than you, that have large towns with walls that reach up into the sky. The people are strong and tall; they are the descendants of the Anakim. You all know about them and you have heard the saying, “Who could ever defeat the sons of Anak?” But you should realize that today the Lord your God is going across ahead of you. He is like a consuming fire; he will destroy them and defeat them ahead of you. You will drive them out and quickly wipe them out, just as the Lord promised you.

When the Lord your God has driven them out ahead of you, don't say to yourselves, “It's because I'm such a good person that the Lord has brought me here to take over this land.” No, the Lord is driving out these nations ahead of you because they're so wicked. It's not because you're so good or moral that you're going to take over their land. No, it's because of their wickedness that the Lord your God is driving out these nations ahead of you, to keep the promise he made to your fathers—to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You'd better believe that it's not because you're such good people that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to own, because you are stubborn, hard-hearted people.

Remember how you provoked the Lord your God in the desert! Don't ever forget it! From the time you left the land of Egypt until you arrived here, you've been constantly rebelling against the Lord. At Horeb you provoked the Lord, making him so angry he was about to destroy you. This was when I climbed up the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets that recorded the agreement the Lord made with you. I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights, and I didn't eat or drink anything.

The Lord gave me the two stone tablets on which he'd written with his finger everything he'd told you when he spoke from the fire on the mountain when we were all assembled there. After forty days and forty nights, the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the agreement. The Lord told me, “Hurry! Go down immediately, because your people that you led out of Egypt, are committing a terrible sin. They have disobeyed what I told them so quickly! They have made themselves an idol using molten metal.”

The Lord also told me, “I have been watching these people, and they really are stubborn and hard-hearted. Leave me, so that I can destroy them and wipe out their name completely. Then I will turn you into a nation even more powerful and more important than them.”

I went back down the mountain while it was still on fire, carrying the two tablets of the agreement. Then I saw how much you had sinned against the Lord your God by making for yourselves a molten calf. You had disobeyed what the Lord had told you so quickly. I threw the two tablets down, smashing them to pieces as you watched.

Then I lay down on the ground before the Lord for forty days and forty nights, just as I had before. I didn't eat or drink anything because of all the sins you had committed by doing what was evil in the Lord's sight, making him angry. I was terrified at how angry and furious the Lord was with you. He was ready to destroy you. But once again the Lord listened to me.

The Lord was so angry with Aaron he was ready to destroy him, but right then I prayed for Aaron too. I took that abominable thing, the calf you'd made, and burned it. Then I crushed it up and ground it into dust, and I threw it into the stream that descended from the mountain.

But you went on provoking the Lord at Taberah, at Massah, and at Kibroth-hattaavah. When the Lord had you leave Kadesh-barnea, he told you, “Go and take over the country that I've given you.”

But you defied the command of the Lord your God. You didn't believe him and you didn't obey him. You have been rebelling against the Lord from the day I first knew you.

So I lay down on the ground before the Lord for forty days and forty nights, because the Lord had threatened to destroy you. I prayed to the Lord, saying, “Please Lord, God, don't destroy your people that belong to you, the ones whom you rescued by your great ability and led out of Egypt by your power. Please remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Please disregard the stubbornness of this people and their wicked sin. If you don't, those people back in Egypt will say, ‘The Lord brought them out to kill them in the desert because he couldn't take them to the land he'd promised them, and because he hated them.’ But they are your people, Lord! They belong to you! You led them out of Egypt by your amazing power and might!”

After that the Lord told me, “Cut out two stone tablets just like the first ones, make an Ark out of wood, and come up to me on the mountain. I will write the same words on the tablets that were on the first ones, which you broke. Then put them in the Ark.”

I made an Ark out of acacia wood, cut out two stone tablets like the first ones, and went up the mountain carrying them. The Lord wrote what he had before on the tablets, the Ten Commandments that he'd told you when he spoke from the fire on the mountain when we were all assembled there. The Lord gave them to me, and I went back down the mountain and put them in the Ark I'd made following the Lord's instructions. They have been there ever since.

The Israelites went from the wells of the people of Jaakan to Moserah. Aaron died there and was buried, and Eleazar his son took over as priest. From there they moved on to Gudgodah, and from Gudgodah to Jotbathah, a land that had many streams. At this time the Lord put the tribe of Levi in charge of carrying the Ark of the Lord's Agreement, as well as serving the Lord by standing in his presence, and of pronouncing blessings in his name, as they continue to do to this day. That's why the tribe of Levi has no land allowance or share among the other tribes. The Lord provides what they need, just as the Lord your God promised.

I remained on the mountain forty days and forty nights as before, and during that time the Lord listened

to my prayers once more and agreed not to destroy you. Then the Lord told me, “Get ready and continue your journey leading the people so they may enter and take over the land that I promised their forefathers to give them.”

People of Israel, what does the Lord your God want from you? He wants you to respect the Lord your God by following all his ways. He wants you to love him. He wants you to worship the Lord your God with all your mind and with all your being, He wants you to keep the commandments and regulations of the Lord that I am giving you today for your own good. Look! Everything belongs to the Lord your God: the heavens, the highest heavens, and the earth and all that is there. Yet the Lord was attracted to your forefathers and he loved them. He has also chosen you, their descendants, above any other people, even until now. Dedicate yourselves to God. Don't be stubborn and hard-hearted anymore.

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords. He is the great, powerful, and awesome God. He shows no favoritism and accepts no bribes. He makes sure that orphans and widows receive justice, and he loves the foreigners, providing them with food and clothing. You too must love the foreigner because you yourselves were once foreigners in Egypt.

You must respect the Lord your God and worship him. Hold onto him and make your promises in his name. He is the one you should praise and he is your God, who has carried out for you these incredible and awesome miracles that you've seen with your own eyes. When your forefathers went to Egypt there were only seventy of them in total, but now God has increased your numbers so much that there are as many of you as there are stars in the sky.

Love the Lord your God and do everything he says —his rules, regulations, and commandments.

You should realize that it's not your children who have experienced the Lord your God's discipline. It was you who saw his greatness, his power and strength; and his miracles. You saw what he did to Pharaoh king of Egypt and his whole country. You saw what he did to the Egyptian army and its horses and chariots when he swept them away in the Red Sea, drowning them as they chased after you. The story hasn't changed! You saw what he did for you in the desert until you arrived here. You saw what he did, right there among you, to Dothan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab of the tribe of Reuben, when the earth split open and swallowed them down—their families, their tents, and all their animals. You saw with your own eyes all the amazing things that the Lord has done.

So you must keep every commandment I am giving you today That way you will have the strength to enter and take over the country that you are crossing the Jordan to have as your own, You will also have long lives in the country that the Lord promised to give your forefathers and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey. The country you're entering to occupy isn't like the country of Egypt that you've come from. There you had to sow your seed and work hard irrigating the ground, like taking care of a vegetable garden. But here in the country that you are crossing the Jordan to take over is a land of mountains and valleys that receives plenty of rain It is a land that the Lord your God takes care of. The Lord your God is always watching over it, all year long.

So if you pay careful attention to keep the commandments that I'm giving to you today, if you love the Lord your God and worship him with all your mind and with all your being, then I will send rain for your land at the right time, rain in autumn and spring, so that you can harvest your grain, new wine, and olive oil. I will also provide grass in the fields for your livestock. You will have more than enough to eat.

But make sure that you're not fooled into worshiping and bowing down to other gods, or the Lord will become angry with you. He won't send any rain, and the land won't produce any crops, and you will soon die, even in the good land that the Lord is giving you. Focus your minds on the words that I'm saying. Tie them on your hands as reminders and put them on your foreheads as well. Teach them to your children and talk about them when you're at home and when you're traveling, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorposts of your homes and on your gates, so that as long as the earth lasts, you and your children may have long lives in the country the Lord promised to give your forefathers.

If you are careful to keep all these commandments I am giving you to follow, if you love the Lord your God and follow all his ways and hold onto him, then the Lord will drive out all these nations ahead of you, and you will take over the country from nations that are greater and stronger than you. Everywhere you walk will belong to you. Your territory will extend from the desert all the way to Lebanon, and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. No one will be able to withstand you; the Lord your God will make everyone living there absolutely terrified of you wherever you go, just as he promised you.

Look! Today I'm placing before you both a blessing and a curse. You will receive a blessing if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I'm giving you today. But you will receive a curse if you disobey the commandments of the Lord your God and don't keep to the path I'm ordering you to follow today by worshiping some other unknown gods. When the Lord your God takes you into the country you are going in to occupy, announce the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. (These mountains are to the west of the Jordan, in the country of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah near Gilgal, beside the oaks of Moreh.) Shortly you're going to cross the Jordan to enter and occupy the country the Lord your God is giving you. When you take it over and settle there, make sure you follow all the rules and regulations that I'm giving you today.

These are the rules and regulations you must make sure to follow the whole time you live in the land that the Lord, the God of your forefathers, has given you to own.

You are to completely destroy all the pagan shrines where the nations you're driving out worshiped their gods: on the top of high mountains, on the hills, and under every green tree. Tear down their altars, knock down their idolatrous pillars, burn down their Asherah

poles, and cut down the idols of their gods. Remove any trace of them from everywhere. You are not to worship the Lord your God in the way that they did.

No, you must go to the place the Lord your God will choose from the territory of all your tribes where he will live with you. That's where you must go. You'll take there your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and all your offerings—your freewill offerings and offerings to fulfill a promise, along with the firstborn of your herds and flocks. That's where, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families will eat and celebrate everything you've worked for, because the Lord your God has blessed you.

You're not to do like we're doing here today. At the moment everyone does what they think is right, because you haven't arrived in the land you will own that the Lord your God is giving you and where you will be at peace. After you cross the Jordan and settle down in the country that the Lord your God is giving you to possess, and he lets you rest from fighting all your enemies and you live in safety, then the Lord your God will choose a place where he will live with you. That's where you are to bring all that I've ordered you—your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and freewill offerings, and all the special gifts that you promise to give to the Lord.

You will celebrate there in the presence of the Lord your God—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites living in your towns, because they don't have any share in the allotment of land. Make sure you don't present your burnt offerings just anywhere you want. You are to offer them only in the place the Lord will choose in the territory of one of your tribes. That's where you are to do everything that I order you to do.

Of course you can slaughter and eat meat wherever you are, anytime you want, depending on how much the Lord your God has blessed you. All of you, whether you're ceremonially clean or not, can it eat it just like you would a gazelle or a deer, but you are not to eat the blood—pour that out on the ground.

In your towns you must not eat the tithe of your grain or new wine or olive oil, the firstborn of your herds or flocks, any of the offerings that you give to fulfill a promise, your freewill offerings, or your special gifts. No, you must eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites living in your towns. Celebrate in the presence of the Lord your God in everything you do, and make sure you don't forget about the Levites for as long as you live in your land.

When the Lord your God gives you more land as he promised, and you feel like having some meat, and say, “I want to have some meat,” you can eat it whenever you want. If the place where the Lord your God chooses to live with you is a long way away, then you can slaughter any animal from the herd or flock he has given you, following the regulations I have given you, and you can eat it in your town whenever you want. In fact you can eat it like you would eat a gazelle or deer—whether you're ceremonially clean or not, you can eat it. Just make sure you don't eat the blood, because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood; pour it out on the ground. Don't eat it, so that all will go well with you and your children, because you will be doing what is right in the Lord's sight.

Take your holy sacrifices and the offerings to fulfill your vows and go to the place the Lord will choose. Present your burnt offerings, the meat and blood, on the altar of the Lord your God. The blood of your other sacrifices is to be poured out beside the altar of the Lord your God, but you are allowed to eat the meat. Make sure you obey everything I'm commanding you, so that it may always go well with you and your children, because you will be following what is good and right in the sight of the Lord your God.

When the Lord your God destroys the nations ahead of you as you enter the country to possess, and you drive them out and settle down in their land, make sure you don't fall into the trap of following their ways after they have been destroyed right in front of you. Don't try and find out about their gods, asking, “I wonder how these people worship their gods? I'll do like they did.” You must not worship the Lord your God like this, because when they worship their gods they do every kind of abominable thing that the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods! Be careful to do everything I order you to do. Don't add or take away anything from these instructions.

Maybe a prophet or someone who has dreams about the future will come along and give you a prediction about some sign or miracle, and the sign or wonder happens. If after that they tell you, “Let's follow other gods that you don't know, and let's worship them,” then you must not listen to what that prophet or dreamer has to say because the Lord your God is trying to find out whether you really love him with all your mind and with all your being.

You are to follow the Lord your God and respect him. Keep his commandments and do what he says; worship him and hold onto him. These kinds of prophets or dreamers must be executed, because they have promoted rebellion against the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt and rescued you from the prison-house of slavery. They have tried to lead you from the way that the Lord your God has ordered you to follow. You must eliminate the evil among you.

Even if your own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your best friend secretly encourages you, saying, “Let's go and worship other gods” unfamiliar to you and your forefathers, the gods of the nations around you (whether they live close by or far away, in any direction), don't give into them or listen to them. Show them no mercy. Don't spare them or protect them. No, you absolutely must kill them! You start killing them, and then have everyone else help. Stone the person to death for trying to lead you away from the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt, out of the prison-house of slavery. Then every Israelite will hear about it and be afraid, and won't ever do such an evil thing among you.

It may happen that once you're living in the towns the Lord your God is giving you, you hear that evil

people have taken over in one of your towns and have led the people there astray, telling them, “Let's go and worship other gods” that you don't know. If this does happen you need to make a full investigation, inquiring about the facts and interrogating witnesses.

If it's proved beyond doubt that this awful sin has actually been committed among you, then you have to kill the people living in that town with the sword. Set apart for destruction its people and its livestock. You must pile up all the people's possessions in the middle of the public square, and completely burn the town and everything in it as a complete burnt offering to the Lord your God. The town must remain a heap of ruins forever. It must never be rebuilt. Don't take for yourselves anything that has been set apart for destruction so that the Lord won't be angry any more. He will be merciful to you, showing you compassion, and giving you many descendants as he promised to your forefathers, because you are obeying the Lord your God, keeping all his commandments that I'm giving you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God.

You are the children of the Lord your God. Don't mutilate yourselves or shave your forehead like pagans do when they mourn the dead, because you are a holy people who belong to the Lord your God. The Lord chose you as his special people out of all the nations on earth.

You must not eat anything repulsive. These are the animals that you are allowed to eat: cattle, sheep, goats, deer, gazelles, wild goats, antelopes, and mountain sheep. You can eat any animal that both has a divided hoof and also chews the cud. But you are not allowed to eat those that either chew the cud or have a divided hoof. This includes: camels, rabbits, and rock hyraxes. Even though they chew the cud, they don't have a divided hoof. You must treat them as unclean. The same applies to the pig. Even though it has a divided hoof, it does not chew the cud. So you must treat it as unclean. You must not eat its meat or touch its dead body.

When it comes to creatures that live in the water, you are allowed to eat anything that has fins and scales. But you must not eat anything that does not have fins and scales. You must treat them as unclean. You are allowed to eat any clean bird. But you must not eat the following: eagle, griffon vulture, bearded vulture, buzzard, kites, any kind of falcon, any member of the crow family, tawny owl, long-eared owl, gulls, any kind of hawk, little owl, eagle owl, barn owl, desert owl, Egyptian vulture, fish owl, storks, any kind of heron, hoopoe, or bats. All insects that fly are unclean to you; you must not eat them. But you are allowed to eat any clean animal that has wings. You must not eat any animal that dies. You can give it to a foreigner in your town, and they can eat it, or you can sell it to a foreigner. You, however, are a holy people who belong to the Lord your God. Don't cook a young goat in its mother's milk.

Make sure you pay a tithe of every crop grown each year in your fields. You are to eat a tenth of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks, in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose to live with you, so that you will learn to always respect the Lord your God. However, if it's too far to carry all the tithe that the Lord your God has blessed you with, because the place where the Lord your God will choose to live with you is too distant, then you can exchange it for money, take the money with you and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. Then you can spend the money on anything you like—cattle, sheep, wine, alcoholic drink, or anything else you want. Then you can have a feast there in the presence of the Lord your God and celebrate with your family.

Don't forget to take care of the Levites in your town, because they don't have any share in the allotment of land. At the end of every third year, collect a tenth of all your produce for that year and store it in your town. This way the Levites (who don't have any share in the allotment of land), the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows in your town will be provided with what they need. The Lord your God will bless you in everything you do.

You are to cancel debts at the end of every seven years. This is the way it will work: If you provided a loan to someone you must cancel it. You are not allowed to collect anything from another Israelite, because the Lord's time of debt cancelation has been announced. You are allowed to collect payments from a foreigner, but you must cancel whatever your fellow Israelite owes you.

However, you shouldn't have poor people among you, for the Lord will really bless you in the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own. You just need to make sure you obey the Lord your God, and that you're careful to follow all these commandments I'm giving you today.

The Lord your God is going to bless you as he promised. You will lend money to many nations but you won't need to borrow from any of them; you will rule over many nations but you won't be ruled by them. If there are Israelites who are poor in any of your towns in the country the Lord your God is giving you, don't act in an unfeeling or miserly way towards them.

On the contrary. You are to be generous to them, and lend them whatever they need. Make sure you don't think evil thoughts like, “The seventh year is coming up when debts will be canceled,” so that you look down on the poor with a sneer and refuse to give them anything. They will complain to the Lord about you, and you will be found guilty of sin. Give and give again to them, and don't feel irritated when you give. When you give generously the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you decide to do. You will always have those who are poor and in need among you, so that's why I'm telling you to give generously to them.

If a Hebrew, one of your own people, whether man or woman, sells themselves to you as a slave and works for you for six years, you have to free them in the seventh year. And when you free them, don't send them away with nothing. Give them plenty of gifts: animals from your flocks, grain from your threshing floor, and wine from your winepress. Give to them as generously as the Lord your God has blessed you. Don't forget that you were once slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God set you free. That's why I'm giving you this command today.

However, if your male slave tells you, “I don't want to leave you,” because he loves you and your family and is better off staying with you, then use a metal tool to pierce his ear against the door, and he will be your slave for life. Do the same for your female slave. Don't see it as a problem to free your slave, because your slave's six years of service to you was worth twice what you would have paid to hire someone. The Lord your God will bless you in everything you do for acting in this way.

You are to separate out to give the Lord your God all the firstborn males of your herds and flocks. You must not have the firstborn of your cattle work, and don't shear the firstborn of your sheep. Every year you and your family are to eat these animals that have been sacrificed in the presence of the Lord your God in the place that the Lord will choose. However, if an animal has some defect or is lame or blind, in fact if it has any serious defect at all, you are not to sacrifice it to the Lord your God. Eat it at home. All of you, whether you're ceremonially clean or not, can eat it just like you would eat a gazelle or a deer, but you are not to eat the blood—pour that out on the ground.

You are to observe the month of Abib and to celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, because it was in the month of Abib that the Lord your God led you out of Egypt by night.

The Passover sacrifice from your herd or flock must be offered to the Lord your God in the place where the Lord will choose to live with you. Don't eat ordinary bread with it. For seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast, the bread of hardship, because you had to leave Egypt in such a hurry. This way you'll remember the day you left Egypt for the rest of your lives.

Don't have yeast anywhere in your country for seven days. Don't keep any of the meat that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day until the morning. Don't sacrifice the Passover animal in any of the towns that the Lord your God is giving you. The Passover sacrifice must be offered by you only at the place where the Lord your God will choose to live with you. You are to do this in the evening at sunset-the same time you left Egypt. Cook it and eat it in the place the Lord your God will choose. Then in the morning go back to your tents. Eat bread without yeast for six days, and then on the seventh day you are to have a holy meeting to honor the Lord your God. You are not to do any work.

Count off seven weeks from when you start the grain harvest. Then celebrate the Festival of Weeks to honor the Lord your God by giving him a freewill offering, depending on just how much the Lord your God has blessed you. You will celebrate in the Lord's presence in the place where he will choose to live with you. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who live in your towns, as well as the foreigners, orphans, and widows among you. Don't forget that you were once slaves in Egypt, and be careful to follow these regulations.

Celebrate the Festival of Shelters for seven days once you have finished threshing your grain and pressing your grapes. Enjoy your feast—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female slaves, and the Levites who live in your towns, as well as the foreigners, orphans, and widows among you. Celebrate this Festival for seven days to honor the Lord your God in the place he will choose, because the Lord your God will bless your whole harvest and everything you do, so you will be really happy.

All your men must come before the Lord your God in the place He will choose three times every year: the Festival of Bread without Yeast, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Shelters. No one should come before the Lord without an offering. Each of you is to bring whatever gift you can, depending on how much the Lord your God has blessed you.

Choose judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town that the Lord your God is giving you. They must judge the people fairly. Don't pervert justice or show favoritism. Don't take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the wise and twists the words of the truthful. Always do what is right and just, so that you may go on living, occupying the land that the Lord your God is giving you. Don't ever set up a wooden Asherah pole next to the altar you build for the Lord your God, and don't make for yourselves an idolatrous stone pillar, which the Lord your God hates.

Don't sacrifice to the Lord your God cattle or a sheep that has a defect or has something seriously wrong, for that is offensive to the Lord your God.

There may be a report that one of you, whether a man or a woman, living in a town that the Lord your God gave you, has been found to be sinning in the sight of the Lord your God by breaking the Lord's agreement. This person has done this by going to worship other gods, bowing down to them—or to the sun, moon, or any of the stars of heaven—which I have ordered you not to do.

If you hear such a report, you need to make a full investigation. If you find out that the report is true, and that such an awful sin has been committed in Israel, you must have the man or woman who has committed this terrible act taken outside the town and stoned to death. That person is to be executed based on the evidence given by two or three witnesses. No one shall be executed on the evidence given by a single witness. The witnesses must act first in executing the person, and then the rest of those who are present. You must eliminate the evil from among you.

If there's a case before your town court that is too problematic for you to settle, whether the argument is over murder or manslaughter, one legal decision against another, or different degrees of assault, you must take the issue to the place the Lord your God will choose. Go to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge in charge. Present the case to them, and they will give you their decision. You must abide by the decision they give you there at the place the Lord will choose. Make sure you do everything they tell you to do, in accordance with the legal instructions they give you and the verdict they delivered. Don't deviate from the decision they give you. Anyone who treats with contempt either the priest (who ministers before the Lord your God) or the judge, must be executed. You must eliminate this evil from Israel. Then everyone else will hear about it and be afraid, and won't act with contempt in the future.

After you've entered the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and have taken it over and settled

in it, and you decide, “Let's have a king to rule over us like all the other nations around us do,” you can have a king but only one chosen by the Lord your God. He must be an Israelite. You must not have a king who is a foreigner; someone who is not an Israelite. Your king must not have large numbers of horses, or send his men to Egypt to buy more horses, because the Lord has declared, “You must never return there again.” He must not have many wives, so they don't lead him away from following the Lord. He must not have large quantities of silver and gold. Once he is king and sits on his royal throne, he must make a copy for himself of these instructions, writing them on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. He is to keep it with him, and he is to read from it each day throughout his life, so he may learn to respect the Lord his God by being careful to follow every word of these instructions and regulations. Then he won't think more of himself than his fellow Israelites, and he won't deviate from the commandments, so that he and his sons may have long reigns over the kingdom of Israel.

The Levitical priests, in fact the whole tribe of Levi, will not have a share in the land allotment with the other Israelites. They are to eat from the food offerings presented to the Lord—that is what they are entitled to receive. While they don't own land among the other tribes, the Lord takes care of them, as he promised.

The priests' share of a sacrifice of a bull or a sheep that is brought by the people is as follows. The priests are to be given the shoulder, the jaw, and the insides. You are to provide them with the firstfruits of your grain, new wine, and olive oil, as well as the first wool sheared from your flock. For the Lord your God has chosen Levi and his descendants from all your tribes to stand before him and serve in his name forever.

If a Levite is convinced he should move from any Israelite town and goes to the place the Lord will choose, then he shall be allowed to serve in the name of the Lord his God like all his fellow Levites who stand there in service before the Lord. They will all receive the same food allowances, despite him having received money from the sale of his father's property.

Once you enter the country the Lord your God is giving you, don't copy the offensive ways of the nations there. No one is to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire, practice divination or fortune-telling, use magic or sorcery, practice witchcraft, visit a medium or spiritist, or communicate with the dead. Anyone who does such things offends the Lord. It's because of these offensive things that the Lord your God is driving out the nations before you. You are to be innocent of such things in the presence of the Lord your God. Even though these nations, whose land you will occupy, listen to magicians and fortune-tellers, the Lord your God forbids you to do so.

The Lord your God will send you a prophet like me from your people. You must listen to him. Remember what you told the Lord your God at Horeb when you were all assembled there. You said, “Please don't let us go on hearing the Lord our God speak to us, or see this terrifying fire anymore! Otherwise we're going to die!” Then the Lord told me, “They are right in what they're saying. I'm going to send them a prophet like you from their people. I will give him my messages, and he will tell them everything I order him to say. I will deal with anyone who does not listen to my message that the prophet speaks in my name. However, if any prophet claims to be delivering a message in my name that I have not ordered him to give, or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must be executed.”

You may be wondering, “How can we be sure that a message hasn't come from the Lord?” When a prophet speaks in the Lord's name and what he says doesn't happen or come true, then that is a not a message from the Lord. The prophet has spoken with contempt for the Lord. Don't be intimidated by him.

After the Lord your God has destroyed the nations whose land he's giving you, and after you have driven them out and settled in their cities and houses, then you are to choose three sanctuary towns in the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own. You are to build roads to these towns. Divide the country the Lord is giving you into three sections. This way anyone who kills someone else can easily run to these towns for protection.

This is what is to happen when a person accidentally kills someone else without meaning to, and runs to one of these sanctuary towns to save their life. For example, if a man goes to cut wood in the forest with his friend and swings his axe to chop down a tree, but the head flies off the handle and hits and kills his friend, he may run to one of these towns to save his life. Otherwise the avenger in his anger might chase after the man and catch up with him and kill him, if it's a long distance. The man would be killed even though he didn't deserve to die, because he hadn't meant to cause any harm.

This is the reason why I'm giving this order to choose three sanctuary towns. Should the Lord your God expand your territory, as he promised your forefathers, and give you all the land he said he would, and if you are careful to keep all these commandments I'm giving you today, loving the Lord your God and always following his ways, then you are to choose three additional sanctuary towns. In this way the blood of innocent people won't be shed in the country the Lord your God is giving you to own and you won't be responsible for the death of innocent people who aren't guilty of losing their lives.

On the other hand, if a man hates someone, hides in wait, and attacks and kills them, and then the killer runs to one of the sanctuary towns, the elders of his home town must send for him, bring him back, and hand him over to the avenger to be killed. Show him no mercy. You are to eliminate from Israel the guilt of shedding the blood of the innocent, and then all will be well.

Don't move your neighbor's boundary marker. It was placed there by your ancestors to mark the land allotment you will receive in the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own.

The evidence given by a single witness is not enough to prove a sin or a crime against someone, never mind what offense they are alleged to have committed. The facts must be confirmed by the evidence given by two or three witnesses. If someone falsely accuses another person of a crime, both those involved

must come to be judged in the presence of the Lord by the priests and judges who are then in office. The judges shall conduct a full investigation, and if the accuser proves to be a liar who has made false accusations then you must punish the accuser in the same way they wanted to punish their victim. You must eliminate this evil from among you. Then the rest of the people will hear and be afraid, and they will never again do anything so evil among you. Then everyone else will hear about it and be afraid, and won't ever do anything so evil. Don't show any mercy. The rule is life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot.

When you go to war with your enemies and you see horses and chariots, and a larger army than yours, don't be afraid of them, because the Lord your God who led you out of Egypt is with you. Before you go into battle, the priest shall come and speak to the army. He is to tell them, “Listen, men of Israel! Today you are going to fight your enemies. Don't be nervous or afraid; don't be panicked or terrified by them. For the Lord your God is going with you to fight for you against your enemies, and he will give you the victory.”

The officers shall also speak to the army and tell them, “Is there any man here who has built a new house and hasn't dedicated it to the Lord? He can go home, otherwise he might die in battle and another man will dedicate it. Is there any man here who has planted a vineyard and hasn't yet enjoyed its fruit? He can go home, otherwise he might die in battle and another man will enjoy its fruit. Is there any man here who is engaged to a woman and hasn't married her? He can go home, otherwise he might die in battle and another man will marry her.”

The officers are also to tell the army, “Is there any man here who is afraid or nervous? He can go home, so he won't affect his fellow-soldiers and make them as frightened as himself.”

After the officers have finished speaking to the army, they are to put commanders in charge to lead it into battle.

When you arrive at a town, ready to attack it, you must first make an offer of peace to the people living there. If they accept your offer of peace and open their gates to you, all the inhabitants will become your slave-laborers.

However, if they refuse to make peace with you and decide to fight you, then lay siege to the town. Once the Lord your God has handed it over to you, kill every male with the sword. But you can take as plunder the women, children, livestock, and everything else in the town. You can take and use all your enemies' possessions the Lord your God gives you. This is the way you are to deal with all the towns that are a long way from you and don't belong to neighboring nations.

However, when it comes to the towns of those nations whose land the Lord your God is giving you to occupy, don't leave anything alive that breathes. Set them apart for complete destruction—the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites —as the Lord your God has ordered you to do. This is to prevent them from teaching you all the offensive things that they do in worshiping their gods, and by doing so make you sin against the Lord your God.

Now when you lay siege to a town and it goes on for a long time as you fight to capture it, don't destroy the fruit trees there. You can eat their fruit. Don't cut them down. Are the trees in the orchard human beings that you should also attack? However, you may destroy the trees that you know are not fruit trees. You can use them to build siege equipment to attack the town that is fighting against you until it falls.

Someone may be found murdered, lying in a field in the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own, and nobody knows who killed them. Your elders and judges must come and measure the distance from the body to the surrounding towns. Then the elders of the town that's found to be nearest to the body shall take a cow that has never been put under a yoke or used for work. Take the cow to a valley that has a stream running through it and whose ground has never been plowed or sown. Break the cow's neck there beside the stream.

The Levitical priests must be there too, because the Lord your God has chosen them to serve him and to give blessings in his name, and to decide on legal disputes and cases of assault. Then all the elders of the town nearest the body are to wash their hands in the stream over the dead cow, saying, “We had nothing to do with this murder, and we didn't see who did it. Lord, please forgive your people Israel who you rescued, and do not hold them guilty of shedding of innocent blood. In this way the guilt for shedding blood will be forgiven.” This is how you are to remove from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood, since you have done what is right in the Lord's sight.

When you go to war with your enemies and the Lord your God hands them over to you in defeat, and you capture them, you may see that one of them is a beautiful woman who you like and want to marry. Take her home and have her shave her head, cut her nails, and get rid of the clothes she was wearing when she was captured.

After she has lived in your home and has finished her month of mourning for her father and mother, you may sleep with her and marry her, and she shall be your wife. However, if you are not happy with her, you must let her leave and go wherever she wants. You are not allowed to sell her for money or treat her like a slave, because you have brought shame on her.

If a man has two wives, one he loves and one he doesn't, and both have sons by him, but the firstborn son is from the wife he doesn't love, when the time comes for the man to decide what each son will inherit from him, he must not prefer the son of the wife he loves and treat him as the firstborn instead of the son of the wife he doesn't love.

No. He is to recognize the firstborn, the son of the wife he doesn't love through the usual custom of giving him a double portion of all that he owns. The firstborn son is the firstfruits of his father's strength, and so the rights of the firstborn are his.

If someone has an obstinate and rebellious son who doesn't obey his parents and doesn't obey them even when he's punished, his parents must take him to the town elders, to the court in his hometown, and tell them, “Our son is obstinate and rebellious, He doesn't

obey us. He's a worthless drunk!" Then all the men of his home town will stone him to death. You must eliminate the evil from among you, and every Israelite will hear about it and be afraid.

If someone commits a crime punishable by death, and the person is executed by hanging on a tree, don't leave the body hanging there overnight. Make sure you bury the body the same day, because anyone who is hung is under God's curse. Don't defile the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own.

If you see someone's cow or sheep wandering around, don't just ignore it. Make sure you take it back to its owner. If its owner doesn't live near you, or if you don't know who it is, take the animal home with you and keep it until the owner comes looking, then you can return it. Do the same for whatever else you find that someone has lost—a donkey, a cloak, anything. Don't just ignore it. If you see someone's donkey or cow that has fallen down on the road, don't just ignore it. Help lift it up.

A woman must not wear men's clothing, and a man must not wear women's clothing. Anyone who does this offends the Lord your God.

If you happen to find a bird's nest with chicks or eggs, whether it's in a tree or on the ground beside the road, and the mother is sitting on the chicks or eggs, don't take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but make sure you let the mother go, so that you will do well and have a good long life.

When you build a new house, be sure to install a railing around your roof, so that you won't be held guilty if someone dies falling from it.

Don't plant your vineyard with another kind of crop. Otherwise everything you produce—the crop you planted and the fruit of your vineyard—must be dedicated to the Lord.

Don't harness an ox and a donkey together when you plow.

Don't wear clothes made of wool and linen woven together.

Put tassels on the hem of the cloak you use to cover yourself.

It may happen that a man marries a woman and sleeps with her, but ends up hating her, and accuses her of being immoral, giving her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman and slept with her, but I found out she wasn't a virgin."

The woman's parents are to bring the proof of her virginity to the elders at the town gate, and the father will explain to them, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he has ended up hating her. Now he has accused her of being immoral, saying, 'I found out that your daughter wasn't a virgin.' But here's the proof of her virginity." The parents shall spread out the sheet in front of the town elders.

Then the elders of that city shall take the man and punish him. They shall also fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give the money to the young woman's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She is to remain his wife; he is not allowed to divorce her as long as he lives.

But if the accusation is true, and there's no proof of the woman's virginity, she is to be taken to the door of her father's house, and there the men of her town are to stone her to death. She has done something disgraceful in Israel by acting immorally in her father's house. You must eliminate the evil from among you.

If a man is found sleeping with someone else's wife, both the man and the woman must die. You must eliminate the evil from Israel.

If a man meets a girl, a virgin engaged to another man, and sleeps with her there in the town, then you must take both of them to the town gate and stone them to death. The young woman is guilty because she did not cry out for help in the town, and the man is guilty because he has brought shame on someone else's fiancée. You must eliminate the evil from among you.

However, if the man happens to meet a woman who is engaged out in the countryside, and he attacks her and rapes her, only the man has to die. Don't do anything to the woman, because she has not committed a sin punishable by death. (This is the same kind of situation as when a man attacks someone else and murders them.) When the man raped the woman who was engaged out in the countryside, she shouted out, but there wasn't anyone there to rescue her.

If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not engaged, and he grabs her and rapes her, and someone sees them, the man must pay the woman's father fifty shekels of silver, and he must marry her because he has brought shame on her. He is not allowed to divorce her as long as he lives. A man must not marry his father's wife, so that he won't bring shame on his father.

No man whose genitals have been damaged or cut off is allowed to enter the Lord's sanctuary.

No one of mixed race is allowed to enter the Lord's sanctuary, and none of his descendants may do so either, up to the tenth generation.

No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants are allowed to enter the Lord's sanctuary, up to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with food and water on your journey from Egypt, and they hired Balaam, son of Beor, from Pethor in Mesopotamia, to curse you. But the Lord your God refused to listen to Balaam. The Lord your God turned what was meant to be a curse into a blessing for you because the Lord your God loves you. Don't arrange a peace treaty with them or help them out as long as you live.

Don't look down on an Edomite, for they are your relatives. Don't look down on an Egyptian either, because you lived as foreigners in their country. The third generation of their children are allowed to enter the Lord's sanctuary.

When you are in an army camp during a war with your enemies, make sure you avoid anything wrong. Any man there who becomes unclean because of a release of semen must leave the camp and remain outside. Towards the end of the day he must wash himself with water, and at sunset he may return to the camp. Choose a place outside the camp to be used as a toilet. You need to have a spade as part of your equipment so that you can dig a hole, and then when you're finished you can cover up your excrement.

The Lord your God is present with you in your camp to keep you safe and to defeat your enemies. Your

camp must be kept holy, because if he sees anything unclean among you, he will leave you.

Don't send a slave back to their master if they have come to you for protection. Let the slave live in your country wherever they want, in whatever town they want. Don't mistreat them.

No Israelite women or men are to be cult prostitutes. Don't bring into the house of the Lord your God any money from a prostitute, whether a woman or a man, using it to fulfill a promise to the Lord, for both are offensive to the Lord your God.

Don't charge a fellow Israelite interest on money, food, or any other kind of loan. You may charge a foreigner interest, but not an Israelite, so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything you do in the country that you are going in to occupy.

If you make a promise to the Lord your God, don't be slow in keeping it, because he will definitely demand that you fulfill it and you will be guilty of sin if you don't. If you don't make such promises then you won't be guilty of sin. But make sure to carry out what you've said to the Lord your God, because it was you who freely chose to make such a promise.

When you walk through your neighbor's vineyard, you can eat as many grapes as you want, but you must not collect any to take with you.

When you walk through your neighbor's grainfield, you may pick the ears of grain with your hand, but you must not use a sickle to harvest it.

Should a man marry a woman, but then isn't pleased with her because he finds out something shameful about her, he is allowed to write out a certificate of divorce for her, give it to her, and send her out of his house.

Suppose that after leaving his house, she goes and marries another man, and suppose the second man also ends up hating her, writes out a certificate of divorce for her, gives it to her, and sends her out of his house—or he may happen to die. The first husband who divorced her is not permitted to marry her again after she was shamed, for that offends the Lord. You are not to bring guilt upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you to own.

If a man has just got married, he is not to be sent to war or made to do any other duties. He is free to stay at home for one year and make his wife happy.

Don't accept a pair of millstones, or even just an upper millstone, as security for a debt, because that would put the borrower's life in danger.

Anyone caught kidnapping a fellow Israelite must be executed, whether the kidnapper makes him a slave or sells him. You must eliminate the evil from among you.

When it comes to infectious skin diseases, make sure you follow carefully all the instructions of the Levitical priests. Be careful to follow the orders I've given them. Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam on the journey out of Egypt.

If you lend anything to someone, don't go into their house to take some kind of security. Stand outside while they go inside and bring the security out to you. If he is a poor man he may give his cloak as security, but you must not keep it when you go to sleep. Make sure you give it back by sunset, so that he can sleep in his own cloak and thank you, and you will be counted as doing good by the Lord your God.

Don't mistreat a paid servant who is poor and needy, whether he's an Israelite or a foreigner living in one of your towns. Pay his wages every day before sunset, because he is poor and is relying on them. If you don't he may complain to the Lord about you, and you will be found guilty of sin.

Fathers are not to be executed because of their children, and children are not to be executed because of their fathers. Each person is to be executed because of their own sin.

Don't treat foreigners or orphans unjustly; don't take a widow's cloak as security. Remember that you were once slaves in Egypt, and the Lord your God rescued you from that place. That's why I'm ordering you to do this.

If when you're harvesting in your field you forget a sheaf there, don't go back for it. Leave it for the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows, so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything you do.

When you shake the olive trees to knock down the olives, don't go over the branches again. What's left is for the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows.

When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, don't go over the vines again. What's left is for the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows. Remember you were once slaves in Egypt. That's why I'm ordering you to do this.

If there is some legal argument between two people, they are to go to court to have the case judged, in order to justify the one who is right and condemn the one who is wrong. If the person who is guilty is sentenced to be flogged, the judge shall order them to lie down and be flogged before him with the number of lashes the crime deserves. They are not to receive more than forty lashes. More than that would be to publicly humiliate them.

Don't muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.

When two brothers live near to each other and one of them dies without having a son, the widow is not to marry a stranger outside the family. Her husband's brother is to marry her and sleep with her, fulfilling the requirements of a brother-in-law to provide her with children. The first son she has will be named after the dead brother, so that his name won't be forgotten in Israel.

However, if the man refuses to marry his brother's widow, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and tell them, “My husband's brother is refusing to keep his brother's name alive in Israel. He doesn't want to perform the requirements of a brother-in-law for me.” The town elders are to summon him and talk with him. If he continues to refuse and says, “I don't want to marry her,” his brother's widow is to confront him in the presence of the elders, pull off his sandal, spit in his face, and announce, “This is what happens to the man who refuses to keep his brother's family name alive.” From then on his family name in Israel will be called “The Family of the Pulled-off Sandal.”

If two men are fighting, and one of their wives intervenes to save her husband from being beaten, and

she grabs hold of the attacker's genitals, you are to cut her hand off. Don't show her any mercy.

Don't have two different measuring weights in your bag, one that's heavy and one that's light. Don't have two different measuring containers in your house, one that's large and one that's small. Make sure you always use accurate and true weights and measures. In that way you will have long lives in the country the Lord your God is giving you. Anyone who doesn't do so and cheats like this offends the Lord your God.

Remember what the Amalekites did to you on your way out of Egypt. They came out to confront you when you were tired and weary from your journey, and they attacked all those of you who were lagging behind. They didn't have any respect for God.

Once the Lord your God gives you peace after fighting your enemies in the country that he's giving you to take over and own, you are to wipe out even the memory of the Amalekites from the earth. Don't forget!

Once you've entered the country that the Lord your God is giving you to own, and you take it over and settle there, take some of the firstfruits of all your crops produced by the land that the Lord your God is giving you and place them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose to live with you, and tell the priest in charge at the time, “Today I declare to the Lord your God that I now live in the country that the Lord promised our forefathers to give us.” The priest will take the basket from you and place it in front of the altar of the Lord your God.

Then this is what you are to publicly declare before the Lord your God, “My father was an Aramean who moved from place to place. There were only a few of them when he and his family went to live in Egypt. But they became a large and powerful nation. But the Egyptians treated us very badly, oppressing us and forcing us to do hard labor. We cried out for help to the Lord, the God of our forefathers; and the Lord answered us as he saw how much we were suffering, forced to work so hard in such cruelty. The Lord led us out of Egypt with his great power and incredible strength and terrifying actions, signs and miracles. He brought us here and gave us this country, a land flowing with milk and honey. Look, Lord! I have brought you the firstfruits of the land that you have given me.” You shall place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down in worship before him. Then you, the Levites, and the foreigners who live with you are to celebrate all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your family.

Once you've finished storing up a tenth of all your crops in the third year (the year of the tithe), you shall give it to the Levites, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows, so they will have enough to eat in your towns. Then you are to make this declaration in the presence of the Lord your God: “I have brought the holy tithe and I have given it to the Levite, the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows as you have ordered me to do. I have not broken or forgotten your commandments. I have not eaten any of the holy tithe while in mourning, or taken any of it while I was unclean, or used any of it as an offering for the dead. I have obeyed the Lord my God. I have done everything you ordered me to do. Please look down from your home in heaven, and bless your people the Israelites and the country you have given us as you promised our fathers—a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Today the Lord your God orders you to carry out these rules and regulations. Make sure you follow them with all your mind and with all your being.

Today you have publicly declared that the Lord is your God and that you will follow his ways, keep rules and commandments and regulations, and obey what he says.

Today the Lord has announced that you are a special people who belong to him as he promised. He has announced that you are to keep all his commandments. He has announced that he will give you greater praise and reputation and honor than any other nation he has made. He has announced that you will be a holy people to the Lord your God, as he promised.

Moses and the Israelite elders of Israel gave these instructions to the people: Keep all the commandments I am giving you today. The day you cross the Jordan into the country the Lord your God is giving you, set up some large stones and paint them with whitewash. Then write all these laws on them once you've crossed over to enter the country that the Lord your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your forefathers, promised you. After you've crossed the Jordan, you are to set up these stones on Mount Ebal, having painted them with whitewash, as I've ordered you to do today.

Also build a stone altar there to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. Don't use any stone tools in its construction. Build the altar of the Lord your God with uncut stones and sacrifice burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. That is also where you are to sacrifice and eat your peace offerings, celebrating in the presence of the Lord your God. Write all these laws clearly on the stones.

Moses and the Levitical priests gave these orders to all the Israelites: “Be quiet, people of Israel, and listen! Today you have become the people of the Lord your God. So obey what the Lord your God tells you, and follow commandments and regulations that I'm giving you today.”

That day Moses gave these orders to the people: After you've crossed the Jordan, the following tribes are to stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. The following tribes are to stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

Then the Levites will shout in a loud voice so every Israelite can hear:

“A curse on anyone who makes a carved image or a metal idol and worships it in secret. It's only an object that someone made, and it's offensive to the Lord!” Everyone says “Amen!”

“A curse on anyone who dishonors their father or mother.” Everyone says “Amen!”

“A curse on anyone who moves their neighbor's boundary stone!” Everyone says “Amen!”

“A curse on anyone who allows a blind man to wander in the road!” Everyone says “Amen!”

"A curse on anyone who doesn't treat foreigners, the orphans, and widows fairly!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on any man who sleeps with his father's wife, for he has disgraced his father!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on anyone who has sex with any animal!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on any man who sleeps with his sister, the daughter of his father or the daughter of his mother!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on any man who sleeps with his mother-in-law!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on anyone who secretly attacks his neighbor!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on anyone who accepts a bribe to kill someone who's innocent!" Everyone says "Amen!"

"A curse on anyone who doesn't carefully obey all these laws by keeping them!" Everyone says "Amen!"

If you truly obey what the Lord your God tells you, and carefully follow all his commandments that I'm giving you today, then the Lord your God will place you high above all the nations of the earth.

You will have all the following blessings and even more, if you do what the Lord your God says.

You will be blessed when you're in the town; you will be blessed when you're in the countryside. You will be blessed with many children. You will be blessed with good harvests. You will be blessed with livestock—your cattle will have many calves, and your sheep will have many lambs. You will be blessed with plenty of bread. You will be blessed wherever you go and in everything you do.

The Lord will defeat the enemies who come to attack you. They will come at you from one direction, but they will scatter seven different ways. The Lord will bless your income and everything you do. The Lord your God will bless you in the country he is giving you. The Lord will make you his holy people, just as he promised you, if you obey the Lord your God's commandments and follow his ways. Then everyone on earth will see that the Lord has chosen you to be his, and they will be afraid of you.

The Lord will make you very prosperous. You will have many children, your livestock will produce plenty of young, and your land will grow good harvests—all this in the country the Lord promised your forefathers he would give you. The Lord will provide rain for your land at the right time from his heavenly storehouse to bless all your work growing crops. You will lend money to many nations but you won't need to borrow from any of them. The Lord will put you in first place, not the last. You will only go up, never down, as long as you listen to and follow carefully the commandments of the Lord your God that I'm giving you today. Don't deviate from any of my instructions today. Don't go and worship other gods.

But if you don't obey the Lord your God by following carefully all his commandments and regulations I'm giving you today, then you will experience all the following curses and more: You will be cursed when you're in the town; you will be cursed when you're in the countryside. You will be cursed by not having bread. You will be cursed by not having children, and by not having good harvests, and by your cattle not having calves, and your sheep not having lambs. You will be cursed wherever you go and in everything you do.

The Lord will send you curses, making you confused and frustrated in everything you do, until you are brought down and die quickly because of the evil that you've done by abandoning him. The Lord will give you infectious diseases until he has wiped you out from the country you are entering. Then the Lord will hit you with sickness that makes you waste away, with a severe fever and swelling like you're burning up, while your crops are damaged by drought and blight and mildew. These will attack you until you die. The sky above you will be like bronze, and the earth beneath you will be like iron. The Lord will change the rain of your land into dust and sand; it will fall from the sky on you until you're destroyed.

The Lord will have your enemies defeat you. You will attack them from one direction, but you will scatter seven different ways. Everyone on earth will be horrified at what happens to you. Your dead bodies will be food for birds of prey and wild animals, and there won't be anyone to scare them away. The Lord will give you boils like he did to the Egyptians, with swellings and scabs and skin rashes that can't be cured. The Lord will drive you mad; he will blind you and confuse you so that even at noon you will be groping around like a blind man in the dark. You won't be successful in what you do. You'll be persecuted and robbed the whole time, and no one will come and save you.

You will be engaged to marry a woman, but another man will sleep with her. You will build a house but you won't live in it. You will plant a vineyard but won't benefit from any harvest. Your ox will be slaughtered right in front of you, but you won't eat any of it. Your donkey will be taken away and won't be returned to you. Your sheep will be taken by your enemies, and no one will come and save you. Your sons and daughters will be taken away as slaves to other nations while you watch, and you'll wear your eyes out crying over them, but there won't be anything you can do about it. A foreign nation you've never heard of will eat all the crops you worked so hard to grow. You will be continually persecuted and downtrodden. What you see will drive you mad. The Lord will give you painful boils that can't be cured on your knees and thighs, in fact from head to toe.

The Lord will exile you and your chosen king to a foreign nation that neither you nor your forefathers have ever heard of. There you will worship other gods, idols made of wood and stone. You will be something that horrifies all the nations where you've been exiled by the Lord. They will laugh at you and ridicule you.

You will sow a lot of seed in the field, but harvest very little because the locusts will destroy it. You will plant vineyards and care for them, but you won't harvest the grapes or drink the wine, because the grapes will be eaten by maggots. You will have olive trees all over the country but you won't have any olive oil to use, because the olives will drop early from the trees. You will have sons and daughters, but you won't have them for long, because they will be taken off into captivity

as slaves. Locust swarms will destroy all your trees and crops. Foreigners who live with you will rise higher and higher in status above you, while you sink lower and lower. They will lend to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the first, and you will be the last.

All these curses will come down on you. They will chase after you and attack you until you die because you did not obey the Lord your God and keep the commandments and regulations he gave you. They will be lasting evidence, visible signs of what happened to you and your descendants. Because you did not serve the Lord your God with happiness and with a joyful attitude, you will serve your enemies that the Lord sends to attack you. You will be hungry, thirsty, naked, and poor. He will tie an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you.

The Lord will bring a nation to attack you from a long way off, from the ends of the earth. They will swoop down upon you like an eagle, this nation whose language you won't understand. They are a ruthless nation that doesn't have respect for the old and doesn't have mercy on the young. They will eat your lambs and calves and the crops you've grown until you are destroyed. They won't leave you any grain or new wine or olive oil, no calves from your herds or lambs from your flocks, so you'll die of starvation. They will besiege all the towns in your country, until the high, fortified walls that you trust in have fallen. They will besiege all your towns in your country that the Lord your God has given you. You'll end up eating your children, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God gave you, because of the siege and the suffering that your enemy will cause you.

The kindest and most sensitive man among you will refuse to share his food with his brother, the wife he loves, and those of his own children who are left. He will refuse to share with any of them the flesh of his children that he's forced to eat because he doesn't have anything else because of the siege and suffering your enemy has caused you in all your towns.

The kindest and most sensitive woman among you, so kind and sensitive she wouldn't ever go barefoot on the ground, will refuse to share her food, a baby and its afterbirth, with the husband she loves and her own son and daughter. She will even secretly eat the babies she gives birth to, as well as the afterbirth, since she doesn't have anything else because of the siege and the suffering your enemy has caused in all your towns,

If you don't carefully observe all these laws written down in this book so that you may show respect for this glorious and awesome Lord your God, he will bring down on you and your descendants unbelievable disasters, intense and long-lasting diseases, and terrible and incurable sicknesses. He will give you all the diseases you were terrified of in Egypt, and they will stay with you. The Lord will also give you every sickness and disease, even those not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. You who grew as numerous as the stars in the sky will end up as only a few, because you would not obey what Lord your God told you. In the same way as he wanted to make you prosperous and increase in number, so now he will wipe you out and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the country you are going in to own.

The Lord will scatter you among the nations all over the earth, and there you will worship other gods, gods made of wood and stone, which you and your fathers had never heard of. You won't find any place to rest among those nations, no place of your own. The Lord will make you anxious, with failing eyesight and a mind full of despair. You will see your life hanging in the balance as you doubt. You will be afraid day and night, terrified you won't survive. In the morning you'll say, “I wish it was evening!” and in the evening you'll say, “I wish it was morning!” because you're so frightened by the terrifying things you see.

The Lord will send you back to Egypt in ships to a place that I said you weren't ever meant to see again. You will put yourselves on sale there to your enemies as male and female slaves, but nobody will want to buy you.

The following are the terms of the agreement that the Lord ordered Moses to make with the Israelites in the country of Moab. This was in addition to the agreement he had made with them at Horeb.

Moses called all the Israelites together and announced to them, You saw with your own eyes everything the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his whole country. You saw with your own eyes the amazing tests, and those great signs and miracles. But up to now the Lord has not given you minds that understand, or eyes that see, or ears that hear, saying, For forty years I led you through the desert, but your clothes and sandals didn't wear out. You didn't have bread to eat, or wine or alcohol to drink in order that you would realize that I am the Lord your God.

When we arrived here, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan marched out to fight us in battle, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh to own. So make sure you keep and follow the terms of this agreement in order that you may be successful in everything you do.

Every one of you stands here today before the Lord your God: you tribal leaders, officials, and all the men of Israel, your children and wives, and the foreigners in your camps who cut your firewood and carry your water. You're here so you can enter into the agreement of the Lord your God, which he is making with you today, and accept his solemn promise, and so he can confirm you today as his people. He will be your God as he told you and as he promised your forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It's not only with you that the Lord is making this agreement and solemn promise, those who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God, but also with those who are not here today.

You know very well what it was like when we lived in the land of Egypt and our experiences as we passed through the nations on the way here. You saw their disgusting religious practices and their idols of wood and stone, and silver and gold.

You need to make sure today that there's no man or woman, family or tribe of yours who wants to turn

from the Lord our God and go and worship the gods of these nations. Make sure there is nothing like that among you that would produce such poison and bitterness. For when someone like that hears the words of this solemn promise, they think they'll still receive a blessing, telling themselves, “I'll be safe, even though I'll go on doing whatever I feel like.” Such an attitude would destroy good and bad alike. The Lord would never want to pardon them. In fact, his passionate anger will burn against them, and every curse written in this book will fall on them. The Lord will erase their name from the earth, and will punish them as an example to all the Israelite tribes, in accordance with all the curses of the agreement written in this Book of the Law.

Later generations, your descendants and foreigners from far away, will see how the Lord has brought disaster on the country and devastated it. The whole country will be a burning wasteland of sulfur and salt. Nothing is sown; it's totally unproductive; no plant grows there—just like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his furious anger.

Everyone everywhere will ask, “Why did the Lord do this to the country? Why did he get so terribly angry?”

The people will answer, “It's because they abandoned the agreement of the Lord, the God of their forefathers, which he made with them when he led them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods, bowing down to gods they'd never heard of—gods that the Lord had not given to them. That's why the Lord was so angry with this land, and he rained down on it every curse written in this book. The Lord uprooted them from their country in his anger, rage, and fury, and he threw them out, leaving them in another land, where they are to this day.”

The Lord our God has secrets that belong to him, but what has been revealed belong to us and to our descendants forever, so that we may follow everything in this law.

One day after you experience all this, the blessings and curses I've told you about, you'll think about them, living in all the different nations where the Lord your God has exiled you. When that happens, and when you and your children come back to the Lord your God, and when you do what he says with all your mind and all your being in accordance with everything I'm telling you today, then the Lord your God will be merciful to you. He will bring you back home, gathering you from all the nations where he scattered you. Even if you're exiled to the ends of the earth, I will gather you from there and bring you back.

The Lord your God will bring you home to the country that belonged to your forefathers and you will own it again. He will make you successful, and you will have even more descendants than your forefathers. The Lord your God will make you and your descendants his again, and you will love him with all your mind and with all your being, so that you'll live.

Then the Lord your God will place all these curses upon your enemies instead, on those who hate and persecute you. You will once again do what the Lord tells you and follow all his commandments that I'm giving you today. The Lord your God will make you successful in everything you do, you will have children, your livestock will be productive, and you will have good harvests. The Lord will once again be happy to do you good, as he did to your forefathers, if you obey the Lord your God by keeping his commandments and regulations written in this book of the Law, and if you come back to him with all your mind and with all your being.

The instruction I'm giving you today isn't too difficult for you to follow. It's not as if it's so far from you that it's impossible to achieve. It's not in heaven so you have to ask, “Who is going to go up to heaven to get it for us and let us know what it says so we can obey it?” It's not across the ocean so you have to ask, “Who is going to cross the ocean to get it for us and let us know what it says so we can obey it?” No—you have this instruction right there before you. It's in the words you speak and in the thoughts you think, so obey it.

Listen! Today I've placed a choice before you: life and what's good, or death and what's evil. I'm telling you today to love the Lord your God, to follow his ways, and to keep his commandments, rules, and regulations, so you can live and grow in number, and so the Lord your God may bless you in the country that you are entering and will own.

If you disregard this and you refuse to listen, if you're lured into bowing down to other gods and worshiping them, then I warn you right now that you will definitely die. You won't live long in the country that you're going to own after you cross the Jordan.

I call on heaven and earth to be my witnesses against you today that I have placed before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life, so you and your descendants will live, so you will love the Lord your God, obey him, and hold onto him. For he is your life, and he will give you long lives in the country that the Lord promised to give your forefathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Once Moses had finished giving these instructions to all the Israelites, he told them, I'm now a hundred and twenty years old. I can't get around like I used to, and the Lord has told me, “You are not to cross the Jordan.”

The Lord your God himself is going to lead you across. He will destroy these nations as you advance, and you will take over their land. Joshua will cross ahead of you, as the Lord said. The Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and their land when he destroyed them.

The Lord will hand them over to you, and you will deal with them exactly as I've told you. Be strong! Be brave! Don't be frightened or terrified of them, because the Lord your God will go with you. He won't ever leave you or abandon you.

Moses called for Joshua and told him in front of all the Israelites, “Be strong!! Be brave! You will accompany this people into the country that the Lord promised to give their forefathers, and you are to allocate it for them to own. The Lord himself goes ahead of you. He will be with you. He won't ever leave you

or abandon you. Don't be afraid and don't be discouraged."

Moses wrote this law down and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the Ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the Israelite elders.

Moses gave them these orders, "At the end of every seven years, the year when debts are canceled during the Festival of Shelters, when all the Israelites come before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you are to read this law for everyone to hear.

Have the people gather together—the men, women, children, and the foreigners living with you—so that they can listen and learn to respect the Lord your God and to carefully observe all the instructions of this law. Then their children who are ignorant of the law will listen and learn to respect the Lord your God for as long as you live in the country you are going to occupy once you cross the Jordan."

Then the Lord told Moses, "Listen, you are soon going to die. Tell Joshua to meet you, and then both of you are to come and stand before me at the Tent of Meeting, so that I may appoint him as leader."

Moses and Joshua went to stand before the Lord at the Tent of Meeting. The Lord appeared there at the tent in a pillar of cloud. The cloud stood at the entrance to the tent.

The Lord told Moses, "You will join your ancestors in death, and these people are going to prostitute themselves by worshiping the foreign gods of the country they are entering. They will abandon me and break the agreement I've made with them. Then I will abandon them and turn away from them, so they will be destroyed, and they will experience many disasters and problems.

At that time they'll say, 'We're suffering these disasters because our God has abandoned us!'

Then I will definitely ignore them because of all the evil they have done by worshiping other gods.

So write down this song and teach it to the Israelites. Help them learn to sing it, so it will provide evidence for me against them. Once I've led them into the country that I promised to give their forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey, they will have plenty to eat and will do well. Then they will go and worship other gods, and they will abandon me and break my agreement. Once they've experienced plenty of trouble and suffering, this song will testify against them, because their descendants won't forget the words. I know what they're like, even before I lead them into the country that I promised to give them."

Right then Moses wrote down this song and taught it to the Israelites.

Then the Lord appointed Joshua son of Nun as leader, and told him, "Be strong! Be brave! For you are going to lead the Israelites into the country that I promised to give them, and I will be with you."

After Moses had finished writing down this Law in a book from start to finish, he ordered the Levites who carried the Ark of the Lord's Agreement: "Place this book of the Law beside the Ark of the Lord your God's Agreement, so that it will be kept there as a evidence against you. I know how stubborn and rebellious you are. If you've already started rebelling against the Lord while I'm still alive, how much worse will you get after I die?

Summon all the elders of your tribes and all your officers to gather here before me so that I can tell them this directly and call on heaven and earth as witnesses against them. I know that after my death you will become completely immoral, leaving the path I have ordered you to follow. In the future, evil things will happen to you because of the evil sins you commit in the sight of the Lord, making him angry by what you do."

Then Moses recited all the words of this song as the Israelites listened.

Heaven, listen as I speak; Earth, hear what I'm saying.

May my teaching fall gently like the rain; may my words drop lightly like the dew, like soft rain on new grass, like spring showers on growing plants.

I will praise the Lord's character. Tell everyone how great he is!

He is the Rock. Everything he does is perfect, for all his ways are right. He is the trustworthy God who is never unjust; he is fair and honest.

His children have acted immorally towards him; so they are no longer his children because of their sinful stains. They are a perverse and corrupt people.

Is this any way to repay the Lord, you foolish, stupid people? Isn't he your Father who created you? Isn't he the one who turned you into a nation and made you strong?

Remember the olden days; think about the generations of the past. Go and ask your father about them, and he will explain them to you. Talk to your elders, and they will tell you what you need to know.

The Most High gave the nations their lands when he divided the human race; he fixed their borders depending on their gods.

But the Lord's people are his, Israel is his chosen one.

He found you in a desert land, in a desolate wasteland of whirlwinds. He protected you; he cared for you; he looked after you as the one he loved the most.

Like an eagle watching over its nest, hovering over its chicks, he spread his wings and picked you up and carried you along.

The Lord was the only one who led you; no foreign god was with him.

The Lord gave you the high country to rule, and fed you with the crops of the field to eat. He sustained you with honey from the rock and olive oil from the flinty crag,

with yogurt from the herd and milk from the flock, with the fat of lambs, with rams from Bashan, and goats, along with the best wheat. You drank the wine made from the best grapes.

But Israel, you grew fat and rebelled—fat, overweight, and bloated with food. You abandoned the God who made you and despised the Rock of your salvation.

You made the Lord jealous by worshiping foreign gods; you made him angry with such disgusting practices.

You offered sacrifices to demons instead of God, to gods you didn't know anything about, to brand-new gods that your forefathers didn't worship.

You dismissed the Rock who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave birth to you.

The Lord rejected them when he saw this; his sons and daughters made him angry.

He said: “I will turn away from them. Then I'll see what happens to them! They are a perverse people, unfaithful children.

They have made me jealous by worshiping things that are not God; they have made me angry with their useless idols. So I will make them jealous using a people that aren't really a nation; I will make them angry using ignorant foreigners.

My anger has been set on fire, burning down to the depths of the grave, destroying the earth and all it produces, even setting fire to the foundations of the mountains.

I will pile disasters on them; I will use up my arrows shooting at them.

They will waste away from hunger, destroyed by disease and poisonous plague. I will send wild animals to bite them with their teeth, the fangs of snakes that slide along the ground.

Outside in the streets the sword kills their children, inside their homes, they die from fright; young men and young women, children and old people.

I would have told them I was going to cut them to pieces and wipe out even the memory of them;

but I didn't want to hear their conquerors jeering, their enemies misunderstanding what had happened and saying, ‘We won all by ourselves, the Lord didn't have anything to do with it.’

Israel is a nation that doesn't think straight; none of them understand anything.

How I wish they were wise, so they could understand it; they would recognize what was going to happen to them.

How on earth could one man chase after a thousand, or two make ten thousand run away, unless their Rock of protection had sold them, unless the Lord had surrendered them?

The rock they rely on is not like our Rock, as even our enemies admit.

But their vine comes from the vine of Sodom, from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are poisonous; they are bitter bunches.

Their wine is the poison of serpents, deadly snake venom.

I've stored this all up; it's sealed in my vaults.

I make sure justice is done, I will repay. The time is coming when they will fall, their day of disaster is approaching, their doom will soon arrive.”

The Lord is going to vindicate his people; he will be merciful to his servants when he sees that they have no strength left, and that everyone is gone, whether slave or free.

He'll ask, “What happened to your gods, the rock where you went for protection?

Who ate the fat of your sacrifices and drank the wine of your drink offerings? Have them come and help you; have them come and protect you!

Listen! I am the only God! There is no other God except me! I bring death, and I give life; I wound, and I heal. No one can be rescued from my power.

I hold up my hand to heaven and solemnly declare on my eternal life,

when I sharpen my shining sword and pick it up to execute judgment, I will repay my enemies and punish those who hate me as they deserve.

My arrows will become drunk with blood, as my sword eats flesh; the blood of those who are killed and captured, the heads of the enemy's leaders.”

Celebrate with him! Let all God's angels worship him! Celebrate, foreigners, with his people; because he will pay back those who killed his children. He will punish his enemies, and repay those who hate him; he will purify his land and his people.

Then Moses came with Joshua son of Nun and recited all the words of this song for the people to hear.

After Moses finished reciting the whole song to all the Israelites, he told them, “Think about all these words I've declared to you today, so you can order your children to follow carefully everything in this law. Don't treat these words as trivial because they are your life, and by them you will have long lives in the country that you will own after crossing the Jordan.”

That same day the Lord told Moses, “Climb up into the Abarim mountains to Mount Nebo, in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look over the country of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites for them to own.

There on the mountain you've climbed, you will die and join your people in death, in the same way your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and joined his people.

For there at the waters of Meribah-kadesh in the Desert of Zin, you both were unfaithful to me. You misrepresented me to the Israelites when you didn't treat me as holy in their presence. Though you will see the country that I am giving the Israelites from a distance, you won't enter it.”

The following is the blessing that Moses the man of God gave to the Israelites before he died. He said, The Lord came from Mount Sinai and shone on us from Mount Seir; he blazed out from Mount Paran coming with ten thousand holy ones, holding flaming fire at his right hand.

How much you love the people; you hold all the holy ones in your hand. They sit down at your feet to listen to your words: the law that Moses delivered to us that belongs to all the Israelites. The Lord became King in Israel when the people's leaders gathered, when the tribes of Israel assembled.

To Reuben he said, “May he live and not die, but may he only have a few men.”

To Judah he said: “Lord, please hear the cry of Judah and reunite him with his people. Even though he fights for himself, may you help him against his enemies.”

To Levi he said: “Your Thummim were given to Levi and your Urim to those dedicated to God, the ones you tested at Massah and argued with at the waters of Meribah. Levi said that he didn't pay attention to his father and mother, that he didn't acknowledge his brothers, and that he didn't recognize his children. The Levites did what you said and kept your agreement. They will teach your regulations to Jacob and your law to Israel. They will place incense before you, and

sacrifice whole burnt offerings on your altar. Lord, please bless what they have, and accept their service for you. Destroy those who attack them; make sure their enemies never rise again."

To Benjamin he said: "May the one the Lord loves be kept safe and secure in the Lord. The Lord always protects him, letting him rest on his shoulders."

To Joseph he said: "May the Lord bless his land with the best gifts of heaven—with the dew and water from the depths below; with the best crops ripened by the sun and the best produce of the seasons; with the finest contributions of the ancient mountains and the best materials of the everlasting hills; with the best gifts of the land and everything in it, along with the appreciation of the one who was in the burning bush. May these blessings rest on the head of Joseph like a crown for this prince among his brothers. He is as majestic as a firstborn bull; his horns are like those of a wild ox. He will use them to gore the nations, driving them to the ends of the earth. The horns represent the ten thousands of Ephraim, and the thousands of Manasseh."

To Zebulun he said: "Celebrate, Zebulun, in your travels and Issachar, in your tents. They will summon the peoples to a mountain; will offer the appropriate sacrifices there. They will enjoy the rich produce of the seas and from trading on the seashores."

To Gad he said: "Blessed is he who makes Gad's territory larger! Gad is like a lion lying in wait, ready to rip off an arm or a head. He chose the best land for himself, for he was allocated a ruler's share. He met with the people's leaders; he did what the Lord said was right, following the Lord's regulations for Israel."

To Dan he said: "Dan is a young lion that leaps out of Bashan."

To Naphtali he said: "Naphtali is really favored, full of the Lord's blessing. He shall take over the land to the west and south."

To Asher he said: "May Asher be blessed more than all the other sons; may he be favored above his brothers and bathe his feet in olive oil. May the bolts of your gate be strong as iron and bronze, and may you be strong all your life."

There is no one like the God of Israel, who rides across the heavens to come to help you; who rides the clouds in majesty.

The eternal God is your home, and he holds you up with his everlasting arms. He drives out the enemy ahead of you, and gives the order, "Destroy him!"

As a result Israel lives in peace; Jacob has no trouble in a country of grain and new wine, where the heavens drip with dew.

How blessed you are, Israel! Is there anyone like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is the shield that protects you, the sword that gives you confidence. Your enemies will tremble before you, and you shall tread them underfoot.

Moses left the plains of Moab and went to Mount Nebo, climbing right to the top of Pisgah that faces in the direction of Jericho. The Lord showed him the whole country, from Gilead all the way to Dan. This included all the territories of Naphtali, Ephraim and Manasseh, Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, the Negev, and the Jordan Valley from Jericho (the city of palms) down to Zoar.

The Lord told him, "This is the country I solemnly promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, 'I'm giving it to your descendants.' I have allowed you to see it for yourself, but you're not going to enter it."

Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the country of Moab, just as the Lord had said. He buried him in a valley there in Moab that is opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows to this day where Moses' grave is.

Moses was 120 when he died, yet he was still seeing clearly and he was still strong. The Israelites mourned for Moses on the plains of Moab for thirty days, until the time of mourning was over.

Joshua, son of Nun, was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had placed his hands on him to dedicate him. The Israelites paid attention to him, and followed the instructions the Lord had given to Moses. Since then there has never been a prophet in Israel like Moses who was the Lord's close friend. The Lord sent him to carry out all the signs and miracles in Egypt to convince Pharaoh and his officials, and all the people in the country. Moses did these amazing things with tremendous power as the Israelites watched.

Joshua

Book of Joshua

After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua, the son of Nun, who had been Moses' assistant. He told him, “My servant Moses has died. So go and cross the Jordan, you and all the people, and enter the country I am giving to the Israelites. As I promised Moses, everywhere you set foot will be land I am giving to you, from the desert to Lebanon, and on up to the River Euphrates; all the land of the Hittites, and to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea to the west. This will be your territory. No one will be able to stand against you while you live. Just as I was with Moses, I will be with you. I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.

Be strong! Be brave! You will be the people's leader as they occupy the land I promised their ancestors that I would give them. Just be strong and very brave, and be sure to obey all the law that my servant Moses instructed you to follow. Don't turn aside from it, either to the right or to the left, so that you may be successful in everything you do. Keep on reminding the people about the law. Meditate on it day and night, so you can be sure to do what it requires. Then you will be successful and prosper in what you do. Don't forget what I told you: Be strong! Be brave! Don't be afraid! Don't get discouraged! For the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Then Joshua gave an order to those in charge of the people: “Go through the whole camp and tell the people, ‘Get everything ready, because in three days time we will cross the Jordan, to go and take the land God is giving to you to possess.’”

But to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, Joshua said, “Remember what Moses, the servant of the Lord, ordered you to do: ‘The Lord your God is giving you rest, and will give you this land.’ Your wives and children, and your livestock will remain here in the land that Moses allotted you on the east side of the Jordan. But all your armed men, ready for battle, will cross over ahead of your brothers to help them, until the Lord lets them rest, as he has let you rest, and they too have taken possession of the land that the Lord is giving to you. Then you can return and occupy your own land which Moses allotted to you on the east side of the Jordan.”

They said to Joshua, “We will do everything you have ordered us to do, and we will go wherever you send us. We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses in everything. May the Lord God be with you as he was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against what you say and doesn't follow your orders, who doesn't obey everything you command, will be put to death. So be strong! Be brave!”

Then Joshua, son of Nun, secretly sent out two spies from Shittim. “Go and explore the land, especially around Jericho,” he told them. So they went, and stayed at the house of woman named Rahab, a prostitute. There they spent the night.

But the king of Jericho was told, “Look, some Israelites have come here this evening to spy out the land.” So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, telling her, “Hand over the men who came to visit you and stay in your house, for they've come to spy out our whole country.”

The woman had taken the two men and had hidden them. She told the king's messengers, “Yes, it's true—the men did come to visit me, but I didn't know where they were from. They left at sundown, just as the city gate was closing. I've no idea where they went. If you're quick, you can chase after them and maybe catch up with them.” (She had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some bundles of flax that she had lying there.)

The king's messengers went chasing after the men down the road that leads to the Jordan River fords. As soon as the pursuers had left, the city gate was shut behind them.

Before the spies went to sleep, Rahab came up to the roof to talk to them. She told them, “I know that the Lord has given this land to you. We're all terrified of you. Everyone who lives here is dying of fright since you people arrived. We've heard how the Lord dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you left Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard all this, our courage melted away. Nobody had any fighting spirit left because of you. For the Lord your God is God of heaven above and the earth below. So now promise me in the name of the Lord that because I have acted in good faith to you, then you will do the same for my family. Give me some sign that I can trust you, that you will spare my father and mother and brothers and sisters—and all who are part of their families—that you will save them from death.”

“Our lives for yours!” the men told her. “If you don't tell anyone about this, we will treat you honestly and faithfully when the Lord gives us the land.”

Then she lowered them down by a rope through the window since the house where she lived was built into the outside of the city wall.

“Run to the hills,” she told them. “That way those searching for you won't find you. Stay there three days until they've gone home, and then you can be on your way.”

The men had told her, “We will be freed from the promise you made us swear, unless when we enter this land, you hang a scarlet cord in the window through which you lowered us. You must gather together in the house your father and mother and brothers—all the family. If anyone leaves your house and is killed, that's their fault—we're not responsible for their death. But if anyone lays a hand on someone who is inside your house, we take full responsibility for their death. But if you tell anyone about this then we will be freed from the promise you made us swear.”

“I agree—may it be as you say,” she replied. She sent them off, and hung a scarlet cord in the window.

They went up into the hill country and stayed there three days. The men searching for them looked all along the road, but couldn't find them, so they returned home.

Then the two men started back. They came down from the hill country and crossed over the Jordan. They went to Joshua and explained to him all that had happened to them.

"The Lord has placed this land in our hands," they assured him. "All the people who live there are scared to death of us!"

Early the following morning Joshua and the Israelites set out from Shittim and arrived at the banks of the Jordan. There they all spent the night before crossing over.

Three days later those in charge of the people went through the camp telling the people, "When you see the Ark of the Agreement of the Lord your God carried by the priests, the Levites, you must leave the place where you are and follow it. That way you'll know which way to go, since you haven't been here before. Leave about 3,000 feet between you and the Ark. Don't go near it!"

Then Joshua said to the people, "Make sure you are pure, because tomorrow the Lord is going to do amazing things among you."

Joshua spoke to the priests, "Pick up the Ark of the Agreement and go before the people." So they picked up the Ark of the Agreement and went ahead of the people.

The Lord said to Joshua, "What I do today will confirm you as a great leader in the sight of all the Israelites, so that they'll realize that just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. Tell the priests carrying the Ark of the Agreement, 'When you get to the edge of the Jordan, take a few steps into the water and then stop.'"

So Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to what the Lord your God has to say to you. This is how you will know that the living God is right here with you," he told them. "You can be sure that he will drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites. Just watch—the Ark of the Agreement of the Lord of all the earth will cross in front of you through the Jordan. Choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one per tribe. The moment the priests carrying the Ark step into the water the river will stop flowing and the water will pile up." So the people broke camp and set out to cross the Jordan, with the priests carrying the Ark ahead of them.

As it was harvest season, the Jordan was full of water, overflowing its banks. But at the very moment the priests carrying the Ark stepped into the water, the river stopped flowing. The water piled up a long way upstream, at the town of Adam, near Zarethan, while downstream no more water flowed into the Dead Sea. So the people crossed over, opposite Jericho. The priests carrying the Ark stood on the dried-up riverbed of the Jordan as all the people went by, staying there until everyone had crossed over on dry ground.

Once the entire nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord told Joshua, "Choose twelve men from the people, one per tribe, and tell them, 'Pick up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing. Then carry them and set them down at the place where you will camp tonight.'" So Joshua sent for the twelve men he had chosen, one from each tribe, and told them, "Go back into the middle of the Jordan, right in front of the Ark of the Agreement of the Lord your God, and each of you pick up a stone and carry it on your shoulder, one for each of the tribes of Israel. This will be a memorial among you so when your children one day ask, 'What do these stones mean?' you can tell them, 'It's about the time the Jordan River stopped flowing when the Ark of the Lord's Agreement went across. When it crossed over the water stopped. These stones are a memorial to the people of Israel forever.'"

The people of Israel did as Joshua told them. The men picked up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan as the Lord had instructed Joshua. They carried them to the place where they camped overnight and placed the stones there, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Joshua also set up twelve stones in the middle of the Jordan right where the priests carrying the Ark of the Agreement had stood, and they are still there to this very day.

The priests carrying the Ark remained standing in the middle of the Jordan until everything was done just as the Lord had told the people to do, all that Moses had told Joshua to do. The people crossed over quickly. Once all the people had crossed over, they watched as the Ark of the Lord was carried across by the priests.

The armed men from the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh crossed at the head of the people of Israel, as Moses had stipulated. They numbered about 40,000 men, armed and ready for battle, who crossed in the presence of the Lord to the plains of Jericho.

On that day the Lord confirmed Joshua as a great leader in the sight of all the Israelites, and they were in awe of him just as they had been in awe of Moses.

The Lord had told Joshua, "Order the priests carrying the Ark of the Testimony to come up out of the Jordan." So Joshua told the priests, "Come up out of the Jordan." The priests came up out of the Jordan carrying the Ark of the Agreement, and as soon as their feet touched dry ground the waters of the Jordan returned to where they had been, overflowing its banks as before.

The people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal, to the east of Jericho, on the tenth day of the first month. Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones that had been taken from the Jordan. He told the Israelites, "When some day your children ask you their parents, 'What do these stones mean?' you can explain to them, 'This is where the Israelites crossed the Jordan on dry ground.' For the Lord your God made the Jordan River dry up right in front of you so you all could cross, just as the Lord your God did at the Red Sea which he dried up so we could all cross. He did this so everyone on earth would know how powerful the Lord is, and so that you might be in awe of the Lord your God forever."

When all the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and all the Canaanite kings of the Mediterranean coast heard how the Lord had dried up the waters of the River Jordan so that the Israelites could cross over, their courage melted and they no longer had any fighting spirit to face the Israelites.

At that time the Lord told Joshua, "Make flint knives and circumcise the new generation of Israelites." Joshua had flint knives made and all male Israelites

were circumcised at the place that became known as "the hill of foreskins." This is the reason why Joshua had them all circumcised: all those who left Egypt—the men of fighting age—had died on the journey through the wilderness after the Exodus. They had all been circumcised when they left Egypt, but those born on the journey since then had not. For forty years the Israelites traveled through the wilderness until all the men of fighting age when they left Egypt had died, because they had not done what the Lord had told them to do. So the Lord had vowed that he would not let them see the land he had promised their forefathers to give us, a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord replaced them with their children, and these were the ones that Joshua circumcised. They were uncircumcised since they hadn't been circumcised on the way. Once they had all been circumcised, they stayed in the camp until they recovered.

The Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have removed from all of you the disgrace of Egypt." So that place has been called Gilgal to this day. The Israelites camped at Gilgal and celebrated Passover there on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month. From the very next day they began to eat produce from the land: unleavened bread and roasted grain. On the same day when they began eating produce from the land there was no more manna. No longer did the Israelites have manna; after that they ate the produce of the land of Canaan.

One day when Joshua was near Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Joshua went up to him and asked, "Are you for us or against us?"

"Neither," said the man. "I am the commander of the Lord's army. Now I'm here!"

Joshua fell down with his face to the ground in awe. Then he said, "What orders does my lord have for his servant?"

The commander of the Lord's army told Joshua, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you're standing is holy ground." Joshua did so.

Jericho's gates were shut and barred because of the Israelites. Nobody was allowed in or out. But the Lord told Joshua, "I'm handing over the city of Jericho to you, along with its king and its army of warriors. March around the city with your armed men once a day for six days. Seven priests are to go ahead of the Ark, each carrying a ram's horn. On the seventh day, march seven times around the city, with the priests blowing their rams' horns. When you hear a long blast on the rams' horns, everyone shall give a really loud shout. The city walls will collapse, and every man can go right in."

So Joshua, son of Nun, sent for the priests, and told them, "Pick up the Ark of Agreement, and have seven priests carry seven rams' horns and go ahead of the Ark of the Lord." Then he told the people, "Move out! March around the city with the armed men up front ahead of the Ark of the Lord!" When Joshua finished speaking to the people, the seven priests carrying the seven rams' horns in the presence of the Lord started out, blowing the horns, with the Ark following behind. Some of the armed men marched ahead of the priests blowing the horns, while some followed the Ark, the horns being blown continually. However, Joshua ordered them, "Don't shout, don't even talk. Don't say anything until I tell you all to shout—then shout!" So the Ark of the Lord was carried around the city, circling it once. Then they returned to the camp and spent the night there.

Joshua got up early in the morning, and the priests picked up the Ark of the Lord. The seven priests with the seven rams' horns went ahead of the Ark of the Lord, blowing the horns. The armed men went before them and behind the Ark of the Lord, the horns being blown continually. So on the second day they marched around the city, circling it once, and returned to the camp. They did this for a total of six days.

On the seventh day they got up at dawn and marched around the city in the usual way, except that this day they circled the city seven times. The seventh time around when the priests blew the horns, Joshua told the people, "Shout! For today the Lord has given the city to you! The city and everything in it is to be set apart for the Lord and destroyed. Only Rahab the prostitute and all those with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent. But stay away from everything set apart for the Lord, for if you were to take anything you too would be liable to be destroyed, and you would also bring disaster on the camp of Israel. All the silver and the gold, and everything made of bronze and iron, are holy to the Lord and they must be placed in the Lord's treasury."

So as soon as they heard the sound of the horns, the people gave a loud shout, and the city walls collapsed. The men went in right away and captured the city. They destroyed everything in the city: men and women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys, all were killed by the sword.

Joshua had told the two men who had gone to explore the land, "Go to the house of Rahab the prostitute and bring her out together with all her family, as you promised." So the spies went and brought out Rahab, her father and mother, and all who were with her. They brought out the whole family and took them to a place near the Israelite camp.

Then the Israelites burned down the city and everything in it, except for the silver and the gold, and everything made of bronze and iron, which they placed in the treasury of the Lord's house. Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute and her family because she hid the men Joshua had sent to spy out Jericho. And she lives among the Israelites to this day.

At that time Joshua declared a curse, saying: "Cursed before the Lord is anyone who attempts to rebuild this city of Jericho. He lays its foundation at the cost of his firstborn son; he sets up its gates at the cost of his youngest son."

So the Lord was with Joshua, and his fame spread throughout the land.

However, the Israelites had not been faithful regarding those things set apart for the Lord. Achan had taken some of them which made the Lord very angry with the Israelites. Achan was the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah. Joshua sent men from the camp near Jericho to the town of Ai, which is near Bethaven, east of Bethel. "Go and explore the land," he told them. So they went and explored

around Ai. When they returned they told Joshua, “The whole army isn't needed. Two or three thousand men is enough to go and attack Ai. Don't bother sending everyone—there's only a few of them.” So around three thousand men went to fight, but they were beaten by the men of Ai and they ran away. The men of Ai killed about thirty-six of them, chasing the Israelites from the town gate until they were defeated, killing them on their way down. At this the Israelites became afraid, losing all their courage.

Joshua ripped his clothes and fell down with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord until the evening. The elders did likewise, and he and the elders threw dust on their heads. Joshua cried, “Why, oh why, Lord God, did you bring us across the Jordan River only to hand us over to the Amorites for them to destroy us? We should have been satisfied to stay on the other side of the Jordan! Excuse me, Lord, but what can I say now that Israel has turned tail and run away from its enemies? The Canaanites and everyone living in the land will come and surround us and wipe us out so completely that even our name will be forgotten. Then what will happen to your great reputation?”

But the Lord replied to Joshua, “Stand up! What do you think you're doing lying on your face like that? Israel has sinned and has broken my agreement that I ordered them to keep. They have taken some of the things set apart for me; they have acted dishonestly; they have hidden the stolen items with their own belongings. That's why the Israelites can't stand up to their enemies. That's why they turn and run from their enemies, and have themselves become set apart for destruction. You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you have removed from among you those things set apart for destruction. Get up, and make sure the people are pure. Tell them, ‘Make yourselves pure in readiness for tomorrow, because this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says, There are things set apart for me that are hidden among you, Israel. You will not be able to stand against your enemies until you remove all of them. In the morning, you will come forward, tribe by tribe. Whichever tribe the Lord chooses will come forward clan by clan. The clan that the Lord chooses will come forward family by family. The family that the Lord chooses will come forward man by man. The one who is caught with what was set apart for destruction will be burned by fire, along with all that is his, for he broke the Lord's agreement and committed a terrible act in Israel.’”

Joshua got up early the next morning and called Israel forward, tribe by tribe. The tribe of Judah was chosen. The clans of Judah came forward and the Zerahites were chosen. The clan of Zerahites came forward, and the family of Zabdi was chosen. The family of Zabdi came forward, and Achan, son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, was chosen.

Joshua said to Achan, “My son, honor the Lord, the God of Israel, and confess. Tell me what you have done. Don't hide it from me.”

“It's true!” Achan replied. “I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what I did. Among the plunder I saw a beautiful cloak from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing fifty shekels. I really wanted them, so I took them. They're hidden in the ground inside my tent, with the silver buried deeper.” Joshua sent men who ran over to search the tent. They found what had been hidden, with the silver buried deeper. The men took the things from the tent and brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites. There they spread them out before the Lord.

Then Joshua, with all the Israelites, took Achan, the son of Zerah, the silver, the cloak, and the bar of gold, together with his sons and daughters, his cattle, his donkeys, his sheep, and his tent—everything he had—and brought them to the Valley of Achor. Then Joshua said to Achan, “Why did you bring so much trouble down on us? Today the Lord will bring trouble down on you.” All the Israelites stoned Achan. Then when they had stoned the rest they burned their bodies. They set up a great pile of stones over him which remains to this day. The Lord was no longer angry. This is why the place was called the Valley of Achor ever since.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Don't be afraid or downhearted! Take all the fighting men with you and attack Ai, for I'm handing over to you the king of Ai, his people, his town, and his land. You will do to Ai and its king what you did to Jericho and its king. However, this time you may keep for yourselves the plunder and the livestock. Set up an ambush behind the town.”

So Joshua and all the people got ready to attack Ai. He chose thirty thousand of his best fighting men and sent them out at night. He ordered them, “You lie in ambush behind the town, not far away. All of you need to be ready. When I and the rest of the men with me approach the town, the defenders will run out to attack us just like before, and we'll run away from them. They'll chase after us as we draw them away from the town, because they'll say to each other, ‘They're running away from us just like before.’ While we're running away from them, you will get up from your ambush positions and take the town, for the Lord God will hand it over to you. Once you've captured the town, set it on fire, as the Lord has instructed. Now follow your orders.”

Joshua sent them out, and they went to lie in ambush between Bethel and the west side of Ai. But that night Joshua stayed with the people in the camp. Early the next morning Joshua got up early and gathered the people and went up to attack Ai, accompanied by the elders of Israel. All the fighting men who were with him approached the front of the town, and camped there on the north side, with a valley between them and Ai. He took about five thousand men and had them lie in ambush between Bethel and Ai, to the west of the town. So the army took up their positions—the main army to the north of the town, and the ambush to the west. Joshua went that night to the valley.

As soon as the king of Ai saw the situation, he and all his men rushed out early in the morning to attack the Israelites where they had before, at a place overlooking the Jordan valley. He didn't know about the ambush waiting on the other side of the town. Joshua and the Israelites allowed themselves to be driven back, and ran away in the direction of the wilderness. All the men of the town were called out to chase after them, and as they pursued Joshua they were drawn father from the town. There wasn't a man left in Ai and Bethel who

didn't go out to chase the Israelites. They left the town wide open as they pursued the Israelites. Then the Lord told Joshua, “Hold up the spear in your hand and point it at Ai, because I'm giving it to you.” So Joshua held up the spear in his hand and pointed it at the town.

As soon as they saw this signal the men lying in ambush got up and rushed into the town. They captured it, and quickly set it on fire. When the men of Ai looked back they saw the smoke rising up into the sky from the town. They had nowhere to run to, because the Israelites who had been running away towards the wilderness now turned on their pursuers. For when Joshua and the Israelites saw that the ambush group had captured the town, and that smoke was rising from it, they turned around and attacked the men of Ai. The men from the ambush also came from the town and attacked them, so they were caught in the middle, with the Israelites on both sides. The Israelites cut them down—not a single man survived or got away. Only the king of Ai was captured alive, and he was brought before Joshua.

When the Israelites had finished killing the men of Ai who had chased them towards the wilderness—once they had all been cut down by the sword—the whole Israelite army returned to the town and killed everyone living there. Those who were killed that day numbered twelve thousand, men and women—all the inhabitants of Ai. For Joshua had continued to hold up his spear until all the people of Ai had been destroyed. Only the livestock and plunder were taken from the town by the Israelites, as the Lord had instructed Joshua. So Joshua burned the town of Ai, making it permanently into a heap of ruins where no one lives to this very day. He killed the king of Ai and hung his body on a tree until evening. When the sun went down Joshua ordered the body taken down. They threw it down in front of the entrance to the town gate and piled a heap of rocks over it which is still there today.

Then Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal for the Lord, the God of Israel. He did what Moses, the servant of the Lord, had told the Israelites to do, as recorded in the book of the Law of Moses: an altar of uncut stones which no one has worked with iron tools. On the altar they made burnt offerings and friendship offerings to the Lord. There in the presence of the Israelites, Joshua inscribed on the stones a copy of the Law of Moses. All the Israelites, the elders, the officers, and the judges stood in two groups facing each other with the priests, the Levites, and the Ark of the Lord's Agreement between them. (Included were the foreigners as well as the native born.) Half of them stood in front of Mount Gerizim, and half in front of Mount Ebal, just as Moses had ordered, for the blessing of the people this first time. Then Joshua read out the whole Law—all the blessings and curses recorded in the book of the Law. Joshua read out every word of Moses' instruction to the whole Israelite assembly, including the women, the children, and the foreigners who lived among them.

All the kings west of the Jordan heard what had happened. These included the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites who lived in the hill country, the lowlands, and along the coast as far as Lebanon. So they gathered to fight together as a united army against Joshua and the Israelites.

But when the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they decided on a cunning plan. They sent messengers to Joshua, their donkeys wearing worn-out saddles and carrying old wineskins that were torn and patched. They put on worn sandals that had been mended and wore old clothes. All their bread was dry and moldy. They went to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal and told him and the men of Israel, “We have come from a land far away, so please make a treaty with us.”

But the Israelites said to the Hivites, “Maybe you live close by. If you do, we cannot make a treaty with you.”

“We are your servants,” they replied.

“But who are you? Where do you come from?” Joshua asked.

“Your servants have come from a land far away,” they replied. “For we have heard of the reputation of the Lord your God, and reports of all that he did in Egypt, and what he did to the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan—to Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, who ruled in Ashtaroth. So our leaders and everyone who lives in our land told us: Take what you need with you for the journey. Go and meet with them, and tell them, ‘We are your servants. Please make a treaty with us.’ Look at this bread. It was warm when we took it from our houses on the day we set out to come here. But now it's dry and moldy, as you can see. These wineskins were new when we filled them, but look at them now—they're split and damaged. These clothes of ours and our sandals are all worn out because the journey took so long.” The Israelites tried some of the food. However, they did not consult the Lord. Then Joshua made a treaty with them, promising to spare their lives, and the leaders of the assembly swore an oath to guarantee it.

Three days after they had made the treaty, the Israelites learned that the Gibeonites lived nearby, right among them! The Israelites left to go to the Gibeonite towns, and arrived there on the third day. The towns were Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth and Kiriath Jearim. But the Israelites did not attack them because of the treaty sworn by the leaders of the assembly in the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. At this all the Israelites protested against the leaders. But the leaders replied to the people, “We swore to them by the Lord, the God of Israel, so we cannot lay a hand on them now. So this is what we're going to do to them. We'll let them live, so that we won't be punished for breaking the oath that we swore to them.” The leaders concluded, “Let them live.” So the Gibeonites became woodcutters and water-carriers in service to the entire assembly, as the Israelite leaders had ordered.

Then Joshua summoned the Gibeonites and asked them, “Why did you trick us? You told us, ‘We live a long way from you,’ but you live right next door to us! Consequently you are under a curse. From now on you shall forever be servants, woodcutters and water-carriers for the house of my God.”

They answered Joshua, “We your servants were told very clearly that the Lord your God had ordered

Moses to give you all this land, and that all its inhabitants were to be wiped out before you. So we really feared for our lives because of you. That's why we did what we did. Now we're in your hands. Do to us what you think is right and just."

Joshua did as he had said. He saved them from the Israelites, so that they did not kill them. That day Joshua made them woodcutters and water-carriers in service to the entire assembly and for the altar of the Lord wherever the Lord should choose. That is what they do right up to this very day.

Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, learned that Joshua had captured Ai and destroyed the town completely, as he had also done to Jericho, and had killed its king, just as he had the king of Jericho. He also heard that the Gibeonites had made peace with the Israelites and were allied with them. The people of Jerusalem were very frightened by this because Gibeon was a large town—as large as any town ruled by the king, and larger than Ai, and its men were tough fighters.

So Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, sent a message to Hoham, king of Hebron, Piram, king of Jarmuth, Japhia, king of Lachish, and Debir, king of Eglon, saying, "Come and help me attack Gibeon because they have made peace with Joshua and the Israelites." So these five Amorite kings (the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon) and their armies gathered and set off. They surrounded Gibeon and then began their attack.

The Gibeonites sent a message to Joshua at the camp in Gilgal, saying, "Please don't abandon us, your servants! Come quickly and save us! We need your help for all the Amorite kings of the hill country have joined in attacking us."

So Joshua, all his fighting men and best fighters, set off from Gilgal. The Lord had said to Joshua, "Don't be afraid of them, for you will defeat them. Not a single one will be able to stand against you."

By marching all night from Gilgal, Joshua arrived without warning. The Lord threw the Amorite armies into a panic when they saw the Israelites. He struck them down with a great blow at Gibeon; he chased them all the way up to Beth-horon, cutting them down on the way to Azekah and Makkedah. As they ran away from the Israelites down the slope from Beth-horon, the Lord hurled large hailstones down on them from the skies all the way to Azekah. More were killed by the hailstones than were killed by the swords of the Israelites.

On the day that the Lord handed the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke by the Lord in the presence of the Israelites, saying, "Sun, stand still over Gibeon! Moon, stand still over the Valley of Aijalon!" The sun stopped moving, and the moon stood still, until the nation of Israel had inflicted defeat on their enemies. (This is recorded in the Book of Jashar). The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not go down for around a full day. There wasn't a day like this ever before or since when the Lord listened to a human voice in such a way. It was because the Lord was fighting for Israel. Then Joshua and all the army returned to the camp at Gilgal.

The five kings had run away and hid in a cave at Makkedah. When Joshua was told that the five kings were hiding in a cave at Makkedah, he gave this order, "Roll some large stones to block the entrance to the cave and have some men guard it. But don't you stay there. Chase the enemy down and attack them from the rear. Don't let them escape to their towns for the Lord has given them to you to defeat." So Joshua and the Israelites totally defeated them, striking them down and killing them. Only a few of them survived to escape back to their towns. The army returned to Joshua at the camp at Makkedah, and no one dared even to threaten the Israelites.

Then Joshua said, "Open the cave entrance and bring out the five kings to me from the cave." So they did, bringing out the five kings from the cave—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. When they had brought the kings to Joshua, he summoned all the fighting men, and said to the commanders who had gone with him, "Come here, and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So they came over and put their feet on their necks. Joshua said to them, "Don't ever be afraid or discouraged! Be strong and be brave! For the Lord is going to do the same thing to all your enemies that you're going to fight!" Then Joshua killed the kings and hung their bodies on five trees and left them hanging there until the evening. As the sun went down Joshua gave the order to take their bodies down from the trees and throw them into the cave where they had been hiding. Then the Israelites piled up stones over the entrance to the cave, and they are there to this very day.

That day Joshua captured Makkedah, killing all its inhabitants, including the king. He set it apart and completely destroyed it and everyone in it, leaving no survivors. He killed the king of Makkedah just as he had killed the king of Jericho.

Then Joshua and the Israelite army left Makkedah and went to attack Libnah, and the Lord gave the town and its king to the Israelites. Joshua had everyone in it killed, leaving no survivors. He killed its king just as he had killed the king of Jericho.

Then Joshua and the Israelite army moved on from Libnah to Lachish, surrounding the town and attacking it. The Lord gave the town to the Israelites who captured it on the second day. Joshua had everyone in it killed, just as he had done in Libnah. Then Horam, king of Gezer, came with his army to help Lachish, but Joshua and his men killed them, leaving no survivors.

Joshua and the Israelite army moved on from Lachish to Eglon, surrounding the town and attacking it. They captured it the same day. Joshua had everyone in it killed that very day. He set it apart and completely destroyed it, just as he had done in Lachish.

Joshua and the Israelite army left Eglon and went to attack Hebron. They captured the town, as well as the towns nearby. Joshua had all the inhabitants killed, leaving no survivors. Just as he had done in Eglon, he set it apart and completely destroyed it and everyone in it.

Then Joshua and the Israelite army turned and went to attack Debir. He captured it and its king and all the towns nearby. Joshua had all the inhabitants killed,

leaving no survivors. Just as he had done in Hebron, he set it apart and completely destroyed it and everyone in it. He killed the king of Debir just as he had killed the king of Libnah.

So Joshua conquered the whole land—the hill country, the Negev, the foothills, and the slopes—and all their kings. He didn't leave a single survivor. He killed everyone as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded. Joshua destroyed them from Kadesh-barnea to Gaza and the whole of the land from Goshen to Gibeon. All the kings and their lands were conquered by Joshua in one campaign because the Lord, the God of Israel, was fighting for the Israelites. Joshua and the Israelite army then returned to the camp at Gilgal.

When Jabin, king of Hazor, heard about what happened, he sent a message to Jobab, king of Madon, to the kings of Shimron and Achshaph, and to the kings of the northern hill country, the Jordan Valley south of Kinnereth, the western foothills, and the foothills of Dor to the west, to the kings of the Canaanites, both east and west, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites in the hill country, and the Hivites living near Mount Hermon in the land of Mizpah. All their armies assembled together, a vast horde as numberless as the sand of the seashore, together with many, many horses and chariots. All these kings joined forces and set up camp beside the waters of Merom to fight against Israel.

The Lord said to Joshua, “Don't be afraid because of them, for by this time tomorrow I myself will hand them all over to Israel, dead. Cripple their horses and burn their chariots.”

Joshua and the Israelite army went and attacked them without warning at the waters of Merom. The Lord handed them over to the Israelites who cut them down and chased them as far as Greater Sidon and Misrephoth Maim, and east to the valley of Mizpah, killing them until none were left. Afterwards Joshua did what the Lord had ordered: he crippled the horses and burned the chariots.

Then Joshua turned on Hazor. He captured it and killed its king, for Hazor was at that time the chief of all these kingdoms. Joshua had all the inhabitants killed, leaving no survivors. He set it apart and completely destroyed it—no one was left alive. Then he burned down Hazor.

Joshua captured all these towns and killed their kings. He set them apart and completely destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the Lord had ordered. However, Israel did not burn any of the towns built on mounds, except Hazor, which Joshua did burn. The Israelites did take for themselves all the plunder and livestock from these towns. But they killed all the inhabitants, destroying them all so none were left alive. As the Lord had instructed Moses, so Moses had instructed Joshua. Joshua did what he had been told—he did everything that the Lord had instructed Moses.

So Joshua conquered the whole land—the hill country, the Negev, all the land of Goshen, the western foothills, the Jordan Valley, the mountains of Israel, and the eastern foothills. This covered land from Mount Halak leading to Seir in the south, right up to Baal Gad in the north, below Mount Hermon in the valley of Lebanon. Joshua captured and killed all their kings. Joshua fought a long war with all these kings. Not a single town made peace with the Israelites except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the rest were conquered in battle. For the Lord made them stubborn, wanting to fight the Israelites so that they might be set apart and completely destroyed, wiped out without mercy, as the Lord had instructed Moses.

During this time Joshua also annihilated the descendants of Anak living in the hill country of Hebron, Debir, and Anab, and all the hill country of Judah and Israel. Joshua set apart and completely destroyed their towns, and there were no descendants of Anak left in the land of Israel, only some in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod.

So Joshua took the entire land in accordance with what the Lord had instructed Moses, giving it to Israel to own as it was divided up among the tribes. Then the land was at peace.

These are the kings that the Israelites defeated when they took possession of their land east of the Jordan, from the Arnon valley in the south to Mount Hermon in the north, including all the land on the east side of the Jordan. Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon, ruled from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon valley, all the way from the middle of the valley to the Jabbok River, the boundary with the Ammonites (and included half of Gilead). His territory also included the Jordan Valley up to the sea of Kinnereth and land to the east, and all the way down to the Salt Sea, east towards Beth-jeshimoth and south to the slopes of Pisgah. King Og of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaites, who lived in Ashtaroth and Edrei, ruled in the north from Mount Hermon to Sacaleh, and all of Bashan to the east, and west to the borders of the Geshurites and Maacathites, together with half of Gilead up to the border of Sihon, king of Heshbon.

Moses, the servant of the Lord, and the Israelites had defeated them, and Moses had allotted the land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

These are the kings of the land that Joshua and the Israelites defeated to the west of the Jordan, from Baal Gad in the valley of Lebanon to Mount Halak leading to Seir. Joshua gave it to the tribes of Israel to own as it was allotted to them. The land included the hill country, the foothills, the Jordan Valley, the slopes, and the Negev desert—the land of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

The king of Jericho. The king of Ai, near Bethel. The king of Jerusalem. The king of Hebron. The king of Jarmuth. The king of Lachish. The king of Eglon. The king of Gezer. The king of Debir. The king of Geder. The king of Hormah. The king of Arad. The king of Libnah. The king of Adullam. The king of Makkedah. The king of Bethel. The king of Tappuah. The king of Hepher. The king of Aphek. The king of Lasharon. The king of Madon. The king of Hazor. The king of Shimron-meron. The king of Acshaph. The king of Taanach. The king of Megiddo. The king of Kedesh. The king of Jokneam in Carmel. The king of Dor in Naphath-dor. The king of Goiim in Gilgal. The king of Tirzah. The total of all the kings is 31.

Many years had passed by, and Joshua had grown old. The Lord spoke to him, saying, “You're now an old man, but there's still a great deal of land still to be taken.

This is the remaining land: the territory of all the Philistines and all the Geshurites, from the Shihur River on the border with Egypt north to the border of Ekron —all of which is counted as Canaanite but comes under the five Philistine lords of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. In addition there's the land of the Avvites in the south, all the land of the Canaanites, and Mearah that belongs to the Sidonians, all the way to Aphek on the border with the Amorites, as well as the land of the Gebalites and the Lebanon area from the town of Baalgad to the slopes of Mount Hermon to Lebo-hamath, and those who live in the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim, including all the land of the Sidonians.

I myself will drive them out ahead of the Israelites. Just allocate the land to Israel for them to own, as I have commanded you. So divide this land among the nine tribes and the half-tribe of Manasseh for them to own.”

The other half of the tribe of Manasseh, and the tribes of Reuben and Gad, had already received their land grant on the east side of the Jordan, as allotted to them by Moses, the servant of the Lord. It stretched from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon valley, from the town in the middle of the valley, and all the plateau of Medeba, up to Dibon; and all the towns that belonged to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, up to the border with the Ammonites. In addition it included Gilead, the land of the Geshurites and Maacathites, all of Mount Hermon, and all of Bashan as far as Salecah, as well as all the land of the kingdom of Og of Bashan, who had ruled in Ashtaroth and Edrei. He was one of the last of the Rephaites. Moses had defeated them and driven them out. But the Israelites had not driven out the Geshurites or the Maacathites, who still live among them to this very day. Moses did not allocate any land for the Levites to own. Instead they were allotted the offerings made by fire to the Lord, the God of Israel, as the Lord had promised them.

This was the land that Moses allotted to the tribe of Reuben, by families: Their territory stretched from Aroer on the edge of the Arnon valley, from the town in the middle of the valley, and all the plateau of Medeba; Heshbon and all associated towns on the plateau—Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth Baal Meon, Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth-shahar, on a hill in the valley, Beth-peor, the slopes of Pisgah, Beth-jeshimoth— all the towns of the plateau and all the kingdom of Sihon, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon. He was defeated by Moses, as well as the Midianite leaders Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, princes who lived in the kingdom and who were allied to Sihon. At the same time the Israelites killed Balaam, son of Beor, the fortune-teller, along with the others who were slaughtered. The Jordan was the boundary for the tribe of Reuben. This was the land, the towns and the villages, allotted to the tribe of Reuben, by families.

This was the land that Moses allotted to the tribe of Gad, by families: Their territory was Jazer, all the towns of Gilead, and half of the land of the Ammonites up to Aroer, near Rabbah; stretching from Heshbon to Ramath-mizpeh and Betonim, and from Mahanaim to the Debir region. In the Jordan valley lay Beth-haram, Beth-nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon, the rest of the kingdom of Sihon, king of Heshbon. The boundary ran along the Jordan up to the bottom end of the sea of Kinnereth and then ran east. This was the land, the towns and the villages, allotted to the tribe of Gad, by families.

This was the land that Moses allotted to the half-tribe of Manasseh, that is half of the tribe of the descendants of Manasseh, by families: Their territory stretched from Manahaim through the whole of Bashan, all the kingdom of Og, and all the towns of Jair in Bashan—sixty in all. Also included was Gilead, and Ashtaroth and Edrei, the towns of king Og in Bashan. This was the land allotted to the descendants of Machir, son of Manasseh, for half of them, by families. These were the allocations that Moses made when he was in the plains of Moab, on the other side of the Jordan, east of Jericho. However, Moses did not allot any land to the Levites, for the Lord, the God of Israel, had promised them that he would be their allocation.

This was the land that was allotted to the Israelites to own in the land of Canaan by Eleazar the priest, Joshua, son of Nun, and the leaders of the tribes. The decision regarding the land division among the nine and a half tribes was made by casting lots, as the Lord had instructed Moses. Moses had allotted land to the two and a half tribes east of the Jordan but he had made no allocation to the Levites among them. The descendants of Joseph had become two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. The Levites were not given any land, only towns to live in and pasture for their flocks and herds. So the Israelites followed the instructions the Lord had given Moses in allocating the land.

Leaders from the tribe of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, said to him, “You remember what the Lord told Moses, the man of God, at Kadesh-barnea about me and you. I was forty when Moses, the servant of God, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to spy out the land. When I returned I told the truth in my report. But those who went with me made our people afraid. However, I have faithfully followed the Lord my God. At that time Moses made a solemn promise, telling me, ‘The land where you have walked will belong to you and your children forever, because you faithfully followed the Lord my God.’ Look —the Lord has kept me alive these past forty-five years as he promised, from the time the Lord told Moses this while Israel was wandering in the wilderness. Now I'm eighty-five, but I'm still as strong today as when Moses sent me out. I'm as strong and ready for battle or for whatever may come as I was then. So give me the hill country that the Lord spoke about. You heard at that time about the descendants of Anak who lived there in large, fortified towns. If the Lord is with me I will drive them out as the Lord promised.”

So Joshua blessed Caleb and granted him ownership of Hebron. So Hebron belonged to Caleb, son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, from that day to this because he had faithfully followed the Lord, the God of Israel. (Hebron was formerly called Kiriath-arba, named after a great leader of the descendants of Anak.) And the land was at peace.

This was the land allotted to the tribe of Judah, by families: it stretched south to the border of Edom, to the wilderness of Zin in the far south. Their boundary began at the end of the Salt Sea—the bay that faces south— and then went south of Scorpion Pass through the wilderness of Zin, then heading south from Kadesh-barnea to Hezron. From there it went up to Addar and then turned towards Karka, passing through Azmon and out to the Wadi of Egypt, ending at the sea. This was their southern border.

The eastern border of Judah was the Salt Sea, up to where the Jordan River ends.

The northern boundary ran from the northern bay of the sea where the Jordan ends up to the border of Beth-hoglath, and then north of Beth-arabah to the Stone of Bohan (Reuben's son). From there it went to the border of Debir through the valley of Achor, and turned north towards Gilgal, opposite the heights of Adummim to the south of the valley. Then the boundary continued to the waters of En-shemesh and out to En-rogel. The boundary then went through the valley of Ben-hinnom, along the southern slopes of the Jebusites (that is Jerusalem), then on up to the top of the mountain overlooking the valley of Hinnom right up to the northern end of the valley of Rephaim. From there the boundary ran from the top of the mountain to the water spring at Nephtoah and on to the towns on Mount Ephron. Then it bent towards Ballah (Kiriath-jearim). Then the boundary moved around to the west of Baalah to Mount Seir and passed along the northern slope of Mount Jearim to the town of Kesalon, down to Beth Shemesh and on to Timnah. The boundary then ran to the north slope of Ekron, and bent towards Shikkeron, passing Mount Baalah, out to Jabneel, and ending at the sea.

The western boundary was the coastline of the Great Sea.

These were the boundaries around the tribe of Judah, by families.

The Lord had instructed Joshua to allocate some land in Judah's territory to Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and so he was given the town of Kiriath-arba, or Hebron. (Arba was the father of Anak.) Caleb drove out three family groups—Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai, descendants of Anak. From there he went to attack the inhabitants of Debir (previously known as Kiriath-sepher). Caleb announced, “Whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher and captures it, I will give him my daughter Acsah to marry.” Othniel, son of Kenaz, brother of Caleb, captured the town so Caleb gave him his daughter Acsah to marry.

When she came to him, she encouraged him to ask her father for a field. When she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?” She replied, “Please give me a blessing. Since you have already given me land that's like the desert, please give me springs of water as well.” So he gave her both the upper and the lower springs.

This was the land allotted to the tribe of Judah, by families.

The towns for the tribe of Judah in the far south on the border with Edom: Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron (or Hazor), Amam, Shema, Moladah, Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Beth-pelet, Hazar-shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, Baalah, Iim, Ezem, Eltolad, Kesil, Hormah, Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon —twenty-nine towns with their associated villages.

The towns in the western foothills: Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, Zanoah, En-gannim, Tappuah, Enam, Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, Shaaraim, Adithaim, Gederah, and Gederothaim—fourteen towns with their associated villages.

Also: Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal-gad, Dilean, Mizpeh, Joktheel, Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, Cabbon, Lahmam, Kitlish, Gederoth, Beth-dagon, Naamah, and Makkedah—sixteen towns with their associated villages.

In addition: Libnah, Ether, Ashan, Iphtah, Ashnah, Nezib, Keilah, Aczib, and Mareshah—nine towns with their associated villages.

Ekron and its towns and villages, from Ekron to the sea those towns near Ashdod and their associated villages, Ashdod and its towns with its associated villages, and Gaza with its towns and associated villages, as far as the Wadi of Egypt, and along the coastline of the sea.

In the hill country: Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, Dannah, Kiriath-sannah (or Debir), Anab, Eshtemoh, Anim, Goshen, Holon, and Giloh—eleven towns with their associated villages.

Also: Arab, Dumah, Eshan, Janim, Beth-tappuah, Aphekah, Humtah, Kiriath-arba (or Hebron), and Zior —nine towns with their associated villages.

In addition: Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, Kain, Gibeah, and Timnah—ten towns with their ssociated villages.

Also: Halhul, Beth-zur, Gedor, Maarath, Beth-anoth, and Eltekon—six towns with their associated villages.

In addition: Kiriath-baal (or Kiriath-jearim) and Rabbah—two towns with their associated villages.

In the wilderness: Beth-arabah, Middin, Secacah, Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En-gedi—six towns with their associated villages.

However, the tribe of Judah could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so the Jebusites live among the tribe of Judah in Jerusalem to this very day.

The boundary for the allocation of the descendants of Joseph went from the Jordan near Jericho, then east of the springs of Jericho and through the wilderness from Jericho up into the hill country of Bethel. From Bethel (or Luz) it continued to the border of Ataroth the Archite. Then it descended west to the border of the Japhletites and the border of Lower Beth-horon, on up to Gezer, and then out to the sea. This was the allocation received by the descendants of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.

This was the territory allocated to the tribe of Ephraim, by families. The boundary of their allocation ran from Ataroth-addar in the east to Upper Beth-horon and then on to the sea. From Michmethath in the north the boundary turned east passing Taanath-shiloh to the east of Janoah. From Janoah it went down to Ataroth and Naarah, then touched Jericho and ended at the Jordan. From Tappuah the boundary ran west to the Brook of Kanah and then out to the sea. This was the

land allotted to the tribe of Ephraim, by families. Also some towns with their associated villages that lay in the land allotted to the tribe of Manasseh were assigned to the tribe of Ephraim. However, they did not drive out the Canaanites living in Gezer, so the Canaanites live among the tribe of Ephraim to this very day, but as forced laborers.

This was the allocation to the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn son. Machir was Manasseh's firstborn son who was the father of Gilead. Because Machir had been an excellent fighter, Gilead and Bashan had already been allocated to him. The allocation was for the rest of the tribe of Manasseh, to the families of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hepher, and Shemida. These were the male descendants of Manasseh, the son of Joseph, by families.

But Zelophehad, son of Hepher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, had no sons. He only had daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the leaders, and told them, “The Lord ordered Moses to give us an allocation of land along with our brothers.” So Joshua allotted land to them along with their brothers, as the Lord had ordered. Consequently Manasseh received ten shares of land beside the land of Gilead and Bashan on the other side of the Jordan, because the daughters of the tribe of Manasseh received an allocation along with the sons. (The land of Gilead had been allotted to the rest of the descendants of Manasseh).

The boundary of the tribe of Manasseh ran from Asher to Michmethath, near Shechem, then south to the spring of Tappuah. The land around Tappuah was allocated to Manasseh, but the town of Tappuah, which was on the border of Manasseh's land, was allocated to Ephraim. From there the boundary ran down to the valley of Kenah. South of the valley some of the towns belonged to Ephraim among the towns of Manasseh. The boundary ran along the north side of the valley and ended at the sea. To the south the land belonged to Ephraim, and to the north, to Manasseh. The sea is the boundary. The boundary to the north was with Asher, and with Issachar to the east. The following towns with their associated villages were allocated to Manasseh but lay within the land of Issachar and Asher: Beth-shan, Ibleam, Dor (on the coast), Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo. But the descendants of Manasseh could not take possession of these towns because the Canaanites were determined to go on occupying the land. However, later on, when the Israelites grew strong enough, they made the Canaanites do forced labor—but they did not drive them out.

Then the descendants of Joseph came to Joshua and asked him, “Why have you given us only one allocation —only one share of the land—when there's so many of us because the Lord has blessed us so much?”

Joshua told them, “If there's so many of you, if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, then go and clear ground for yourselves from the forest in the land of the Perizzites and the Rephaim.”

The descendants of Joseph replied, “The hill country isn't big enough for us, but the Canaanites living in the lowlands have iron chariots, both those in Beth-shan and its villages, and those in the valley of Jezreel.”

Joshua said to the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the descendants of Joseph, “Since you are so many, and you are so strong, you will be given more than just one share. You will be allocated the hill country in addition. Though it is forest, you will clear it and own it, from one end to the other. You will drive out the Canaanites, even though they have iron chariots, and even though they are strong.”

The land had been subdued and lay before them. The Israelites gathered together at Shiloh and set up the Tent of Meeting. However, seven of the Israelite tribes had not received their land allocations. So Joshua asked the Israelites, “How long will you go on being reluctant to go and take possession of the land that the Lord gave your forefathers? Choose three men from each tribe and I will send them out to explore the land. Then they can write a description regarding the land allocations and bring it to me. They are to divide the land into seven parts, up to the boundary of Judah's land in the south and Joseph's land in the north. Once you have written the description about the land, divided into seven parts, you will bring it to me here and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the Lord our God.

But the Levites do not receive a share, for their role as priests of the Lord is their allocation. Also, Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have already received their allocation that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave them on the east side of the Jordan.”

As the men started out on their way to explore the land. Joshua told them, “Go throughout the land and write a description of what you find. Then return to me and I will cast lots for you in the presence of the Lord here in Shiloh.” So the men went and explored the land and wrote down on a scroll a description of the seven parts, recording the towns in each part. Then they returned to Joshua at the camp in Shiloh where Joshua cast lots for them in the presence of the Lord. There Joshua divided the land up and allotted the different parts to the remaining Israelite tribes.

The first lot cast went to the tribe of Benjamin, by families. The land allotted lay between that of the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Joseph. Their boundary began at the Jordan, and went north of the slope of Jericho, west through the hill country, coming out at the wilderness of Beth-aven. Then the boundary went south to Luz (or Bethel) and on down to Ataroth-addar on the mountain south of Lower Beth-horon. Here the boundary turned south along the western side of the mountain facing Beth-horon, finishing at Kiriath-baal (or Kiriath-jearim), a town of the tribe of Judah. This was the western boundary.

The southern boundary began at the edge of Kiriath-jearim. It ran to the spring at Nephtoah, and then down to the foot of the mountain that faces the valley of Ben-hinnom, at the north end of the valley of Rephaim. Then it went down the valley of Hinnom, along the slope near the Jebusite town, south towards En-rogel. From there it headed north to En-shemesh and on to Geliloth, opposite the heights of Adummim, and then on down to the Stone of Bohan (Reuben's son). Then it went along the ridge opposite the Jordan Valley

to the north, and then down into the Jordan Valley itself. From there it ran along the north slope of Beth-hoglah, ending at the north bay of the Salt Sea, the southern end of the Jordan. This was the southern boundary.

The eastern boundary was the Jordan.

These were the boundaries around the land of the tribe of Benjamin, by families.

These were the towns of the tribe of Benjamin, according to families: Jericho, Beth-hoglah, Emek-keziz, Beth-arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, Kephar-ammoni, Ophni, and Geba—twelve towns with their associated villages. In addition: Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, Mizpah, Kephirah, Mozah, Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, Zela, Haeleph, Jebus (or Jerusalem), Gibeah, and Kiriath-jearim—fourteen towns with their associated villages. This was the land allotted to the tribe of Benjamin, by families.

The second lot cast went to the tribe of Simeon, by families. The land was within the land allotted to the tribe of Judah. Their allocation included Beersheba, Sheba, Moladah, Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazar-susah, Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhen—thirteen towns with their associated villages. Also: Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan—four towns with their associated villages, as well as all the villages around these towns as far as Baalath-beer (or Ramah of the Negev). This was the land allotted to the tribe of Simeon, by families. The allocation of the tribe of Simeon was part of that given to the tribe of Judah, since what the tribe of Judah had received was too large for them.

The third lot cast went to the tribe of Zebulun, by families. The boundary of their allocation began at Sarid, and then went west past Maralah, touched Dabbeshah, and then the brook near Jokneam. Going the other way from Sarid, the boundary headed east to the border of Kislot-tabor, on to Daberath, and then up to Japhia. From there it ran east to Gath-hepher, Eth-kazin, and on to Rimmon, and turned towards Neah. There the boundary turned north to Hannathon, ending at the valley of Iphtah-el. The towns included: Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem—twelve towns with their associated villages. This was the allocation—the land, towns, and villages—given to the tribe of Zebulun, by families.

The fourth lot cast went to the tribe of Issachar, by families. Their land included these towns: Jezreel, Kesulloth, Shunem, Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, Remeth, En-gannim, En-haddah, and Beth-pazzez. The boundary also reached the towns of Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth-shemesh, and ended at the Jordan River—sixteen towns with their associated villages. This was the allocation—the land, towns, and villages—given to the tribe of Issachar, by families.

The fifth lot cast went to the tribe of Asher, by families. Their allocation included the towns of Helkath, Hali, Beten, Acshaph, Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal. Their boundary reached Carmel and Shihor-libnat in the west. Then it turned east towards Beth-dagon, reaching the land of Zebulun and the valley of Iphtah-el. From there it headed north to Beth-emek and Neiel, and continued north to Cabul, and on through to Ebron, Rehob, Hammon, Kanah, and on up to Great Sidon. The boundary then turned towards Ramah and then the fortified town of Tyre, turning to Hosah and ending at the sea. Towns included Mehebel, Aczib, Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob—twenty-two towns with their associated villages. This was the allocation—the land, towns, and villages—given to the tribe of Asher, by families.

The sixth lot cast went to the tribe of Naphtali, by families. Their boundary began at Heleph, by the oak at Zaananim, and went across to Adami-nekeb, Jabneel, and up to Lakkum, and ending at the Jordan. Then the boundary headed west to Aznoth-tabor, and on to Hukkok. It reached the land of Zebulun on the south, the land of Asher on the west, and the Jordan on the east. The fortified towns included: Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Kinnereth, Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, Kedesh, Edrei, En-hazor, Yiron, Migdal-el, Horem, Beth-anath, and Beth-shemesh—nineteen towns with their associated villages. This was the allocation—the land, towns, and villages—given to the tribe of Naphtali, by families.

The seventh lot cast went to the tribe of Dan, by families. Their allocation included the towns of Zorah, Eshtaol, Ir-shemesh, Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, Elon, Timnah, Ekron, Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, Jehud, Bene-berak, Gath-rimmon, Me-jarkon, Rakkon, along with the territory opposite Joppa. However, the tribe of Dan was not able to hold on to their allotted land, so they went and attacked Leshem and captured it. They slaughtered its inhabitants and took possession of the town, settling there. They renamed Leshem as Dan, after their ancestor. This was the allocation—the land, towns, and villages—given to the tribe of Dan, by families.

After they finished allotting the land and establishing its borders, the Israelites gave Joshua, son of Nun, an allocation among them. Following the Lord's command, they gave him the town he requested—Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim. He rebuilt the town and settled there.

These were the allocations distributed by Eleazar the priest, Joshua, son of Nun, and the leaders of the Israelite tribes. They were made by casting lots at Shiloh in the presence of the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. So they finished dividing up the land.

Then the Lord told Joshua, "Tell the Israelites, 'Assign sanctuary towns, as I instructed you through Moses. Then any man who kills somebody by accident, unintentionally, can run there and they will be protected from those who wish to take revenge. When he gets to one of these towns, he shall state his case to the elders at the town gates. They must allow him to enter, and they will also arrange a place for him to stay. If the one seeking revenge comes looking for the man, they must not hand the one who committed manslaughter over to him, because he killed someone unintentionally and without deliberate hatred. He shall remain in that town until he has received a public trial and a verdict has been given, and until the death of the high priest of the time. Then he is free to return to his home, back to the town from where he ran away.'"

So they assigned the following sanctuary towns: Kedesh of Galilee, in the hill country of Naphtali;

Shechem, in the hill country of Ephraim; and Kiriath-arba (or Hebron), in the hill country of Judah. On the other side of the Jordan, east of Jericho, they assigned: Bezer, in the wilderness on the plateau, from the tribe of Reuben; Ramoth in Gilead, from the tribe of Gad; and Golan in Bashan, from the tribe of Manasseh.

These were the assigned towns for all the Israelites, as well as for the foreigners living among them. Anyone who unintentionally killed someone could go there so they would not be killed by those who wished to take revenge before they had received a public trial and been given a guilty verdict.

The leaders of the tribe of Levi approached Eleazar the priest, Joshua the son of Nun, and the leaders of the Israelite tribes. They spoke to them at Shiloh in Canaan, saying, “The Lord gave instructions through Moses to give us towns to live in, and pastures for our flocks.”

So, following the Lord's instructions, the Israelites gave towns and pastures to the Levites from their own allocations.

The lot was cast for the families of the Kohathites. These Levites, descendants of Aaron, were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The remaining families of the descendants of Kohath were allotted ten towns from the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

The families of the descendants of Gershon were allotted thirteen towns from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and the half-tribe of Manasseh living in Bashan.

The families of the descendants of Merari were allotted twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

So the Israelites gave the Levites by lot these towns and pastures, as the Lord had instructed through Moses.

They gave from the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Simeon the following towns, specifically named, to the families of the Kohathites, descendants of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi, since the first lot fell to them: Kiriath-arba (or Hebron), in the hill country of Judah, together with the pastures around it. (Arba was the forefather of Anak.) But the more distant fields from the town and the villages had been given to Caleb son of Jephunneh to own.

They gave to the descendants of Aaron the priest the following towns and their pastures: Hebron (a sanctuary town for those who accidentally committed murder), Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon, Debir, Ain, Juttah, and Beth-shemesh—nine towns from these two tribes. From the tribe of Benjamin the following four towns and their pastures: Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth, and Almon. So in total thirteen towns and their pastures were given to the priests, the descendants of Aaron.

As for the remaining families of the children of Kohath from the tribe of Levi, they were given by lot four towns and their pastures from the tribe of Ephraim: Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim (a sanctuary town for those who accidentally committed murder), Gezer, Kibzaim, and Beth-horon.

From the tribe of Dan, the following four towns and their pastures: Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Aijalon, and Gath-rimmon.

From the half-tribe of Manasseh the following two towns and their pastures: Taanach and Gath-rimmon. So in total ten towns and their pastures were given to the remaining families of the descendants of Kohath.

The families of the descendants of Gershon from the tribe of Levi received the following two towns and their pastures from the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan (a sanctuary town for those who accidentally committed murder), and Be-eshterah.

From the tribe of Issachar the following four towns and their pastures: Kishion, Daberath, Jarmuth, and En-gannim.

From the tribe of Asher the following four towns and their pastures: Mishal, Abdon, Helkath, and Rehob.

From the tribe of Naphtali the following three towns and their pastures: Kedesh in Galilee (a sanctuary town for those who accidentally committed murder), Hammoth-dor, and Kartan. So in total thirteen towns and their pastures were allotted to the families of Gershon.

The families of the descendants of Merari, those remaining from the tribe of Levi, received the following four towns and their pastures from the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah, and Nahalal.

From the tribe of Reuben the following four towns and their pastures: Bezer, Jahaz, Kedemoth, and Mephaath.

From the tribe of Gad the following four towns and their pastures: Ramoth in Gilead (a sanctuary town for those who accidentally committed murder), Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer. So in total twelve towns were allotted to the families of Merari, those remaining from the tribe of Levi.

The Levites received a total of forty-eight towns and pastures within the land of the Israelites. Each of these towns had pastures around them.

And so the Lord gave to the Israelites all the land he had promised their ancestors. They took possession of it and settled there. The Lord gave them peace on every side as he had promised their ancestors. Not a single one of their enemies could stand against them, for the Lord had handed their enemies over to them to defeat. Not a single one of the good things the Lord promised Israel had failed; everything had come true.

Then Joshua summoned the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He told them, “You have done everything that Moses, the servant of the Lord, told you to do, and you have followed all the commands I gave you. You have never abandoned your brothers all this time, right up to the present day. You have carefully followed what the Lord your God ordered you to do. Now that the Lord your God has given peace to your brothers, as he promised, go back home to your land that Moses, the servant of the Lord, gave you on the other side of the Jordan. But make sure you keep the commandments and the law as Moses instructed you. Love the Lord your God, follow all his ways, keep his commandments, stay close to him, and serve him with your whole being.” Joshua blessed them, sent them on their way, and they went home.

Moses had given to the half-tribe of Manasseh the land of Bashan, and to the other half of the tribe Joshua

had given land west of the Jordan. Joshua blessed them and sent them home.

He told them, “Take all the wealth you have gained back home: the great herds of livestock, the things made of gold, silver, copper, and iron, the huge quantity of clothes. Share all this plunder with your brothers.”

So the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh left the rest of the Israelites at Shiloh in the land of Canaan and went home to their land in Gilead that they had received at the Lord's command through Moses.

When they approached the Jordan region, still in the land of Canaan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built a large and impressive altar beside the Jordan River.

The Israelites were told, “Look, the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have built an altar in the Jordan region of the land of Canaan, on the side belonging to the Israelites.”

The Israelites gathered at Shiloh to go to war against them. Before they did so, they sent Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead. Ten leaders went with him, one from each of the ten tribes of Israel, and each the head of his family. After they arrived they told the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, “This is what all of the Lord's people say, ‘What is this disloyal act you have committed against the God of Israel by building an altar for yourselves? How could you turn away from him now in such rebellion? Wasn't our sin at Peor enough? Even now we're still not clean from the plague that attacked the Lord's people. So why are you turning away from the Lord now? If you rebel against the Lord today, he will be angry with all of us tomorrow!

But if you think your land is tainted then come over to the land of the Lord where the Tabernacle of the Lord is located and share some of our land with us. Just don't rebel against the Lord, or against us, by building for yourselves an altar other than the altar of the Lord our God. When Achan, son of Zerah, acted disloyally in taking consecrated things, didn't the whole of Israel suffer punishment? He wasn't the only one who died because of his sin!’”

Then the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh answered the Israelite leaders, “The Lord is God of gods, the Lord is God of gods, and he knows! May Israel also know! If we're in rebellion against God or being disloyal to him then kill us right now! If our action of building an altar was to turn away from the Lord, or to use the altar to make burnt offerings or grain offerings or friendship offerings, then may the Lord punish us.

We did this because we were worried that in the future your descendants might say to ours, ‘What have you got to do with the Lord, the God of Israel? The Lord put a border—the Jordan River—between us and you, descendants of Reuben and Gad. You don't belong to the Lord.’ So your descendants might stop our descendants from worshiping the Lord.

So we said to ourselves, ‘Let's build an altar, not for burnt offerings or for sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you, and for the generations that come after us, that we will come to worship the Lord in his presence with our burnt offerings, sacrifices, and friendship offerings.’ Then your descendants will not be able to say to ours in the future, ‘You don't belong to the Lord.’

If they were to do so in the future, our descendants could reply, ‘Look at this copy of the Lord's altar which our forefathers made, not for burnt offerings or for sacrifices, but as a witness between us and you.’

We would never think to rebel against the Lord or to turn away from him now by building an altar to make burnt offerings or grain offerings or sacrifices. The only altar of the Lord our God is the one that stands in front of his Tabernacle.”

When Phinehas and the Israelite leaders heard this from the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh they were delighted. Phinehas replied to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, “Today we know that the Lord is with us because you have not acted disloyally in doing this. Now you have saved the Israelites from being punished by the Lord.”

Then Phinehas and the Israelite leaders left the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the land of Gilead and returned to the land of Canaan to explain the situation to the Israelites.

The Israelites were pleased with the report and God blessed them. They didn't talk about going to war any more to destroy the land where the tribes of Reuben and Gad were living. The tribes of Reuben and Gad called the altar, “Witness,” because they said, “It is a witness between us that the Lord is also our God.”

A long time later, after the Lord had given peace to the Israelites from conflict with their enemies around them, Joshua, by now really old, summoned all the Israelites—the elders, leaders, judges, and officials—and told them, “I'm old, getting on in years. You've seen everything the Lord your God has done to all the nations on your behalf—the Lord your God has been fighting for you.

I have allotted the land of the remaining nations for you to own, as well as the nations already conquered, from the Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea. The Lord your God will make them retreat from you. He will drive them out before you and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

Be sure to observe everything that is written in the book of the Law of Moses. Don't stray from it, either to the left or to the right. Don't associate with the nations that are left. Don't mention the names of their gods, and don't swear by them, worship them, or bow down to them. Stay close to the Lord your God, as you have done up to now. The Lord has driven out strong, powerful nations before you. No one has been able to stand up to you to this day. Just one of you can chase away a thousand enemies, for the Lord your God is fighting for you, as he promised you. Take great care to love the Lord your God. For if you do turn from him, and adopt the ways of the nations that are left, if you intermarry with them, associating with one another, you can be absolutely sure that the Lord your God will definitely not drive out these nations before you. On the contrary, they will be a trap and a snare to you, a whip

on your back and thorns in your eyes until you die out completely from this good land the Lord your God has given you.

Now I am about to die, which is the fate of every living thing on the earth. Deep down you know that not a single one of the Lord's good promises has failed. Everything has come true. Not a single one has failed. But in the same way that you received all the good things that the Lord your God promised, the Lord will bring on you all the bad things he has threatened until you're completely wiped out from this good land the Lord your God has given to you. If you break the agreement the Lord your God made with you, and you go and worship other gods, bowing down before them, then the Lord will become angry with you, and you will be quickly wiped out from the good land he has given you."

Joshua summoned all the tribes of Israel to Shechem. Then he called the elders, leaders, judges, and officials and they came and stood before the Tabernacle of God. Joshua said to all the people, "The Lord, the God of Israel, says this: 'Long, long ago your forefathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River, and they worshiped other gods. I brought your father Abraham from beyond the Euphrates and led him through all the land of Canaan and gave him many descendants. I gave him Isaac. I gave to Isaac Jacob and Esau. I gave to Esau the hill country of Seir to own, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

I sent Moses and Aaron, and I brought plagues on the people of Egypt, and I brought you out. Yes, I brought your forefathers out, but when you arrived at the Red Sea the Egyptians were chasing after your forefathers with chariots and horsemen. Your forefathers called out to the Lord for help, and he placed darkness between you and the Egyptians. Then he brought the sea back over them and they drowned. You saw what I did with your own eyes in Egypt. Then you lived for many years in the wilderness.

After that I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought against you but I handed them over to you to defeat and you took over their land. I destroyed them before you.

When Balak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab, wanted to fight against Israel, he sent for Balaam, son of Beor, to come and curse you. But I wasn't willing to listen to Balaam, so instead he blessed you repeatedly, and saved you from Balak.

You crossed the Jordan and arrived at Jericho where the men of Jericho fought against you. So did the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. But I handed them over to you to defeat. And I sent the hornet before you to drive out the two kings of the Amorites. You did not win using your swords or your bows! I gave you a land you didn't work for and towns you didn't build. Now you live in them and eat from vineyards and olive groves you didn't plant.'

So respect the Lord and worship him, sincerely and faithfully. Get rid of the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, and worship the Lord. But if you don't want to worship the Lord, choose today who you want to worship! Is it going to be the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the Euphrates? Or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you're now living? But as for me and my family, we will worship the Lord!"

The people responded, "We are never going to give up on the Lord and worship other gods! For the Lord our God brought us and our forefathers out of slavery in Egypt. He was the one who did great miracles before our very eyes. He looked after us on the way as we traveled through the lands of many nations. The Lord drove out before us the Amorites and all the other nations who were living in the land. So we will worship the Lord, for he is our God!"

Joshua told the people, "Remember that the Lord is a holy and jealous God. You won't be able to worship him, and he won't forgive your rebellion and sins if you give up on him and worship foreign gods. He will turn against you and destroy you despite all the good he has done for you."

"Don't say that!" the people replied. "We will worship the Lord!"

Then Joshua cautioned the people, "You have made yourselves witnesses against yourselves by saying that you have chosen to worship the Lord."

"Yes, we are witnesses," the people replied.

"Then get rid of those foreign gods you have and promise to be loyal only to the Lord, the God of Israel," Joshua told them.

The people said to Joshua, "We will worship the Lord our God and we will obey him."

So Joshua made a solemn agreement between the people and the Lord that day in Shechem, obligating them to follow all the Lord's laws and instructions. Joshua recorded this in the Book of the Law of God, and he set up a large stone under the oak tree near the Lord's sanctuary.

Joshua said to the people, "Look at this stone. It stands here as a witness against us for it has heard everything the Lord has told us, and it will be a witness against you if you ever deny what you have promised your God." Then Joshua dismissed the people, sending them to their allotted lands.

Later, after all this, Joshua, son of Nun, servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. They buried him in Timnath-serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash, the land he had been allocated.

The Israelites continued to worship the Lord throughout Joshua's life, and throughout the lifetimes of the elders who outlived him, those who had seen all that the Lord had done for Israel. The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought with them from Egypt, they buried in Shechem in the piece of ground Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for one hundred pieces of silver. This land was inherited by Joseph's sons. And Eleazar, son of Aaron, died and they buried him at Gibeah, in the hill country of Ephraim, land which had been given to his son Phinehas.

Judges

Book of Judges

After Joshua died, the Israelites asked the Lord, “Which tribe from among us should go first and attack the Canaanites?”

“Judah is to go first,” the Lord replied. “I have handed the land over to them.”

The men of Judah said to their relatives of the tribe of Simeon, “Come with us to the land that has been allotted to us, and fight together with us against the Canaanites. Then we'll do the same for you and your allotted land.” So the tribe of Simeon joined with them.

The men of Judah attacked the Canaanites and Perizzites, and the Lord handed them over in defeat. They killed ten thousand of the enemy at the town of Bezek. There they confronted Adoni-bezek and fought with him, defeating the Canaanites and Perizzites. Adoni-bezek ran away, but they chased after him and captured him, and then cut off his thumbs and big toes.

Adoni-bezek said, “I had seventy kings with their thumbs and big toes cut off picking up left-overs from under my table. Now God has paid me back in the same way what I did to them.” They took him to Jerusalem where he died.

The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem and conquered it. They killed the inhabitants with the sword and burned the town down. After this the men of Judah went to fight against the Canaanites living in the hill country, in the Negev, and in the foothills of the lowlands. They attacked the Canaanites who lived in Hebron (previously known as Kiriath Arba) and defeated Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

From there they went on to attack the people living in Debir (previously known as Kiriath Sepher). Caleb announced, “I will give my daughter Acsah in marriage to whoever attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.” Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, was the one who captured it, so he gave him his daughter Acsah in marriage.

When Acsah came to Othniel, she encouraged him to ask her father for a field. As she got off her donkey, Caleb asked her, “What do you want?”

“Please give me a blessing,” she replied. “You gave me land that's like the desert, so please give me springs of water as well.” So Caleb gave her the upper and lower springs.

The descendants of Moses' father-in-law, the Kenite, went with the people of Judah from the city of palms to the wilderness of Judah in the Negev near Arad where they settled among the people.

Then Judah joined Simeon and defeated the Canaanites living in Zephath. They completely destroyed the town, so they named it Hormah. Judah also captured the towns of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, each with its surrounding territory.

The Lord was with Judah, and they took over the hill country, but they could not drive out the people living on the plain because they had iron chariots.

As Moses had stipulated, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove out from it the descendants of three sons of Anak. However, Benjamin could not drive out the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so the Jebusites live among the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this very day.

The descendants of Joseph went and attacked the town of Bethel, and the Lord was with them. They sent spies to investigate Bethel, which was previously known as Luz. The spies saw a man leaving the town and told him, “Please show us how to get into town, and we will treat you well.”

The man showed them the way into the town, and they killed all the inhabitants except the man and his family, whom they let go. The man moved to the country of the Hittites, and built a town there and called it Luz, which is its name to this day.

However, Manasseh didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Beth Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo and their surrounding villages because the Canaanites insisted on living in the land. When the Israelites grew stronger, they made the Canaanites do forced labor, but they never completely drove them out.

Ephraim didn't drive out the Canaanites living in the town of Gezer, so the Canaanites went on living there among them.

Zebulun didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Kitron and Nahalol, so the Canaanites went on living there among them. However, the Canaanites were made to do forced labor for the people of Zebulun.

Asher didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, and Rehob, so the people of Asher went on living there among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they hadn't driven them out.

Naphtali didn't drive out the people living in the towns of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath. So the people of Naphtali went on living there among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land because they hadn't driven them out. However, the people of Beth-shemesh and Beth-anath were made to do forced labor for the people of Naphtali.

The Amorites pushed the people of Dan back into the hill country—they did not let them come down into the lowlands. The Amorites insisted on remaining in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim, but when the tribes of Joseph grew stronger, the Amorites were made to do forced labor. The border with the Amorites ran from Scorpion Pass through Sela and on up from there.

The angel of the Lord went from Gilgal to Bokim and told the people, “I led you out of the land of Egypt and brought you to this land that I promised to your forefathers, and I said I would never break the agreement I made with you. I also told you not to make any agreements with the people living in the land and to tear down their altars. But you refused to obey what I said. Why did you do this? I also warned you, ‘I will not drive them out before you, and they will be snares for you, and their gods will be traps for you.’”

After the angel of the Lord had explained this to all the Israelites, the people wept out loud. That's why they named the place Bokim, and they presented sacrifices there to the Lord.

After Joshua had dismissed the people, the Israelites went to take possession of the land, each to their allotted land. The people continued to worship the Lord throughout Joshua's life, and throughout the lifetimes of the elders who outlived him, those who had seen all the wonderful things that the Lord had done for Israel.

Joshua, son of Nun, servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. They buried him in Timnath-heres in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash, the land he had been allocated.

Once that generation had passed away, the generation that followed did not know the Lord, or what he had done for Israel. The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and they worshiped the Baals. They deserted the Lord, the God of their forefathers, who had led them out of Egypt. They followed other gods, bowing down in worship to the gods of the peoples around them, making the Lord angry. They deserted the Lord and worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth idols. Because the Lord was angry with Israel he handed them over to invaders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around—enemies they could no longer resist. Whenever Israel went into battle, the Lord fought against them and defeated them, just as he had warned them and as he had vowed he would do. They were in a great deal of trouble.

Then the Lord provided them with judges, who saved them from their invaders. But even so, they refused to listen to their judges, and prostituted themselves by following other gods, bowing down in worship to them. They quickly abandoned the way their forefathers had followed, and they did not obey the Lord's commandments as their forefathers had.

When the Lord provided Israel with judges over Israel, he was with each judge and saved the people from their enemies during that judge's lifetime, because the Lord felt sorry for his people, who groaned under their oppressors and persecutors. But when the judge died, the people relapsed, and did worse things even than their forefathers, following other gods and worshiping them. They refused to give up what they were doing and held to their stubborn ways.

As a result the Lord became angry with Israel and he told them, “Because this nation has broken the agreement I ordered their forefathers to obey, and has not paid attention to what I said, from now on I won't drive out before them any of the nations Joshua left when he died. This is in order to use them to test Israel to see if they will keep the way of the Lord and follow it as their forefathers did.” This is the reason why the Lord allowed those nations to remain, and didn't immediately drive them out by handing them over to Joshua.

The following are the nations the Lord left and used to test all those Israelites who had not known what it was like to be part of any of the wars in Canaan. (He did so to teach warfare to the later generations of Israel, particularly to those who had not previously experienced it.) They are: the five rulers of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites living in the mountains of Lebanon from Mount Baal-hermon to Lebo-hamath. They were left there be to a test for the Israelites, to find out whether the Israelites would keep the Lord's commandments which he had given their forefathers through Moses. They lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. The Israelites intermarried with them, marrying their daughters, giving their own daughters to their sons, and worshiped their gods.

The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They ignored the Lord their God and worshiped the images of Baals and Asherahs. The Lord became angry with Israel, so he sold them to Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram Naharaim. The Israelites were subject to Cushan-Rishathaim for eight years.

But when the Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, he provided someone to rescue them, Othniel, son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, and he saved them. The Spirit of the Lord came on him, and he became Israel's judge. He went to war with Cushan-Rishathaim, king of Aram, and the Lord handed the king over to Othniel, who was victorious. As a result, the country was a peace for forty years until Othniel, son of Kenaz, died.

But once again the Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and because they did this the Lord gave power to Eglon, king of Moab, to conquer Israel. Eglon had the Ammonites and the Amalekite join him, and then attacked and defeated Israel, taking possession of the City of Palms. The Israelites were subject to Eglon, king of Moab, for eighteen years.

Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, and he provided someone to rescue them, Ehud, son of Gera the Benjamite, a left-handed man. The Israelites sent him to pay the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab. Ehud had made for himself a cubit long double-edged sword, and he strapped it to his right thigh under his clothes. He came and presented the tribute to Eglon, king of Moab, who was a very fat man.

Then after delivering the tribute he sent home those who had helped carry it. But when he reached the stone idols near Gilgal, he turned back. He went to see Eglon, and told him, “Your Majesty, I have a secret message for you.” The king told his attendants, “Silence!” and they all left.

Ehud then went over to where Eglon was sitting alone in his cool upstairs room, and told him, “I have a message from God for you.” As the king got up from his seat, Ehud grabbed his sword with his left hand from his right thigh and drove it into Eglon's belly. The handle went in with the blade and the fat closed over it. So Ehud didn't pull the sword out, and the king defecated.

Then Ehud closed and locked the doors, and escaped through the toilet. After he had left, the servants came and saw that the doors of the room were locked. “He must be using the toilet,” they concluded. So they waited until they couldn't stand it any more, and since he still hadn't opened the doors of the room, they went and found the key and opened the doors. There was their lord, lying dead on the floor.

While the servants delayed acting, Ehud escaped, passing the stone idols and on to Seirah. When he got there, he blew a trumpet in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites joined him. They went down from the hills, with Ehud leading them. He told them, “Follow me, for the Lord has handed Moab, your enemy, over

to you." So they followed him down and took control of the fords of the Jordan leading to Moab. They didn't let anyone cross. Then they attacked the Moabites and killed around 10,000 of their best and strongest fighting men. Not a single one escaped. Moab was conquered that day and made subject to Israel, and the country was at peace for eighty years.

After Ehud was Shamgar, son of Anath, who killed six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He also rescued Israel.

After Ehud died, the Israelites once again did what was evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord sold them to Jabin, king of Canaan, who ruled from Hazor. His army commander was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The Israelites cried out to the Lord to help them, for Sisera had nine hundred iron chariots and he cruelly mistreated them for twenty years.

Deborah, wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet, and she was leading Israel as a judge at that time. She would sit under Deborah's Palm between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for her decisions. She sent for Barak, son of Abinoam, from the town of Kedesh in Naphtali and told him, "The Lord, the God of Israel, orders you: 'Go to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun, and lead them there. I will bring Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River, and hand him over to you.'"

Barak replied, "If you come with me, I'll go; but if you don't come with me, I won't go."

"I'll definitely go with you," Deborah answered, "but if you're going to take that route then you won't receive any respect, because the Lord will give Sisera into the hands of a woman." Deborah got up and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called up the armies of Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men assembled under his command. Deborah was also there with him.

(Heber the Kenite had separated from the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses, and had set up his tent at the large tree in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh.)

Sisera heard that Barak, son of Abinoam, had gone to Mount Tabor, so he summoned all his nine hundred iron chariots and all his men to come from Harosheth-hagoyim to the Kishon River.

Then Deborah told Barak, "Get going! Today the Lord has handed Sisera to you. Didn't the Lord march out ahead of you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor, accompanied by ten thousand men. When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a confused panic. Sisera jumped down from his chariot and ran away. Barak chased after the chariots and troops all the way to Harosheth-hagoyim. The whole of Sisera's army was killed—not a single man survived.

In the meantime Sisera had run away to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there was a peace treaty between Jabin, king of Hazor, and the family of Heber the Kenite. Jael went to meet Sisera and told him, "Come on in, my lord, come in with me. Don't be afraid." So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a thick blanket.

"Please give me a bit of water to drink, because I'm thirsty," Sisera asked her. So she opened a skin of milk, let him have a drink, and then covered him up again.

"Stand guard at the tent door," he told her. "If anybody comes and asks you, 'Is there anyone here?' just say no."

But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and crept quietly over to him where he lay fast sleep and exhausted. She drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and he died.

So when Barak came past, hunting for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him, and said, "Come here, and I'll show you the man you're looking for." He went in with her, and there lay Sisera, dead, with the tent peg through his temple.

That day God defeated Jabin, king of Canaan, in the presence of the Israelites. From then on Israel grew ever more powerful until they destroyed Jabin, king of Hazor.

That day Deborah and Barak, son of Abinoam, sang this song:

"Israel's leaders took charge, and the people were totally committed. Praise the Lord!

Listen, kings! Pay attention, rulers! I, yes I, will sing to the Lord; I will praise the Lord, the God of Israel, in song.

Lord, when you set off from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, rain fell from the skies, the clouds poured down water.

The mountains melted in the presence of the Lord, the God of Sinai, in the presence of the Lord, the God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath, in the days of Jael, people didn't use the main highways and stayed on winding paths.

Village life in Israel was abandoned until I, Deborah, came on the scene as a mother in Israel.

When the people chose new gods, then war arrived at their gates. Not even a shield or spear could be found among forty thousand warriors in Israel.

My thoughts are with the Israelite commanders and those people who volunteered. Praise the Lord!

You people riding white donkeys, sitting on comfortable blankets, traveling down the road, notice

what people are talking about as they gather at the watering holes. They describe the Lord's just acts and those of his warriors in Israel. Then the people of the Lord went to the town gates.

'Wake up, Deborah, wake up! Wake up, wake up, sing a song! Get up, Barak! Capture your prisoners, son of Abinoam.'

The survivors went to attack the nobles, the people of the Lord went to attack the powerful.

Some came from Ephraim, a land that used to belong to the Amalekites; the tribe of Benjamin followed you with its men. Commanders came from Makir; from Zebulun came those who carry a military officer's staff.

The leaders of Issachar supported Deborah and Barak; they raced into the valley following Barak. But the tribe of Reuben was very undecided.

Why did you stay at home in the sheepfolds, listening to shepherds whistling for their flocks? The tribe of Reuben really couldn't decide what to do.

Gilead remained on the other side of Jordan. Dan stayed with his ships. Asher sat still on the seacoast, not moving from his ports.

The people of Zebulun risked their lives; as did Naphtali on the high battlefields.

Kings came and fought, the Canaanite kings fought at Taanach near the waters of Megiddo, but they didn't get any silver plunder.

The stars fought from heaven. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.

The Kishon River swept them away—the old river turned into a raging torrent! I bravely march on!

Then the horses' hooves flailed loudly, his stallions stampeded.

'Curse Meroz,' says the angel of the Lord. 'Totally curse those who live there, for they refused to come help the Lord, to help the Lord against the powerful enemies.'

Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite is to be praised the most among women. She deserves praise above all other women who live in tents.

He asked for water, and she gave him milk. In a bowl fit for nobles she brought him buttermilk.

With one hand she picked up the tent peg, and with her right hand she held a workman's hammer. She hit Sisera and smashed his skull; she shattered and pierced his temple.

At her feet he collapsed, he fell, he lay motionless. At her feet he collapsed, he fell; where he collapsed, there he fell, his life plundered from him.

Sisera's mother looked out from the window. Through the latticed window she cried out, 'Why is his chariot taking so long to come? Why is the sound of his chariot arriving so delayed?'

The wisest of her ladies tells her, and she repeats the same words to herself,

'They're busy dividing up the plunder and assigning a girl or two for each man. There'll be colorful clothes for Sisera as plunder; beautifully embroidered colorful clothes as plunder; double-embroidered clothing reaching to the neck as plunder.'

May all your enemies die like this, Lord, but may those who love you shine like the sun in all its brilliance!" The land was at peace for forty years.

The Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. So the Lord handed them over to the Midianites for seven years. The Midianite oppression was so great that because of them the Israelites made themselves hiding places in mountains, caves, and fortifications. Whenever the Israelites planted their crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples from the east would come and attack them. They would set up their camps and destroy the country's crops as far away as Gaza. They didn't leave anything to eat in the whole of Israel, and they took for themselves all the sheep, cattle, and donkeys. They arrived in huge numbers with their livestock and tents like swarms of locusts, with so many camels they couldn't be counted. They invaded the land to completely devastate it. The Israelites were made desperately poor by the Midianites and they called out to the Lord for help.

When the Israelites cried out to the Lord for help because of the Midianites, the Lord sent the Israelites a prophet. He told them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought you out of Egypt; I led you out from the place where you were slaves. I saved you from the power of the Egyptians and from everyone who oppressed you. I expelled them before you and gave their land to you. I warned you: I am the Lord your God. You must not worship the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you're now living.' But you didn't listen to me."

The angel of the Lord came and sat under the oak tree in Ophrah that belonged to Joash the Abiezrite. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in a winepress there to hide it from the Midianites. The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "The Lord is with you, great man of courage!"

"Excuse me, my lord, but if the Lord is with us, why has all this happened to us?" Gideon replied. "Where are all his wonderful miracles that our forefathers reminded us about when they said, 'Wasn't it the Lord who led us out of Egypt?' But now the Lord has given up on us and has handed us over to the Midianites."

The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength that you have and save Israel from the Midianites. Aren't I the one sending you?"

"Excuse me, my lord, but how can I save Israel?" Gideon replied. "My family is the least important of the tribe of Manasseh, and I am the least important person of that family!"

"I will be with you," the Lord told him. "You will defeat the Midianites as if they were just one man."

"Please, Lord, if you think well of me, give me a sign that it's really you telling me this," Gideon asked. "Don't leave until I come back and present my offering to you."

"I will remain here until you return," he replied.

Gideon went and cooked a young goat, and baked some unleavened bread from an ephah of flour. He put the meat in a basket and the broth in a pot. He carried them out and presented them to the angel under the oak tree.

The angel of God told him, "Place the meat and the unleavened bread on this rock and pour the broth over them." So Gideon did.

The angel of the Lord held out the staff he was holding and touched the meat and unleavened bread with the tip. Fire flamed from the rock and burned up the meat and unleavened bread. Then the angel vanished.

When Gideon realized that it was the angel of the Lord, he cried out, "Oh no, Lord God! I've seen the angel of the Lord face to face!"

But the Lord told him, "Peace! Don't worry, you're not going to die."

So Gideon built an altar to the Lord there and called it "The Lord is Peace." It's still there today, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

That night the Lord told Gideon, "Take your father's bull and a second bull seven years old, and tear down your father's altar of Baal, and cut down the Asherah pole beside it. Then build an altar to the Lord your God in the proper way on this hilltop. Using the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down as firewood, take the second bull and present it as a burnt offering."

Gideon accompanied by ten of his servants did what the Lord had told him. However, because he was afraid of his family and the people of the town, he did it during the night rather than in the day.

Early in the morning when the people of the town got up, they saw that the altar of Baal had been torn down and the Asherah pole beside it had been cut down, with the second bull sacrificed on the altar that had just been built. They asked one another, “Who did this?” They made inquiries and they were told, “Gideon, son of Joash, did it.”

“Hand over your son,” the people of the town ordered Joash. “He must die, because he has torn down the altar of Baal and cut down the Asherah pole beside it.”

Joash replied to all those confronting him, “Are you arguing on Baal's behalf? Do you have to save him? Anyone who argues for him will be put to death by morning! If he is a god let him fight for himself against those who tore down his altar.”

That day Gideon was called Jerub-baal, which means “Let Baal fight with him,” because he had torn down his altar.

All the Midianites, Amalekites, and other peoples of the East gathered together and crossed over the Jordan. They camped in the Valley of Jezreel. The Spirit of the Lord came on Gideon, and he blew the trumpet, calling the Abiezrites to join him. He sent messengers through the whole territory of Manasseh, calling them to join him, and also to Asher, Zebulun and Naphtali, so they also came and joined the others.

Gideon said to God, “If you will save Israel through me as you promised, then look—I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing floor. If the fleece is wet with dew but the ground is dry, then I will know that you are going to save Israel through me as you promised.”

That's what happened. When Gideon got up early the next morning, he pressed on the fleece and squeezed out the dew, enough water to fill a bowl.

Then Gideon said to God, “Please don't get cross with me. Just let me make one more request. Let me do one more test with the fleece. This time let the fleece be dry and the whole ground covered with dew.”

That night God did exactly that. The fleece alone was dry and the whole ground was covered with dew.

Jerub-baal (Gideon) and those who were with him got up early and went and camped by the Harod spring. The Midianite camp was to the north in the valley near the Moreh hill.

The Lord told Gideon, “There are too many soldiers with you for me to hand over the Midianites to them, otherwise Israel will brag to me, saying, ‘I saved myself by my own strength.’ So tell the soldiers, ‘Anyone who is worried or afraid can leave Mount Gilead and go back home.’” Twenty-two thousand of them went back home, but ten thousand stayed.

Then the Lord told Gideon, “There are still too many soldiers. Take them down to the water and I will reduce them for you. Whoever I tell you, ‘He shall go with you,’ he shall go. But anyone that I say, ‘He shall not go with you,’ he shall not go.”

Gideon took the soldiers down to the water. The Lord told Gideon, “Set to one side those who lap the water with their tongues, like a dog does, and on the other side those who kneel down to drink.” Three hundred lapped water from their hands to their mouths. All the rest knelt down to drink the water.

The Lord told Gideon, “With these three hundred men that lapped I will save you and hand over the Midianites to you. Let all the rest of the soldiers go home.”

The three hundred took over the supplies and trumpets of the others. Gideon sent all the rest home, but held onto the three hundred men.

The Midianite camp was below him in the valley. That night the Lord spoke to Gideon, “Get up, go down and attack the camp, for I have handed it over to you. But if you are afraid to go down, go with your servant Purah to the camp. You'll hear what they're talking about and then you'll have the courage to attack the camp.” So he took his servant Purah with him and went to the edge of the camp where armed men were on guard.

The Midianites, Amalekites, and all the peoples of the East filled the valley like a swarm of locusts, and as for their camels, they were as uncountable as the sand on the seashore. Just as Gideon arrived, a man was telling his friend about a dream he'd had. He was saying, “I had this dream. I dreamed I saw a round loaf of barley bread come rolling into the Midianite camp. It hit a tent, knocking it upside-down, flat on the ground!”

“This can only represent the victory by the sword of Gideon, son of Joash, a man of Israel,” his friend answered. “God has handed over to him the Midianites and everyone else camped here.”

When Gideon heard the dream and what it meant, he bowed in thanks to God. He went back to the Israelite camp and announced, “On your feet! For the Lord has handed over the Midianite camp to you!”

He divided the three hundred men into three companies. He handed them all trumpets, and empty jars with torches inside them. “Watch me and follow my example,” he told them. “So when I get to the edge of the camp, do exactly what I do. When I and those with me blow the trumpets, then you are to blow your trumpets from all around the camp, and shout, ‘For the Lord and for Gideon!’”

Gideon and the hundred men who were with him arrived at the edge of the camp around midnight, after the guards were changed. They blew their trumpets and smashed the jars they were holding. All three companies blew their trumpets and smashed their jars. They held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands, and they shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

Each man stood in his place encircling the camp, and all the enemy soldiers ran around shouting—then they fled. When they blew the three hundred trumpets, the Lord made all the men in the camp attack one other with their swords. The enemy army fled to Beth-shittah near Zererah, all the way to the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. The Israelite soldiers were summoned from Naphtali, Asher, and all of Manasseh, and they chased after the Midianites. Gideon sent messengers through all the hill country of Ephraim saying, “Come and attack the Midianites, and take control of the Jordan fords ahead of them as far as Beth-barah.” So all the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they took control of the Jordan fords as far as Beth-barah. They also captured Oreb and Zeeb, two of the Midianite commanders. They killed Oreb at the rock of Oreb, and

Zeeb at the winepress of Zeeb. They continued chasing down the Midianites and brought the heads of Oreb and Zeeb back to Gideon who was on the other side of the Jordan.

Then the men of Ephraim asked Gideon, “Why have you treated us like this? Why didn't you call us when you went to attack the Midianites?” They argued furiously with him.

“Now what have I achieved in comparison to you?” Gideon replied. “Even Ephraim's left-over grapes are better than Abiezer's whole grape harvest! God handed over to you Oreb and Zeeb, the two Midianite commanders. What have I managed to achieve in comparison to you?” When he told them this their animosity towards him died down.

Then Gideon crossed the Jordan with his three hundred men. Even though they were exhausted they continued the chase. When they got to Succoth, Gideon asked the people there, “Please provide some bread to the men with me because they're worn out—I'm pursuing Zebah and Zalmunna, the Midianite kings.”

But the Succoth town leaders replied, “Why should we give your army bread when you haven't even captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet?”

“In that case, once the Lord has handed Zebah and Zalmunna over to me, I'll return and thrash you with thorns and briers from the desert!” Gideon replied.

He left and went to Penuel and asked them the same thing, but the people of Penuel answered the same way as the people of Succoth. So he told them, “When I return victorious, I'll demolish this tower!”

Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their armies of around fifteen thousand men. These were all who remained of the armies of the people of the East—one hundred and twenty thousand swordsmen had already been killed. Gideon took the caravan route to the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and he attacked their army, catching them offguard. Zebah and Zalmunna ran away, but he chased after the two Midianite kings and captured them, defeating the whole of their terrified army.

Then Gideon, son of Joash, returned from the battle through the Heres Pass. There he captured a young man from Succoth and questioned him. The man wrote down for him the names of the seventy-seven leaders and elders of Succoth. Gideon went and said to the Sukkoth town leaders, “Here are Zebah and Zalmunna, the ones you taunted me about when you said, ‘Why should we give your exhausted army bread when you haven't even captured Zebah and Zalmunna yet?’” So he took the town elders of Succoth and taught them a lesson using thorns and briers from the desert. He also demolished the tower of Peniel and killed the men of the town.

Then Gideon asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What were they like, the men you killed at Tabor?”

“They looked like you,” they answered. “Each of them had the stature of a prince.”

“Those were my brothers, my mother's sons,” Gideon burst out. “As the Lord lives, if you had let them live, I wouldn't kill you!”

He told Jether, his oldest son, “Go on, kill them!” But the boy refused to draw his sword, because he was young and afraid.

Zebah and Zalmunna said to Gideon, “Come on, you do it! Show yourself a man and kill us!” So Gideon went over and killed Zebah and Zalmunna, and he took the crescent-shaped ornaments from the necks of their camels.

Then the Israelites said to Gideon, “You must become our ruler, you, your son, and your grandson; because you've saved us from the Midianites.”

“I won't be your ruler, and my son won't either,” Gideon replied. “The Lord will be your ruler.”

Then Gideon said, “I have a request to ask of you: that each of you give me an earring from your plunder.” (Their enemies were Ishmaelites and wore gold earrings.)

“We'll happily give them to you,” they replied. They spread out a cloak, and each of them threw on it earrings from their plunder. The weight of the earrings he'd asked for was 1,700 shekels, not including the ornaments, the pendants, and the purple garments worn by the Midianite kings or the chains that were round their camels' necks.

From the gold Gideon made an ephod, which he placed in his hometown of Ophrah. All Israel prostituted themselves there by worshiping it as an idol, and it became a trap to Gideon and his family.

This is how the Midianites were subjugated before the Israelites and did not gain power again. So the land was at peace for forty years during the lifetime of Gideon. Jerub-baal, son of Joash, went home to live in his own house. Gideon had seventy sons, all his own, because he had many wives. His concubine, who lived in Shechem, also had a son. He named him Abimelech. Gideon, son of Joash, died at a good old age and was buried in the tomb of his father Joash, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites. But as soon as Gideon died, the Israelites went back to prostituting themselves, worshiping before the Baals. They made Baal-berith their god. They forgot about the Lord their God, who had saved them from all their enemies that surrounded them. They did not show any respect to the family of Jerub-baal (Gideon) for all the good he had done for Israel.

Abimelech, son of Jerub-baal, went to his mother's brothers at Shechem and told them and all his mother's relatives, “Please ask all the leaders of Shechem, ‘What's best for you? That seventy men, all of them Jerub-baal's sons, rule over you—or just one man?’ Remember I'm your own flesh and blood!”

His mother's brothers shared his proposal with all the leaders of Shechem, and they decided to follow Abimelech, because they said, “He is our relative.” They gave him seventy shekels of silver from the temple of Baal-berith. Abimelech used the money to hire some arrogant troublemakers as his gang. He went to his father's house in Ophrah, and on one stone killed his seventy half-brothers, the sons of Jerub-baal. But Jotham, Jerub-baal's youngest son, escaped by going into hiding.

Then the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo all assembled by the oak at the pillar in Shechem and made Abimelech their king.

When Jotham got to hear this, he went up to the top of Mount Gerizim, and shouted in a loud voice: “Listen to me, leaders of Shechem, and God may listen to you!

Once upon a time the trees were determined to anoint a king to rule over them. They said to the olive tree, ‘You shall be our king.’ But the olive tree replied, ‘Should I stop giving my rich oil that benefits both gods and men just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?’ Then the trees asked the fig tree, ‘You come and be our king.’ But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I stop giving my good sweet fruit just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?’ Then the trees asked the grape vine, ‘You come and be our king.’ But the grape vine replied, ‘Should I stop giving my wine that makes both gods and men happy just to go and sway to and fro over the trees?’ Then all the trees asked the thorn bush, ‘You come and be our king.’ The thorn bush replied to the trees, ‘If you're really sincere about anointing me as your king, come and find shelter in my shade. But if not, may fire flame out of the thorn bush and burn up the cedars of Lebanon!’

Have you acted sincerely and honestly by making Abimelech your king? Have you acted honorably towards Jerub-baal and his family? Have you respected him for all that he accomplished? Don't forget how my father fought for you and risked his own life to save you from the Midianites!

But you have rebelled against my father's family today. You have killed his seventy sons on one stone and have made Abimelech, the son of his slave woman, king over the leaders of Shechem simply because he's related to you. Have you acted sincerely and honestly toward Jerub-baal and his family today? If so, may you be happy with Abimelech, and may he be happy with you too! But if you haven't, then may fire flame out from Abimelech, and may it burn up the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo, and may fire flame out from the leaders of Shechem and Beth-millo and burn up Abimelech!” Then Jotham escaped and ran away. He went to Beer and stayed there because of the threat of Abimelech his brother.

Abimelech ruled over Israel for three years. Then God sent an evil spirit to cause trouble between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem. The leaders of Shechem betrayed Abimelech. This happened because of the murder of the seventy sons of Jerub-baal and that responsibility for their blood be placed on Abimelech their brother, who killed them, and on the leaders of Shechem, who provided the means to kill his brothers.

The leaders of Shechem sent men to the hill passes to lie in wait and attack Abimelech, and, in the meantime, they robbed everyone who passed by on the road. Abimelech found out what was happening.

Gaal, son of Ebed, had moved to Shechem with his relatives, and he gained the loyalty of the leaders of Shechem. At harvest-time they went out into the countryside and gathered the grapes from their vineyards and trod them. They celebrated by having a festival in the temple of their god, where they ate and drank, and cursed Abimelech.

“Who is this Abimelech?” asked Gaal, son of Ebed. “And who is Shechem, that we should have to serve him? Isn't he the son of Jerub-baal, while Zebul is actually the one in charge? You should serve the family of Hamor, the father of Shechem. Why should we have to serve Abimelech? If I was the one in charge of you people, I would dispose of Abimelech! I would tell him, ‘Get your army together, and come and fight!’”

When Zebul, the governor of the city, got to hear what Gaal was saying, he became very angry. He secretly sent messengers to Abimelech to tell him, “Look, Gaal, son of Ebed, and his relatives have arrived in Shechem, and they are stirring up the town to rebel against you. So come at night with your army and hide in the countryside. In the morning as soon as the sun comes up, go and attack the town. When Gaal and his men come out to fight you, you can do whatever you want to them.”

Abimelech left at night along with his army, and they separated into four companies that lay in wait near Shechem. When Gaal, son of Ebed, went out and stood at the town's entrance gate, Abimelech and his army came out from where they had been hiding. Gaal saw the army approaching and said to Zebul, “Look! Some people are coming down from the hilltops!”

“That's just shadows made by the hills that look like men,” Zebul replied.

“No really, people are coming down from the high ground,” Gaal repeated. “Plus, there's another company coming down the road that passes the diviners' oak tree.”

“Where's your big mouth now? You're the one who said, ‘Who is this Abimelech, that we should have to serve him?’” Zebul told him. “Aren't these the people you detested? Go on then—go and fight with them!”

So Gaal led the leaders of Shechem out of the town and fought with Abimelech. Abimelech attacked, and chased him and his men as they ran away, killing many of them as they tried to get back to the town gate. Abimelech went back to Arumah while Zebul expelled Gaal and his relatives from Shechem.

The following day the people of Shechem went out to the fields, and Abimelech was informed about it. He divided his army into three companies and had them lay in ambush in the fields. When he saw the people coming out of the city, he attacked and killed them. Abimelech and his company raced to occupy the town's entrance gate, while the two companies raced to attack everyone in the fields and kill them. The battle for the town lasted all day but eventually Abimelech captured it. He killed the people, demolished the town, and scattered salt over the ground.

When all the leaders of the tower of Shechem realized what had happened, they took refuge in the strongroom of the temple of El-berith. When Abimelech found out that all the leaders in the tower of Shechem had gathered there, he and all the men with him went up Mount Zalmon. Abimelech grabbed hold of an ax and cut a branch from the trees. He lifted it onto his shoulder, and told his men, “Quick! You saw what I did. Do the same!” Each of them cut down a branch and followed Abimelech. They placed the branches against the strongroom and set it on fire. So all the people who lived in the tower of Shechem died, around one thousand men and women.

Then Abimelech went to attack Thebez and captured it. But there was a strong tower inside the city. All the men and women and the town leaders ran there and barricaded themselves in, and then went up to the roof of the tower. Abimelech went up to the tower to attack it. But as he approached the tower's entrance to set it on fire, a woman dropped a millstone down on Abimelech's head and cracked his skull open.

He quickly called the young man who carried his weapons, and ordered him, “Draw your sword and kill me, so they won't say about me that a woman killed him.” So the young man drove his sword through him, and he died. When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they all left and went home.

This is how God paid back Abimelech's crime against his father of murdering his seventy brothers. He also repaid the people of Shechem for their evil, and the curse of Jotham, son of Jerub-baal, came down upon them.

After Abimelech's time, Tola, son of Puah, son of Dodo, from the tribe of Issachar, came on the scene to save Israel. He lived in the town of Shamir, in the hill country of Ephraim. He led Israel as a judge for twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried in Shamir.

After Tola came Jair from Gilead, who led Israel as a judge for twenty-two years. He had thirty sons who rode thirty donkeys. They had thirty towns in the land of Gilead, which to this day are called the Towns of Jair. Jair died and he was buried in Kamon.

Once again the Israelites did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They worshiped the Baals and the Ashtoreths, as well as the gods of Aram, Sidon, and Moab, and the gods of the Ammonites and Philistines. They rejected the Lord and did not worship him. So the Lord became angry with Israel, and he sold them to the Philistines and the Ammonites. That year and for eighteen more years they harassed and oppressed the Israelites, all the Israelites that lived on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to attack Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, causing terrible trouble for Israel.

The Israelites cried out to the Lord for help, saying, “We have sinned against you, rejecting our God and worshiping the Baals.”

The Lord replied to the Israelites, “Didn't I save you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites? When they attacked you, and you cried out to me for help, didn't I save you from them? But you have rejected me and worshiped other gods, so I won't save you again. Go and cry out for help to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you in your time of trouble.”

The Israelites said to the Lord, “We have sinned! Treat us in whatever way you think you should, only please save us now!” So they got rid of the foreign gods they had and worshiped the Lord. And the Lord couldn't stand Israel's misery any longer.

The Ammonite armies had been called up and were camped in Gilead. The Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. The commanders of the people of Gilead agreed among themselves, “Whoever leads the attack on the Ammonites will become ruler over everyone who lives in Gilead.”

Jephthah of Gilead was a strong fighter. He was the son of a prostitute, and his father was Gilead. Gilead's wife gave him sons, who when they grew up, drove Jephthah away, telling him, “You won't inherit anything from our father because you are another woman's son.”

Jephthah ran away from his brothers and went to live in the land of Tob. A gang of trouble-makers joined him and he led them out on raids.

Later on, the Ammonites were at war with Israel. As the Ammonites were attacking Israel, the elders of Gilead came to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. “Come and be our army commander,” they asked Jepthah, “so we can fight the Ammonites.”

“Weren't you the ones who hated me and drove me from my father's house?” Jephthah asked them. “Why are you coming to me now you're in trouble?”

“Yes, that's why we've turned to you now,” the elders of Gilead replied. “Come with us and fight the Ammonites, and you will be the leader of all the people of Gilead.”

“So if I go back with you and fight the Ammonites, and the Lord makes me victorious, then I'll be your leader?” Jephthah asked the elders of Gilead.

“The Lord will be a witness between us,” they replied. “We'll do whatever you say.”

So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him their leader and army commander. And Jephthah repeated all his conditions before the Lord at Mizpah.

Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites to ask him, “What have you got against me that you want to attack my land?”

The king of the Ammonites replied to Jephthah's messengers, “Israel seized my land when they came from Egypt. It extended from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, and across to the Jordan River. So give it back and there'll be no fighting.”

Jephthah sent messengers back to the king of the Ammonites to tell him, “This is Jephthah's reply: The Israelites did not take any land from Moab or from the Ammonites. When they left Egypt, the Israelites went through the desert to the Red Sea and arrived at Kadesh. They sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your country,’ but the king of Edom refused to listen. They also sent the same request to the king of Moab, and he refused too. So they remained at Kadesh.

Eventually the Israelites traveled through the desert, avoiding the lands of Edom and Moab. They arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon River. But they did not enter Moab territory, for the Arnon River was its border.

Then the Israelites sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who ruled from Heshbon, and asked him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our own country.’ But Sihon didn't trust the Israelites to pass through his territory. So he assembled his army, set up camp at Jahaz, and attacked the Israelites. However, the Lord, the God of Israel, handed over Sihon and all his people to the Israelites, who defeated them. So the Israelites took over all the land inhabited by the Amor-

ites. They occupied all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, and from the desert to the Jordan River.

It was the Lord, the God of Israel, who drove out the Amorites before his people Israel, so why should you take it over? Why don't you keep whatever your god Chemosh gave you, and we'll keep whatever the Lord our God has given us? Do you think you're so much better than Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or attack them?

Israelites have been living in Heshbon, Aroer, their villages, and in all the towns along the banks of the Arnon River for three hundred years. Why didn't you take them back during that time? I have not sinned against you, but you have done me wrong by going to war against me. Let the Lord, the Judge, decide today between the Israelites and the Ammonites."

But the king of Ammon didn't pay any attention to what Jephthah had to say.

Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He passed through Gilead and Manasseh, then on through Mizpah of Gilead. From there he advanced to attack the Ammonites. Jephthah made a solemn promise to the Lord, saying, "If you make me victorious over the Ammonites, I will dedicate to the Lord whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the battle. I will present it as a burnt offering."

Jephthah advanced to attack the Ammonites, and the Lord gave him the victory over them. He soundly defeated them, capturing twenty cities from Aroer to the area around Minnith, up as far as Abel-keramim. This is how the Ammonites were conquered by the Israelites.

When Jephthah arrived home in Mizpah, there came his daughter out to meet him, with tambourines and dancing! She was his only child—he had no son or daughter apart from her. The moment he saw her, he ripped his clothes in agony and cried out, "Oh no, my daughter! You have crushed me completely! You have destroyed me, for I made a solemn promise to the Lord and I can't go back on it."

She replied, "Father, you have made a solemn promise to the Lord. Do to me what you promised, for the Lord gave you victory over your enemies, the Ammonites."

Then she went on to say to him, "Just let me do this: let me walk through the hills for two months with my friends and grieve the fact that I'll never marry."

"You can go," he told her. He sent her away for two months, and she and her friends went into the hills and cried because she would never marry. When the two months were over, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had promised, and she was a virgin. This is the origin of the custom in Israel that every year the young women of Israel leave for four days to weep in commemoration of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Then the Ephraimites were called up and crossed the Jordan to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why did you go and fight the Ammonites without summoning us to go with you? We're going to burn your house down with you inside it!"

"I was a man with a great fight on my hands," Jephthah replied. "I and my people were fighting the Ammonites. When I called on you for help, you didn't come and help save me from them. When I realized that you weren't going to help, I took my life in my hands and went to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord made me victorious over them. So why have you come here today to attack me?"

Jephthah summoned all of the men of Gilead and fought against the Ephraimites. The men of Gilead killed them because the Ephraimites taunted them, saying, "You Gileadites are nothing more than escapees living among Ephraim and Manasseh."

The Gileadites took control of the fords over the Jordan River that led to Ephraim's territory, and when an Ephraimite escapee from the battle would come and ask, "Let me cross over," the Gileadites would question him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he answered, "No," they would tell him, "Say Shibboleth." If he was from Ephraim he would say "Sibboleth" because he couldn't pronounce it right, and they'd grab him and kill him there at the Jordan fords. A total of 42,000 were killed at that time.

Jephthah led Israel as judge for six years. Then he died and was buried in one of Gilead's towns.

After Jephthah, Ibzan of Bethlehem led Israel as a judge. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters. He married off his daughters to men of other tribes, and he brought in thirty wives from other tribes to marry his sons. Ibzan led Israel as judge for seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

After him, Elon the Zebulunite led Israel as judge for ten years. Then he died and was buried at Aijalon in the territory of Zebulun.

After him, Abdon, son of Hillel, from Pirathon, led Israel as judge. He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode seventy donkeys. He led Israel as judge for eight years. Then he died and was buried at Pirathon in the territory of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.

The Israelites continued to do what was evil in the Lord's sight, so the Lord handed them over to the Philistines to rule them for forty years.

At that time there was a man named Manoah. He was from the tribe of Dan and lived in the town of Zorah. His wife couldn't conceive and had no children.

The Angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her, "It's true that you couldn't conceive, and have no children, but now you're going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. So then please be careful not to drink any wine or other alcoholic drink, and don't eat anything unclean. You're going to become pregnant and have a son whose head a razor must never touch, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from birth. He will start the process of saving Israel from the Philistines."

The woman went and told her husband, "A man of God came to me. He looked like the Angel of God, really frightening. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. But he told me, 'You're going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. You must not drink wine or any other alcoholic drink, and don't

eat anything unclean. For the boy is to be a Nazirite, dedicated to God from birth until the day of his death.'"

Then Manoah prayed to the Lord, "Please, Lord, let the man of God you sent us return to us to explain what we're supposed to do with the boy who is to be born."

God responded to Manoah's request, and the Angel of God returned to the woman while she was sitting out in the field. However, her husband Manoah was not with her. So she ran quickly to tell her husband, "Look! The man who appeared to me the other day has come back!"

Manoah got up and went back with his wife, and asked, "Are you the man who spoke to my wife before?"

"Yes I am," he replied.

So Manoah said, "May your promise come true! What shall be decided for the boy, and what is to be his vocation?"

"Make sure your wife is careful to follow everything I told her," the angel of the Lord replied. "She must not eat anything that comes from the vine or drink wine or any other alcoholic drink. She must not eat anything unclean. Your wife must follow everything I instructed her to do."

Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, "Please let us keep you here while we prepare a meal of a young goat for you."

The angel of the Lord replied, "I'll stay, but I won't eat your food. However, if you prepare a burnt offering, you can present it to the Lord." (Manoah didn't know he was the angel of the Lord.)

Manoah asked the angel of the Lord, "What is your name, so when your promise comes true we may honor you?"

"Why do you ask this?" the angel of the Lord responded. "My name is beyond comprehension."

Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and presented them on a rock to the Lord. As Manoah and his wife watched, the Lord did something amazing. As the flame from the altar blazed up into the sky, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Manoah and his wife saw what happened and fell with their faces to the ground. The angel of the Lord did not appear to Manoah or his wife again, and Manoah realized that he was the angel of the Lord.

"We're definitely going to die," he told his wife, "for we have seen God!"

But his wife replied, "If the Lord had wanted to kill us he wouldn't have accepted our burnt offering and grain offering. He wouldn't have shown us all these things, and he wouldn't have come now and announced this to us."

She gave birth to a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up, and the Lord blessed him. The Spirit of the Lord began to prompt him at Mahaneh Dan, a place between Zorah and Eshtaol.

One day Samson went to Timnah, where a young Philistine woman attracted his attention. He went back home and told his father and mother, "A Philistine woman in Timnah caught my attention. Now get her for me because I want to marry her."

But his father and mother replied, "Can't you find a young woman from our tribe or from our own people? Do you have to go to the heathen Philistines to get a wife?"

But Samson told his father, "Just get her for me, because she's the one I find attractive."

(His father and mother didn't realize that this was in the Lord's plans, who was looking for an opportunity to deal with the Philistines; because at that time the Philistines ruled over Israel.)

Samson went to Timnah with his father and mother. When they passed the Timnah vineyards, all of a sudden a young lion came out roaring and attacked him. The Spirit of the Lord swept over him, and he ripped the lion apart with his bare hands as easily as ripping apart a young goat. But he didn't tell his father or mother what he'd done. Then he went on his way. When Samson talked with the woman he decided she was right for him.

Later on when Samson returned to marry her, he turned off the road to look for the lion's carcass. Inside the body was a swarm of bees and their honey. He scraped out some of the honey into his hands and ate it as he walked. When he got back to his father and mother, he gave some to them and they ate it. But he didn't tell them he'd taken the honey from a lion's carcass.

While his father went to visit the woman, Samson held a drinking party there, because this was the custom among high-class young men. When the Philistine people saw him, they arranged for thirty men to accompany him.

"Let me pose a riddle to you," Samson said to them. "If you can find its meaning and explain it to me during the seven days of the party, I'll give you thirty linen cloaks and thirty sets of clothes. But if you can't explain it to me, you'll give me thirty linen cloaks and thirty sets of clothes."

"Fine," they replied. "Let's hear your riddle!"

"Food came out of the eater, and sweetness came out of the strong," he said. Three days later they still hadn't worked it out. On the fourth day they came to Samson's wife and told her, "Use your charms to get your husband to explain the riddle and then tell us, or we'll burn you and all your family to death. Did you bring us here just to rob us?"

So Samson's wife went crying to him, saying, "You really do hate me, don't you! You don't love me at all! You have posed a riddle to my people, but haven't even explained it to me."

"So?" he replied. "I haven't even explained it to my father or mother! Why should I explain it to you?"

She cried in front of him for the whole time of the party, and eventually on the seventh day he explained it to her because she nagged him so much. Then she explained the meaning of the riddle to the Philistine young men.

Before the sun set on the seventh day, the men of the town came to Samson and said, "What's sweeter than honey? What's stronger than a lion?"

"If you hadn't used my cow to plow with, you wouldn't have found out the meaning of my riddle," Samson replied.

The Spirit of the Lord swept over him and he went to Ashkelon, killed thirty of their men, took their clothing, and gave it to those who had explained the riddle. Furiously angry, Samson went back to his father's

house. Samson's wife was given to his best man who had accompanied him at the wedding.

Some time later when the wheat was being harvested, Samson went to pay his wife a visit, taking with him a young goat as a present. “I want to go to my wife in her bedroom,” he said when he arrived, but her father would not let him go in.

“I thought you must totally hate her, so I gave her to your best man,” he told Samson. “But her younger sister is even more attractive—why don't you marry her instead?”

“This time I can't be blamed for the trouble I'm going to cause the Philistines,” Samson declared. He went and caught three hundred foxes and tied their tails together, two by two. He attached a torch to each of the tied tails and set them on fire. Then he let them loose in the grain fields of the Philistines, setting fire to all the grain, harvested and unharvested, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.

“Who did this?” the Philistines asked. “It was Samson, the son-in-law of the man from Timnah,” they were told. “That man gave Samson's wife to Samson's best man.” So the Philistines went and burned her and her father to death.

Samson told them, “If this is the way you're going to act, then I won't stop until I take my revenge on you!” He attacked them violently, killing them, and then left to go and live in a cave at the rock of Etam.

So the Philistine army came and camped in Judah, drawn up for battle near Lehi. The people of Judah asked, “Why have you invaded us?”

“We've come to capture Samson, to do to him what he's done to us!” they replied.

Three thousand men of Judah went to the cave at the rock of Etam and asked Samson, “Don't you understand that the Philistines rule over us? What do you think you're doing to us?”

“I only did what they did to me,” he replied.

“Well, we've come to take you prisoner and hand you over to the Philistines,” they told him.

“Just swear to me that you're not going to kill me yourselves,” Samson answered.

“No, we won't,” they assured him. “We'll only tie you up and hand you over to the Philistines. We certainly aren't going to kill you!” They tied him using two new ropes and led him up from the rock.

When Samson got close to Lehi, the Philistines ran towards him, shouting at him. But the Spirit of the Lord swept over him, and the ropes tying his arms together became as weak as burnt flax, and his hands broke free. He grabbed the fresh jawbone of a donkey, using it to kill a thousand Philistines.

Then Samson declared, “With a donkey's jawbone I have piled the dead into heaps. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men.”

After Samson had finished his speech, he threw away the jawbone, and he named the place Hill of the Jawbone. Samson was now extremely thirsty, and he called out to the Lord, saying, “You have achieved this amazing victory through your servant, but now do I have to die of thirst and be captured by the heathen?”

So God split open a rock seam in Lehi, and water came out of it. Samson drank and his strength returned —he felt much better. That's why he named it the Spring of the Caller, and it's still there in Lehi to this very day.

Samson led Israel as judge for twenty years during the time of the Philistines.

Samson went to Gaza. There he saw a prostitute and he went to have sex with her that night. The men of Gaza found out Samson was there, so they gathered to spend the night lying in wait for him at the town gates. They kept quiet all night, whispering to one another, “We'll kill him when it gets light.”

But Samson only stayed until halfway through the night. He grabbed hold of the town gates along with their two posts and ripped them up, along with the lock-bar. Putting them on his shoulders, he carried them to the hill opposite Hebron.

Later he fell in love with a woman named Delilah living in the Sorek Valley. The Philistine leaders approached her, saying, “See if you can seduce him and get him to show you the secret of his incredible strength, and find out how we can overpower him and tie him up so he can't do anything. We'll all give you eleven hundred shekels of silver each.”

Delilah went and pleaded with Samson, “Please tell me where your incredible strength comes from, and what can be used to tie you up so you can't do anything.”

“If I'm tied up with seven supple bowstrings that haven't dried out, I'll become just as weak,” Samson told her.

The Philistine leaders brought her seven supple bowstrings that hadn't dried out, and she tied him up with them. Having arranged for men to hide in her bedroom ready to attack him, she shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” But he snapped the bowstrings like a thread snaps when a flame touches it. So nobody found out where his strength came from.

Later Delilah said to Samson, “You've made me look stupid, telling me these lies! So now please tell me what can be used to tie you up.”

“If I'm tied up tight with new ropes that haven't been used before, I'll become just as weak as anyone else,” he told her.

So Delilah got some new ropes and tied him up with them. She shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” As before, men were hiding in her bedroom. But again Samson snapped the ropes from his arms as if they were thin threads.

Delilah said to Samson, “You keep on making me look stupid, telling me these lies! Just tell me what can be used to tie you up!”

“If you were to weave the seven braids of my hair into the web on the loom and tighten it with the pin, I'll become as weak as anyone else,” he told her. So while he was asleep, Delilah took the seven braids of his head, weaving them into the web, and tightening the pin. She shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!” But Samson woke up and ripped out both the pin and the web from the loom.

Then Delilah complained to Samson, “How can you tell me, ‘I love you,’ when you don't let me into your confidence? Three times you've made me look stupid, not telling me where your incredible strength comes from!”

She nagged and complained all the time, pestering him until he wanted to die. Eventually Samson confided

in her, sharing everything. “My hair has never been cut, because I've been dedicated as a Nazirite to God from my birth. If I'm shaved, my strength will leave me, and I'll become as weak as anyone else.”

Delilah realized that he had truly confided in her and shared everything, she sent a message to the Philistine leaders telling them, “Come back once more, because this time he's confided in me and told me everything.” So the Philistine leaders returned, bringing with them the money to give to her.

Delilah soothed him to sleep on her lap, and then called in someone to shave off the seven braids of hair. She started to torment him but he couldn't do anything for his strength left him. She shouted out, “Samson, the Philistines are here to get you!”

Samson woke up and thought to himself, “I'll do like before and shake myself free.” But he didn't know that the Lord had left him.

The Philistines grabbed him and gouged out his eyes. Then they took him to Gaza where they imprisoned him in bronze chains. He was made to work grinding grain at the mill in the prison.

But his hair began to grow back after it had been shaved off.

The Philistine leaders gathered for a great religious festival to sacrifice to their god Dagon and to celebrate, saying, “Our god has handed Samson our enemy over to us!”

When the people saw him, they praised their god, and said, “Our god has handed our enemy over to us, the one who devastated our land and killed so many of us.”

As they began to get drunk, they shouted, “Summon Samson so he can entertain us!” So they summoned Samson from the prison to entertain them, and made him stand between the two main pillars of the building.

Samson said to the servant boy who was leading him by the hand, “Leave me by the pillars on which the temple rests so I can feel them, and lean against them.” The temple was full of people. All the Philistine rulers were there, and on the roof were the ordinary people watching what Samson was doing.

Samson called out to the Lord, “Lord God, please remember me and give me strength. Please God, do this just once more, so that with one act I may pay the Philistines back in revenge for the loss of my two eyes.” Samson reached for the two middle pillars that supported the temple. With his right hand leaning on one pillar and his left hand on the other, Samson shouted, “Let me die with the Philistines!” and he pushed with all his strength. The temple collapsed on the rulers and all the people in it. So those killed at his death were more than he killed in his life.

Then his brothers and his whole family came and took him back and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of Manoah his father. He led Israel as judge for twenty years.

A man named Micah from the hill country of Ephraim told his mother, “Those eleven hundred shekels of silver that were stolen from you and that I heard you curse—I've got the silver. I was the one who took it.”

Then his mother said, “My son, the Lord bless you!”

He gave back to his mother the eleven hundred shekels of silver. His mother announced, “I'm completely dedicating this money to the Lord. I'm handing it over to my son to have an idol carved, an image made with molten silver. So now I return it to you.”

After he'd returned the silver to his mother she gave two hundred shekels to a silversmith who made it into a carved idol, an image made with molten silver. They were kept in Micah's house. Micah had built a shrine for the idol. He also made an ephod and some household gods, and ordained one of his sons as his priest. At that time Israel didn't have a king— everyone did what they themselves thought was the right thing to do.

One young man, a Levite from the tribe of Judah had been living in Bethlehem in Judah, left Bethlehem to look for a different place to live. As he traveled through the hill country of Ephraim, he came to Micah's house.

“Where are you from?” Micah asked him.

“I'm a Levite from Bethlehem in Judah,” the man replied. “I'm looking for a place to live.”

“Come and stay here with me. You can be my ‘father’ and priest, and I'll give you ten shekels of silver a year, plus your clothes and food.” So the Levite went inside and agreed to stay with him. The young man became like a son to him. Micah ordained the Levite as his own priest and he lived in Micah's house.

“I'm sure the Lord will bless me now, because I have a Levite as my priest,” Micah concluded.

At that time Israel didn't have a king. The tribe of Dan was looking for territory where they could live, because up until then they hadn't gained possession of the land granted to them among the tribes of Israel. So the Danites chose from among their tribes five leading men who came from the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol to scout out the land and explore it.

“Go and explore the land,” they told them. When the men came to the hill country of Ephraim, they arrived at Micah's house where they spent the night. While they were there, they recognized the young Levite's accent, so they went to him and asked him, “So who brought you here, and what are you doing in this place? Why are you here?”

“Micah arranged things for me, and he hired me as his priest,” he told them.

“Please ask the Lord for us so we can find out if our journey will be successful,” they asked him.

“Go in peace,” the priest replied. “The journey you are taking is being observed by the Lord.”

The five men left and went to the town of Laish. They observed that the people there lived in safety, and followed the customs of the Sidonians. The people were unsuspecting and confident of their security, at home in a productive land. They didn't have a strong ruler, they lived a long way from the Sidonians, and had no other allies to help them.

When the men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked them, “What did you…?”

“Come on, let's go and attack them!” the men interrupted. “We've surveyed the land, and it's excellent! Aren't you going to do something? Don't put off going there and occupying the land! When you get there you'll find the people are unsuspecting and the land is

extensive. God has given you a place where there's no shortage of anything!"

So six hundred Danite armed men left Zorah and Eshtaol, ready to attack. En route they camped at Kiriath-jearim in Judah. That's why the place west of Kiriath-jearim is called the Camp of Dan to this very day. Then they left from there and went into the hill country of Ephraim and came to Micah's house.

Then the five men who had gone to scout out the land of Laish told the other tribesmen, "Do you realize that here in these houses there's an ephod, household gods, and a carved idol, an image made with molten silver? So you know what you should do." The five men left the road and went to where the young Levite was living in Micah's home to ask how he was. The six hundred Danite armed men stood at the entrance by the gate. The five men went inside and took the carved idol, the ephod, the household idols, and the image made with molten silver. The priest was standing by the gate with the six hundred armed men.

When the priest saw them taking all the religious objects from Micah's home, he asked them, "What are you doing?"

"Be quiet! Don't say anything! Come with us, and you can be our 'father' and priest. Wouldn't it be better for you if instead of being a priest for just one man's household that you were the priest of an Israelite tribe and family?"

This seemed like a good idea to the priest and he left with them. Carrying the ephod, the household idols, and the image made with molten silver, he marched with the people all around him. They continued their journey, putting their children, livestock, and possessions ahead of them.

The Danites were already quite a way from Micah's home when men from Micah's village caught up with them, shouting at them. The Danites turned around to face them and asked Micah, "What's the matter with you? Why call out these men to come after us?"

"You stole the gods I made, and my priest too, and then left. What have you left me with? How can you ask me, 'What's the matter with you?'"

"Don't complain to us!" Danites replied. "Otherwise some hot-tempered people here might attack you, and you and your family will lose your lives!" The Danites carried on their way. Micah saw that they were too strong for him to fight so he turned around and went back home.

So the Danites took with them the idols that Micah had made, as well as his priest. They attacked Laish with its peaceful and unsuspecting people, killed them with swords, and burned down the town. No one could save them because they were a long way from Sidon and had no other allies to help them. The town was in the valley belonging to Beth-rehob. The Danites rebuilt the city and lived there. They renamed the city Dan after their forefather, the son of Israel. Laish was its former name. The Danites erected the carved idol to worship, and Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons became priests for the tribe of Dan until the time when the people went into captivity from the land. They worshiped the carved idol that Micah had made the whole time God's Temple was at Shiloh.

At that time Israel didn't have a king. A Levite who was living in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim married a concubine-wife from Bethlehem in Judah. But she was unfaithful to him and left him to return to her father's house in Bethlehem. She was there for four months.

Then her husband went after her, to talk kindly with her and bring her back home. With him went his servant and two donkeys. She took him to her father's house and when her father met him, he gladly welcomed him. Her father pressed him to stay with them, so he remained for three days, eating, drinking, and sleeping there. On the fourth day he and his concubine got up early in the morning and prepared to leave, but her father said to his son-in-law, "You'll feel better if you have something to eat before you go." So the two men sat down to eat and drink together. The father said to his son-in law, "Please agree to spend another night here, and you can enjoy yourself!" The man got up to leave, but his father-in-law pressed him to stay, so in the end he spent the night there.

On the fifth day he got up early in the morning to leave. But his father-in-law said, "Eat before you go, then leave later this afternoon." So they had a meal together. When he got up to leave with his concubine and his servant, his father-in-law told him, "Look it's late—it's already evening. Spend the night here. The day's almost over. Stay here the night and enjoy yourself, then tomorrow you can get up early and be on your way home."

But the man didn't want to spend another night, so he got up and left. He headed towards the town of Jebus (now called Jerusalem) with his two saddled donkeys and his concubine. As they approached Jebus the day was over, and the servant said to his master, "Sir, why don't we stop here at this Jebusite town for the night?"

But his master replied, "No, we're not going to stop in this town where only foreigners live and no Israelites. We'll continue on to Gibeah." Then he told his servant, "Come on, let's try and get to Gibeah or Ramah and spend the night somewhere there." So they carried on and reached Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin just as the sun was setting. They stopped in Gibeah to spend the night, and sat down in the town's main square, but no one invited them to come and stay.

But later that evening an old man came by, returning from working in the fields. He was from the hill country of Ephraim, but was now living in Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. He looked over and noticed the traveler in the square and asked, "Where are you going and where have you come from?"

"We've come from Bethlehem in Judah and we're going to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim," the man replied. "I'm from there and I went to Bethlehem, and now I'm going to the Lord's Temple. No one here has invited me to stay. There's straw and food for our donkeys, and we your servants have bread and wine—enough for me, the woman, and my servant. We have all we need."

"You are welcome to stay with me," the man replied. "I can let you have everything you need. Just don't spend the night here in the square." He took him

home and fed the donkeys. The travelers washed their feet and then started to eat and drink.

While they were enjoying themselves, some depraved men from the town came and surrounded the house and banged on the door, shouting to the old man who owned the house, “Bring out the man who came to stay in your house so we can have sex with him.”

The man who owned the house went outside and told them, “My brothers, don't act in such an evil way! This man is a guest in my house. Don't do something so disgusting! Look, here's my virgin daughter and the man's concubine. Let me bring them out and you can rape them and do whatever you want to them. But don't do something so disgusting to this man.”

But the men refused to listen, so the man grabbed his concubine and threw her outside to them. They raped her and abused her all night until the morning, and only discarded her at dawn. As night turned into day she returned to the house where her master was staying and collapsed in front of the door as it got light.

Her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house. He went out to continue his journey and there was his concubine, stretched out in the doorway of the house, with her hands holding onto the doorstep.

“Get up, let's go,” he told her, but there was no answer. Then the man lifted her onto his donkey and went home. When he got home he took a knife, and holding onto his concubine, cut her up, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent these pieces of her to every part of Israel. Everyone who saw her said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen before, from the time the Israelites left Egypt up until now. You should think about what happened to her! Decide what to do! Speak up!”

All the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, including the land of Gilead, went and gathered at Mizpah before the Lord. The assembly was united in purpose. The leaders of all the people of every Israelite tribe took their assigned positions in the assembled army of God's people, four hundred thousand soldiers armed with swords. The tribe of Benjamin found out that the Israelites had assembled at Mizpah. The Israelites asked, “Tell us, how could such an evil act have happened?”

The Levite, the husband of the woman who had been murdered, explained, “I and my concubine came to spend the night at the town of Gibeah in the territory of Benjamin. The leaders of Gibeah came to attack me at night. They surrounded the house, intending to kill me. They raped my concubine and she died. I took my concubine and cut her into pieces, and I sent these pieces of her to every part of the country that had been given to Israel, because those men had done something shameful and disgusting in Israel. So all of you Israelites have to decide here and now what you're going to do about it!”

Everyone stood up and unitedly declared, “None of us are going home to our tents! None of us are going home to our houses! This is what we're going to do to Gibeah: we will attack it with our forces chosen by lot. We'll take ten men from a hundred from all the Israelite tribes, then a hundred from a thousand, then a thousand from ten thousand, to arrange food for the army, so when the troops reach Gibeah in Benjamin, they can pay them back for all these disgusting things they've done in Israel.”

All the men of Israel were in agreement and gathered to attack the town. The Israelite tribes also sent men throughout the territory of Benjamin, asking the people, “What are you doing about this terrible evil that has taken place among you? Hand over these wicked men so we can execute them and get rid of this evil from Israel!” But the Benjamites refused to listen to what their fellow Israelites had to say. They left their towns and assembled at Gibeah to go and fight the other Israelites. That day a total of twenty-six thousand men armed with swords were called up from the towns of Benjamin, in addition to the seven hundred seasoned warriors from Gibeah. Making up part of this army were seven hundred experienced soldiers who used their left hands. All of them could fire a slingshot and not miss by even a hair's breadth. The Israelite army (excluding Benjamin) numbered four hundred thousand seasoned warriors, all armed with swords.

The Israelites went to Bethel and asked God, “Which ones of us should be the first to go and fight the Benjamites?”

“Judah is to go first,” the Lord replied. The next morning the Israelites left and set up their camp near Gibeah. Then they marched out for battle with the army of Benjamin, taking up their positions to attack Gibeah. But the Benjamites came out of Gibeah and slaughtered twenty-two thousand Israelites on the battlefield that day.

But the Israelites encouraged one another to be confident, and they took up the same positions they had on the first day. The Israelites went and cried before the Lord until the evening and asked, “Should we go and attack the Benjamites again, our relatives?”

“Go and attack them,” the Lord replied.

So the second day they advanced to attack the army of Benjamin. However, Benjamites came out of Gibeah once more and slaughtered eighteen thousand Israelites, all armed with swords.

Then all the Israelites and all their army went to Bethel, and sat crying there before the Lord. That day they fasted until evening and gave burnt offerings and friendship offerings to the Lord. The Israelites asked the Lord what to do. At that time the Ark of God's Agreement was kept there. Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, was the priest. The Israelites asked the Lord, “Should we go and fight against our relatives from Benjamin again, or not?”

“Yes, go! Tomorrow I will hand them over to you,” the Lord replied.

Then the Israelites set up an ambush around Gibeah. On the third day they took up the same positions they had as before. The Benjamites came out to attack them and were lured away from the town as they began to kill Israelites as they had before. Some thirty Israelites died on the battlefield and along the roads, the one that goes towards Bethel and the other that goes back towards Gibeah.

“We're defeating them, just like before,” the Benjamites shouted.

But the Israelites said, “Let's run away from them and lure them away from the town towards the roads.”

The main army of Israelites left where they were and took up positions at Baal-tamar, while those in the ambush west of Gibeah charged out to attack from where they had been hiding. Ten thousand seasoned Israelite warriors attacked Gibeah, and the fighting was so intense the Benjamites didn't realize they were on the brink of disaster. So the Lord defeated Benjamin before Israel. That day the Israelites killed twenty-five thousand one hundred Benjamites, all armed with swords. The Benjamites saw that they were defeated.

The Israelites had fallen back before the Benjamites because they were confident the ambush they had put in place near Gibeah would be successful. The men from the ambush raced to attack the town, and they killed everyone in it. The agreement was that they would send up a great cloud of smoke to show the town had fallen. The Israelite army turned to attack the Benjamites, who had already killed about thirty Israelites. The Benjamites were saying, “We're completely defeating them, just like the first battle!”

However, when the Israelites saw the columns of smoke rising heavenwards to form a great cloud over the whole of the town, they turned on their enemies. The Benjamites were horrified when they saw it and realized they were doomed. They turned and ran from the Israelites towards the desert, but the battle caught up with them, and the Israelites also killed those who left the towns on the way. Chasing after the Benjamites, the Israelites surrounded them, easily overtaking them east of Gibeah. Eighteen thousand Benjamites were killed, all of them courageous warriors. Some of the Benjamites that were left ran towards Pomegranate Rock in the desert, and the Israelites killed another five thousand men on the way. They chased another group of Benjamites as far as Gidom and killed another thousand.

So that day twenty-five thousand Benjamites were killed, all armed with swords and all courageous warriors. There were six hundred who ran away to Pomegranate Rock in the desert and they stayed there four months. The Israelites went back into the territory of the Benjamites, and going from town to town, they killed everything: people, animals, everything they found. Then they burned down every town on their way.

The men of Israel had sworn an oath at Mizpah, “None of us will allow our daughters to marry a Benjamite.” The Israelites went to Bethel and sat there before God until the evening, crying loudly in distress. “Lord, God of Israel, why has this happened to Israel?” they asked. “Today one of our tribes is missing from Israel.”

The next day they got up early, built an altar, and brought burnt offerings and friendship offerings. “Which of all the tribes of Israel didn't attend the assembly we held before the Lord?” they asked. For they had sworn a sacred oath that anyone who did not come before the Lord at Mizpah would without exception be executed.

The Israelites felt sorry for their brother Benjamin, saying, “Today one tribe has been hacked off from Israel! What shall we do about wives for those who are left, since we have sworn an oath before the Lord that we will not allow any of our daughters to marry them?”

Then they asked, “Which one of all the tribes of Israel didn't attend the assembly we held before the Lord at Mizpah?” They found out that no one from Jabesh-gilead had come to the camp for the assembly, for once they had done a head count, there was nobody there from Jabesh-gilead.

So the assembly sent twelve thousand of their best warriors there. They gave them orders, saying, “Go and kill the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead with your swords, even the women and children. This is what you have to do: Destroy every male and every woman who has had sex with a man.”

They managed to find among the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead four hundred virgins who had not had sex with a man. They took them to the camp in Shiloh, in the land of Canaan. Then the whole Israelite assembly sent a message to the Benjamites at Pomegranate Rock to tell them, “Peace!” So the men of Benjamin went back home, and the Israelites gave them the four hundred women from Jabesh-gilead who had been spared as wives. However, there weren't enough for all of them.

The people felt sorry for the Benjamites because the Lord had made this empty hole among the Israelite tribes. The elders of the assembly asked, “What shall we do to supply the remaining wives because all the women of Benjamin have been destroyed?” They added, “There have to be heirs for the Benjamite survivors—an Israelite tribe of Israel can't be wiped out. But we can't let them have our daughters as wives, since we as the people of Israel swore a sacred oath, saying, ‘Anyone who gives a wife to a Benjamite is cursed!’”

Then they said, “Look! Every year there's the Lord's festival in Shiloh. It's held north of Bethel, and east of the road that goes from Bethel to Shechem, south of Lebonah.”

So they ordered the Benjamites, “Go and hide in the vineyards. Keep a lookout, and when you see the young women from Shiloh come out to perform their dances, run out from the vineyards, and each of you abduct a wife for yourself and go back home to the land of Benjamin. If their fathers or brothers come complaining to us, we'll tell them, ‘Please do us a favor, because we couldn't find enough wives for them in the war. And it's not as if you're guilty of breaking the oath since you didn't give them in marriage.’”

The Benjaminites did as they were ordered. Each man grabbed one of the women dancers up to the total needed and carried her off to be his wife. Then they went back to their own land, where they rebuilt their towns and lived in them.

Then the Israelites left and went home to their tribes and families, each one going to the land they owned. At that time Israel didn't have a king—everyone did what they themselves thought was the right thing to do.

Ruth

Book of Ruth

There was a famine during the time when the judges ruled Israel, so a man left Bethlehem in Judah and went to live in exile in the country of Moab, along with his wife and two sons. His name was Elimelech, and his wife's name Naomi. His sons were called Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went to the country of Moab and lived there.

However, Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. The sons married Moabite women. One was called Orpah, the other was called Ruth. After about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion died. Naomi was left alone, without her two sons or her husband. So she and her daughters-in-law prepared to leave the country of Moab and return home because she had heard that the Lord had blessed his people there with food. She left the place where she had been living and with her two daughters-in-law set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

However, as they left, Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Each of you, go back to your mother's homes, and may the Lord be as kind to you as you have been to me, and to those who have died. May the Lord give you a good home with another husband.” She kissed them, and they all started to cry loudly.

“No! We want to go back with you to your people,” they replied.

“Why do you want to go back with me?” Naomi asked. “I'm not able to have any more sons for you to marry. Go back home, my daughters, because I'm too old to marry again. Even if I were to sleep with a new husband tonight and had sons, would you wait for them to grow up? Would you decide you weren't going to marry anyone else? No. The whole situation is more bitter for me than it is for you, for the Lord has turned against me!”

They started crying loudly again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye. But Ruth held on tightly to Naomi.

“Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back home with her,” said Naomi.

But Ruth replied, “Please don't keep on telling me to leave you and go back. Where you go, I will go. Where you live, I will live. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me harshly if I let anything but death separate us!”

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped telling Ruth to go home. So the two of them walked on until they reached Bethlehem. When they arrived there, the whole town got excited. “Is this Naomi?” the women asked.

She said to them, “Don't call me Naomi! Call me Mara, for the Almighty has treated me very bitterly. I left here full, but the Lord has brought me home empty. Why call me Naomi when the Lord has condemned me, when the Almighty has brought disaster on me?”

This is the way that Naomi returned from Moab with Ruth, the Moabite, her daughter-in-law. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side whose name was Boaz. He was a rich and influential man from the family of Elimelech.

Soon after, Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Please let me go to the fields and pick up grain that's been left behind—if I can find someone who'll give me permission.”

“Yes, go ahead, my daughter,” Naomi replied.

So she went and picked up grain the reapers had left behind. She happened to be working in a field that belonged to Boaz, a relative of Elimelech.

Later on Boaz arrived from Bethlehem, and said to the reapers, “May the Lord be with you!” They replied, “The Lord bless you!” Then Boaz asked his servant who was in charge of the harvesters, “Who is this young woman related to?” “The young woman is a Moabite who came back with Naomi from Moab,” the servant replied. “She asked me, ‘Please may I have permission to pick up grain behind the reapers.’ So she came, and she's been working here from morning until now, except for a brief rest in the shelter.”

Boaz went and spoke to Ruth. “Listen to me, my daughter,” he told her. “Don't leave to go and pick up grain in someone else's field. Stay close to my women. Pay attention to what part of the field the men are reaping and follow the women. I've told the men not to bother you. When you get thirsty, go and have a drink from the water jars the servants have filled.”

She bowed down with her face to the ground. “Why are you being so kind to me or even notice me, seeing I'm a foreigner?” she asked him.

“I've heard about all you've done for your mother-in-law since your husband died,” Boaz replied. “And also how you left your father and mother, and the land of your birth, to come and live among people you didn't know. May the Lord fully reward you for all you've done—the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you've come for protection.”

“Thank you for being so good to me, sir,” she replied. “You have reassured me by speaking to me kindly. I'm not even one of your servants.”

When it was time to eat, Boaz called her over. “Come here,” he said. “Take some bread and dip it in wine vinegar.”

So she sat down with the workers and Boaz passed her some roasted grain to eat. She ate until she'd had enough with some left over.

After Ruth went back to work Boaz told his men, “Let her pick up grain even among the sheaves. Don't say anything to embarrass her. In fact, pull out some stalks from the bundles you're cutting and leave them for her to pick up. Don't tell her off.”

Ruth worked in the field until the evening. When she beat out the grain that she had picked up it was a large amount. She picked it up and took it back to town to show her mother-in-law how much she had collected. Ruth also gave her what she had left over from her meal.

Naomi asked her, “Where did you pick up grain today? Exactly where did you work? Bless whoever cared enough about you to pay you some attention!” So she told her mother-in-law about who she had worked with. “The man I worked with today is called Boaz.”

“The Lord bless him!” Naomi exclaimed to her daughter-in-law. “He goes on showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is a close relative to us—a ‘family redeemer.’”

Ruth added, “He also told me, ‘Stay close to my workers until they have finished harvesting my entire crop.’”

“That's good, my daughter,” Naomi told Ruth. “Stay with his women workers. Don't go to other fields where you might be molested.” So Ruth stayed with Boaz's women workers, picking up grain until the end of the barley harvest, and then on to the end of the wheat harvest. She lived with her mother-in-law the whole time.

A little later Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, don't you think I should find you a husband and a good home? Don't ignore the fact that Boaz, whose women you worked with, is closely related to us. Now tonight he will be busy winnowing grain on the threshing floor. Have a bath, put on some perfume, wear your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor—but don't let him recognize you. Once he's finished eating and drinking, watch where he goes to lie down. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. Then he will tell you what to do.”

“I'll do everything you told me,” said Ruth. She went down to the threshing floor and did what her mother-in-law had told her to do. After Boaz had finished eating and drinking, and was feeling contented, he went and lay down beside the grain pile. Ruth quietly approached him, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

Around midnight Boaz suddenly woke up. Bending forward he was surprised to see a woman lying at his feet.

“Who are you?” he asked.

“I'm Ruth, your servant,” she replied. “Please spread the corner of your cloak over me, for you are my family redeemer.”

“May the Lord bless you, my daughter,” he said. “You are showing even more loyalty and love to the family than before. You haven't gone looking for a younger man, of whatever social status. So don't worry, my daughter. I will do everything you ask—everyone in town knows you are a woman of good character. However, even though I'm one of your family redeemers, there's one who is more closely related than I am. Stay here tonight, and in the morning if he wants to redeem you, then fine, let him do it. But if he doesn't, then I promise you in the name of the living Lord, I will redeem you. Lie down here until morning.”

So Ruth lay at his feet until morning. Then she got up before it was light enough to recognize anyone because Boaz had told her, “No one must know that a woman came here to the threshing floor.”

He also told her, “Bring me the cloak you're wearing and hold it out.” So she held it out and he poured out six measures of barley into it. He helped her put it on her back and she went back to town.

Ruth went to her mother-in-law, who asked her, “How did it go for you, my daughter?” So Ruth told her everything that Boaz had done for her.

“And he also gave me these six measures of barley,” she added. “He told me, ‘You mustn't go home to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

Naomi said to Ruth, “Wait patiently, my daughter, until you find out how it all works out. Boaz won't rest until he has it settled today.”

Boaz went to the town gate, and sat down there. The family redeemer that Boaz had mentioned happened to pass by, so Boaz said to him, “Come over here, friend, and sit down.” The man came over and sat down. Then Boaz selected ten of the town elders and asked them to sit there with them.

Boaz said to the family redeemer, “Naomi who has returned from the country of Moab is selling the piece of land that belonged to Elimelech, our relative. I decided I should tell you in case you want to buy it here in the presence of these elders of the people. If you want to redeem it, then go ahead. But if you don't, then tell me so I'll know, because you are first in line to redeem it, and I'm next.”

“I want to redeem it,” said the family redeemer.

“When you buy the land from Naomi you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, so you can marry her and have children with her to ensure the man's line continues,” Boaz explained.

“Well, I can't do it then,” the family redeemer replied. “If I were to redeem it, that could jeopardize what I already own. You redeem it for yourself, because I can't.”

(Now during those times it was the custom in Israel to confirm the action of family redeemer, property transfer, or any similar legal matter by removing a sandal and handing it over. This was the way of validating a transaction in Israel.)

So the family redeemer took off his sandal and told Boaz, “You buy it.”

Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people present, “You are witnesses that today I have bought from Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech, Mahlon, and Chilion. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife. By having children who may inherit his property his name will be kept alive in his family and in his home town. You are witnesses of this today.”

The elders and all the people present at the town gate said, “Yes, we are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah who between them gave birth to the people of Israel. May you become prosperous in Ephrathah, and famous in Bethlehem. May your descendants the Lord gives you through this young woman become like the descendants of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah.”

Boaz took Ruth home, and she became his wife. He slept with her, and the Lord arranged for her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son.

The women of the town came to Naomi and said, “Praise the Lord, for today he didn't leave you without a family redeemer by giving you this grandson—may he become famous throughout Israel. He will give you a new lease on life and provide for you in your old age,

for your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better than seven sons to you, has given birth to him."

Naomi picked up the child and hugged him. She looked after him like her own son.

The neighbor women named him Obed, saying "Naomi now has a son!" He was the father of Jesse who was the father of David.

This is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron. Hezron was the father of Ram. Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon. Nahshon was the father of Salmon. Salmon was the father of Boaz. Boaz was the father of Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse was the father of David.

1 Samuel

First Book of Samuel

Once there was a man from Ramathaim-zophim in the hill country of Ephraim. His name was Elkanah, son of Jeroham, son of Elihu, son of Tohu, son of Zuph, from the tribe of Ephraim.

He had two wives. The name of the first wife was Hannah, and the name of the second, Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Every year Elkanah would leave his town and go to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were the Lord's priests.

Whenever Elkanah offered a sacrifice, he would give portions of it to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. He would give an extra portion to Hannah, to show his love for her even though the Lord hadn't given her any children. Her rival—the other wife—would taunt her badly to upset her because the Lord hadn't given her any children.

This went on for years. Whenever Hannah went to the Lord's Temple, Peninnah would taunt her until she cried and couldn't eat.

"Hannah, what are you crying for?" her husband Elkanah would ask. "Why don't you eat? Why are you so upset? Aren't I better to you than ten sons?"

One time when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to the Temple. Eli the priest was sitting on his seat by the entrance to the Lord's Temple. She was terribly upset, and prayed to the Lord as she cried and cried. She made a vow, asking, "Lord Almighty, if only you would pay attention to the suffering of your servant and remember me, and not forget me but give me a son, then I will dedicate him to the Lord for his whole life, and no razor shall ever touch his head."

As Hannah went on praying before the Lord, Eli watched her mouth. Hannah was praying in her head, and though her lips were moving, her voice made no sound. Eli thought she must be drunk.

"Do you have to come here drunk?" he asked. "Get rid of your wine!"

"It's not that, my lord," Hannah replied. "I'm a very miserable woman. I haven't been drinking wine or beer; I'm just pouring my heart out to the Lord. Please don't think I'm a bad woman! I have been praying because of all my troubles and grief."

"Go in peace, and may the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for," Eli replied.

"Thank you for your kindness to your servant," she said. Then she went on her way, had something to eat, and she didn't look sad any more.

Elkanah and Hannah got up early the next morning to worship the Lord, and then they went home to Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the Lord honored her request. In due course she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him."

Elkanah and all his family went to make the yearly sacrifice to the Lord and to fulfill his vow. But Hannah did not go. She told her husband, "Once the boy is weaned I will take him to be presented to the Lord and to remain there forever."

"Do as you see fit," her husband Elkanah replied. "Stay here until you have weaned him. May the Lord fulfill what he has said." So Hannah stayed behind and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

When she had weaned him, Hannah took the boy with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a wineskin containing wine. Even though the boy was young, she brought him to the Lord's Temple at Shiloh. After they had slaughtered the bull, they presented the boy to Eli.

"Please, my lord," said Hannah, "as surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here with you praying to the Lord. I prayed for this boy, and since the Lord has given me what I asked him for, now I'm giving him to the Lord. As long as he lives he will be dedicated to the Lord." And he worshiped the Lord there.

Hannah prayed, "I'm so happy in the Lord! He has empowered me! Now I have plenty to say in answer to those who hate me. I celebrate your salvation! There's no one holy like the Lord—no one apart from you, no Rock like our God!

Don't speak so conceitedly! Don't talk so arrogantly! For the Lord is a God who knows everything—doesn't he judge what you do?

The weapons of the powerful are shattered, while those who stumble along are made strong. Those who used to have plenty of food now have to work to earn a crust, while those who used to be hungry now have become fat. The woman who was childless now has seven children, while the woman with many children fades away.

The Lord kills and he revives; he sends some down to the grave, but he raises others up. The Lord makes some poor, but others rich; he brings some down, but he lifts others up. He helps the poor up from the dust; he raises the lowborn from the trash pile and seats them with the upper class in places of honor. For the foundations of the earth belong to the Lord, and he has placed the world on them.

He will take care of those who trust him, but the wicked vanish into the darkness, for people don't succeed through their own strength. The Lord crushes his enemies, he thunders against them from heaven. He rules the whole earth; he strengthens his king, and gives power to the one he has anointed."

Then Elkanah went home to Ramah while the boy stayed with Eli the priest serving the Lord.

Eli's sons were worthless men who didn't have any time for the Lord or their role as priests to the people. They would send one of their servants over with a fork when anyone came to offer a sacrifice. The servant would stick the fork into the pot while the meat from the sacrifice was being boiled, and would take whatever meat came up on the fork to Eli's sons. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. In fact even before the fat of the sacrifice was burned up the servant would come and would demand from the man

sacrificing, “Give me meat to roast for the priest. He doesn't want boiled meat from you—he wants it raw.”

The man might answer, “Let me first burn up all the fat, and then you can have as much as you want.”

But the priest's servant would reply, “No, you must give it to me now. If you don't, I'll take it by force.” The sins of these young men were extremely serious from the Lord's perspective because they were treating with contempt the Lord's offerings.

But Samuel served before the Lord—a boy dressed as a priest, wearing a linen ephod. Every year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the Lord give you children by this woman to replace the one she prayed for and dedicated to the Lord.” Then they would return home. The Lord blessed Hannah with three sons and two daughters. The boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord.

Eli was very old, however he had heard about all the things his sons were doing to the people of Israel, and how they were seducing the women who were serving at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. He asked them, “Why are you doing all this? I keep on hearing from everyone about your evil actions. No, my sons, the report I hear about you from the Lord's people isn't good. If a man sins against someone, God can intercede for him; but if a man sin against the Lord, who is going to intercede for him?” But they didn't pay attention to what their father said, for the Lord was planning to put them to death.

The boy Samuel grew physically, and also grew in the approval of both the Lord and the people.

A man of God came to Eli and told him, “This is what the Lord says: Didn't I very clearly reveal myself to your forefather's family when they were ruled by Pharaoh in Egypt? I chose him out of all the tribes of Israel as my priest, to offer sacrifices on my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave to your forefather's family all the Israelites' offerings made with fire. So why have you treated with contempt my sacrifices and offerings that I have ordered for my place of worship? You honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves with the best parts of all the offerings from my people Israel.

Consequently, this is the declaration of the Lord: I made a definite promise that your family and your father's family would always serve me as priests. But now the Lord declares: Not anymore! Instead I will honor those who honor me, but those who despise me I will treat with contempt. The time is coming when I will bring your family and your father's family to an end. No one will live to an old age. You will see tragedy in the place of worship. While Israel will prosper, no one in your family will ever again reach old age. Anyone of your family not cut off from serving at my altar will make your eyes weep and cause you grief. All your descendants will die when full of life. Here is a sign for you that this will happen regarding your two sons Hophni and Phinehas: both will die on the same day. I will choose for myself a trustworthy priest who will do what I really want, what I have in mind. I will make sure he and his descendants are trustworthy and they will always serve my anointed one. Every one of your descendants who is left will come and bow down to him, asking for money and food, saying, ‘Please give me work as a priest so that I can have food to eat.’”

The boy Samuel served before the Lord under Eli's supervision. At that time messages from the Lord were rare—visions were not common. One evening, Eli had gone to bed in his room. His eyes were now so weak that he couldn't see. The lamp of God hadn't yet gone out, and Samuel was sleeping in the Lord's Temple where the Ark of God was.

Then the Lord called, “Samuel!”

He answered, “I'm here.” He ran to Eli, and said, “I'm here—you called me.”

“I didn't call you,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.” So Samuel went back to bed.

Then the Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up, went to Eli and said, “I'm here—you called me.”

“I didn't call you, my son,” Eli replied. “Go back to bed.”

(Samuel hadn't yet come to know the Lord and had not received any message from him.)

The Lord called again for the third time, “Samuel!” He got up went to Eli and said, “I'm here—you called me.” Then Eli realized that it was the Lord calling the boy.

Eli told Samuel, “Go back to bed, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, because your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went back to his bed.

The Lord came and stood there, calling just as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” Samuel answered, “Speak, because your servant is listening.”

The Lord told Samuel: “Pay attention, because I'm going to do something in Israel that will surprise everyone who hears it. That's when I will carry out against Eli and his family everything I have said, from beginning to end. I told him that I will judge his family forever because of the sins he knows about, because his sons blasphemed God and he did not try and stop them. That's why I swore to Eli and his family, ‘The guilt of Eli and his descendants will never be removed by sacrifice or offering.’”

Samuel remained in bed until the morning. Then he got up and opened the doors of the Lord's Temple as usual. He was afraid to tell Eli about the vision. But Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

“I'm here,” Samuel answered.

“What did he tell you?” Eli asked. “Don't hide it from me. May God punish you very severely if you hide anything he told you from me!”

So Samuel told him everything and didn't hide anything from him.

“It's the Lord,” Eli replied. “May he do what he thinks is good.”

Samuel continued to grow up. The Lord was with him and made sure all he said was trustworthy. Everyone in the whole of Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. The Lord went on appearing at Shiloh, because there he revealed himself to Samuel and delivered his messages,

and Samuel's words were communicated to all the Israelites.

The Israelites marched out to confront the Philistines in battle. They set up camp at Ebenezer, while the Philistines set up camp at Aphek. The Philistines attacked the Israelites in formation, and when the battle spread, the Philistines defeated the Israelites, killing 4,000 of them on the battlefield. When the Israelite army returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the Lord defeat us before the Philistines today? Let's go and get the Ark of the Lord's Agreement from Shiloh, so that he can accompany us and save us from our enemies.”

So the army sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the Ark of the Lord Almighty's Agreement, he who sits on his throne between the cherubim. Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were there with the Ark of the God's Agreement. When the Ark of the Lord's Agreement arrived in the camp, all the Israelites gave such a loud shout it made the ground shake.

When the Philistines heard all the shouting, they asked, “What's the meaning of this shouting in the Israelite camp?” When they found out that the Ark of the Lord had arrived in the camp, the Philistines were afraid. “A god has arrived in the camp,” they said. “We're in trouble, for nothing like this has happened before. This is disaster for us! Who will save us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who attacked the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. Be brave, and fight like real men, Philistines! Otherwise you'll end up as slaves to the Israelites, just as they were your slaves. Now be real men and fight!”

So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated—every man ran away home. The death toll was very large: thirty thousand of the Israelite infantry were killed. The Ark of God was captured, and Hophni and Phinehas, Eli's two sons, died.

A man from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battle that day all the way to Shiloh. His clothes were torn and he had dirt on his head. When he arrived, Eli was sitting there on his chair by the road, watching out for news because he was worried about the Ark of God. When the man came into town and gave his report, the whole town cried out loud.

Eli heard the crying and asked, “What's all this noise?” The man rushed over to Eli and told him what had happened.

Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were fixed because he couldn't see.

“I've just come from the battle,” the man said. “I ran away from it today.”

“What happened, my son?” Eli asked.

“Israel ran away from the Philistines—we were badly defeated,” the messenger replied. “Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed, and the Ark of God has been captured.”

As soon as the Ark of God was mentioned, Eli fell backward from his chair by the town gate. Since he was old and heavy, he broke his neck and died. Eli had been Israel's leader for forty years.

His daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was pregnant and about to give birth. When she heard the news that the Ark of God had been captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but her labor pains were too strong. Just before she died, the women caring for her said, “Don't give up—you have given birth to a son!” But she didn't answer or give any response.

She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The glory has left Israel,” because Ark of God had been captured, and her father-in-law and her husband had died. She said, “The glory has left Israel, for the Ark of God has been captured.”

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. They brought the Ark of God into the Temple of Dagon and placed it next to Dagon. When the people of Ashdod got up early the next day, they saw Dagon had fallen on his face in front of the Ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set him back up. When they got up early the next morning, they saw Dagon had fallen on his face in front of the Ark of the Lord, with his head and hands broken off lying on the doorstep. Only his body remained intact. (That's why the priests of Dagon, and all who enter the temple of Dagon in Ashdod, don't tread on the doorstep, even up to now.)

The Lord punished the people of Ashdod and its surrounding area, devastating them and plaguing them with swellings. When the people of Ashdod saw what was going on, they said, “We can't let the Ark of the God of Israel remain here with us, because he is punishing us and Dagon our god.” So they sent for all the Philistine rulers and asked them, “What should we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?”

“Take the Ark of the God of Israel to Gath,” they replied. So they moved it to Gath. But once they'd moved the Ark to Gath, the Lord also took action against that town, throwing it into great confusion and attacking the people of the town, young and old, with a plague of swellings.

So they sent the Ark of God to Ekron, but as soon as it arrived, the leaders of Ekron shouted, “They've moved the Ark of the God of Israel here to kill us and our people!” So they sent for all the Philistine rulers and said, “Send the Ark of the God of Israel away, back to where it came from, otherwise it's going to kill us and our people.” People were dying throughout the town, creating terrible panic, for God's punishment was very hard. Those who didn't die were plagued with swellings, and the cry for help from the town reached up to heaven.

After the Ark of the Lord had been in the country of the Philistines for seven months, the Philistines summoned the priests and fortune-tellers, and asked, “What should we do with the Ark of the Lord? Explain to us how to send it back to where it came from.”

“If you're going to send back the Ark of the God of Israel, do not send it back empty-handedly, but make sure to send along with it a gift of a guilt offering to him,” they replied. “Then you will be healed, and you will understand why he has treated you like this.”

“What kind of guilt offering should we send back to him?” asked the Philistines. “Five gold objects in the shape of the swellings, and five gold rats representing the number of rulers of the Philistines,” they replied. “The same plague attacked both you and your rulers. Make models to represent your swellings and the rats

destroying the country, and honor the God of Israel. Perhaps he will stop punishing you, your gods, and your land. Why be stubborn like the Egyptians and Pharaoh? When he punished them, didn't they send the Israelites on their way as they left?

So get a new cart ready, pulled by two milk cows that have never been yoked. Tie the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and put them in a stall. Pick up the Ark of the Lord, put it on the cart, and place the gold objects you are sending him as a guilt offering in a chest beside it. Then send the Ark away. Let it go whichever way it wants, but keep watching it. If it goes up the road to its home country, to Beth-shemesh, then it is the Lord who caused all this terrible trouble for us. But if it doesn't, then we'll know that it wasn't him who punished us—it just happened to us by chance."

So that's what the people did. They took two milk cows and tied them to the cart, and kept their calves in a stall. They put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, together with the chest containing the gold rats and models of their swellings. The cows went straight up the road to Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went, going directly on the main road and not turning either left or right. The Philistine rulers followed them all the way to the border of Beth-shemesh.

The people of Beth-shemesh were reaping wheat in the valley. When they looked up and saw the Ark, they were so happy to see it. The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh, and stopped there beside a large rock. The people cut up the cart for wood and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites took down the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold objects, and put them on the large rock. The people of Beth-shemesh presented burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the Lord that day. The five Philistine rulers saw all that happened and then went back to Ekron the same day.

The five gold models of swellings sent by the Philistines as a guilt offering to the Lord were from the rulers of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The gold rats represented the number of Philistine towns of the five rulers—the fortified towns and their surrounding villages. The large rock on which they placed the Ark of the Lord still stands to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh as a witness to what happened there.

But God killed some of the people of Beth-shemesh because they looked inside the Ark of the Lord. He killed seventy, and the people mourned deeply because the Lord had killed so many. The people of Beth-shemesh asked, "Who can stand before the Lord, this holy God? Where should the Ark go from here?"

They sent messengers to the people of Kiriath-jearim to say, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it home with you."

So the people of Kiriath-jearim came and took the Ark of the Lord. They put it in Abinadab's house on the hill. They dedicated his son Eleazar to take care of the Ark of the Lord. The Ark remained there in Kiriath-jearim from that day for a long time, in fact for twenty years. Everyone in Israel mourned and in repentance came back to the Lord.

Then Samuel said to all of Israel, "If you sincerely wish to come back to the Lord, then get rid of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreth images you have, and commit yourselves to the Lord and only worship him, and he will save you from the Philistines." The people of Israel got rid of their Baals and Ashtoreth images and worshiped only the Lord.

Then Samuel said, "Have all the people of Israel gather at Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you."

Once they had gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. They fasted that day, and admitted, "We have sinned against the Lord." Samuel became the leader of the Israelites at Mizpah.

When the Philistines found out that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, their rulers led an attack on Israel. When the Israelites heard about this, they were terrified at what the Philistines might do. They told Samuel, "Don't stop pleading with the Lord our God for us so he can save us from the Philistines." Samuel took a young lamb and presented it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out for help to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord responded.

While Samuel was presenting the burnt offering, the Philistines approached to attack Israel. But the Lord thundered extremely loudly against the Philistines that day, which totally confused them, and they were defeated as Israel watched. Then the men of Israel ran out from Mizpah and chased them, killing them all the way to a place near Beth-car.

After this Samuel took a stone and placed it between Mizpah and Shen. He called it Ebenezer, saying, "The Lord helped us right up to here!"

In this way the Philistines were kept under control and did not invade Israel again. During Samuel's lifetime the Lord used his power against the Philistines. The towns the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, all the way from Ekron to Gath, and Israel also liberated the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites.

Samuel was Israel's leader for the rest of his life. Every year he went around, going to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. At all these places he ruled Israel. Then he would return to Ramah because that was where he lived. He ruled Israel from there, and also built an altar to the Lord.

When Samuel grew old, he made his sons leaders over Israel. His first son was named Joel, and his second son was named Abijah. They were rulers in Beersheba. However, his sons did not follow his ways. They were corrupt, making money by accepting bribes and perverting justice.

So the elders of Israel all joined together and came to meet Samuel at Ramah. "Look here," they told him, "you are old, and your sons do not follow your ways. Choose a king to rule over us like all the other nations."

Samuel thought this was a bad idea when they said, "Give us a king to rule over us," so he prayed to the Lord about it. "Do what the people tell you," the Lord said to Samuel, "because it's not you they're rejecting, but me as their king. They're doing just as they have always done since I led them out of Egypt right up to now. They have abandoned me and worshiped other

gods, and they're doing just the same to you. So do what they want, but give them a solemn warning—explain to them what a king will do when he rules over them."

Samuel repeated all that the Lord had said to the people asking him to give them a king. "This is what a king will do when he rules over you," he told them. "He will take your sons and make them serve as charioteers and horsemen, and to run as a guard in front of his chariot. Some of them he will make commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some will have to plow his fields and reap his harvest. Some will be assigned to making weapons of war and chariot equipment. He will take your daughters and have them work as perfume-makers, cooks, and bakers. He will take your best fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his officials. He will take a tenth of your grain harvest and the produce of your vineyards and allocate it to his chief officers and officials. He will take your male servants and your female servants, and your best young men and your donkeys, and make them work for him. He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will be his slaves. On that day you will plead to be rescued from the king you have chosen, but the Lord won't answer you then."

But the people refused to listen to what Samuel said. "No!" they insisted. "We want our own king! That way we can be like all the other nations. Our king will rule us, and will lead us when we go out to fight our battles."

Samuel listened to everything the people said and repeated it to the Lord. The Lord told Samuel, "Do what they say and give them a king." Then Samuel told the Israelites, "Go back to your homes."

There was a wealthy and influential man from the tribe of Benjamin, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Bekorath, son of Aphiah, a descendant of Benjamin. Kish had a son called Saul, the most handsome young man in all of Israel. He was head and shoulders taller than anyone else.

One time the donkeys of Saul's father Kish went astray. Kish told his son Saul, "Please go and look for the donkeys. You can take one of the servants with you." Saul searched the hill country of Ephraim and then the land of Shalishah, but didn't find the donkeys. He and the servant searched the region of Shaalim, but they weren't there. Then they searched the land of Benjamin, and they still couldn't find them.

When they got to the land of Zuph, Saul told his servant, "Come on, let's go back, otherwise my father won't be worrying about the donkeys, but about us."

But the servant replied, "Hold on! There's a man of God here in this town. He's very well thought of, and everything he says comes true. Let's go and see him. Maybe he can tell us which way we should take."

"But if we do go, what can we give him?" Saul replied. "All the bread in our bags is gone. We don't have anything to take to the man of God. What do we have with us?"

"Look, I've got a quarter shekel of silver with me. I'll give it to the man of God so he can tell us the way we should take," the servant told Saul.

(In the old days in Israel, someone who went to inquire of God would say, "Come on, let's go to the seer," because prophets used to be known as seers.)

"That's good," Saul told his servant. "So let's go." They went to the town where the man of God was.

As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to draw water and asked them, "Is the seer here?"

"He is," they replied, "Up ahead of you. But you'll have to hurry. He's come to town today because the people are having a sacrifice at the high place. When you enter the town you can find him before he goes up to eat at the high place. The people won't eat before he comes, because he has to bless the sacrifice. After that, those who've been invited will eat. If you leave now you'll catch him."

So they carried on their way up to the town. As they arrived there was Samuel going in the opposite direction. They met him on his way up to the high place.

The day before Saul arrived, the Lord had told Samuel, "Around this time tomorrow I'm going to send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him as ruler over my people Israel, and he will rescue them from the Philistines. I have seen what's happening to my people and I have heard their cry for help."

When Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said to him, "This is the man I told you about. He is the one who is going to rule my people."

Saul went up to Samuel in the gateway and asked him, "Could you please tell me where the house of the seer is?"

"I am the seer," Samuel told Saul. "Go up ahead of me and we will eat together. Then in the morning I will answer all your questions and then send you on your way. About the donkeys you lost three days ago—don't worry about them because they've been found. But now—doesn't the hope of all of Israel rest on you and your family line?"

"But I'm from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least significant of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin!" Saul replied. "Why are you telling me this?"

Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall, and sat them at the head of the thirty people who'd been invited. Samuel told the cook, "Bring the special piece of meat I gave you and told you to keep to one side."

So the cook took the upper thigh of meat and what was with it and placed it before Saul. Then Samuel said, "See, this is what was kept to one side. It was reserved for you. Eat it, for it was kept for you for this particular time, right from when I said, 'I have invited the people.'" So Saul ate with Samuel that day.

Once they had returned from the high place to the town, Samuel spoke with Saul on the roof of his house. At dawn the next day Samuel called out to Saul on the roof, "Get up! I need to send you on your way!" So Saul got up, and he went outside with Samuel. As they approached the edge of town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell your servant to go on ahead of us. Once he's gone stay here for a while, because I have a message from God to give you." So the servant went on ahead.

Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it over Saul's head, and kissed him, saying, "The Lord has

anointed you as ruler of his chosen people. When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb in Zelzah, on the border of Benjamin. They will tell you that the donkeys you went to look for have been found.

Now your father isn't concerned about them but is worried about you. He's wondering, 'What about my son?'

You will leave there and go on to the oak at Tabor where you will meet three men on their way to worship God at Bethel. One will be carrying three young goats, one will be carrying three loaves of bread, and one will be carrying a skin of wine. They will greet you and give you two loaves of bread which you should take.

Next you will come to Gibeah of God, where the Philistines have a garrison. As you come into town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place led by harps, tambourines, flutes, and lyres, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the Lord will come on you with power. You will prophesy with them, and you will become a different man. After these signs have happened, do what you need to do, for God is with you. Then go ahead of me to Gilgal. I assure you I will come and join you to present burnt offerings and friendship offerings. Wait there seven days until I come to you, and let you know what you should do."

The moment Saul turned to leave Samuel, God gave Saul a different way of thinking, and all the signs were fulfilled that day. When Saul and his servant arrived in Gibeah, there was a procession of prophets coming out to meet them, the Spirit of God came on Saul with power, and he also started to prophesy with them.

Everyone who had known Saul and now saw him prophesying with the prophets said to each other, "What's going on with the son of Kish? Is Saul one of the prophets too?"

A man living there responded, "But who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul one of the prophets too?"

After Saul had finished prophesying, he went to the high place. Saul's uncle asked Saul and his servant, "Where have you been?"

"We were looking for the donkeys," Saul replied. "When we couldn't find them we went to Samuel."

"Please tell me what he said to you," Saul's uncle asked.

"He promised us the donkeys had been found," Saul replied. But Saul didn't tell his uncle what Samuel had said about him becoming king.

Samuel called the people of Israel to come before the Lord at Mizpah. He told the Israelites, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I led Israel out of Egypt, and I saved you from the Egyptians and from all the kingdoms that were oppressing you. But now you have rejected your God, the one who saves you from all your troubles and disasters. You told him, 'You must appoint a king to rule us.' So now present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and family groups."

Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen by lot. Then he had the tribe of Benjamin come forward by its family groups, and the family group of Matri was chosen. Lastly, Saul, son of Kish, was chosen. But when they looked for him, he couldn't be found. So they asked the Lord, "Has he arrived here yet?"

The Lord replied, "Go and look—he's hiding among the baggage."

They ran and brought Saul over. When he stood among the people, he was head and shoulders taller than anyone else.

Samuel said to everyone, "Can you see the one the Lord has chosen? There's no one like him anywhere!"

All the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Then Samuel explained to the people all that a king would do. He wrote it down on a scroll and placed it before the Lord. Then Samuel sent everyone home.

Saul also returned to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by warriors whom God had encouraged to help him.

But some obnoxious men asked, "How could this man save us?" They hated him and didn't bring him any gifts; but Saul did not retaliate.

Nahash the Ammonite came with his army and besieged Jabesh-gilead. All the people of Jabesh said to him, "Make a peace treaty with us, and we will be your subjects."

But Nahash the Ammonite responded, "I'll make a peace treaty with you on one condition: that I gouge out everyone's right eye to bring shame on all Israelites."

"Let us have seven days so we can send messengers all over Israel," replied the town elders of Jabesh. "If no one comes to help us, we will surrender to you."

When the messengers arrived in the town called Gibeah of Saul and gave the message as the people listened, they all wept out loud.

Right then Saul was coming back from plowing a field with his oxen. "Why is everyone so upset?" he asked. They told him what the men from Jabesh had said.

The Spirit of God came on Saul in power when he heard about this, and he grew very angry. He took a pair of oxen and cut them into pieces. Then he sent them by messenger to every part of Israel with the message, "This is what will happen to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." The Lord made the people anxious to do so, and they came out as one. When Saul counted them at Bezek, there were 300,000 men from Israel and 30,000 men from Judah.

They said to the messengers who came, "Tell the men of Jabesh-gilead, 'Tomorrow you'll be rescued, by the time the sun is hot.'" The people of Jabesh were so happy when the messengers arrived and told them this. They told the Ammonites, "We will surrender to you tomorrow, and then you can do to us whatever you want."

The next day Saul organized the army into three divisions. They attacked the Ammonite camp before dawn and went on killing them until the day grew hot. The survivors were so scattered that not even two of them were left together.

Then the people asked Samuel, "Who was saying, 'Why should we have Saul as our king?' Hand these men over so we can execute them."

But Saul replied, "No one's going to be executed today, for this is the day that the Lord saved Israel."

Then Samuel said to the people, "Come with me—let's go to Gilgal and renew the kingdom."

Everyone went to Gilgal and confirmed Saul as king before the Lord. They sacrificed friendship offerings to the Lord, and Saul together with all the Israelites had a great celebration.

Then Samuel said to all of Israel, “I have paid attention to everything you asked from me, and I have given you a king to rule over you. Now your king is your leader. I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have led you from the time I was a boy up to today. I stand here before you. Bring any charges you have against me in the presence of the Lord and of his anointed one. Have I taken anyone's ox or donkey? Have I wronged anyone? Have I oppressed anyone? Have I accepted a bribe from anyone to turn a blind eye? Tell me, and I will repay you.”

“No, you have never cheated or oppressed us,” they replied, “and you have never taken anything from anyone.”

Samuel told them, “The Lord is a witness, and his anointed is a witness today, in this case involving you, that you have not found me guilty of anything.”

“He is a witness,” they replied.

“The Lord is a witness, he who appointed Moses and Aaron,” Samuel went on. “He led your forefathers out of the land of Egypt. So stand here as I present to you in the presence of the Lord the evidence of all the good things the Lord has done for you and your forefathers.

After Jacob had gone to Egypt, your fathers cried out to the Lord for help, and he sent Moses and Aaron to lead your forefathers out of Egypt and settle them here. But they forgot about the Lord their God, so he abandoned them to Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, to the Philistines, and to the king of Moab, who attacked them.

They cried out to the Lord for help and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have rejected the Lord and worshiped the Baals and Ashtoreths. Please save us from the hands of our enemies, and we will worship you.’ Then the Lord sent Gideon, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he saved you from your enemies who surrounded you so you could live in safety.

But when you saw that Nahash, king of the Ammonites, was coming to attack you, you told me, ‘No, we want our own king,’ even though the Lord your God was your king. So here's the king you have chosen, the one you asked for. Look—the Lord now gives him to you as your king!

If you honor the Lord, worship him, do what he tells you, and don't rebel against the Lord's instructions, and if both you and your king follow the Lord your God, then good! However, if you refuse to do what he tells you, and rebel against the Lord's instructions, then the Lord will be against you as he was against your forefathers.

Now stand still and watch what the Lord is going to do, right before your very eyes. Isn't it the time of wheat harvest? Well, I will ask the Lord to send thunder and rain. Then you will realize how very evil you were in the Lord's sight when you demanded your own king.”

Then Samuel prayed to the Lord, and that very day the Lord sent thunder and rain. Everyone was in absolute awe of the Lord and of Samuel.

“Please pray to the Lord your God for us your servants, so we will not die!” they begged Samuel. “For we have added to all our sins the evil of asking for our own king.”

“Don't be afraid,” Samuel replied. “Even though you have indeed done all these evil things, don't give up following the Lord, but dedicate yourselves completely to worshiping him. Don't worship worthless idols that can't help you or save you, for they are nothing. The fact is because of the kind of person the Lord is, he won't give up on his people, because he was happy to claim you as his own.

As for me, how could I sin against the Lord by no longer praying for you? I will also continue to teach you the way of goodness and right. Make sure you honor God and worship him faithfully, with complete dedication. Think of all the tremendous things he has done for you. But if you continue to do what is evil, you and your king will be wiped out.”

Saul was thirty when he became king, and he reigned over Israel for forty-two years. Saul had chosen three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand of them were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and another thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. He sent the rest of the army home.

Jonathan attacked the Philistine garrison at Geba. The Philistines soon heard about it, so Saul had the trumpet call to arms sounded throughout the land, saying, “Hebrews, pay attention!”

All of Israel heard the news, “Saul has attacked the Philistine garrison, and now Israel is like a bad smell to the Philistines!” So the whole army was called up to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines gathered to fight against Israel. They had three thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and soldiers as numerous as sand on the seashore. They advanced and camped at Michmash, east of Beth-aven.

When the Israelite men realized the tough situation they were in, and that the army was taking a beating, they hid themselves in caves, holes, rocks, pits, and cisterns. Some of the Hebrews even crossed the Jordan into the territory of Gad and Gilead, but Saul stayed at Gilgal, and all the men with him were trembling with fear. Saul waited there seven days for the time that Samuel had said, but Samuel did not arrive at Gilgal, and the army started to desert him.

So Saul ordered, “Bring the burnt offering and the friendship offerings to me,” and he presented the burnt offering.

Just as he finished presenting the burnt offering, he saw Samuel arrive. Saul went over to meet him and say hello.

“What have you done?” Samuel asked.

Saul replied, “Well I saw my men were deserting me, and you hadn't arrived when you said you would, and the Philistines were gathering at Michmash to attack. I said to myself, ‘The Philistines are about to attack me at Gilgal, and I haven't asked the Lord for his help.’ So I felt I had to present the burnt offering myself.”

“You've been really stupid,” Samuel told him. “You haven't kept the commands of the Lord your God. If you had, the Lord would have made your kingdom

over Israel secure forever. But now your kingdom won't last. The Lord has found for himself a man who thinks like him, and has chosen him as ruler over his people, because you haven't kept the commands of the Lord."

Then Samuel left Gilgal. The rest of the soldiers followed Saul to meet the army, going from Gilgal to Geba in Benjamin. Saul counted the number of soldiers who were with him and there were about six hundred. Saul, his son Jonathan, and the soldiers with them were staying in Geba of Benjamin, while the Philistines were camped at Michmash. Three groups of raiders left the Philistine camp to go and attack. One group went towards Ophrah in the land of Shual, one towards Beth-horon, and one towards the border that looks down on the Valley of Zeboim by the wilderness.

There wasn't a blacksmith to be found anywhere in Israel, because the Philistines had said, "So that the Hebrews don't make swords and spears." All the Israelites had to go to the Philistines to sharpen their iron plowshares, pickaxes, axes, and sickles. The fee was two-thirds of a shekel for plowshares and pickaxes, and a third of a shekel for sharpening the axes and cattle prods.

So when it came to the day of battle none of the soldiers with Saul and Jonathan had swords or spears —only Saul and his son Jonathan had such weapons.

A Philistine garrison had taken control of the pass at Michmash.

One day Jonathan, son of Saul, said to the young armor-bearer, "Come on, let's cross over to the Philistine garrison on the other side." But he didn't let his father know his plans. Saul was staying near Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. He had about six hundred men with him, including Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub, son of Phinehas, son of Eli, priest of the Lord in Shiloh. No one realized Jonathan had left. Cliffs stood on both sides of the pass that Jonathan planned to cross to reach the Philistine garrison, one called Bozez and the other Seneh. The cliff to the north was on the Michmash side, the one to the south on the Geba side.

Jonathan said to the young armor-bearer, "Come on, let's cross over to the garrison of these heathen men. Maybe the Lord will help us out. It's not a problem for the Lord to win, whether by many or by few."

"You choose what you want to do," the armor-bearer replied. "I'm with you whatever you decide!"

"Let's go then!" Jonathan said. "We'll cross over in their direction so they can see us. If they tell us, 'Wait there until we come down to you,' we will wait where we are and we won't go up to them. But if they say, 'Come on up to us,' we'll climb up, for that will be the sign that the Lord has handed them over to us."

So both of them let themselves be seen by the Philistine garrison. "Hey, look!" shouted the Philistines. "The Hebrews are coming out of the holes they were hiding in."

The men from the garrison called down to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up here, and we'll teach you a thing or two!"

"Follow me up," Jonathan told his armor-bearer, "for the Lord has handed them over to Israel."

So Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. Jonathan attacked and killed them, and his armor-bearer followed doing the same. In this first attack, Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed about twenty men over an area of half an acre. Then the Philistines went into a panic, in the camp, in the field, and throughout their army. Even those in the outposts and the groups of raiders became terrified. The earth shook—this was a panic sent from God.

Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the Philistine army melting away, scattering in all directions. Saul told the soldiers with him, "Do a roll-call and find out who isn't here with us." When they did the roll-call, they discovered that Jonathan and his armor-bearer weren't there.

Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the Ark of God here." (At the time the Ark of God traveled with the Israelites.)

But as Saul was speaking to the priest, the commotion coming from the Philistine camp grew louder and louder. So Saul told the priest, "Forget it!"

Then Saul and all his army assembled and went into battle. They discovered the Philistines were in total disarray, attacking each other with swords. The Hebrews who had previously sided with the Philistines, and who were with them in their camp, switched sides and joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. When all the Israelites who had been hiding in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were running away, they also joined in chasing after the Philistines to attack them. On that day the Lord saved Israel, and the battle extended past Beth-aven.

It was difficult for the men of Israel that day because Saul had ordered the army to take an oath, saying, "Cursed is anyone who eats anything before evening, before I have avenged myself on my enemies." So no one in the army had eaten anything. When they all entered the forest they found honeycomb on the ground. While they were in the forest they saw the honey running out, but no one picked it up to eat it because they were all afraid of the oath they had taken. But Jonathan hadn't heard that his father had ordered the army to take this oath. So he stuck the end of his stick into the honeycomb, picked up a piece to eat, and he felt much better. But one of the soldiers told him, "Your father made the army take a solemn oath, saying, 'Cursed is anyone who eats anything today!' That is why the men are exhausted."

"My father has caused a whole lot of trouble for everyone," Jonathan replied. "See how well I am because I've eaten a little of this honey. It would have been so much better if only the army had eaten plenty today from the plunder taken from their enemies! How many more Philistines would have been killed?"

After defeating the Philistines that day, killing them from Michmash to Aijalon, the Israelites were totally exhausted. They grabbed the plunder, taking sheep, cattle, and calves, and slaughtered them right there on the ground. But they ate them with the blood.

Saul was told, "Look, the men are sinning against the Lord by eating meat with the blood."

"Law-breakers!" said Saul. "Roll a large stone over here right now!" Then he said, "Go around the soldiers

and tell them, 'Every man must bring me his cattle or his sheep and slaughter them here, and then eat. Don't sin against the Lord by eating meat with the blood.'" Everyone in the army brought what he had and slaughtered it there that night. So Saul built an altar to the Lord. This was the first altar he had built to the Lord.

Saul said, "Let's go and chase down the Philistines during night and plunder them till dawn, leaving no survivors."

"Do what you think best," they replied. But the priest said, "Let's ask God first."

Saul asked God, "Shall I go down and chase down the Philistines? Will you hand them over to Israel?" But that day God didn't answer him.

So Saul gave the order, "All you army commanders, come here so we can investigate what sin has happened today. I swear on the life of the Lord who saves Israel, that even if it's my son Jonathan, he will have to die!" But no one of the whole army said anything.

Saul told them all, "You stand over to one side, and I and my son Jonathan will stand on the opposite side."

"Do what you think best," the army replied.

Saul prayed to the Lord, the God of Israel, "Let the Thummin show." Jonathan and Saul were identified, while everyone else was cleared.

Then Saul said, "Cast lots between me and my son Jonathan." Jonathan was selected.

"Tell me what you have done," Saul asked Jonathan.

"I just tasted a little honey with the end of my stick," Jonathan told him. "Here I am, and I have to die."

Saul said, "May God punish me very severely if you do not die, Jonathan!"

But the people told Saul, "Does Jonathan have to die, the one who achieved this great victory in Israel? Absolutely not! We swear on the life of the Lord, not a single hair of his head will fall to the ground, for it was with God's help that he achieved this today." The people saved Jonathan, and he didn't die.

Saul stopped chasing down the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own country.

After Saul had made his hold over Israel secure, he fought against all his enemies all around: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Whatever direction he went he defeated them all. He fought bravely, conquering the Amalekites, saving Israel from those who plundered them.

Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua. The names of his two daughters were Merab (the firstborn), and Michal (the younger one). The name of his wife was Ahinoam, daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of Saul's army commander was Abner, son of Ner, and Ner was Saul's uncle. Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.

Throughout Saul's lifetime there was constant war with the Philistines. Saul recruited into his army every strong warrior and every brave fighter that he met.

Samuel told Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king of his people Israel. So now pay attention to what the Lord has to say. This is what the Lord Almighty says: I observed what the Amalekites did to Israel when they ambushed them on their way from Egypt. Go and attack the Amalekites and exterminate all of them. Don't spare anyone, but kill every man, woman, child, and baby; every ox, sheep, camel, and donkey."

Saul called up his army at Telem. There were 200,000 Israelite infantry and 10,000 men from Judah. Saul advanced on the town of Amalek and set up an ambush in the valley. Saul sent a message to warn the Kenites, "Move out of the area and leave the Amalekites so that I don't destroy you with them, because you showed kindness to all the people of Israel on their way from Egypt." So the Kenites moved away and left the Amalekites.

Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, to the east of Egypt. He captured Agag, king of Amalek, alive, but exterminated all the people by the sword. Saul and his army spared Agag, together with the best sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs, and everything else that was any good. They didn't want to destroy those, but they completely destroyed all that was unwanted and worthless.

The Lord sent a message to Samuel, saying, "I'm sorry I made Saul king, for he has given up following me and hasn't done as I ordered." Samuel was upset, and he cried out to the Lord all through the night.

Samuel got up early in the morning and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul's gone to Carmel. There he's even erected a monument to honor himself, and now he's left and gone down to Gilgal."

When Samuel caught up with him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have done what the Lord ordered."

"So what's this bleating of sheep my ears are picking up? What's this lowing of cattle that I'm hearing?" Samuel asked.

"The army brought them from the Amalekites," Saul replied. "They spared the best sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we completely destroyed the rest."

"Oh, be quiet!" Samuel told Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord told me last night."

"Tell me what he said," Saul replied.

"Once you didn't use to think much of yourself, but haven't you become the leader of the tribes of Israel?" Samuel asked. "The Lord anointed you king of Israel. Then he sent you out to do something, telling you, 'Go and exterminate those sinners, the Amalekites. Attack them until they're all destroyed.' Why didn't you do what the Lord ordered? Why did you swoop down on the plunder and do what was evil in the Lord's sight?"

"But I did do what the Lord ordered!" Saul replied. "I went and did what the Lord sent me to do. I brought back Agag, king of Amalek, and completely destroyed the Amalekites. The army took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was consecrated to God, to sacrifice them to the Lord your God in Gilgal."

"Does the Lord prefer burnt offerings and sacrifices, or obedience to what he says?" Samuel asked. "Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice. Paying attention is more important than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as bad as witchcraft, and arrogance is as bad as the sin of idolatry. Because you have rejected the Lord's commands, he has rejected you as king."

"I have sinned," Saul confessed to Samuel. "I disobeyed the Lord's orders and your instructions, because I was afraid of the people and followed what they

said. So please forgive my sin and come back with me, so I can worship the Lord."

But Samuel told him, "I'm not going back with you. You have rejected the Lord's orders, and the Lord has rejected you as king of Israel!"

As Samuel turned away to leave, Saul grabbed hold of the hem of his robe, and it ripped.

Samuel said to him, "The Lord has ripped the kingdom of Israel away from you today and has given it to your neighbor—someone who is better than you! In addition, the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind, for he is not a human being who changes his mind!"

"Yes, I have sinned," Saul replied. "Please honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel —come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." So Samuel went back with Saul after all, and Saul worshiped the Lord.

Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag, king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him confidently, for he thought, "The threat of being killed must have passed."

But Samuel said, "In the same way that your sword has made women childless, so too your mother will be childless among women." Samuel cut Agag to pieces before the Lord at Gilgal.

Samuel left for Ramah, and Saul went home to his town called Gibeah of Saul. Until the day of his death, Samuel never visited Saul again. Samuel mourned over Saul, and the Lord regretted he had made Saul the king of Israel.

The Lord asked Samuel, "How long are you going to continue to mourn over Saul because I have rejected him as king of Israel? Fill your flask with olive oil and go. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem, for I have chosen a king for myself from among his sons."

"How can I go and do that?" Samuel asked. "Saul will hear about it and kill me!"

The Lord answered, "Take a young cow with you and say, 'I've come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you have to do. Anoint for me the one I tell you to."

Samuel did what the Lord had told him to and went to Bethlehem. When the town elders met him, they were afraid and asked him, "Do you come in peace?"

"Yes, I come in peace," he replied. "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." He purified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

When they arrived and Samuel saw Eliab, he said to himself, "This has got to be the Lord's anointed!"

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't look at his outward appearance or how tall he is, because I have rejected him, for the Lord does not look as human beings do. Human beings only see with their eyes what's on the outside, but the Lord looks at the way people think deep inside."

Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him come before Samuel, who said, "The Lord hasn't chosen this one either."

Then Jesse had Shammah come forward. But Samuel said, "The Lord hasn't chosen this one either."

Jesse had seven of his sons come before Samuel, but Samuel told him, "The Lord has not chosen any of these."

So he asked Jesse, "Don't you have any more sons?"

"Well, there's still the youngest," Jesse replied, "but he is out looking after the sheep."

"Send for him and bring him here because we will not sit down and eat until he gets here," Samuel told Jesse.

So Jesse sent for him and brought him in. He had a red complexion with beautiful eyes, and looked handsome. The Lord said, "Go and anoint him, for he's the one."

Samuel took the flask of olive oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came on David in power from that day on. Then Samuel left and returned to Ramah.

The Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. Saul's servants told him, "It's definitely an evil spirit from God that's tormenting you. Give us your servants here the order to find someone who is good at playing the harp so that when the evil spirit from God comes on you, he can play and you'll feel much better."

Saul gave the order to his servants, "Find me someone who is good at playing the harp and bring him to me."

One of the servants replied, "I know a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who is good at playing the harp. He is a brave man, a good fighter, well-spoken and handsome, and the Lord is with him."

Saul sent messengers to Jesse, telling him, "Send me your son David who takes care of the sheep."

So Jesse loaded a donkey with bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul. David came to Saul and began working for him. Saul thought a great deal of him, and David became his armor-bearer.

Saul sent a message to Jesse, saying, "Please allow David to continue working for me because I am pleased with him."

So whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take his harp and play, and Saul would gain relief and feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

The Philistine armies gathered for battle at Socoh in Judah. They set up camp between Socoh and Azekah in Ephes-dammim. Saul and the Israelites gathered and camped in the Valley of Elah and took up their positions to engage in battle with the Philistines. The Philistines were on one hill and the Israelites on another with the valley between them.

Then a champion came out of the Philistine camp. His name was Goliath from Gath, and he was six cubits and a span tall. He had on his head a bronze helmet and he wore a bronze coat of mail weighing five thousand shekels. On his legs he wore bronze armor, and he carried a javelin slung between his shoulders. The shaft of his spear was as thick as weaver's beam, with an iron tip that weighed six hundred shekels. His shield-bearer walked ahead of him carrying his shield.

Goliath stood and shouted at the lines of Israelite soldiers, "Why have you come and lined for battle? I am the Philistine, and you're Saul's servants. Pick one of your men and have him come down and fight me. If he can fight me and kill me, then we will be your slaves.

But if I beat him and kill him, then you'll be our slaves and work for us."

Then the Philistine said, "I mock the battle lines of Israel today! Give me a man so we can fight each other!"

Saul and all the Israelite soldiers were shattered and absolutely terrified when they heard what the Philistine said.

David was the son of a man named Jesse. He was an Ephrathite from Bethlehem of Judah who had eight sons. At the time Saul was king, Jesse was very old. Jesse's three oldest sons had joined Saul's army. These were Eliab (the firstborn), Abinadab (second), and Shammah (third). David was the youngest. The three oldest were with Saul, while David went to Saul and then back again to look after his father's sheep.

Every morning and evening for forty days the Philistine came out to take his stand.

Jesse told his son David, "Please take your brothers this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers. Take them quickly to your brothers' camp. Take these ten cheese pieces to their commander. Check carefully to see how your brothers are doing and bring back their news." They were with Saul and the whole Israelite army in the Valley of Elah, fighting the Philistines.

David got up early in the morning and left the flock with a shepherd. He took the supplies and set out as Jesse had told him to. He arrived at the camp just as the army was marching out to its battle line, shouting the war cry. The Israelites took up their battle line and the Philistines took up their battle line on the opposite side. David left his supplies with the one responsible and ran to the battle line. When he got there he asked his brothers how they were. While he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, came up out of his lines and shouted his challenge as he had before, and David heard what he said.

All the Israelite soldiers ran away when they saw him because they were terribly afraid. "Have you seen this man who keeps on coming out to mock Israel?" they asked. "The king will make the man who kills him really rich. He will also give him his daughter in marriage, and his family will live tax-free in Israel."

David asked the men who were standing beside him, "What will the man receive who kills this Philistine and removes this shame from Israel? Who does this heathen Philistine think he is, mocking the armies of the living God?"

The soldiers repeated what they had said, telling him, "This is what the man who kills him will receive."

When David's oldest brother Eliab heard him talking with the men, he got angry with him. "What are you doing here?" he asked. "Whom have you left those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know how proud and wicked you are! You've just come to watch the battle!"

"What have I done now?" David asked. "Can't I even ask a question?" He went over to some others and asked the same question, and they gave the same answer as before. Someone overheard what David said and reported it to Saul who sent for him.

David told Saul, "No one should lose heart because of this Philistine. I, your servant, will go and fight him!"

"You can't go out and fight this Philistine," Saul replied. "You're just a boy, and he's a warrior trained from his youth."

David replied, "Your servant has been looking after his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I would chase after it, knock it down, and save the lamb from its mouth. If it turned to attack me, I would grab its hair, hit it, and kill it. I have killed lions and bears, and this heathen Philistine will be just like one of them, for he has mocked the armies of the living God."

David concluded, "The Lord who saved me from the claws of the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine."

"Go, and may the Lord be with you," Saul responded.

Saul gave David his own battle clothes to wear, placed a bronze helmet on his head, and put armor on him. David strapped his sword on over the armor but he couldn't walk because he wasn't used to it.

"I can't walk in all this," David told Saul. "I'm not used to it." So David took all the armor off. He picked up his stick, chose five smooth stones from the stream, and put them in his shepherd's bag. Carrying his sling in his hand, he approached the Philistine.

The Philistine came towards David, closer and closer, with his shield-bearer in front of him. When the Philistine looked closely he could see that David was just a red-faced handsome youth, and so he treated David with contempt.

"Do you think I'm a dog, coming to fight me with a stick?" the Philistine asked David, and he cursed David by his gods. Then the Philistine shouted at David, "Come over here, and I'll feed your flesh to the birds and the wild animals."

David replied to the Philistine, "You come to attack me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin. But I come to attack you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel—the one you have mocked. Today the Lord will hand you over to me, and I will strike you down, cut off your head, and give the dead bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and the wild animals. Then all the world will know that there is a God who acts for Israel. Everyone gathered here will realize that the Lord saves, but not with sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's, and he will hand all of you over to us."

As the Philistine moved forward to attack him, David raced toward the battle line to confront him. David reached into his bag, took out a stone, and fired it from his sling, hitting the Philistine on the forehead. The stone went into his forehead, and he collapsed facedown on the ground.

This is how David defeated the Philistine with just a sling and a stone; with no sword in his hand David knocked the Philistine down and killed him. David ran and stood over the Philistine. He took the Philistine's sword and pulled it out of its sheath. He killed him and then he cut off his head with the sword. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they turned and ran away.

Then the men of Israel and Judah rushed forward shouting the war cry and chased the Philistines all the

way to Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their bodies were scattered along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron.

When the Israelites returned from their hot pursuit of the Philistines, they plundered their camps. David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem, but he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.

When Saul had watched David going out to fight the Philistine, he'd asked Abner the army commander, “Abner, whose son is that young man?”

“On your life, Your Majesty, I do not know,” Abner replied.

“Find out whose son this young man is,” the king ordered.

As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul. David was still clutching the Philistine's head in his hand.

“Whose son are you, young man?” Saul asked.

“I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem,” David replied.

After David finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan became great friends with David. He loved David as he loved himself. From that time on Jonathan had David work for him and would not let him go back home. Jonathan made a solemn agreement with David because he loved him as he loved himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, together with his tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt.

David was successful in doing everything Saul asked him to do, so Saul made him an officer in the army. This pleased everyone, including Saul's other officers.

When the soldiers returned home after David had killed the Philistine, the women of all the towns of Israel came out singing and dancing to meet King Saul, happily celebrating with tambourines and musical instruments. As they danced the women sang, “Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.”

What they were singing made Saul very angry as he didn't think it was right. He said to himself, “They've given David credit for killing tens of thousands, but only thousands to me. All that's left is to give him the kingdom!” From that time on Saul viewed David with suspicion.

The following day an evil spirit from God came on Saul with power, and he was ranting inside the house while David played the harp as he regularly did. Saul happened to be holding a spear, and he threw it at David, saying to himself, “I'll pin David to the wall.” But David managed to escape him twice.

Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with David, but he had given up on Saul. So Saul sent David away and made him a commander of a thousand soldiers, leading them out and back as part of the army.

David was very successful in everything he did, because the Lord was with him. When Saul saw how successful David was, he was even more afraid of him. But everyone in Israel and Judah loved David, because of his leadership in the army.

One day Saul told David, “Here's my oldest daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage, but only if you prove to me you're a brave warrior and fight the battles of the Lord.” For Saul was thinking, “I don't need to be the one to kill him—let the Philistines do it!”

“But who am I, and what status does my family have in Israel, for me to become the son-in-law of the king?” David replied.

However, when the time came to give Merab, Saul's daughter, to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah instead.

Meanwhile Saul's daughter Michal had fallen in love with David, and when Saul was told, he was happy about it. “I'll give her to David,” Saul thought. “She can be the bait so the Philistines can trap him.” So Saul said to David, “This is the second time you can become my son-in-law.”

Saul gave these instructions to his servants, “Talk with David in private and tell him, ‘Look, the king is very happy with you, and all of us love you. Why not become the king's son-in-law?’”

Saul's servants spoke privately to David, but he replied, “Do you think it's nothing to become the king's son-in-law? I'm a poor man, and I'm not important.”

When Saul's servants explained to him what David had said, Saul told them, “Tell David, ‘The only dowry the king wants for the bride is one hundred foreskins of dead Philistines as a way of taking revenge on his enemies.’” Saul's plan was to have David be killed by the Philistines.

When the servants reported what the king had said back to David, he was happy to become the king's son-in-law. While there was still time, David set off with his men and killed two hundred Philistines, and brought back their foreskins. They counted them all out before the king so that David could become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

Saul realized that the Lord was with David and that his daughter Michal was in love with David, and so he became even more afraid of David, and was David's enemy for the rest of his life.

Whenever the Philistine commanders attacked, David was more successful in battle than all of Saul's officers, so that his reputation grew rapidly.

Then Saul instructed his son Jonathan and all his officials to kill David. But Jonathan really liked David, so he warned him, “My father Saul is trying to kill you. So be careful tomorrow morning—find a place to hide and stay hidden. I'll go out with my father and stand in the field near to where you are hiding. I'll talk to him about you and see what I can find out, then I'll let you know.”

Then Jonathan spoke positively about David to his father Saul, and told him, “The king should not do anything bad to his servant David because he's not done anything bad to you—he has always served you well. He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine, and the Lord brought about great salvation for the whole of Israel. You saw it and you were delighted, so why would you sin and spill innocent blood by killing David without having any reason?”

Saul accepted what Jonathan had to say, and promised with an oath: “I swear on the life of the Lord, he won't be put to death.”

Later Jonathan called David and told him all that had been said. Then he took him to Saul, and David worked for Saul as he had before.

War broke out once again, and David went to fight the Philistines. He attacked them so forcefully that they ran away in defeat.

A while later an evil spirit from the Lord came on Saul while he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. As David played the lyre, Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear. David managed to dodge the spear which embedded itself in the wall. Then David escaped and ran away into the night.

Saul sent some messengers to David's house to keep watch and kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, “If you don't get away tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed.”

Michal lowered David down from a window, and he ran off, managing to escape. Then she took a home idol and laid it in the bed, put a goat hair wig on its head, and covered it with bedclothes.

When Saul sent the messengers to arrest David, Michal told them, “He's sick.”

Saul sent the messengers back to see David, saying, “Bring him to me in the bed so I can kill him.” But when the messengers went into the bedroom, there was the idol in the bed with the goat hair wig on its head.

“Why did you trick me like this—helping my enemy get away so he could escape?” Saul asked Michal.

“He told me, ‘Get out of my way! I don't want to have to kill you!’” Michal replied.

This is how David got away and escaped. He went to Samuel at Ramah and explained to him everything that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to stay in Naioth. When Saul got to hear that David was at Naioth in Ramah, he sent messengers to arrest him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying with Samuel leading out, the Spirit of God came on Saul's messengers and they started prophesying too. Saul was told what had happened, so he sent more messengers, and they started prophesying as well. For the third time Saul sent messengers, and they also started prophesying. In the end Saul went himself to Ramah and arrived at the large cistern at Secu. “Where are Samuel and David?” he asked.

“At Naioth in Ramah,” someone told him.

So Saul went on to Naioth at Ramah, but the Spirit of God even came on him, and he was prophesying as he walked along until he arrived in Naioth. Then Saul also took off his clothes and he too prophesied in Samuel's presence. Then he fell down and lay there naked all that day and all that night. That's why it is said, “Is Saul one of the prophets too?”

David ran from Naioth in Ramah to Jonathan and asked him, “What have I done? What is my wrong have I done? What terrible thing have I done to your father that he wants to kill me?”

“Nothing!” Jonathan replied. “You're not going to die! Listen! My father tells me everything he's planning, whatever it is. Why would my father keep something like this from me? It's not true!”

But David swore an oath again, saying, “Your father knows very well that I'm your friend, and so he's told himself, ‘Jonathan can't find out about this, otherwise he'll be really upset.’ I swear on the life of the Lord, and on your own life, my life is hanging by a thread.”

“Tell me what you want me to do for you and I'll do it,” Jonathan told David.

“Well, the New Moon festival is tomorrow, and I'm meant to sit down and eat with the king. But if it's all right with you, I plan to go and hide in the field until the evening three days from now. If your father does indeed miss me, tell him, ‘David had to urgently ask my permission to hurry down to Bethlehem, his hometown, because of a yearly sacrifice there for his whole family group.’ If he says, ‘That's fine,’ then there's no problem for me, your servant, but if he gets mad, you'll know he intends to do me harm. So please treat me well, as you promised when you made an agreement with me before the Lord. If I've done wrong, then kill me yourself! Why take me to your father for him to do it?”

“Absolutely not!” Jonathan replied. “If I knew for certain that my father had plans to harm you, don't you think I'd tell you?”

“So who's going to let me know if your father gives you a nasty answer?” David asked.

“Come on, let's go out into the countryside,” Jonathan said. So they both went out into the countryside.

Jonathan said to David, “I promise by the Lord, the God of Israel, that I will question my father by this time tomorrow or the day after. If things look good for you, I'll send a message to you and let you know. But if my father plans to do you harm, then may the Lord punish me very severely, if I don't let you know by sending you a message so you can get away safely. May the Lord be with you, just as he was with my father. While I live, please show me trustworthy love like that of the Lord so I don't die, and please don't ever remove your trustworthy love for my family, even when the Lord has removed every one of your enemies from the earth.”

Jonathan made a solemn agreement with the family of David, saying, “May the Lord impose retribution on David's enemies.” Jonathan made David swear this once more by making an oath based on David's love for him, for Jonathan already loved David as he loved himself.

Then Jonathan said to David, “The New Moon festival is tomorrow. You'll be missed, because your place will be empty. In three days time, go quickly to where you hid when all this started, and stay there beside the pile of stones. I'll shoot three arrows to the side of it as if I were shooting at a target. Then I'll send a boy and tell him, ‘Go and find the arrows!’ Now, if I say to him specifically, ‘Look, the arrows are this side of you; bring them over here,’ then I swear on the life of the Lord it's safe for you to come out—there's no danger. But if I tell the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are way past you,’ then you'll have to leave, for the Lord wants you to go away. As for what you and I talked about, remember that the Lord is a witness between you and me forever.”

So David hid himself in the field. When the New Moon festival arrived, the king sat down to eat. He sat in his usual place by the wall opposite Jonathan. Abner sat next to Saul, but David's place was empty. Saul didn't say anything that day because he thought, “Something has probably happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—yes, he must be unclean.”

But the second day, the day after the New Moon, David's place was still empty. Saul asked his son

Jonathan, “Why hasn't the son of Jesse come to dinner either yesterday or today?”

Jonathan answered, “David had to urgently ask my permission to go to Bethlehem. He told me, ‘Please let me go, because our family is having a sacrifice in the town and my brother told me I had to be there. If you think well of me, please let me go and see my brothers.’ That's why he's absent from the king's table.”

Saul got very angry with Jonathan and said, “You rebellious son of a whore! Don't you think I know that you prefer the son of Jesse? Shame on you! You're a disgrace to the mother who bore you! While the son of Jesse remains alive, you and your kingship are not secure. Now go and bring him here to me, for he has to die!”

“Why does he have to be put to death?” Jonathan asked. “What has he done?”

Saul threw his spear at Jonathan, trying to kill him, so he knew that his father definitely wanted David dead. Jonathan left the table absolutely furious. He would not eat anything on the second day of the festival, for he was so upset by the shameful way his father had treated David.

In the morning Jonathan went to the field to the place he had agreed with David, and a young boy was with him. He told the boy, “Run and find the arrows that I shoot.” The boy started running and Jonathan shot an arrow past him. When the boy got to the place where Jonathan's arrow had landed, Jonathan shouted to him, “Isn't the arrow farther past you? Hurry up! Do it quickly! Don't wait!” The boy picked up the arrows and took them back to his master. The boy didn't suspect anything—only Jonathan and David knew what it meant. Jonathan gave his bow and arrows to the boy and said, “Take these back to town.”

After the boy had gone, David got up from beside the pile of stones, fell facedown to the ground, and bowed three times. Then he and Jonathan kissed each other and cried together as friends, though David cried the hardest.

Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, for the two of us have sworn a solemn oath in the name of the Lord. We said, ‘The Lord will be a witness between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.’” Then David left, and Jonathan went back to town.

David went to the town of Nob to see Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech was trembling in fear when he met him, and he asked, “Why are you here alone? Why isn't there anybody with you?”

“The king has given me an assignment,” David replied. “He told me ‘Nobody must know anything about the assignment I have sent you to do.’ As for my men, I've told them where to meet me. So what do you have on hand to eat? Let me have five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

“There's no ordinary bread,” the priest told David, “but there's some holy bread, as long as your men have not slept with any women lately.”

“We have not slept with any women,” David answered. “In fact that's the rule when I lead the troops on mission. They keep themselves pure even during ordinary missions, and all the more so right now.”

So the priest gave him the holy bread as they didn't have any other bread there except this “Bread of the Presence,” which had been removed from the presence of the Lord that day and replaced with fresh bread.

One of Saul's servants happened to be there that day, trying to make himself right with the Lord. He was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's chief shepherd.

“Have you got a spear or sword here?” David asked Ahimelech. “I didn't bring my sword or any of my weapons with me, because what the king needed me to do was urgent.”

The priest replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine is here—the one you killed in the Valley of Elah. It's wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. You can take it if you want. It's the only one here.”

“It's better than any other sword! Please give it to me,” David replied.

David ran away from Saul that day and went to Achish, king of Gath.

But Achish's officials asked the king, “Isn't this David, the king of that country? Didn't they sing about him in their dances, ‘Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands’?”

David listened carefully to what they said and this made him very afraid of Achish, the king of Gath. So he changed the way he acted toward them and pretended to be crazy. He scratched marks on the town gates and let his spit run down his beard. Achish told his officials, “Look, you can see the man is completely mad! Why did you bring him to me? Is it because I need more mad people that you've brought this man to go crazy right in front of me? Do you think I'm going to let him come into my house?”

David escaped and went to the cave of Adullam. When they heard where he was his brothers and all the rest of his family went and joined him there. Everyone who was in trouble or in debt or resentful also came to him and he became their leader. He had around four hundred men with him.

Then David went to Mizpeh in the country of Moab. He asked the king of Moab, “Please let my father and mother come and stay with you until I find out what God is planning for me.” So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with the king all the time David lived in the stronghold.

But then the prophet Gad told David, “Do not stay in the stronghold. Go back to the land of Judah.” So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

Saul found out that David had returned and where he was. Saul was sitting under the tamarisk tree on the hill in Gibeah. He had his spear in his hand, with all his officials surrounding him.

Saul said to them, “Listen to me, you men of Benjamin! Is the son of Jesse going to give all of you fields and vineyards and make you commanders and officers in the army? Is that why you've all plotted against me? Not a single one of you told me that my own son had made an agreement with Jesse's son. Not a single one of you has shown you cared about me, or explained to me that my son has encouraged him to try and kill me, which is what he's doing right now!”

Doeg the Edomite, who was standing there with Saul's officers, spoke up, saying, “I saw the son of Jesse visit Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, at Nob. Ahimelech asked

advice from the Lord for him and gave him food. He gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine as well."

The king sent a message to summon Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub, and all his family, who were priests at Nob. They all came to the king.

"Now you listen, son of Ahitub," the king shouted.

"What is it, my lord?" Ahimelech asked.

"Why have you and the son of Jesse plotted against me? You gave him bread and a sword, and asked advice from God for him so that he could rebel against me and try and kill me, which is what he's doing right now!"

"Who of all your officers is as trustworthy as David, the king's son-in-law? He is in charge of your bodyguard, and highly respected in your family!" Ahimelech responded. "And was that day the first time he asked advice from God on his behalf? Of course not! The king should not accuse me your servant or any of my family, for I didn't know anything about any of this."

"You're going to die for this!" the king declared. "You and all your family!"

Then the king turned to his bodyguards standing there and ordered them, "Kill these priests of the Lord, because they're on David's side! They knew he was a fugitive and yet they didn't tell me!" But the king's guards refused to attack the priests of the Lord.

So the king ordered Doeg, "You kill the priests!" Doeg the Edomite attacked and killed the priests, killing eighty-five men wearing the priestly ephod. Then he went to Nob, the town of the priests, and slaughtered its men and women, children and infants, cattle, donkeys, and sheep.

But one of the sons of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub, managed to escape. His name was Abiathar, and he ran away and joined David. He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. David told Abiathar, "I knew that day when Doeg the Edomite was there that he was going to tell Saul about it. It's my fault that all your family have died. But you can stay with me and you don't need to be afraid, because the man who wants to kill you wants to kill me too. I'll take good care of you."

One day David heard the news, "The Philistines are attacking Keilah and stealing the grain from the threshing floors." So he asked advice from the Lord, "Should I go and attack these Philistines?"

The Lord told David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

But David's men told him, "Even here in Judah we feel afraid. If we went to Keilah to fight the Philistine armies we'd be absolutely terrified!"

So David asked advice from the Lord again, and the Lord told him, "Go immediately to Keilah, for I will give you victory over the Philistines."

Then David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines. They slaughtered them and drove off their livestock. By doing this David saved the people of Keilah. (When Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, ran away to David at Keilah he brought the ephod with him.)

When Saul found out that David had gone to Keilah, he said, "God has handed him over to me, because he has locked himself inside a town with gates that can be barred shut." So Saul called up his whole army to go and attack Keilah and to besiege David and his men.

When David learned that Saul was plotting to attack him, he asked Abiathar the priest, "Please bring the ephod."

David prayed, "Lord, God of Israel, I your servant have been clearly told that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town because of me. Are the town leaders of Keilah going to hand me over to him? Is Saul going to come, as I have heard? Lord, God of Israel, please tell me."

"Yes, he'll come," the Lord replied.

"And will the town leaders of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?" David asked.

"Yes, they will," the Lord replied.

So David and his men, who numbered around six hundred, left Keilah and moved around from place to place. When Saul discovered that David had escaped from Keilah, he didn't bother going there. David set up camp in the wilderness strongholds, staying in the mountains of the Desert of Ziph. Saul searched for him continually, but God did not let David be captured.

While David was staying at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he found out that Saul was on his way to murder him. Saul's son Jonathan went to see David in Horesh and encouraged him to go on trusting in God, telling him, "Don't worry, because my father Saul is never going to find you. You're going to be king of Israel, and I'll be your deputy. Even my father Saul knows this." The two of them made an agreement before the Lord. David stayed in Horesh and Jonathan went home.

Then the people of Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David is hiding in our area, in the strongholds in Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, in the southern wastelands. So, Your Majesty, please come whenever you want, and we'll make sure to hand him over to you."

"The Lord bless you for thinking about me," Saul replied. "Please go and make absolutely sure you know exactly where he is—where he stays and who has seen him there—because people tell me that he's very devious. Look for and mark down all his hiding places. Then come back to me when you're sure, and I'll go back with you. If he's here in the country, I will hunt him down among all the people of Judah."

So the people of Ziph set off, returning to Ziph ahead of Saul. David and his men were in the Desert of Maon in the Arabah Valley in the southern wastelands. Saul and his men started hunting for him. When David found out, he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he chased after David in the Desert of Maon.

Saul was traveling along one side of the mountain, while David and his men were on the other side, rushing to get away. But just as Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men, about to capture them, a messenger arrived to tell Saul, "Come at once! The Philistines have invaded the country!"

So Saul had to stop chasing David and went to confront the Philistines. That's why the place is called the "Rock of Escape." Then David left and went to live in the strongholds of En-gedi.

When Saul returned from chasing the Philistines, it was reported to him, "David is in the Desert of En-gedi." So Saul took three thousand specially-picked men from

all Israel and went searching for David and his men in the area around Wild Goats' Rocks. As Saul passed the sheep pens on the way, there was a cave, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were hiding deep inside the cave.

David's men said to him, “Today's the day the Lord promised you when he told you, ‘Listen, I'm going to hand over your enemy to you, so you can do to him whatever you want.’” Then David crept up quietly and cut a piece from the edge of Saul's robe.

But afterwards David felt really bad because he'd cut off a piece of Saul's robe. He told his men, “May the Lord prevent me from doing anything like this to my master, the Lord's anointed one. I will never attack him, for he is the Lord's anointed one.” He reprimanded his men and didn't allow them to attack Saul.

Saul stood up and went on his way. A little later David came out of the cave and shouted, “My master the king!” When Saul looked around, David bowed down with his face to the ground.

“Why do you pay attention to people who say, ‘Watch out, David wants to harm you’?” David asked. “Just look! You've seen with your own eyes today that the Lord handed you over to me in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I showed you compassion, and said, ‘I refuse to attack my master, for he is the Lord's anointed one.’ Take a look, my father! You see this piece of your robe I'm holding. Yes, I did cut it off, but I didn't kill you. Now you can see for yourself and you can be sure that I have done nothing evil or rebellious. I have not sinned against you, but you are hunting me down, trying to kill me.

May the Lord decide between you and me as to who of us is right, and may the Lord punish you, but I myself will never try to harm you. As the old saying goes, ‘From the wicked comes wickedness,’ but I myself will never try to harm you. Who is the king of Israel coming after? Who are you chasing? A dead dog! Just a flea! May the Lord decide and choose between you and me. May he pay attention to my case and support it; may he save me from you.”

After David finished saying this, Saul asked, “Is that you speaking, David my son?” and he wept out loud. He told David, “You are a better person than I am, because you have repaid me with good, but I have repaid you with evil. Today you have demonstrated how well you have treated me—for when the Lord handed me over to you, you didn't kill me. For if a man caught hold of his enemy, would he let him escape unharmed? The Lord reward you well for how you've treated me today. Listen, I know you definitely will be king, and your rule over the kingdom of Israel will be secure. Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not destroy my descendants who follow me, and that you will not wipe out my name from my family line.”

So David promised this to Saul with an oath. Then Saul went back home, but David and his men returned to the stronghold.

Samuel died. Everyone in Israel gathered to mourn for him, and they buried him at his home in Ramah. David left and went to the Desert of Paran.

A man from Maon was very wealthy. He had property in Carmel and owned one thousand goats and three thousand sheep. He was in Carmel shearing them. The man's name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. She was a wise and beautiful woman, but her husband was cruel and treated people badly. He was a descendant of Caleb. David was in the wilderness, and he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. So David sent ten of his young men and told them, “Go and see Nabal at Carmel. Greet him in my name, and say hello from me. Tell him, ‘I wish you a long life! Peace to you and your family, and may everything you do prosper. Now I've heard that you are busy shearing. When your shepherds were with us, we didn't mistreat them, and nothing belonging to them was stolen all the time they were in Carmel. Check with your men and they'll confirm it. Please be kind to my men, especially since we've come on this day of celebration. Please give whatever food you can to us and to your good friend David.’”

David's young men arrived, gave Nabal this message from David, and waited for his reply.

“Who does this ‘David, son of Jesse’ think he is?” Nabal replied. “Nowadays there are many servants on the run from their masters! Why should I take the bread and water I've supplied, and the meat I've slaughtered for my shearers, and hand it over to these strangers? I don't even know where they're from!”

So David's men turned around and went back the way they came. When they got back they told David everything Nabal had said.

“Everyone, put on your swords!” David ordered. They all put on their swords, and David did too. About four hundred followed David, while two hundred remained behind to guard their gear.

In the meantime one of Nabal's men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, “David sent some messengers from the wilderness to bring greetings to our master, but he only insulted them. David's men were always very good to us and they never mistreated us. All the time we were out in the fields with them nothing was stolen from us. They were like a protective wall to us, both day and night, during the whole time we were with them looking after the sheep. You should know what happened and consider what you should do about it. Disaster is about to strike our master and his whole family, but he's so obnoxious no one can talk sense into him!”

Abigail quickly gathered together two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already slaughtered, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred raisin cakes, and two hundred fig cakes, and then loaded everything on donkeys. She told her men, “Go on ahead. I'll follow you.” But she didn't say anything to her husband Nabal.

As Abigail was riding her donkey through a mountain valley, she saw David and his men descending towards her, and she met them. David had just been complaining, “So much for my protecting everything that belonged to this man in the wilderness! Nothing at all was stolen from him, and yet what does he do? Pay me back evil for good! May God punish me very severely if I leave even a single one of his men alive by morning!”

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off the donkey, and bowed before him, her face to the ground. Falling at his feet in respect, she said, “Sir, I accept

full responsibility for what's happened. Please listen to what I, your servant, have to say. Please don't concern yourself with this worthless man Nabal. His name means 'fool,' and he is really foolish! As for me, your servant, I didn't even see the men you sent.

Now, sir, as the Lord lives and as you live, the Lord has kept you from shedding blood and from taking your own revenge. Sir, may your enemies and those who want to do you harm be like Nabal. Please accept this present that I, your servant, have brought to you, sir, and give it to your men. Please forgive any offense that I, your servant, have committed, for the Lord is sure to set up a dynasty for you that will last for a long time, because you, sir, fight the battles of the Lord. Wickedness should not be found in you as long as you live. If anyone pursues you and tries to kill you, then your life will remain bound up with those the Lord your God looks after, safe in his care. But he will throw away the lives of your enemies like stones from a sling. So when the Lord has done for you, sir, everything good he promised, and has made you ruler over Israel, you won't have feelings of remorse or a guilty conscience over unnecessary bloodshed or of taking your own revenge. And when the Lord has done these good things for you, sir, please remember me, your maidservant."

Then David said to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! May you be rewarded for your wise decisions, for preventing me from shedding blood today and taking my own revenge. On the contrary, as the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you hadn't rushed to meet me, then definitely not a single one of Nabal's men would have been left alive by dawn."

David accepted from Abigail what she had brought him, and told her, "You may go home in peace, because I agree with your advice and grant your request."

When Abigail got back home to Nabal, he was in the house, partying like a king. He was feeling very merry, and he was very drunk. So she didn't tell him anything until the morning. When Nabal had sobered up the next morning, his wife told him what had happened. When he heard what she had to say he had a heart attack and was paralyzed. About ten days later the Lord struck Nabal down and he died.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, "Praise the Lord who has supported me against Nabal's insult and has kept me from doing evil. For the Lord made Nabal's wickedness fall back on himself." Then David sent a message to Abigail, asking for her to marry him.

When David's men arrived at Carmel, they said to Abigail, "David has sent us to you to bring you back to become his wife."

She stood up, then bowed down low, and said, "I am David's maidservant. I am prepared to serve and to wash the feet of my master's servants." Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, with her five female servants, went back with David's men and became his wife. David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. So they both were his wives. However, Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel, son of Laish. He was from Gallim.

The people of Ziph went to Saul at Gibeah and told him, "David's hiding on the hill of Hakilah, opposite the wastelands."

So Saul went to the Desert of Ziph along with three thousand specially-picked men from Israel to search for David there. Saul set up camp beside the road at the hill of Hachilah opposite the wastelands, near to where David was living in the desert. When he realized that Saul had come looking for him there, he sent out spies and found out Saul had definitely arrived.

One night David got up and went over to Saul's camp and saw where Saul was sleeping, along with Abner, son of Ner, the army commander. Saul was lying in the middle of the camp with his men all around him. David asked Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai, son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, "Who wants to go with me into the camp to Saul?"

"I'll go with you," Abishai replied.

So David and Abishai went to the army camp at night. Saul was sleeping there in the camp with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head, with Abner and his men sleeping around him.

Abishai said to David, "God has handed your enemy over to you today. So please let me spear him to the ground in one go. I won't need to do it twice!"

But David said to Abishai, "No, don't kill him! Who can attack the Lord's anointed one and not be guilty of a crime? As the Lord lives, the Lord himself will kill him. Either his time will come and he'll die, or he will go into battle and be killed. May the Lord prevent me from attacking the Lord's anointed one. Just pick up the spear and water jug beside his head, and let's go."

David took the spear and water jug beside Saul's head, and they left. Nobody saw anything; nobody knew what had happened; nobody woke up. Everybody stayed asleep, because the Lord had made them fall into a deep sleep.

Then David went back over to the other side, and stood on top of the hill far enough away—there was a considerable distance between them. He shouted down to the army and Abner, son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?"

"Who is that shouting, disturbing the king?" Abner called back.

David called to Abner, "Aren't you meant to be this great man? Is there anyone in Israel who is better than you? So why didn't you protect your master the king when someone came to kill him? You haven't done well at all. As the Lord lives, you all deserve to die, because you did not protect your master, the Lord's anointed. Take a look around. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were beside his head?"

Saul recognized David's voice and asked, "Is that you speaking, David, my son?"

"Yes it's me, my lord and king," David replied. "Why is my lord hunting me, his servant? What is it that I've done? What crime am I guilty of?" he continued. "Please listen to me, my lord and king. If the Lord has made you angry with me, then may he be happy to accept an offering. But if it's men that have done it, may they be cursed before the Lord for all this. They've been driving me away from living among God's chosen people, telling me, 'Go away and worship other gods.' Please

don't let me die so far from the presence of the Lord. The king of Israel has come to chase down one little flea, hunting me like someone who hunts a partridge in the mountains."

"I've done wrong," Saul replied, "Come back, David, my son. I won't ever try to harm you again, because you valued me and spared my life today. I've been so stupid! I've made a big mistake!"

"I have the king's spear here," said David. "Send one of your men over to collect it. The Lord rewards all those who do what is right and who are trustworthy. The Lord handed you over to me today, but I refused to harm the Lord's anointed one. In the same way as I valued your life today, may the Lord value my life, and may he rescue me from all my troubles."

Saul said to David, "May you be blessed, David my son. You will accomplish a great deal and always be successful." David left, and Saul went back home.

But David said to himself, "One of these days Saul is going to get me. I think I'd better run away to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up looking for me all over Israel and he won't catch me."

So David and the six hundred men with him set off, crossed the border, and went to Achish, son of Maoch, the king of Gath. David and his men settled down with Achish in Gath. All the men had their families with them, and David had his two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail from Carmel, Nabal's widow. When Saul found out that David had run away to Gath, he didn't go on looking for him.

David said to Achish, "Please do me a favor: assign me somewhere in one of the towns in the countryside so I can live there. I, your servant, don't really deserve to live in the royal city with you."

Achish gave him Ziklag right away, and the town still belongs to the kings of Judah to this day. David lived in the country of the Philistines for a year and four months.

During that time David and his men were raiding the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. These people had lived in the land as far as Shur and Egypt from ancient times. When David attacked a place, he did not leave anybody alive. He took the flocks and herds, the donkeys, camels, and clothing. Then he would go back to Achish. When Achish asked him, "Where have you been raiding today?" David would reply, "In the desert of Judah," or "the desert of Jerahmeel," or "the desert of the Kenites."

David didn't leave anybody alive that could come to Gath because he thought, "They might tell on us and say, 'David did this.'" This is what he did all the time he lived in the country of the Philistines. Achish trusted David, and said to himself, "He's made himself so offensive to his people the Israelites that he'll have to serve me forever."

Around that time the Philistines called up their armies to go to war against Israel. So Achish told David, "You do realize that you and your men must accompany me as part of the army."

"That's fine!" David replied. "Then you yourself will discover what I, your servant, can do."

"That's fine too," Achish responded. "I'll make you my bodyguard for life."

By now Samuel had died, and all of Israel had mourned for him and buried him in Ramah, his home town. Saul had got rid of mediums and spiritists from the country.

The Philistine armies gathered and set up camp at Shunem. Saul called up all the Israelite army and set up camp at Gilboa. When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was terrified, shaking with fear. He asked advice from the Lord, but the Lord didn't answer him either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets. So Saul told his officers, "Find me a woman who is a medium so I can go and ask her advice."

"There's a woman who is a medium at Endor," his officers replied.

Saul disguised himself by wearing different clothes. He went with two of his men to the woman at night. Saul told her, "Bring up a spirit for me so I can ask some questions. I'll give you the name."

"Don't you know what Saul has done," she replied. "He's got rid of the mediums and spiritists from the country. Are you trying to set a trap for me and get me killed?"

Saul swore an oath to her by the Lord, "As the Lord lives, you won't be held guilty for doing this."

"Who do you want me to bring up for you?" the woman asked.

"Bring up Samuel," he replied.

But when the woman saw Samuel, she shouted loudly, and said to Saul, "Why have you tricked me? You're Saul!"

"Don't be scared," the king told her. "What can you see?"

"I see a god coming up out of the ground," the woman replied.

"What does he look like?" Saul asked.

"An old man is coming up," she replied. "He has a robe wrapped around him." Saul thought it must be Samuel, and he bowed facedown in respect.

Samuel said to Saul, "Why are you bothering me by bringing me up?"

"I'm in terrible trouble," Saul replied. "The Philistines are attacking me, and God has abandoned me. He doesn't answer me anymore, either by prophets or by dreams. That's why I have called you up so you tell me what to do."

"Why come and ask me when the Lord has abandoned you and has become your enemy?" Samuel asked. "The Lord has done to you exactly what he said through me, for the Lord has ripped the kingdom from you and has given it to your neighbor, David. The Lord has done this to you today because you did not do what the Lord commanded and you did not execute his furious anger on the Amalekites. The Lord will hand over Israel and you yourself to the Philistines. Tomorrow you and your sons will die and be with me. The Lord will also hand over the Israelite army to the Philistines."

Saul collapsed facedown on the ground, terrified at what Samuel had said. He had no strength, because he hadn't eaten anything all that day and night. The woman came over to Saul and saw that he was absolutely terrified. She told him, "Look, sir, I did what you asked. I risked my life and did what you told me. Now please do what I tell you. Let me bring you a little

bit of food. Eat it, and you'll have the strength to go on your way."

But he refused, saying, "I can't eat anything." But his men and the woman encouraged him to eat, and he did what they said. He got up from the ground and sat on the bed.

The woman had a fattened calf at the house, and she quickly went and slaughtered it. She also got some flour, kneaded it, and baked some unleavened bread. She served the meal to Saul and his men, and they ate it. Then they got up and left, the same night.

The Philistines gathered all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites set up camp by the spring in Jezreel. The Philistine rulers were marching out in their divisions of hundreds and thousands with David and his men at the rear with King Achish. But the Philistine commanders asked, "What are these Hebrews doing here?"

Achish replied to the Philistine commanders, "That's David, an officer of King Saul of Israel. He's been with me for a long time, years even, and I haven't found any fault in him since the day he came over to our side up till now."

But the Philistine commanders got angry with Achish, and told him, "Send him back to the place he came from, to the town you assigned to him. He can't go with us into battle. What if he turns on us during the fighting? What a great way for him to please his master—by handing over the heads of our men! Isn't this the David they sing about in their dances: 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"

So Achish called David over and told him, "As the Lord lives, you are honest and you've done what's right as far as I can see. As far as I'm concerned you should march with me into battle because I haven't found any fault in you from the day you arrived until now. But the other leaders don't approve of you. So go back home in peace, and that way you won't do anything to upset the Philistine leaders."

"But what have I done?" David asked. "What fault have you found in me, your servant, from the day I came to you until now, that would prevent me from going to fight the enemies of my lord the king?"

"As far as I'm concerned, you're as good as an angel of God," Achish replied. "But the Philistine commanders have stated, 'He can't go into battle with us.' So get up early tomorrow morning and leave with your men as soon as it's light." David and his men got up early in the morning and went back to the country of the Philistines. But the Philistines advanced on Jezreel.

Three days later David and his men arrived back in Ziklag. Some Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it down. They had captured the women and everyone else there, young and old. They hadn't killed anyone, but they took everyone with them as they left.

When David and his men arrived back in town, they found it burned to the ground, and their wives and children captured. David and his men cried loudly until they couldn't cry any more. David's two wives had also been taken as prisoners—Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, Nabal's widow, from Carmel. David was in a great deal of trouble, because the men were so upset over losing their children that they began to talk of stoning him.

But trusting in the Lord his God, David went to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, and said, "Bring me the ephod." Abiathar brought it to him. David asked the Lord, "Should I chase after these raiders? Will I catch up with them?"

"Yes, chase after them," the Lord replied, "for you will definitely catch up with them and rescue the prisoners."

David and six hundred of his men set off for the Besor Valley. Two hundred of them remained behind there because they were too tired to cross the valley while David continued on with four hundred men.

They came across an Egyptian in the countryside and they took him to David. They gave him some food to eat and water to drink. They also gave him a piece of a fig cake and two raisin cakes. He ate them and recovered, because he hadn't had any food or water for three days and nights.

"Whose slave are you, and where do you come from?" David asked him.

"I'm an Egyptian," he replied, "the slave of an Amalekite. My master left me behind three days ago when I got sick. We raided the Kerethites in the Negev, as well as the part that belongs to Judah, and the Negev of Caleb. We burned Ziklag too."

"Can you lead me to these raiders?" David asked.

"If you swear to me by God that you won't kill me or hand me over to my master, then I'll take you to them," the man replied.

He led David to the Amalekites, where they were spread out all over the place, eating, drinking, and dancing because of the large haul of plunder they had taken from the lands of the Philistines and of Judah. David attacked them from dusk until the following evening. Nobody escaped, except for four hundred men who managed to get away, riding on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Everything was accounted for—all the adults and children, as well as all the plunder the Amalekites had taken. David brought everything back. He also recovered all the flocks and herds. His men drove them ahead of the other livestock, shouting, "This is David's plunder!"

When David got back to the two hundred men who had been too tired to continue with him from the Besor Valley, they came to meet him and the men with him. As David approached the men to greet them, all the unpleasant, good-for-nothing men of those who had gone with David said, "They weren't with us, so we won't share the plunder that we took, except to give them back their wives and children. They can take them and leave."

But David intervened, saying, "No, my brothers, you shouldn't do this with what the Lord has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the raiders that had attacked us. Who's going to listen to you when you say such things? Whatever share those who went into battle receive will be the same as those who stayed to guard the supplies." David made this the rule and regulation for Israel from that day until now.

When David got back to Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to each of his friends among the elders of Judah, saying, “Here's a gift for you from the plunder of the Lord's enemies.” David sent it to those who lived in Bethuel, Ramoth Negev, Jattir, Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, Racal, the towns of the Jerahmeelites and Kenites, Hormah, Bor-ashan, Athach, Hebron—all the places David and his men had gone to.

Meanwhile the Philistines had attacked Israel, and the Israelite army ran away from them, and many were killed on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines chased down Saul and his sons, killing Saul's sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. The fighting became very intense around Saul, and the arrows of the Philistine archers found their target, wounding Saul very badly.

Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Take your sword and kill me, or these heathen men will come and kill and torture me!”

But the armor-bearer didn't want to do it because he was too afraid. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his own sword and died with him. Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer, and all the men with him, died the same day.

When the Israelites who lived along the valley and those on the other side of the Jordan realized that the Israelite army had run away, and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their cities and they also ran away. So the Philistines came and took them over.

The next day, when the Philistines went to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons lying on Mount Gilboa. They cut off Saul's head, stripped him of his armor, and sent messengers throughout the country of the Philistines to announce the news in the temples of their idols and to their people. They placed his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths, and nailed his body to the town wall of Beth-shan.

However, when the people of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their strong warriors set out, traveled all night, and took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth-shan. When they got back to Jabesh, they burned the bodies there. Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted for seven days.

2 Samuel

Second Book of Samuel

After the death of Saul, David returned from attacking the Amalekites. He stayed in Ziklag for two days. Then on the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp. His clothes were torn and he had dust on his head. When he approached David, he bowed before him, and fell to the ground in respect.

"Where have you come from?" David asked him.

"I got away from the Israelite camp," he replied.

"Tell me what happened," David asked.

"The army ran away from the battle," the man replied. "Many of them died, and Saul and his son Jonathan also died."

"How do you know Saul and Jonathan died?" David asked the man giving the report.

"I just happened to be there on Mount Gilboa," he replied. "I saw Saul, leaning on his spear, with the enemy chariots and the charioteers advancing on him. He turned around and saw me. He called out and I replied, 'I'm here to help!'

He asked me, 'Who are you?'

I told him, 'I'm an Amalekite.'

Then he told me, 'Please come over here and kill me! I'm in terrible agony but life is still hanging on.'

So I went over him and killed him, because I knew that wounded as he was he couldn't last long. I took the crown from his head and his bracelet from his arm, and I've brought them here to you, my lord."

David grabbed hold of his clothes and ripped them, as did his men. They mourned and cried and fasted until the evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord, the Israelites, that had been killed by the sword.

David asked the man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I'm the son of a foreigner," he replied. "I'm an Amalekite."

"Why weren't you worried about killing the Lord's anointed one?" David asked.

David called over one of his men and said, "Go ahead, kill him!" So the man cut the Amalekite down and killed him.

David had told the Amalekite, "Your death is your own fault because you testified against yourself when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed one.'"

Then David sang this lament for Saul and his son Jonathan. He ordered it to be taught to the people of Judah. It is called "The Bow" and is recorded in the Book of the Just:

"Israel, the glorious one lies dead on your mountains. How the mighty have fallen! Don't announce it in the town of Gath, don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon, so that the Philistine women won't rejoice, so that the heathen women won't celebrate. Mountains of Gilboa, may no dew or rain fall on you! May you have no fields that produce offerings of grain. For it was there that the shield of the mighty was defiled; Saul's shield, no longer cared for with olive oil. Jonathan with his bow did not retreat from attacking the enemy; Saul with his sword did not return empty-handed from shedding blood. During their lives, Saul and Jonathan were much loved and very pleasant, and death did not divide them. They were faster than eagles, stronger than lions. Women of Israel, mourn for Saul, who gave you fine scarlet clothes decorated with gold ornaments. How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies dead on your mountains. I weep so much for you, my brother Jonathan! You were so very dear to me! Your love for me was so wonderful, greater than the love women have! How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war are gone!"

Sometime after this, David asked the Lord, "Should I go to one of the towns of Judah?"

"Yes, do it," the Lord replied.

"Which one should I go to?" David asked.

"Go to Hebron," said the Lord.

So David moved there with his two wives, Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, Nabal's widow from Carmel. He also brought the men who were with him, along with their families, and they settled in the villages near Hebron. Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king of the people of Judah. When David found out that it was the men from Jabesh-gilead who had buried Saul, he sent messengers to them, saying, "May the Lord bless you, because you demonstrated your loyal love to Saul your master, and you buried him properly. Now may the Lord show you loyal love and trustworthiness, and I will also be good to you because of what you did for Saul. So be strong and be brave, for even though Saul your master is dead, the people of Judah have anointed me as their king."

However, Abner, son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, had taken Ishbosheth, son of Saul, to Mahanaim. There he set up Ishbosheth as king over Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin, in fact over all Israel.

Ishbosheth, son of Saul, was forty when he became king over Israel, and he reigned for two years. However, the people of Judah were on David's side. David ruled in Hebron as king over the people of Judah for seven years and six months.

One day Abner and Ishbosheth's men left Mahanaim and went to the town of Gibeon. Joab, son of Zeruiah, and David's men set off and met them at the pool of Gibeon, where they all sat down, facing each other across the pool.

Abner said to Joab, "Let's have some of the men fight in hand-to-hand combat before us."

"Fine," Joab agreed.

So twelve men came forward from each side—twelve for Benjamin and Ishbosheth, and twelve for David. Each man grabbed his opponent's head and drove his sword into his opponent's side so that they all fell down dead together. That's why this place in Gibeon is called the Field of Sword-edges.

The battle that followed was hard-fought, but eventually Abner and his men were defeated by David's men.

The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel was a fast runner, like a gazelle racing across the open countryside. He chased after Abner

with single-minded determination. Abner looked back and asked, “Is that you, Asahel?”

“Yes, it's me,” Asahel replied.

Abner told him, “Leave me alone! Go and fight somebody else and take his weapons for yourself!” But Asahel refused to stop chasing him.

Abner warned Asahel again. “Stop chasing me!” he shouted. “Why do you want me to kill you? How could I ever face your brother Joab?”

But Asahel wouldn't stop chasing him, so Abner drove the handle of his spear into his belly. It came out the back, and he fell down dead right there. Everyone who passed by stopped at the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

But Joab and Abishai set off to chase after Abner. By the time the sun went down they had got as far as the hill of Ammah near Giah, on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon. Abner's men from the tribe of Benjamin rallied to him there, forming a tight group around him standing at the top of the hill.

Abner shouted to Joab: “Do we have to keep killing each other forever? Don't you realize that if we go on it'll only get worse? How long are you going to wait before you order your men to stop chasing their brothers?”

“As God lives,” Joab replied, “if you had not said anything, my men would have continued chasing their brothers until the morning.” Joab blew the horn, so all the men stopped—they didn't continue chasing or fighting the Israelites.

All through the night Abner and his men marched through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, and continued all morning until they arrived back at Mahanaim.

When Joab got back from chasing Abner, he gathered all the men together. Nineteen of David's men were missing in addition to Asahel. However, they had killed three hundred and sixty of Abner's men from the tribe of Benjamin. They took Asahel's body and buried him in his father's tomb in Bethlehem. Then they marched all through the night and reached Hebron at dawn.

There was a long war between those on the side of Saul and those on the side of David. David's side grew stronger, while Saul's side grew weaker.

David's sons born at Hebron were: Amnon (firstborn), by Ahinoam from Jezreel; Chileab (second), by Abigail, Nabal's widow from Carmel; Absalom (third), by Maacah, daughter of King Talmai of Geshur; Adonijah (fourth), by Haggith; Shephatiah (fifth), by Abital; Ithream (sixth), by David's wife Eglah. These were the sons born to David at Hebron.

Abner had been strengthening his position among the supporters of Saul's dynasty during the war between those on the side of Saul and those on the side of David. Saul had a concubine named Rizpah, daughter of Aiah. One day Ishbosheth accused Abner, saying “Why have you been sleeping with my father's concubine?”

Abner got extremely angry at Ishbosheth's accusation. “Am I a dog's head siding with Judah?” he replied. “Right up to the present day I have been loyal to your dynasty—to your father Saul, and to his brothers and friends. I haven't betrayed you to David. But now you dare to accuse me of sinning with this woman! So now may God punish me severely if I don't help David achieve what the Lord has promised him. I will hand over the kingdom from Saul's dynasty, and help set up David's rule over Israel and Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.” Ishbosheth didn't dare to say anything else to Abner because he was frightened of him.

Then Abner sent messengers to speak for him to David, saying, “Who does the country belong to anyway? Make an agreement with me, and you can be sure I'll be on your side to have all of Israel follow you.”

“Fine,” David replied, “I'll make an agreement with you. But I have one condition: I won't see you unless you bring Saul's daughter Michal when you come.”

Then David sent messengers to tell Ishbosheth, son of Saul, “Give me back my wife Michal—I paid a dowry for her of one hundred Philistine foreskins.”

Ishbosheth sent for her and took her away from her husband Paltiel, son of Laish. Her husband followed her to the town of Bahurim, crying as he went. Then Abner ordered him, “Go back home!” So he went home.

Abner spoke with the elders of Israel and said, “For a while now you have wanted to have David as your king. Now is the time to do it, because the Lord promised David, ‘Through my servant David I am going to save my people Israel from the Philistines and all their enemies.’” Abner also talked to the people of Benjamin, and went to Hebron to let David know everything that the Israelites and the whole tribe of Benjamin had decided to do.

Abner came with twenty of his men to see David at Hebron, and David prepared a feast for them. Abner told David, “Let me go immediately and summon all of Israel to come together for my lord the king, so they may make an agreement with you, and that you may rule over all you would wish.” Then David sent Abner safely on his way.

Soon after Joab and David's men came back from a raid, bringing with them a large amount of plunder. However, Abner wasn't there with David in Hebron because David had already sent him safely on his way in peace. When Joab and all the army that was with him arrived, he was told, “Abner, son of Ner, came to see the king, who sent him safely on his way.”

Joab went to the king and asked, “What do you think you're doing? Here's Abner, who came to see you. Why on earth did you send him on his way? Now he's got clean away! You do see that Abner, son of Ner, came here to trick you, to spy on the movements of your army, and to find out everything you're doing!”

When Joab left David, he sent messengers after Abner. They met up with him at the well of Sirah and brought him back, but David didn't know anything about it. When Abner arrived back in Hebron, Joab took him aside into the town gatehouse as if he was going to talk with him in private. But Joab stabbed him in the belly, killing him in revenge for killing Joab's brother Asahel.

When David heard about this later he said, “I and my kingdom are totally innocent before the Lord regarding the death of Abner, son of Ner! May the guilt for his death fall on Joab and his family! May Joab's descendants always have someone who has running

sores or leprosy or is crippled or who is killed by the sword or who is starving."

(This is why Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel during the battle at Gibeon.)

Then David ordered Joab and everyone who was there, "Tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn for Abner." King David himself followed the body as it was carried to the grave. They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king cried loudly at the grave, along with all the people. The king sang this lament for Abner:

"Did Abner deserve to die like a criminal? Your hands were not tied together, your feet were not in shackles. But just like a murderer's victim, you too were killed." All the people cried for him even more.

Then people came to David and tried to persuade him to have something to eat during the day. But David swore an oath, saying, "May God punish me severely if I eat bread or anything else before sunset!"

Everyone saw this and thought it was the right thing to do, in the same way that they thought everything the king did was the right thing to do. That day everyone in Judah and throughout Israel realized that David had not ordered Abner's murder.

Then the king said to his officers, "Don't you recognize that a commander and a truly great man has fallen in Israel today? I am weak right now, even though I'm anointed as king and these men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too powerful for me. But may the Lord repay the evil man according to the evil he has done."

When Ishbosheth, son of Saul, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he was very discouraged, and everyone in Israel was shocked.

Ishbosheth had two commanders of his raiding bands, brothers by the name of Baanah and Rechab. They were the sons of Rimmon of the tribe of Benjamin from the town of Beeroth. Beeroth is considered part of the territory of Benjamin, because the people who had lived in Beeroth before ran away to Gittaim and lived there as foreigners right up to the present.

Jonathan, son of Saul, had a son lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about the deaths of Saul and Jonathan had come from Jezreel. His nurse had picked him up and run away, but as she rushed to get away, he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

Rechab and Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to Ishbosheth's house, arriving in the heat of the day as the king was taking his midday rest. The woman doorkeeper had been cleaning wheat, but she had grown tired and fallen asleep, so Rechab and Baanah were able to slip inside. They had gone into the house while Ishbosheth was asleep on his bed in his bedroom. After stabbing and killing him, they cut off his head which they took with them, and they traveled all night by the Jordan Valley road.

They took the head of Ishbosheth to David in Hebron. They told the king, "Here is the head of Ishbosheth, son of Saul, your enemy who tried to kill you. Today the Lord has taken revenge on Saul and his family for my lord the king."

But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, "As the Lord lives, who has saved me from all my troubles, when someone told me, 'Look, Saul is dead' and he thought he was bringing me good news, I grabbed him and had him put him to death at Ziklag. That was what he got for bringing me his news! Even more so then, when evil men kill a good man in his own house, and in his own bed, shouldn't I demand you pay for his life with your own lives, and exterminate you!"

David gave the order to his men, and they killed Rechab and Baanah. They chopped off their hands and feet, and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron. Then they took Ishbosheth's head and buried it in Abner's grave in Hebron.

All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and told him, "We are your flesh and blood. Previously when Saul was our king, you were the one who led the Israelite army into battle. The Lord told you, 'You will be the shepherd of my people Israel, and you will be their ruler.'"

All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, where King David made an agreement with them in the Lord's presence. Then they anointed him king of Israel.

David was thirty when he became king, and he reigned for forty years. He reigned over Judah seven years and six months from Hebron, and he reigned over all of Israel and Judah for thirty-three years from Jerusalem.

David the king and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites who were living there. The Jebusites told David: "You'll never enter here. Even the blind and lame could stop you." They were convinced that David could not get in.

But David did capture the fortress of Zion, now known as the City of David. At that time he said, "If we are to successfully conquer the Jebusites we'll have to go up the water shaft to attack these 'lame and blind' — these people who hate David." This is why it's said, "The blind and the lame will never enter the house."

David went and lived in the fortress, and named it The City of David. He extended it in all directions, starting from the outer supporting terraces and moving inwards. David became increasingly powerful, for the Lord God Almighty was with him.

King Hiram of Tyre sent representatives to David, together with cedar timber, carpenters, and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. David realized that the Lord had installed him as king of Israel, and had made his kingdom great for the sake of his people Israel.

After he moved from Hebron, David added more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, and he had more sons and daughters. These are the names of his children born in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel, the whole Philistine army came out to capture him, but David found out and went inside the stronghold. The Philistines came and spread out across the Valley of Rephaim. David asked the Lord "Should I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

"Yes, go," the Lord replied, "for I will definitely hand them over to you."

David went to Baal-perazim and he defeated the Philistines there. "Like a flood that bursts out, so the Lord has burst out against my enemies right before me," David declared. So he named that place Baal-perazim. The Philistines left their idols behind, and David and his men removed them.

A while later the Philistines came again and spread out across the Valley of Rephaim. David asked the Lord what to do. The Lord replied, "Don't attack them directly, but go round behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. Immediately when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees be ready, because this means the Lord has marched out before you to attack the Philistine camp."

David followed the Lord's orders, and he slaughtered the Philistines from Geba all the way to Gezer.

Once again David called up all the specially chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand in total. He went with all his men to Baalah in Judah to bring back the Ark of God, which belongs to the Lord Almighty who sits between the cherubim that are on the Ark. They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from Abinadab's house, which was on a hill. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were directing the cart with the Ark of God on it, with Ahio walking in front of it. David and all the Israelites were celebrating in the Lord's presence, singing songs accompanied by zithers, harps, tambourines, rattles, and cymbals.

But when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, so Uzzah reached out to stop the Ark of God from falling. The Lord was angry with Uzzah, and God struck him down right there for his disobedience, and he died beside the Ark of God. David was angry because of the Lord's violent outburst against Uzzah. He called the place Perez-uzzah, which is still its name today.

David became afraid of the Lord that day. "How can I ever bring back the Ark of God home to me?" he asked. Not wanting to bring the Ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David, he had it taken to the home of Obed-edom the Gittite. The Ark of the Lord remained in Obed-edom's home for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom's whole household.

King David was told, "The Lord has blessed Obed-edom's household and all that he has because of the Ark of God." So David went and had the Ark of God brought from Obed-edom's house to the City of David. There was a lot of celebration! After those carrying the Ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. Wearing a priest's ephod, David danced as hard as he could before the Lord as he and all the Israelites brought along the Ark of the Lord, with plenty of shouting and the sound of horns being blown.

As the Ark of the Lord was carried into the City of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked down from a window. She watched King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she really loathed him.

They brought the Ark of the Lord and put it in its place inside the tent that David had set up for it. Then David offered burnt offerings and friendship offerings before the Lord. Once he had finished offering the sacrifices, David blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty. He gave all the Israelites, both men and women, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. Then he sent everyone home.

When David got home to bless his family, Michal, Saul's daughter came out to meet him and said, "How distinguished the king of Israel made himself look today, taking off his robes so everyone's servant girls could see, just as somebody crude would expose himself!"

David told Michal, "I was dancing before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his family when he named me ruler over the Lord's people Israel. I will continue to celebrate before the Lord, in fact I'm going to make myself even less distinguished, become even more humble. However, I will be respected by those servant girls you spoke about." And Michal, Saul's daughter, never had any children.

By now the king was comfortable in his palace and the Lord had given him peace from all the enemy nations around him. So he said to Nathan the prophet, "Look at me—I live in a palace made of cedar, but the Ark of God is still in a tent."

"Go ahead, do whatever you want, for the Lord is with you," Nathan told the king.

But that night the Lord spoke to Nathan and told him, "Go and tell my servant David, This is what the Lord says: Should you be the one to build a house for me to live in? For I have never lived in a house, from the time I led the Israelites out of Egypt up till now. I have always moved from place to place, living in a tent and a Tabernacle. But in all those travels with all of Israel did I ever ask any Israelite leader I'd ordered to take care of my people, 'Why haven't you built a cedar house for me?'

So then, tell my servant David this is what the Lord Almighty says. I was the one who took you from the fields, from looking after sheep, to become a leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you've gone. I have destroyed all your enemies right in front of you, and I will make your reputation as great as the most famous people on earth. I will choose a place for my people Israel. I will settle them there and they won't be disturbed anymore. Evil people won't persecute them as they used to, from the time I placed judges in charge of my people. I will defeat all of your enemies.

Also I want to make it clear that I the Lord will build a house for you. For when you come to the end of your life and join your ancestors in death, I will bring to power one of your descendants, one of your sons, and make sure his kingdom is successful. He will be the one to build me a house, and I will make sure his kingdom lasts forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. If he does wrong, I will discipline him with the rod like people do, like a parent punishing a child. But I will never take away my kindness and love from him, as I did in the case of Saul whom I removed before you. Your house and your kingdom will last forever; your dynasty will be secure forever." This is what Nathan explained to David—everything he was told in this divine revelation.

Then King David went and sat down in the presence of the Lord. He prayed, "Who am I, Lord God,

and what is significant about my family, that you have brought me to this place? God, you talk as if this was a small thing in your eyes, and you also have spoken about the future of my house, my family dynasty. Is this your usual way of dealing with human beings, Lord God?

What more can I, David, tell you? You know exactly what your servant is like, Lord God. You're doing all this for me and you have explained it to me, your servant, because of your promise and because it's what you want to do.

How great you are, Lord God! There really is no one like you; there is no other God, only you. We have never heard about anyone else. Who else is as fortunate as your people Israel? Who else on earth did God go and redeem to make his own people? You gained a wonderful reputation for yourself by all the tremendous, amazing things you did in driving out other nations and their gods before your people as you redeemed them from Egypt. You made your people Israel your own forever, and you, Lord, have become their God.

So now, Lord God, please ensure that what you have said about me and my house happens, and is confirmed forever. Please do as you have promised, and may your true nature be honored forever, with people declaring, 'The Lord Almighty is Israel's God!' May the house of your servant David continue to be there in your presence. Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to me, your servant, telling me, 'I will build a house for you.' That's why your servant has had the courage to pray this prayer to you. Lord Almighty, you are God! Your words are truth, and you are the one who has promised these good things to your servant. So now, please bless your servant's house that it may continue in your presence forever. For you have spoken, Lord God, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."

Sometime after this, David attacked and subdued the Philistines, taking Metheg-ammah from the them. David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground, and he measured them with a length of cord. He measured two lengths for those to be killed, and one cord length for those to be allowed to live. So he made them subject to him and required them to pay taxes.

David also defeated Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he tried to enforce his control along the Euphrates River. David captured from him 1,000 chariots, 7,000 charioteers, and 20,000 foot soldiers. David hamstrung all the chariot horses—except he saved enough for 100 chariots.

When the Arameans of Damascus came to help King Hadadezer of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of them. He placed garrisons in the Aramean kingdom with its capital in Damascus, and made the Arameans subject to him and required them to pay taxes. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went.

David took the shields of gold that belonged to Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. King David also took a large quantity of bronze from Betah and Berothai, towns that had belonged to Hadadezer.

When Tou, king of Hamath, learned that David had destroyed the entire army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, he sent his son Joram to David to make friends with him and to congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer. Tou and Hadadezer had often been at war. Joram brought all kinds of gifts of gold, silver, and bronze. King David dedicated these gifts to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from all the nations he had subdued: Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalekites; as well as the plunder taken from Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

David also made a name for himself when he came back after defeating eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He placed garrisons all through Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went. David ruled over all Israel. He did what was fair and right for all his people. Joab, son of Zeruiah, was the army commander, and Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the official records. Zadok, son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, were priests, while Seraiah was the secretary. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were priests.

David said, "Is there anyone still left of Saul's family so I can be kind to him for Jonathan's sake?"

There was a man called Ziba who used to be a servant of Saul's family. They called for him to come to David, and the king asked him, "Are you Ziba?"

"Yes, I am your servant," he replied.

The king asked him, "Is there anyone still left of Saul's family so I can be kind to him as I promised before God?"

"There's still one of Jonathan's sons, who is lame in both feet," Ziba replied.

"Where is he?" asked the king.

"He's in the town of Lo-debar, living in the home of Machir, son of Ammiel," Ziba replied.

So King David had him brought from Machir's home. When Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, came to David, he bowed facedown to the ground in respect. Then David said, "Welcome, Mephibosheth."

"I am your servant," he replied.

"Do not be afraid," said David, "for I will truly be kind to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will return to you all the land owned by your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."

Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "Who am I, your servant, that you should pay any attention to a dead dog like me?"

Then the king called for Saul's servant Ziba and told him, "I have given to your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and workers are to farm the ground for him and bring in the produce, so that your master's grandson will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master's grandson, will always eat at my table." Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty workers.

Ziba replied to the king, "My lord the king, your servant will do everything that you have commanded." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. All the people who lived in Ziba's house became Mephibosheth's servants. But Mephibosheth lived in

Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table. He was lame in both feet.

Sometime after this, Nahash, the Ammonite king died and his son Hanun succeeded him. David said, “I will be kind to Hanun, son of Nahash, just as his father was kind to me.” So David sent representatives to take his condolences to Hanun regarding his father. But when they arrived in the country of the Ammonites, the Ammonite military leaders said to Hanun their king, “Do you really believe David sent condolences to you out of respect for your father? Isn't it more likely that David sent his representatives to scout out the city, spy on it, and then conquer it?”

So Hanun had David's representatives detained, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their clothes at the buttocks, and then sent them back home.

When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet them, because they were very embarrassed. The king instructed them, “Stay in Jericho until your beards have re-grown, and then you can return.”

When the Ammonites realized they had become like a bad smell to David, they sent a request to the Arameans and hired twenty thousand of their foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as one thousand men from the king of Maakah, and also twelve thousand men from Tob.

When David learned of this, he sent Joab and the entire army to confront them. The Ammonites set up their battle lines near the entrance to their town gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah took up positions by themselves in the open fields. Joab realized he would have to fight both in front of him and behind him, so he chose some of Israel's best troops and he took charge of them to lead the attack against the Arameans. He put the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother. They were to attack the Ammonites. Joab told him, “If the Arameans are stronger than me, you come and help me. If the Ammonites are stronger than you, I'll come and help you. Be brave, and fight your best for our people and the towns of our God. May the Lord do what he sees as good!”

Joab attacked the Arameans with his forces and they ran away from him. When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans had run away, they also ran away from Abishai, and retreated into the town. So Joab went back to Jerusalem after fighting the Ammonites.

As soon as the Arameans saw they had been defeated by the Israelites they reassembled their forces. Hadadezer sent for more Arameans to be brought from beyond the Euphrates River. They arrived in Helam under the leadership of Shobach, commander of Hadadezer's army.

When this was reported to David, he assembled all Israel together. He crossed the Jordan and advanced on Helam. The Arameans positioned themselves in battle line against David and fought him. But the Aramean army ran away from the Israelites, and David killed 700 charioteers and 40,000 infantry. He also attacked Shobach, their army commander, and he died there. When all the kings allied with Hadadezer realized that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became subject to him. As a result, the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites any more.

In the spring, at the time of year when kings go out to war, David sent out Joab and his officers and the whole Israelite army on an attack. They massacred the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. However, David remained behind in Jerusalem.

Late one afternoon, David got up from taking a nap and was walking on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing—a very beautiful woman. David sent someone to find out about the woman. He was told, “It's Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam, and wife of Uriah the Hittite.” David sent messengers to fetch her. When she came to him, he had sex with her. (Now she had just purified herself from having her period.) Afterwards she went back home. Bathsheba became pregnant and sent a message to David to tell him, “I'm pregnant.”

So David sent a message to Joab, telling him, “Send Uriah the Hittite to me.” Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to see him, David asked him how Joab was doing, and how the army was doing, and how the war was going. Then David told Uriah, “Go home now and have a rest.” Uriah left the palace, and the king sent him a gift after he'd gone. But Uriah didn't go home. He slept in the guardroom at the palace entrance with all the king's guards.

David was told, “Uriah didn't go home,” so he asked Uriah, “Haven't you just got back from being away? Why didn't you go home?”

Uriah answered, “The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and my master Joab and his men are camped out in the open. How can I go home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? On my life I won't do such a thing!”

David told him, “Stay here today, and tomorrow I'll send you back.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day, and the next. David invited Uriah to dinner. Uriah ate and drank with him, and David got Uriah drunk. But in the evening he went to sleep on his mat with the king's guards, and didn't go home.

In the morning David wrote Joab a letter, and gave it to Uriah to take to him. In the letter, David told Joab, “Put Uriah right in the front where the fighting is worst, and then pull back behind him so that he'll be attacked and killed.” As Joab besieged the town, he made Uriah take a place where he knew the strongest enemy men would be fighting. When the town's defenders came out and attacked Joab, some of David's men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite.

Joab sent David a full report about the battle. He ordered the messenger, saying, “When you've finished telling the king all about the battle, if the king gets angry and asks you, ‘Why did you get so near to the town in the attack? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelech, son of Jerub-Besheth? Wasn't it a woman who dropped a millstone on him from the wall, killing him there in Thebez? Why on earth did you get so close to the wall?’ Just tell him, ‘In addition, your officer Uriah the Hittite was killed.’”

The messenger left, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had directed him to say. The messenger explained to David, “The defenders were

stronger than us, and they came out at us in the open, but we forced them back to the entrance of the town gate. Their archers shot at us from the wall, and killed some of the king's men. Your officer Uriah the Hittite was also killed."

Then David said to the messenger, "Tell Joab this: 'Don't be upset about this, for the sword destroys people at random. Press on with your attack against the town and conquer it.' Encourage him by telling him this."

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. Once the period of mourning was over, David sent for her to be brought to his palace, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But what David had done was evil in the Lord's sight.

The Lord sent Nathan to see David. When he got there, he said, "Once there were two men living in the same town. One was rich, and one was poor. The rich man had many thousands of sheep and cattle, but the poor man didn't have anything but one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He cared for it, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his plate and drink from his cup. It slept on his lap and was like a daughter to him. One day the rich man had a visitor. He didn't want to take one of his own sheep or cattle to feed his visitor. He took the poor man's lamb instead to prepare a meal for his visitor."

David became absolutely furious with what that man did, and angrily told Nathan. "As the Lord lives, the man who did this should be put to death! He must repay that lamb with four of his own for doing this, for being so heartless."

"You are that man!" Nathan told David. "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I anointed you king of Israel, and I saved you from Saul. I gave your master's house to you and placed your master's wives in your lap. I gave you the kingdom of Israel and Judah, and if that hadn't been enough, I would have given you so much more. So why have you treated what the Lord said with contempt by doing evil in his sight? You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword and stole his wife—you killed him using the sword of the Ammonites. So your descendants will always face the sword that kills because you treated me with contempt and stole Uriah's wife.

This is what the Lord says: 'I'm going to bring disaster on you from your own family. I will take your wives before your very eyes and give them to someone else, and he will sleep openly with your wives where everyone can see. You did it all in secret, but I will do it openly where everyone in all of Israel can see.'"

David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

"The Lord has forgiven your sins. You're not going to die," Nathan replied. "But because by doing this you have treated the Lord with complete contempt, the son you have will die." Then Nathan went home.

The Lord made the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David become very sick. David pleaded with God on behalf of the boy. He fasted, went to his bedroom, and spent the night lying in sackcloth on the ground. His senior officials approached him and tried to help him up from the ground, but he didn't want to, and he refused their appeals to eat.

On the seventh day the child died. But David's officials were scared to tell him that the child was dead, for they said to each other, "Look, while the child was still alive, we talked with him, and he refused to listen to us. How on earth can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something really bad!"

But when David saw his officials were whispering among themselves, he realized that the child was dead. So he asked his officials, "Did the child die?"

"Yes, he died," they replied.

David got up from the ground, washed and put on scented oils, and changed his clothes. Then he went to the house of the Lord and worshiped. Afterwards he went back home, and asked for some food. So they served him a meal which he ate.

"Why are you acting like this?" his officials asked him. "While the child was still alive, you fasted and cried aloud, but now that he's dead, you get up and eat."

David replied, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and cried aloud, for I thought to myself, 'Who knows? Maybe the Lord will be gracious to me and let him live.' But now that he's dead, what's the point for me to go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? One day I will die and go to him, but he will never come back to me."

David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and he made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and named him Solomon. The Lord loved the child, so he sent a message through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah, because the Lord loved him.

At this time Joab had been fighting against the Ammonite town of Rabbah, and had captured the royal fortress. Joab sent messengers to David to tell him, "I have attacked Rabbah and I have also captured its water supply. So please call up the rest of the army, besiege the town, and capture it. Otherwise I will capture the city, and I will get the credit."

So David called up the rest of the army and marched on Rabbah. He attacked it and captured it. He took the crown from the head of their king, and it was placed on David's head. It weighed a talent of gold and was decorated with precious stones. David took a large amount of plunder from the town. David took the inhabitants and forced them to work with saws, iron picks, and axes, and he also made them work making bricks. He did the same in all the Ammonite towns. Then David and the whole Israelite army returned to Jerusalem.

David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and another of David's sons, Amnon, fell in love with her. Amnon became so infatuated with his sister Tamar that he felt sick. She was a virgin, and Amnon saw it was impossible for him to have her.

However, Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, and he was the son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab was a very cunning man. He asked Amnon, "Why are you, the king's son, so down every morning? Why don't you tell me what's wrong?"

"I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister," Amnon replied.

"Lie down on your bed and pretend you're sick," Jonadab told him. "When your father comes to see you, tell him, 'Please have my sister Tamar come and give

me some food to eat. She can make it as I watch and she can hand it to me.'"

So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. When the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, "Please have my sister Tamar come and make a couple of pancakes as I watch, and she can hand them to me to eat."

Then David sent a message to Tamar at the palace: "Please be so kind as to go to the house of your brother Amnon and make him some food."

So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon to where he was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, and cooked the pancakes as he watched. Then she took the pan and emptied it out before him, but he refused to eat. "Everybody leave me!" Amnon shouted. Everyone left.

Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so you can hand it to me to eat." So Tamar took the pancakes she had made to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. But as she handed him the food, he grabbed hold of her, and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister!"

"No, you're my brother!" she exclaimed. "Don't rape me! That's not what we do in Israel! Don't do something so shameful! Stop and think about me! How could I bear such a disgrace? Think about yourself too! You'd be treated with contempt, regarded as a complete fool in Israel! Please talk with the king, for he won't stop you marrying me."

But Amnon wouldn't listen to her, and because he was stronger than she was, he raped her. Then Amnon hated Tamar with immense hatred. His hatred was so strong that it was greater than the love he'd had before. "Get up! Get lost!" he told her.

"No! Don't do this!" she answered. "Sending me away in disgrace would be an even greater evil than what you've already done to me." But he wouldn't listen to her. He called for his servant and said, "Get rid of this woman and lock the door behind her!"

So his servant threw her out and locked the door behind her. Tamar was wearing the long robe of a princess, which is what the king's virgin daughters wore. Tamar put ashes on her head and tore her long robe. She put her hands on her head, and she went away crying loudly.

Her brother Absalom found her and asked, "Has brother Amnon been with you? Keep quiet for the moment, my sister. He's your brother. Don't be so upset about it." So Tamar lived as a ruined and abandoned woman in her brother Absalom's home.

When King David heard about it, he was very angry. Absalom didn't talk to Amnon at all because he hated Amnon for raping his sister Tamar.

Some two years later, when his sheepshearers were at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king's sons to join the celebrations. He went to the king and said, "I, your servant, have hired shearers. Would the king and his servants please join me?"

"No, my son," the king replied, "we can't all go. We would be a burden to you." Even though Absalom went on asking, he was not willing to go, but he did give Absalom his blessing.

"Well then, at least let my brother Amnon join us," Absalom responded.

"Why do you want him to go?" the king asked.

But Absalom kept on asking, so the king sent Amnon and his other sons.

Absalom gave orders to his men, saying, "Pay attention! When Amnon is feeling happy from drinking wine and I tell you, 'Attack Amnon!' then kill him. Don't be afraid. I myself am giving you this order. Be strong and be brave."

So Absalom's men did what Absalom had ordered and killed Amnon. Then all the rest of the king's sons jumped up, got on their mules, and ran away.

While they were on their way back, David received a message, "Absalom has killed all the king's sons—there's not a single one left!" The king stood up, tore his clothes, and lay down on the ground. All his officials stood beside him with their clothes torn.

But Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah, told them: "Your Majesty must not think they have killed all the king's sons—only Amnon is dead. Absalom has been planning this ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. So, Your Majesty, please don't believe the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."

In the meantime, Absalom had run away.

When the watchman in Jerusalem looked out, he saw a large crowd coming along the road west of him, down the side of the hill.

Jonadab told the king, "Can you see? The king's sons are arriving! It's exactly as your servant said." As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, crying and wailing. Then the king and all his officials also cried loudly.

Absalom ran away to Talmai, son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. Every day David mourned for his son Amnon. After Absalom had run away to Geshur, he remained there for three years. King David longed to go and see Absalom, for he had finished grieving over the death of Amnon.

Joab, son of Zeruiah, knew that the king kept on thinking about Absalom. So Joab sent a messenger to Tekoa to bring back a wise woman who lived there. He told her, "Pretend to be a mourner. Put on clothes for mourning, and don't use any scented oils. Be like a woman who has been in mourning for the dead a long time. Then go to the king and tell him this." Joab told her what to say.

When the woman from Tekoa went to see the king, she bowed facedown to the ground in respect, and said, "Please help me, Your Majesty!"

"What's the matter?" the king asked her.

"Sadly I'm a widow. My husband is dead," she replied. "Your Majesty, I had two sons. They had a fight outside, and there was nobody there to stop them. One of them hit the other, and killed him. Now the whole family is against me. They're saying, 'Hand over your son who killed his brother so we can put him to death for murdering his brother. That way he won't inherit anything either!' By doing this they would snuff out the last ember of hope I have to carry on my husband's name and family in the world."

"Go on home," the king told the woman, "and I myself will make sure your case is dealt with for you."

"Thank you, Your Majesty," said the woman. "I and my family will take the blame, and may Your Majesty and your family be held to be innocent."

“If anyone complains to you about it, bring him here to me, and he won't bother you again!” the king told her.

“Please, Your Majesty,” the woman continued, “swear by the Lord your God that you will stop the person wanting to avenge the murder from making it worse by killing my son!”

“As the Lord lives,” he promised, “not a single hair from your son's head will fall to the ground.”

“Could I please ask for one other thing, Your Majesty?” the woman asked.

“Go ahead,” he replied.

“So why have you schemed in a similar way against the people of God?” the woman asked. “Since Your Majesty just decided my case by what you said, haven't you convicted yourself because you refuse to bring back the son you banished? Yes, we all have to die. We're like water spilled on the ground that can't be collected again. But that's not what God does. Instead he works out ways for anyone who is banished to come back home to him. That's why I've come to explain this to Your Majesty, because someone has frightened me. So I thought to myself, I will go and speak to the king. Perhaps he will grant my request. Perhaps the king will listen and save me from the man who would cut off both me and my son from God's chosen people. I thought: May what Your Majesty says bring me peace, for Your Majesty is able to tell the difference between good and evil, just like an angel of God. May the Lord your God be with you!”

“Please don't refuse to answer the question I'm about to ask,” the king said to the woman.

“Please ask your question, Your Majesty,” she replied.

“Is all this Joab's doing?” the king asked.

The woman replied, “As you live, Your Majesty, no one can hide anything from you. Yes, it was Joab, your officer, who ordered me to do this—he told me exactly what to say. He did so to show the other side of the situation, but Your Majesty is as wise as an angel of God, and you know everything that happens in this country.”

The king said to Joab, “Fine, I'll do it. Go and bring young Absalom back.”

Joab bowed down with his face to the ground in respect, and blessed the king. “Today,” said Joab, “I, your servant, know that you approve of me, Your Majesty, because you have granted my request.” Joab went to Geshur, and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king gave this order, “He may return to his home, but he's not to come and see me.” So Absalom returned to his own home, but he didn't go and see the king.

Absalom was admired as the most handsome man in the whole of Israel. He didn't have a single blemish from head to toe. He cut his hair every year because it got so heavy—it weighed two hundred royal shekels. He had three sons, and a daughter named Tamar—a very beautiful woman.

Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years but was not permitted to see the king. Absalom called Joab to arrange for him to see the king, but Joab refused to come. Absalom called Joab again, but Joab still wouldn't come. So Absalom told his servants, “Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley growing there. Go and set it on fire!” Absalom's servants went and set the field on fire.

Joab went to Absalom's house and asked “Why did your servants set my field on fire?”

“Look here,” said Absalom, “I sent for you, saying, ‘Come here. I want you to go to the king and ask: Why did I bother coming back from Geshur? It would have been better for me to stay there.’ So go and arrange for me to see the king, and if I'm guilty of anything, he can kill me.”

So Joab went and told the king what Absalom had said. Then David summoned Absalom, who came and bowed down with his face to the ground before him in respect. Then the king kissed Absalom.

Sometime later, Absalom got himself a chariot with horses, and fifty men as bodyguards to run ahead of him. He used to get up early and stand by the main road that led to the city gate. When people brought a case to the king for his decision, Absalom would call out and ask them, “What town are you from?” If they replied, “Your servant is from this particular tribe of Israel,” Absalom would tell them, “Look, you're in the right and you've got a good case. It's such a shame there's no one from the king to hear you.” Then he would say, “If only there was someone to appoint me as judge for the country. Then everyone could come to me with their case or complaint, and I would give them justice.”

When anyone came to bow down before him, Absalom would stop them by reaching out his hand, taking hold of him, and kissing him. This is how Absalom treated all the Israelites who came to the king for his judgment. So he captured the loyalty of the men of Israel.

Four years later Absalom asked the king, “Please let me go to Hebron to fulfill a promise I made to the Lord. For I, your servant, made this promise while living at Geshur in Aram, saying: ‘If the Lord does bring me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.’”

“Go in peace,” said the king. So Absalom went to Hebron.

Then Absalom sent his accomplices among all the tribes of Israel, saying, “When you hear the sound of the ram's horn, shout, ‘Absalom is king at Hebron!’” Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom. They had been invited and went in all innocence, because they didn't know anything about what was planned. While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's advisor, asking him to come from Giloh, the town where he lived. The conspiracy grew stronger, and Absalom's followers went on increasing.

A messenger came to tell David, “Absalom has the loyalty of the men of Israel.”

David said to all the officials with him in Jerusalem, “Quick! Let's go! Otherwise we won't be able to get away from Absalom! We must leave immediately, or he will soon catch up with us, attack us, and kill the people here in the city.”

“Whatever Your Majesty decides, we'll do what you want,” the king's servants replied.

The king set off with his whole household following him, but he left behind ten concubines to look after the palace. The king left with all his soldiers following him.

He stopped at the last house, and all his men marched past him, including all the Cherethites and Pelethites, and six hundred Gittites who had come with him from Gath.

The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why are you coming with us too? Go back and stay with the new king, because you are a foreigner and an exile a long way from home. You only just got here, so why should I make you wander around with us now when I don't even know where I am going? Go back and take your men with you. May the Lord show you kindness and faithfulness.”

But Ittai answered the king, “As the Lord lives, and as Your Majesty lives, wherever Your Majesty may be, whether dead or alive, that's where your servant will be!”

“Go ahead, march on!” David replied. Ittai the Gittite marched past with all his men and all the families that were with him.

All the people in the countryside were crying aloud as everyone with David passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley with the king on the way toward the wilderness. Zadok was there too, and all the Levites were with him, carrying the Ark of God's Agreement. They set down the Ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until everyone had left the city.

Then the king told Zadok, “Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find the Lord approves of me, he will bring me back and let me see both the Ark and his Tent again. But if he says, ‘I'm not happy with you,’ then here I stand. Let him do to me whatever he thinks best.”

The king also told Zadok the priest, “You understand the situation, don't you? Go back to the city safely with your son Ahimaaz, and also Jonathan, son of Abiathar. You and Abiathar take both of your sons back with you. I'll wait at the fords of the wilderness until I hear from you.” Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and remained there.

David went on his way up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he did so. He had his head covered, and walked barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads, weeping as they went along. David was told, “Ahithophel is one of the people conspiring with Absalom.” So David prayed, “Lord, please make Ahithophel's advice worthless.”

When David arrived at the top of the Mount of Olives, where people worshiped God, there to meet him was Hushai the Archite, with his robe torn and with dust on his head.

David told him, “If you come with me, you'll only be a burden to me, but if you go back to the city and tell Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, Your Majesty! Formerly I worked for your father, but now I'll work for you,’ then you can block Ahithophel's advice for me. Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, will be there too. Tell them everything you hear in the king's palace. Their two sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, are there with them. Send them to me so they can tell me everything you hear.” David's friend Hushai arrived back in Jerusalem at the same time Absalom was entering the city.

After David had gone a little way past the top of the mountain, there was Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, waiting to meet him. He had two donkeys already saddled with him carrying two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred raisin cakes, a hundred summer fruits, and a skin of wine.

“What did you bring these for?” David asked Ziba.

Ziba replied, “The donkeys are for the king's family to ride on, the bread and summer fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is for those to drink who get worn out in the wilderness.”

“Where is your master's grandson?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He decided to stay in Jerusalem. He's saying, ‘Today the people of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.’”

The king told Ziba, “I give you everything that belongs to Mephibosheth!”

“I bow before you,” Ziba replied. “May you approve of me, Your Majesty.”

As King David arrived at the town of Bahurim, a man from Saul's family was just leaving. His name was Shimei, son of Gera, and he was shouting out curses as he came. He threw stones at David and all the king's officers, even though the king's men and all his bodyguards surrounded David.

“Get out of here, just get out, you murderer, you wicked man!” Shimei said as he cursed. “The Lord has paid you back for all of Saul's family that you killed, and for stealing Saul's throne. The Lord has given the kingdom to your son Absalom. Look how you've ended up in disaster because you're a murderer!”

Abishai, son of Zeruiah, asked the king, “Why should this dead dog curse Your Majesty? Let me go and cut off his head!”

“What's that got to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah?” the king replied. “If he's cursing me because the Lord told him to, then who can question what he's doing?”

David said to Abishai and to all his officers, “Look, if my very own son is trying to kill me, why shouldn't this Benjamite want to even more! Leave him alone; let him curse me, for the Lord told him to. Perhaps the Lord will see how I'm suffering and will pay me back with good for his curses today.” David and his men continued down the road, with Shimei keeping up with them on the hillside opposite. He went on cursing as he went along, throwing stones and dirt at David.

The king and everyone with him were tired out when they arrived at the Jordan. David rested there.

In the meantime Absalom and all the Israelites with him arrived in Jerusalem, along with Ahithophel. Hushai the Archite, David's friend, went to see Absalom and declared, “Long live the king! Long live the king!”

“Is this how you show loyalty to your friend?” Absalom asked. “Why didn't you leave with your friend?”

“Certainly not!” Hushai replied. “I'm on the side of the one chosen by the Lord, by the army, and by all the people of Israel. I will remain loyal to him. In any case, why shouldn't I serve his son? In the same way I served your father I will serve you.”

Then Absalom asked Ahithophel, “Give me your advice. What shall we do?”

Ahithophel told him, “Go and sleep with your father's concubines—the ones he left here to look after the palace. Then everyone in Israel will realize that you have so offended your father there's no turning back, which will encourage all your supporters.”

So they put up a tent on the palace roof and Absalom went in and had sex with his father's concubines in the full view of everyone. At that time Ahithophel's advice was like receiving messages from God himself. This was how both David and Absalom viewed Ahithophel's advice.

Ahithophel said to Absalom, “Let me choose twelve thousand men and set off in pursuit of David tonight. I'll attack him while he is tired and weak. I'll catch him by surprise and all his men will run away. I'll only kill the king and bring everybody else back to you. When everybody returns apart from the one man you're after, the whole country will be at peace.” This plan looked good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

But then Absalom said, “Call in Hushai the Archite too, and let's hear what he's got to say as well.” When Hushai came in, Absalom asked him, “Ahithophel has recommended this plan. Should we go ahead with it? If not, what's your suggestion?”

“For once Ahithophel's advice isn't good,” Hushai replied. “You know what your father and his men are like. They're great fighters, and now they're as furious as a she-bear robbed of her cubs. In any case, your father is experienced in military tactics, and he won't spend the night with his men. Right now he's holed up in a cave or some place like that. If he attacks first and some of your men are killed, people who hear about it will say, ‘Absalom's men are being slaughtered.’ Then even the bravest soldier who has the heart of a lion will be scared to death, because everyone in Israel knows that your father is a powerful man who has brave men with him.

My recommendation is that you call up the entire Israelite army from Dan to Beersheba—an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore! Once they've assembled, then you yourself lead them into battle! Then we'll attack David wherever he is, and we'll fall on him as dew falls on the ground. Neither he nor a single one of all the men with him will be left alive! If he tries to find protection in a town, all of Israel will bring ropes to that town, and we will pull it down into the valley so that not even a stone will be left.”

Absalom and all the Israelite leaders said, “Hushai the Archite's advice is better than Ahithophel's.” For the Lord had decided to block Ahithophel's good advice in order that he might bring disaster on Absalom.

Hushai spoke to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, and told them, “Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the Israelite leaders to act in one way, but I have advised them to act in this different way. So send a message quickly to David and tell him, ‘Don't wait and spend the night at the fords of the wilderness, but cross over immediately or the king and everybody with him will be destroyed.’”

Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel because they couldn't be seen entering the city. A servant girl would come and tell them what was happening. Then they would go and let King David know. But a boy did see them and he told Absalom. So the two left immediately and went to the house of a man in the town of Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed into it. His wife took a cloth to cover the well and spread it out over the opening and then scattered grain over it. No one knew the men were there.

When Absalom's officers arrived they asked the woman, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?” “They crossed over the stream,” she replied. The men searched for them but didn't find them, so they went back to Jerusalem.

After Absalom's officers left, the two men climbed out of the well and rushed off to give the king their message. “Have everybody get up and cross the river right away, for Ahithophel's advice is to attack you immediately.” David and everybody with him got up and crossed the Jordan. By the time it got light there wasn't anybody who hadn't crossed over.

When Ahithophel realized that his advice had been ignored, he saddled up his donkey and left for his home in the town where he lived. He put his affairs in order and then he hanged himself. He died and was buried in his father's tomb.

David went on to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed over the Jordan with the entire Israelite army. Absalom had put Amasa in charge of the army to replace Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra, the Ishmaelite who lived with Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah, Joab's mother. The Israelites under Absalom set up camp in the land of Gilead.

When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was welcomed by Shobi, son of Nahash, from Rabbah of the Ammonites, Machir, son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim. They brought bedding, bowls, and clay jars, as well as wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, curds, sheep, and cheese made from cow's milk for David and the people with him to eat. For they said, “The people are hungry, tired, and thirsty from their time in the wilderness.”

David organized the men who were with him and put commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds in charge of them. David sent the army out divided into three sections. One third was commanded by Joab, one third was commanded by Abishai, son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and one third was commanded by Ittai the Gittite. The king told the men, “I myself will go out to battle with you.”

But the men replied, “No, you must not go out into battle! For if we have to run away, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care about that either. But you are worth ten thousand of us, so it's better if you stay here and send us help from the town.”

“I will do whatever you think best,” the king replied. The king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out by hundreds and by thousands. The king ordered Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Treat young Absalom gently for me.” All the men heard the king giving orders to each of his commanders about Absalom.

David's army marched out to face the Israelites in battle, which was fought in the forest of Ephraim. The Israelites were defeated by David's men and many were killed that day—some twenty thousand. The battle covered the whole countryside, and that day more died because of the forest than were killed by the sword.

Absalom ran into some of David's men while he was riding on his mule. As the mule went under the twisted branches of a large oak tree, Absalom's hair got

caught in the tree. The mule he was riding kept going, leaving him hanging between earth and sky. One of David's men saw what happened, so he told Joab, “I just saw Absalom hanging from an oak tree!”

“What! You saw him like that?” Joab said to the man. “Why didn't you kill him right then and there? I would have given you ten shekels of silver and a soldier's belt as a reward!”

But the man replied, “Even if you gave me a thousand shekels of silver, I wouldn't hurt the king's son. We all heard the king give the order to you, Abishai, and Ittai, ‘Look after young Absalom for me.’ If I had disobeyed and killed Absalom—and the king finds out everything—you yourself wouldn't have defended me.”

“I'm not going to waste time waiting around like this with you!” Joab told him. He grabbed three spears and drove them into Absalom's heart while he was still alive, hanging from the oak tree. Ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom and hacked him to death.

Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and his men stopped chasing the Israelites because Joab had signaled them to stop. They took Absalom and threw him into a deep pit in the forest, and piled a large heap of stones over him. All the Israelites ran away to their homes.

Absalom while he was alive had made a stone pillar and set it up in the King's Valley as a memorial to himself, for he thought to himself, “I don't have a son to keep the memory of my name alive.” He named the pillar after himself, and it's called Absalom's Monument even today.

Then Ahimaaz, son of Zadok, said, “Please let me run and take the good news to the king that the Lord has vindicated him over his enemies.”

“You're not the man to take the good news today,” Joab replied. “You can do it some other time, but don't do it today, because the king's son is dead.”

So Joab said to a man from Ethiopia, “Go and tell the king what you have seen.” He bowed to Joab and ran off.

Ahimaaz asked Joab again, “Never mind what happens, please let me run too, after the Ethiopian!”

“Son, why do you want to run? You won't get anything for it.” Joab replied.

“Doesn't matter, I want to run anyway,” he said.

“Fine, start running!” Joab told him. Ahimaaz took the route over flatter ground and overtook the Ethiopian.

David was sitting between the inside and outside gates. The watchman climbed up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. He looked out, and saw a man running by himself. So he shouted down to tell the king.

“If he's by himself then he's bringing good news,” the king replied.

As the first runner got closer, the watchman saw someone else running, and he shouted down to the gatekeeper, “Look! There's another man running by himself!”

“He'll also be bringing good news,” said the king.

“The first man seems to me to be running like Ahimaaz, son of Zadok,” said the watchman.

“He's a good man,” the king replied. “He'll bring good news.”

Ahimaaz shouted out greetings to the king. Then he came and he bowed facedown before the king. “Blessed be the Lord your God!” he said. “He has defeated the men who rebelled against Your Majesty!”

“How is young Absalom? Is he all right?” the king asked.

Ahimaaz answered, “It was very chaotic when your officer Joab sent me, your servant. I really don't know what was happening.”

“Stand to one side and wait,” the king told him. So Ahimaaz stood to one side and waited.

Right then the Ethiopian arrived and said, “Your Majesty, listen to the good news! Today the Lord has defeated all those who rebelled against you!”

“How is young Absalom? Is he all right?” the king asked.

The Ethiopian replied, “May what has happened to the young man happen to Your Majesty's enemies, and to everyone who rebels against you!”

The king broke down. He went up to the room over the gate and cried. As he walked, he sobbed out, “My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! I wish I'd died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!”

Soon Joab was told, “The king is crying and mourning for Absalom.” Victory that day was turned into mourning for the whole army, because they were told, “The king is grieving for his son.” They stole back into town that day like defeated people steal in, ashamed of running away from the battle. The king held his face in his hands and sobbed loudly, “My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!”

Then Joab went inside and told the king, “Today you have humiliated all your men who have saved your life, and the lives of your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your concubines. You did this by loving those who hate you and hating those who love you. Today you have made it plain that the commanders and the men don't mean anything to you. Today I'm sure that you'd be quite happy if Absalom was alive and all of us were dead! So get up, go out, and thank your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't, you won't have a man left by tonight. That will be far worse for you than all the disasters you've had from your youth until now.”

So the king got up and went to sit at the town gate. Everybody was told: “Look, the king is sitting at the town gate.” They all came to see the king.

In the meantime the Israelites had run away and gone to their homes. Everyone among the tribes of Israel were arguing with each other, saying, “The king rescued us from the persecution of our enemies, he saved us from the Philistines, but now he's had to run from the country because of Absalom. Now Absalom, the man we chose to be our king by anointing him, has died in battle. Why don't we do something and invite King David to come back?”

King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: “Tell the elders of Judah, ‘Are you going to be the last people to bring the king back to his palace, since the king has heard that all of Israel wants it? You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. Why should you be the last ones to want to bring the king back?’ Tell Amasa, ‘Aren't you my flesh and blood too?

May God punish me very severely if from now on you're not the commander of my army instead of Joab!'"

Amasa convinced all the people of Judah to unitedly support David, so they sent a message to the king: "Please come back, you and everyone with you." The king began his journey back, and when he arrived at the Jordan, the men of Judah met him at Gilgal to help him cross the river. Shimei, son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. With him were one thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin, including Ziba, servant of Saul's family, as well as Ziba's fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed down to the Jordan to meet the king. They crossed at the ford to bring the king's household over and whatever else he wanted. Shimei crossed the Jordan and fell facedown before the king.

"Your Majesty, please forgive me and disregard the wrong that I, your servant, did when Your Majesty left Jerusalem. Please forget all about it. I, your servant, recognize that I have sinned. But look! Today I'm the first from any of the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet Your Majesty."

Abishai, son of Zeruiah, said, "Shouldn't Shimei be executed for this, because he cursed the Lord's anointed one?"

But David replied, "What's that got to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? Do you want to be my enemies today? Is this a day to execute anybody in Israel? Aren't I certain that today I'm the king of Israel once more?"

David turned to Shimei and swore an oath to him, "You're not going to die."

Then Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, went to meet the king. He had refused to look after his feet or trim his mustache or have his clothes washed from the day the king left until the day of his peaceful return. When he arrived from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Why didn't you come with me, Mephibosheth?"

Mephibosheth answered, "Your Majesty, my servant Ziba tricked me. I told him, 'Saddle up my donkey so I can ride her and leave with the king,' because you know that I'm lame. Ziba has misrepresented me, your servant, to Your Majesty. However, Your Majesty is like an angel of God, so do what you think best. All my grandfather's family could only expect death from Your Majesty, but you included me, your servant, among those who eat at your table. So what right do I have to ask the king for anything more?"

"Why talk any more about these issues of yours?" David responded. "I've decided that you and Ziba should divide the land."

Mephibosheth replied to the king, "Let him have it all! I'm just happy that Your Majesty has returned home in peace."

Barzillai the Gileadite had also come down from Rogelim to help the king cross the Jordan and to make his way onwards from there. Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age, and because he was a very wealthy man, he had provided the king with food while he was staying in Mahanaim.

The king said to Barzillai, "Cross the Jordan with me, and I will provide for you while you stay with me in Jerusalem."

"How much longer do you think I have to live so I could go to Jerusalem and stay there with the king?" Barzillai replied. "I'm already eighty. I don't enjoy anything anymore. I can't taste what I eat or drink. I can't hear when people sing. There's no point for me, your servant, to be another burden to Your Majesty! For your servant to cross the Jordan River with the king is enough reward for me! Then let your servant go back home, that I may die in my home town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant, my son Chimham. Let him cross over with Your Majesty, and treat him as you think best."

The king replied, "Chimham will cross over with me, and I will treat him as you think best, and I will do for you whatever you want."

So everybody crossed the Jordan first, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and then Barzillai went back home. Then the king carried on to Gilgal, and Chimham went with him. The whole army of Judah and half the army of Israel accompanied the king.

But soon the men of Israel who were there came to the king and asked him, "Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, secretly take Your Majesty away and bring you and your household across the Jordan, together with all your men?"

The men of Judah explained to the men of Israel, "We did this because the king is one of our relatives. Why are you getting upset about this? When did we ever eat the king's food? When did we ever get anything for ourselves?"

"We've got ten shares in the king," the men of Israel replied, "so we have a greater claim on David than you do. Why do you look down on us? Weren't we the first ones to talk about bringing back our king?" But the men of Judah argued even more strongly than the men of Israel.

A rabble-rouser called Sheba, son of Bichri, from the tribe of Benjamin, happened to be there. He blew the ram's horn and shouted: "We have no interest in David, no commitment to Jesse's son. Israelites, let's all go home!"

So all the men of Israel abandoned David to follow Sheba, son of Bichri. But the men of Judah accompanied their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem. When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to look after the palace and put them in a house under guard. He took care of their needs but he didn't sleep with them. They were imprisoned until they died, living like widows.

Then the king ordered Amasa, "Call up the army of Judah. Have them come to me within three days, and you come too." Amasa called up the army of Judah, but he took longer than the time he was given.

David then spoke to Abishai, saying, "Now Sheba the son of Bichri is going to cause us more trouble than Absalom did. Take the king's men and chase him down, or he will take over fortified towns and get away from us."

So Joab's men, along with the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the experienced fighters, marched out of Jerusalem to chase down Sheba, son of Bichri. While they were at the large rock in Gibeon, Amasa

caught up with them. Joab was dressed for battle. Over his clothes was a belt around his waist with a dagger in its sheath. As he moved forward, it fell out.

"How are you doing, my brother?" Joab asked Amasa. Joab held Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. Amasa wasn't prepared for the dagger in Joab's left hand. Joab stabbed him in the belly and his intestines poured out onto the ground. Joab didn't need to stab him twice, because Amasa was already dead. Then Joab and his brother Abishai set off in pursuit of Sheba.

One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and called out, "If you're on Joab's side, and if you are on David's side, then follow Joab!" But Amasa was there, lying in his blood in the middle of the main road. When the man saw that everybody was stopping to look, he pulled the body off the road into a field and threw a cloth over it. Once Amasa's body was off the road, all the men followed Joab in pursuit of Sheba.

In the meantime Sheba had gone around all the tribes of Israel and eventually ended up in the town of Abel-beth-maacah. All the Bichrites gathered for battle and followed him into the town. Joab's army came and besieged Sheba in Abel-beth-maacah. They built a siege ramp against the town's outer wall. While all of Joab's army was battering the wall to knock it down, a wise woman from the town called out, "Listen! Please listen! Tell Joab, 'Come over here so I can speak to you.'"

He went over to her, and the woman asked, "Are you Joab?"

"Yes, that's me," he replied.

"Please listen to what I, your servant, have to say," she said.

"I'm listening," he replied.

Then the woman said, "In times gone by people used to say, 'If you want advice, go to Abel,' and that's how arguments were settled. I am one of the peaceful and faithful people of Israel. You're trying to destroy a town that's like a mother in Israel. Why do you want to tear down the Lord's possession?"

"Certainly not!" Joab answered. "It's not what I want—to destroy or tear down this town! That's not the intention. But a man called Sheba, son of Bichri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has rebelled against the king, against David. Just hand over this one man and I will withdraw from the town."

"Fine," the woman replied, "his head will be thrown over the wall to you."

The woman went and talked with everyone about her wise plan. So they cut off the head of Sheba and threw it to Joab. Then Joab blew the ram's horn to sound the retreat, and all his men left the town and went home. Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem.

Joab commanded the whole army of Israel. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites. Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the official records. Sheva was the secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests, and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

Once during David's reign there was a famine for three years in a row, and David asked the Lord about it. The Lord replied, "It's because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."

David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke with them. The Gibeonites were not Israelites, but what was left of the Amorites. The Israelites had sworn an oath to them, but in his nationalistic passion for the Israelites and Judah, Saul had tried to wipe them out.

"What can I do for you?" David asked the Gibeonites. "How can I compensate you so that you may bless the Lord's people?"

"This isn't a question of us receiving payment in silver or gold from Saul or his family," the Gibeonites replied. "In addition we don't have the right to have anyone in Israel put to death for us."

"I'll do whatever you ask," David answered.

They replied, "Regarding the man who destroyed us, who planned to prevent us having any place to live in the whole country of Israel, have seven of Saul's male descendants be handed over to us, and we will hang them in the presence of the Lord at Gibeon of Saul, the Lord's chosen one."

"I will hand them over to you," said the king. However, the king spared Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, because of the oath sworn before the Lord between David and Jonathan, son of Saul. The king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she had borne to Saul, and the five sons of Merab, the daughter of Saul, whom she had borne to Adriel, son of Barzillai the Meholathite. He handed them over to the Gibeonites, and they hanged them on the hill in the presence of the Lord. All seven of them died at the same time, executed at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took some sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest until the time the rains came and poured down on the bodies, she kept the birds away from them during the day and the wild animals at night.

When David heard what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, Saul's concubine, had done, he retrieved the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the men of Jabesh-gilead, who had taken them from the public square of Beth-shan where the Philistines had hung the bodies after they had killed Saul at Gilboa. David had the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan brought back, and also had the bones of those who had been hanged gathered up. They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan at Zela in the land of Benjamin, in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. Once they finished doing everything the king had ordered, God answered their prayers to end the famine in the land.

There was war once more between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight the Philistines, and he got worn out. Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spear weighed three hundred shekels, and who was carrying a new sword, said he was going to kill David. But Abishai, son of Zeruiah, came to his rescue, attacked the Philistine, and killed him. Then David's men made him promise, saying, "Don't ever go out with us to battle again, so that the Israel's light isn't snuffed out!"

Some time after this there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob. But then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha.

In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan, son of Jair, from Bethlehem, killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite. The shaft of his spear was as thick as a weaver's rod.

In yet another battle at Gath, there was a gigantic man, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, making twenty-four in all. He too was descended from the giants. But when he insulted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. These four were the descendants of the giants in Gath, but they were all killed by David and his men.

David sang the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord saved him from all his enemies, and from Saul. He sang:

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my Savior.

He is my God, my rock who protects me. He shields me from harm, his power saves me, he keeps me safe. He is my protector; he is my savior; he saves me from violence.

I call for help from the Lord, who should be praised, and he saves me from those who hate me.

The waves of death swept over me; surging waters of destruction flooded over me;

The grave wound its ropes around me; death set snares for me.

In my despair I called on the Lord; I called out to my God. He heard my voice from his Temple; my cry for help reached his ears.

The earth shook to and fro; the foundations of the heavens trembled, shaking because of his anger.

Smoke came out of his nostrils, and fire from his mouth, burning coals that blazed before him.

He pushed aside the heavens and came down, with dark clouds beneath his feet.

Riding on a heavenly being he flew, swooping on the wings of the wind.

He hid himself in darkness, covering himself with black rainclouds.

Burning coals blazed out of his brightness.

The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.

He fired his arrows, scattering his enemies, he routed them with his lightning bolts.

The Lord roared, and by the wind from the breath of his nostrils the valleys of the sea could be seen and the foundations of the earth were uncovered.

He reached down his hand from above and grabbed hold of me. He dragged me out of the deep water.

He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and who were much stronger than me.

They came at me at my worst possible moment, but the Lord supported me.

He set me free, he rescued me because he's happy with me.

The Lord rewarded me because I do what's right; he repaid me because I am innocent.

For I have followed the Lord's ways; I have not sinned by turning away from my God.

I have kept all his laws in mind; I have not ignored his commandments.

I am blameless in his sight; I keep myself from sinning.

The Lord rewarded me for doing what's right. I am innocent in his sight.

You show trust to those who are trusting; you show integrity to those with integrity,

You show yourself pure to those who are pure, but you show yourself astute to those who are crafty.

You save the humble, but your eyes watch the proud to bring them down.

You, Lord, are my lamp. The Lord lights up my darkness.

With you, I can charge down a troop of soldiers; with you, my God, I can climb a fortress wall.

God's way is absolutely right. What the Lord says is trustworthy. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection.

For who is God except the Lord? Who is a Rock, except our God?

God makes me strong and keeps me safe.

He makes me surefooted like the deer, able to walk the heights in safety.

He teaches me how to fight in battle; he gives me the strength to draw a bronze bow.

You protect me with the shield of your salvation; your help has made me great.

You gave me room to walk, and prevented my feet from slipping.

I chased my enemies, and caught up with them. I did not turn around until I had destroyed them.

I struck them down—they couldn't get up. They fell at my feet.

You made me strong for the battle; you made those who rose up against me kneel low before me.

You made my enemies run away; I destroyed all my enemies.

They cried out for help, but no one came to rescue them. They even called out to the Lord, but he did not answer them.

I ground them into dust, like the dust of the earth. I crushed them and threw them out like mud in the street.

You rescued me from rebellious people; you have kept me as ruler over nations—people I didn't know now serve me.

Foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey.

They lose heart, and come trembling in surrender from their strongholds.

The Lord lives! Blessed be my Rock! May the God who saves me be praised!

God avenges me, he puts peoples under me,

He frees me from those who hate me. You keep me safe from those who rebel against me, you save me from violent men.

That's why I will praise you among the nations, Lord; I will sing praises about who you are.

You have saved the king so often, showing your trustworthy love to David, your anointed, and to his descendants forever."

These are David's last words. The divine message of David son of Jesse, the divine message of the man made great by God, the one anointed by the God of Jacob, the wonderful psalm-writer of Israel:

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; my tongue gave his message.

Israel's God spoke; Israel's Rock told me, 'He who rules the people justly, he who rules respecting God, is like the light of the morning sunrise on a cloudless dawn; like the shining of raindrops on the new grass growing from the earth.'

Isn't this how my family is with God? For he has made an everlasting agreement with me, set out in detail and with every part guaranteed. He will make sure to save me and to give me all I want.

But evil people are like thorns to be thrown aside; they can't be held in the hand. The only way to deal with them is to use an iron tool or the handle of a spear. They are completely burned up right where they are."

These are the names of the leading warriors who supported David: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, leader of the Three. Using his spear, he once killed eight hundred men in a single battle.

After him came Eleazar, son of Dodai, the Ahohite, one of the Three leading warriors. He was with David when they defied the Philistines gathered for battle at Pas-dammin. The Israelites retreated, but Eleazar took his stand and went on killing Philistines until his hand stuck to his sword. The Lord saved them by granting them a great victory. The Israelite army did return, but only to strip the dead.

After him came Shammah, son of Agee, the Hararite. When the Philistines gathered at Lehi, in a field full of lentils, the Israelite army ran away from them, but Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field, defending it and killing the Philistines. The Lord gave them a great victory.

At harvest-time, the Three, who were part of the Thirty leading warriors, went down to meet David when he was at the cave of Adullam. The Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. At the time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was in Bethlehem. David was feeling really thirsty, and he said, "If only someone could bring me a drink of water from the well beside the entrance gate to Bethlehem!"

The Three leading warriors broke through the Philistine defenses, took some water from the well at Bethelehem's gate, and brought it back to David. But David refused to drink it, and poured it out as an offering to the Lord. "Lord, never let me do this!" he said. "Isn't it like drinking the blood of these men who risked their lives?" So he did not drink it. These are just some of the things the Three leading warriors did.

Abishai, Joab's brother, was leader of the second Three. Using his spear, he once killed 300 men, and became famous among the Three. He was the most highly regarded of the Three and was their commander, though he was not one of the first Three.

Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, a strong warrior from Kabzeel, did many amazing things. He killed two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went after a lion into a pit in the snow and killed it. Another time he killed a huge Egyptian. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand but Benaiah attacked him with just a club. He grabbed the spear from the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. These were the kind of things Benaiah did that made him as famous as the Three leading warriors. He was the most highly regarded of the Thirty, though he was not one of the Three. David put him in charge of his personal bodyguard.

Included in the Thirty were:

Asahel, Joab's brother; Elhanan, son of Dodo, from Bethlehem; Shammoth the Harorite; Elika the Harodite, Helez the Paltite; Ira, son of Ikkesh, from Tekoa; Abiezer from Anathoth; Mebunnai the Hushathite; Zalmon the Ahohite; Maharai the Netophahite; Heleb, son of Baanah the Netophahite; Ittai, son of Ribai from Gibeah of the Benjamites; Benaiah the Pirathonite; Hiddai from the streams of Gaash; Abi-albon the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Baharumite; Eliahba the Shaalbonite; the sons of Jashem; Jonathan, son of Shagee the Hararite; Ahiam, son of Sachar the Hararite; Eliphelet, son of Ahasbai, son of the Maacathite, Eliam, son of Ahithophel, the Gilonite, Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, Igal, son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab, son of Zeruiah, Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; and Uriah the Hittite; a total of thirty-seven.

The Lord was angry with Israel, and he provoked David against them, saying, "go and take a census of Israel and Judah." So David told Joab, the army commander, "Go and count the Israelites from Dan to Beersheba, so I can have a total number."

But Joab replied to the king, "May the Lord multiply his people a hundred times over, Your Majesty, and may you live to see it! But why does Your Majesty want to do this?"

But the king was adamant so Joab and the army commanders left the king and went to census the people of Israel.

They crossed the Jordan and camped on the south side of the town of Aroer, in the middle of the valley, and then continued towards Gad and Jazer. Then they went on to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtim-hodshi; then continued towards Dan, and from Dan around to Sidon. After this they went to the fortress of Tyre, and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. They ended up in the Negev of Judah at Beersheba. After traveling throughout the whole country for nine months and twenty days, they returned to Jerusalem. Joab reported to the king the number of people that had been counted. In Israel there were 800,000 fighting men who could use the sword, and in Judah there were 500,000.

Afterwards, David felt really bad for ordering the census. He said to God, "I have committed a terrible sin by doing this. Please take away the guilt of your servant, for I have been very stupid."

When David got up in the morning, the Lord had sent a message to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and tell David that this is what the Lord says: 'I'm giving you three options. Choose one of them, and that's what I'll do to you.'"

So Gad went and told David, "You can choose three years of famine in your land, or three months of running from your enemies while they chase you, or three days of plague in your land. So think about it and decide how I should reply to the One who sent me."

David replied to Gad, "This is an awful situation for me! Please, let the Lord decide my punishment, for he is merciful. Don't let me be punished by people."

So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the time designated, and seventy thousand people died from Dan to Beersheba. But just as the angel was getting ready to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented from causing such a disaster and told the destroying angel, “That's enough. You can stop now.” Right then the angel of the Lord was standing beside the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

When David saw the angel striking down the people, he said to the Lord, “I'm the one who has sinned; I'm the one who has done wrong. These people are just sheep. What have they done? Punish me and my family instead.”

On that day Gad went to David and told him, “Go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.”

So David went and did what the Lord had ordered, as Gad had told him. When Araunah looked up, he saw the king and his officials approaching. So he went out and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. “Why has Your Majesty come to see me, your servant?” Araunah asked.

“To buy your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the Lord in order that the plague on the people may be stopped.” David replied.

“Take it, and Your Majesty can use it to make offerings as you think best,” Araunah told David. “Here are the oxen for burnt offerings, and here are the threshing boards and the yokes for the oxen for firewood. Your Majesty, I, Araunah, give it all to the king.” Araunah concluded by saying, “May the Lord your God respond positively to you.”

“No, I insist on paying you for it,” the king replied. “I won't present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that didn't cost me anything.” David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

David built an altar to the Lord there, and presented burnt offerings and friendship offerings. The Lord answered his prayer for the country, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

1 Kings

First Book of Kings

King David had grown old and couldn't keep warm in bed however many blankets they used to cover him. So his officials suggested, “Let a search be made on behalf of Your Majesty for a young virgin to serve you and look after you. She can lie next to you and keep you warm.”

So they searched the whole country of Israel for a beautiful young woman and found Abishag from the town of Shunem and took her to the king. She was very beautiful, and she looked after the king, attending to his needs, but he did not have sex with her.

Adonijah, son of Haggith, was busy promoting himself, saying “I'm going to be king!” He arranged chariots and horsemen for himself, and fifty men to run ahead of him. (Never in his life had his father corrected him. He'd never asked him, “Why did you do that?” He was also very good-looking, and had been born after Absalom.)

Adonijah discussed his plan with Joab, son of Zeruiah, and with Abiathar the priest, who agreed to support him. But Zadok the priest, Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei, Rei, and David's bodyguard were not on Adonijah's side.

Adonijah invited all his brothers, the king's sons, and the king's officials of Judah, to come to the stone of Zoheleth, which is near En-rogel, where he sacrificed sheep, cattle and fattened calves. But he didn't invite Nathan the prophet, Benaiah, David's bodyguard, or his brother Solomon.

Nathan went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, and asked her, “Haven't you heard that Adonijah, son of Haggith, has become king, and His Majesty King David doesn't even know? Let me give you some advice so you can save your life, and that of your son Solomon. Go immediately to King David and ask him, ‘Didn't Your Majesty swear to me, your servant, saying, Your son Solomon will definitely be king after me and will sit on my throne? So why is Adonijah saying he's king?’

Then I'll come in while you're still there talking with the king and I'll confirm what you're saying.”

So Bathsheba went to see the king in his bedroom. He was very old and Abishag was looking after him. Bathsheba bowed low in respect. He asked her, “What is it that you want?”

She replied, “Your Majesty, you swore to me, your servant, by the Lord your God, ‘Your son Solomon will definitely be king after me and will sit on my throne.’ But now Adonijah has become king and Your Majesty doesn't even know. He has sacrificed plenty of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest, and Joab the army commander. But he didn't invite your servant Solomon. Now, Your Majesty, everyone in Israel is watching to see who you're going to say will be the next king. If you don't do anything, as soon as Your Majesty dies, I and my son Solomon will be considered traitors…”

Right then, while she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. The king was told, “Nathan the prophet is here.” Nathan went in to see the king. He bowed down with his face to the ground.

Nathan asked the king, “Your Majesty, you must have announced, ‘Adonijah will be king after me and will sit on my throne.’ For today he has gone and sacrificed many cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and he has invited all the king's sons, the army commanders, and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him, shouting, ‘Long live King Adonijah!’ But he didn't invite me, your servant, or Zadok the priest, or Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, or your son Solomon. If Your Majesty did this, you certainly didn't inform your officials as to who is meant to sit on your throne as the next king.”

King David replied, “Call Bathsheba for me.” Bathsheba came in and stood before the king.

The king swore a vow, saying, “As the Lord lives, who has saved me from all kinds of trouble, just as I swore to you previously by the Lord the God of Israel, telling you Solomon your son will be the next king and he will sit on my throne instead of me—I swear I will do this today.”

Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground, honoring the king and said, “May Your Majesty King David live forever.”

Then King David said, “Call for me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada.” When they arrived, the king told them, “Take the king's officials with you, and have them put Solomon on my own mule and lead him down to the Gihon Spring. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king of Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout out, ‘Long live King Solomon!’ Then follow him back up, and have him come and sit on my throne. He is to be king instead of me. I am placing him in charge as ruler of Israel and Judah.”

“Amen!” replied Benaiah, son of Jehoiada. “May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, confirm this! In the same way the Lord was with my lord the king may he be with Solomon, and may he make his reign even greater than the reign of my lord King David.”

Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, together with the Cherethites and Pelethites, went and placed Solomon on King David's mule, and led him down to the Gihon Spring. Zadok the priest took the horn containing olive oil from the Tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people shouted, “Long live King Solomon!” Everyone followed him, playing flutes and celebrating so happily that the sound shook the earth.

Adonijah and all his guests heard the noise as they were finishing eating. When Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he asked, “What's all this noise coming from the city?”

While he was speaking, Jonathan, son of Abiathar the priest, suddenly arrived. “Come on in,” said Adonijah. “A good man like you must be bringing good news.”

“Absolutely not!” Jonathan replied. “Our lord King David has made Solomon king! He sent Solomon to be anointed with Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites. They had him ride on the king's mule.

Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king at the Gihon Spring. Now they have returned, celebrating with shouts that echo round the city. That's the noise you're hearing. On top of that, Solomon is sitting on the royal throne, and the royal officials have also gone to voice their approval to our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make Solomon's reputation even more famous than your own, and may he make his reign greater than your reign.' The king on his bed bowed his head, and said, 'Praise the Lord, the God of Israel! Today he has provided a successor to sit on my throne, and I have been privileged to see it.'"

When all of the guests who were supporting Adonijah heard this they shook with fear. They got up and rushed out in different directions. Adonijah was terrified of Solomon, so he ran off. He went and grabbed hold of the horns of the altar.

Solomon was told, "Adonijah is terrified of Your Majesty. He has grabbed hold of the horns of the altar, saying, 'Let King Solomon swear today that he won't kill me, his servant!'"

Solomon replied, "If he is an honorable man, not one hair of his will fall to the ground. But if he shows himself to be evil, he will die."

King Solomon had Adonijah brought down from the altar, and he came and bowed down before King Solomon, who told him, "Go home."

The time of David's death was approaching, so he gave his son Solomon these last instructions:

"I am about to go the way everybody on earth must go. Be brave, and act like a man. Do what God orders you to do, and follow his ways. Keep his rules, his commands, and his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses, so you may be successful in everything you do, and in everything you give your attention to. If so, then the Lord will keep his promise to me when he said: 'If your descendants are to live right before me, faithfully and with complete commitment, then you will always have one of them on the throne of Israel.'

In addition, you know what Joab, son of Zeruiah, did to me and what he did to Abner, son of Ner, and Amasa, son of Jether, the two army commanders of Israel. He murdered them, spilling the blood of war during a time of peace. He smeared the blood of war on his belt and on his sandals. Do what you think is right, but don't let his gray head go down peacefully into the grave.

But be kind to the sons of Barzillai of Gilead. Bring them into your royal court, for they helped me when I ran from your brother Absalom.

Don't you forget Shimei, son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim who cursed me with painful words when I went to Mahanaim. When he met me at the Jordan I swore to him by the Lord, 'I will not kill you with the sword.' So don't leave him unpunished. You're a wise man and you know what you have to do to him —send him down into the grave with blood on his gray head."

Then David died and was buried in the City of David. His reign over Israel lasted forty years; seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. Solomon took over as king, sitting on the throne of his father David, and his hold on his kingdom was secure.

Adonijah, son of Haggith, went to see Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. She asked him, "Have you come here with good intentions?" He replied, "Yes, with good intentions."

"I have something I'd like to ask of you," he continued.

"Go on," she said.

"You know that the kingdom was mine," he declared, "and everyone in Israel was looking forward to me being their next king. But everything was turned upside down, and the kingdom passed to my brother, because that's what the Lord wanted. Now I've just one request to ask of you—please don't say no."

"Tell me," she said.

He went on, "Please talk to King Solomon for me because he won't turn you down. Ask him to give me Abishag from Shunem as my wife."

"Very well," Bathsheba replied. "I will talk to the king for you."

So Bathsheba went to talk to King Solomon for Adonijah. The king got up from his throne to meet her, and bowed before her. Then he sat back down and ordered another throne brought in for his mother. She sat to his right.

"I have just one small request to ask of you," she said. "Please don't say no."

The king replied, "Ask away, dear mother. I won't say no to you."

"Please give Abishag from Shunem to your brother Adonijah as his wife," she replied.

King Solomon answered his mother, "Why on earth are you asking me to give Abishag to Adonijah? You might as well ask me to give my brother the kingdom! He is my older brother, and Abiathar the priest and Joab, son of Zeruiah, are on his side!"

Then King Solomon vowed before the Lord, "May God punish me, really punish me, if what Adonijah has asked for doesn't cost him his life. So I vow, as the Lord lives, who affirmed me as king and placed me on the throne of my father David, making me the head of a dynasty as he promised, Adonijah shall be executed today."

King Solomon sent Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, who carried out the king's orders and executed Adonijah.

In the case of Abiathar, the high priest, the king told him, "Go home and take care of your fields. You should be condemned to death, but I will not kill you right now because you carried the Ark of the Lord God ahead of my father David and went through all his hard times with him." So Solomon dismissed Abiathar from his position as priest of the Lord, and so fulfilled what the Lord had said at Shiloh regarding the descendants of Eli.

When Joab heard the news he ran to the Lord's Tent and grabbed hold of the horns of the altar. (He had not supported Absalom's rebellion but he had supported Adonijah.) When King Solomon was told that Joab was seeking sanctuary by the altar, he sent Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, to execute him.

Benaiah went to the Lord's Tent and called to Joab, "The king orders you to come out!"

"No! I'll die here!" Joab replied.

Benaiah went back to the king and told him what Joab had said. "Do as he says," the king told Benaiah.

“Strike him down and bury him. In that way you will remove from me and my family the guilt of the innocent blood that Joab shed. The Lord will pay him back for the blood he shed, for without my father David's knowledge, he killed two good men who were better than he was. With his sword he killed Abner, son of Ner, commander of Israel's army, and Amasa, son of Jether, commander of Judah's army. May the responsibility for shedding their blood come back on Joab and his descendants forever; but may the Lord give peace and prosperity to David, his descendants, his family, and his dynasty forever.”

So Benaiah son of Jehoiada returned and killed Joab. He was buried at his home in the wilderness.

The king appointed Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, to take over Joab's role as army commander, and replaced Abiathar with Zadok the priest.

Then the king summoned Shimei and told him, “Go and build yourself a house in Jerusalem and stay there, but don't leave and go anywhere else. You should know for certain that the day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley you will die. Your death will be your own responsibility.”

“What Your Majesty says is fair,” Shimei replied. “Your servant will do as my lord the king has ordered.” Shimei lived in Jerusalem for a long time.

But three years later, two of Shimei's slaves escaped to Achish, son of Maacah, king of Gath. Shimei was told, “Look, your slaves are in Gath.” So Shimei saddled up his donkey and went to Achish in Gath to look for his slaves. He found them and brought them back from Gath.

Solomon was informed that Shimei had left Jerusalem to go to Gath, and had then returned.

The king summoned Shimei and asked him, “Didn't I vow to you by the Lord, didn't I warn you that the day you left and went somewhere else that you should know for certain that you would die? Didn't you reply to me, ‘What Your Majesty says is fair; I'll do as you ordered’? So why haven't you kept your vow to the Lord, and obeyed my orders?”

The king also told Shimei, “Deep down you know all the evil things you did to my father David. That's why the Lord will repay you for your evil. But I, King Solomon, will be blessed and David's dynasty will be kept safe in the presence of the Lord forever.”

The king ordered Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, to execute Shimei, so he went and killed Shimei. In this way Solomon's hold on the kingdom was made secure.

Solomon made a marriage alliance with Pharaoh of Egypt. He married Pharaoh's daughter and brought her to live in the City of David until he finished building his palace, the Lord's Temple, and the walls surrounding Jerusalem. In those days, however, the people still sacrificed on the high places because a Temple to honor the Lord hadn't yet been built.

Solomon showed he loved the Lord by following the instructions of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned offerings on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for it was the leading high place. Solomon presented one thousand burnt offerings on the altar there.

The Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon. God said to him, “Ask what you want me to give you.”

Solomon replied, “You showed your servant David, my father, great trustworthy love because he lived his life before you with faithfulness, doing what was right and committed to principle. You have continued to show this great trustworthy love by giving him a son to sit on his throne to this day.

Now, Lord God, you have made me king in place of my father David. But I am like an inexperienced young boy who doesn't know what to do. I, your servant, am here among your chosen people, a great people that are so many they cannot be counted. So please give me a mind that's receptive so I can rule your people well, understanding the difference between right and wrong, for who can rule this difficult people of yours?”

The Lord considered that what Solomon asked for was good. So God told him, “Because you asked for this, and you didn't ask for a long life, or wealth, or the death of your enemies, but instead you asked for understanding to know what is right, I am giving you what you asked for. I am giving you a mind that is wise, with an understanding of what is right, more than anyone else before you or after you. I am also giving you what you did not ask for, wealth and status—so much so that no king will compare to you for the whole of your life. And if you follow my ways by keeping my laws and my commands, as your father David did, I will give you a long life.”

Then Solomon woke up and realized he'd had a dream. He went back to Jerusalem, and stood in front of the Ark of the Lord's Agreement and he presented burnt offerings and friendship offerings, and he held a feast for all his officials.

Later two prostitutes came to the king and stood before him for judgment. One of the women spoke up, saying, “If it please Your Majesty: I share a house with this woman. I had a baby while she was living in the house. Three days after the birth of my baby, this woman also had a baby. We were together; there was no one else in the house, just the two of us. During the night this woman's son died because she rolled over on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while I was sleeping. She lay him close beside her to cuddle him, and she lay her dead son close beside me. When I got up in the morning to nurse my son I saw that he was dead. When I looked closely at him in the light I realized it wasn't my son.”

The other woman argued, “No! My son is the one that's alive. Your son is the one that's dead.” The first woman objected, “No! Your son is the one that's dead. My son is the one that's alive.” They went on quarrelling in front of the king.

The king intervened, saying, “So this woman says, ‘My son is the one that's alive. Your son is the one that's dead,’ while the other woman says, ‘No! Your son is the one that's dead. My son is the one that's alive.’”

“Bring me a sword,” the king ordered. So they brought him a sword. “Cut the child that's alive in two, and give half to one woman and half to another,” he commanded.

But the woman whose son was alive had so much love for him as a mother that she cried out to the king, “Please, Your Majesty, give her the boy! Don't kill him!” But the other woman said, “He won't be mine or yours —cut him in two!”

The king gave his verdict. “Give the child that's alive to the first woman,” he ordered. “On no account kill him, for she is his real mother.”

When everyone in Israel heard about the verdict the king had delivered, they had great respect for the king, because they recognized the wisdom God had given him to judge rightly.

King Solomon ruled over all of Israel. These were his officials: Azariah, son of Zadok, was the priest; Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha, were the king's secretaries. Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the royal records. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was the army commander. Zadok and Abiathar were priests. Azariah, son of Nathan, was in charge of the governors. Zabud, son of Nathan, was a priest and the king's counselor. Ahishar was the palace manager. Adoniram, son of Abda, was in charge of those forced to work for the king.

Solomon had twelve area governors whose responsibilities covered the whole of Israel, providing food for the king and his household. Each one in turn arranged supplies for one month of the year.

Their names were: Ben-hur, in the hill country of Ephraim;

Ben-deker in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-shemesh and Elon-beth-hanan;

Ben-hesed in Arubboth (Socoh and all the land of Hepher was his);

Ben-abinadab, in the whole of Naphath-dor (Taphath, the daughter of Solomon, was his wife);

Baana, son of Ahilud, in Taanach and Megiddo, the whole of Beth-shan near Zarethan below Jezreel, and from Beth-shan to Abel-meholah and across to Jokmeam;

Ben-geber, in Ramoth-gilead (the towns of Jair, son of Manasseh, in Gilead belonged to him, as well as the region of Argob in Bashan, with sixty great cities having walls and bronze bars);

Ahinadab, son of Iddo, in Mahanaim;

Ahimaaz, in Naphtali (he had married Basemath the daughter of Solomon);

Baana, son of Hushai, in Asher and in Aloth;

Jehoshaphat, son of Paruah, in Issachar;

Shimei, son of Ela, in Benjamin;

Geber son of Uri in the land of Gilead (the former country of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and of Og, king of Bashan. There was also a governor who was over the land of Judah).

Judah and Israel had become as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They ate, they drank, they were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, right up to the border of Egypt. They presented tribute to Solomon and served him during his lifetime. The food required every day for Solomon's court was thirty cors of the best flour and sixty cors of meal; ten fattened cattle, twenty range cattle, one hundred sheep, as well as deer, gazelles, roe deer, and fattened poultry. For Solomon ruled over the whole region west of the Euphrates, from Tiphsah to Gaza—over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates. And he had peace on all sides around him. He had peace on every border. During Solomon's lifetime, everyone in Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan to Beersheba. Each one had their own vine and fig tree. Solomon had 40,000 stalls for his chariot horses, and 12,000 charioteers. Every month the area governors provided in turn food for King Solomon and all who ate at his table. They made sure that nothing was missing. They also delivered barley and straw where they were needed for the chariot horses and cart horses.

God gave to Solomon wisdom, very great discernment, and understanding as extensive as the sand on the seashore. Solomon's wisdom was greater than that of all the Eastern wise men, greater than all of Egypt's wisdom. He was wiser than anyone, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, wiser than Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. His reputation spread through the nations around. Solomon composed three thousand proverbs and one thousand and five songs. He was able to discuss knowledge of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall. He taught about animals, birds, reptiles, and fish. People from all nations came to hear Solomon's wisdom. They were sent by all the kings of the earth, who had heard about his wisdom.

When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father, he sent ambassadors to Solomon because Hiram had always been David's friend. So Solomon sent this message back to Hiram, “As you know, my father David was not able to build a Temple to honor the Lord his God because of the wars fought against him from every direction, until the Lord had conquered his enemies. But now the Lord my God has given me peace all around—no enemies, no bad things happening.

So I plan to build a Temple to honor the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David. He said to him, ‘Your son whom I will place on your throne to succeed you will build the Temple to honor me.’ So please order some cedars of Lebanon to be cut down for me. My workers will assist your workers, and I will pay your workers at the rate that you decide, for you know that we don't have anyone who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.”

When Hiram heard Solomon's message, he was very happy and said, “Praise the Lord today, for he has given David a wise son to lead this great nation!” Hiram sent this reply to Solomon:

“Thank you for your message. As for the cedar and cypress timber, I will do everything you want. My workers will bring the logs down from Lebanon to the sea, and I will have them floated in rafts by sea to wherever you decide. I will have the rafts broken apart there, and you can take the logs away. In return I would like you to provide food for my household.”

So Hiram provided Solomon with as much cedar and cypress timber as he wanted, Solomon gave Hiram 20,000 cors of wheat for food and 20,000 cors of olive oil for his household. Solomon provided this to Hiram every year. The Lord gave Solomon wisdom just as he had promised him. Hiram and Solomon had a good

relationship and they made a peace treaty with each other.

King Solomon drafted a labor force of 30,000 from all of Israel. He sent them in shifts of 10,000 each month to Lebanon, so that they were one month in Lebanon and two months at home, Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Solomon had 70,000 porters and 80,000 stonecutters in the hill country, as well as 3,300 foremen he placed in charge of the workers. Following the king's orders, they quarried large blocks of stone that were expensive to produce, and laid these dressed stones as the foundation for the Temple. So Solomon's and Hiram's builders, together with the Gebalites, cut the stone. They prepared the timber and stone to build the Temple.

Four hundred and eighty years after the Israelites left Egypt, in the fourth year of King Solomon's reign, in the month of Ziv, Solomon began building the Temple of the Lord. The Temple King Solomon built for the Lord measured sixty cubits long by twenty cubits wide by thirty cubits high. The entrance room at the front of the Temple was twenty cubits wide. It ran the whole width of the Temple and projected out ten cubits in front of the Temple. He had latticed windows made to be placed high up in the Temple.

He also had a structure built against the outer wall of the Temple, both the outer and the inner sanctuary, to provide a series of side rooms. The ground floor measured five cubits wide, the first floor six cubits, and the second floor seven cubits. In addition he had offset ledges placed all the way around the outside, so that beams would not have to be inserted into the Temple walls. When the Temple was built the stones were finished at the quarry so that no noise from any hammer, ax, or any iron tool was heard in the Temple during construction. The entrance to the ground floor was on the south side of the Temple. Stairs led to the first floor, and then on to the second floor. So Solomon finished building the Temple, covering it with a roof made of cedar rafters and planks. He built the external structure along the whole of the Temple. It was five cubits high, joined to the Temple with cedar joists.

The Lord sent this message to Solomon, telling him, “About this Temple you are building: if you follow what I have said, fulfilling my requirements and keeping my commandments in what you do, I will keep the promise I made to your father David through you. I will live among the Israelites and will not abandon Israel, my people.”

Solomon finished building the Temple. He lined the walls with cedar panels from floor to ceiling and he covered the floor of the Temple with cypress boards. He sectioned off twenty cubits at the rear of the Temple with boards of cedar from floor to ceiling, making an inner sanctuary as the Most Holy Place. The main Temple in front of this room measured forty cubits long. The cedar panels inside the Temple were decorated with carvings of gourds and open flowers. Everything was lined with cedar—none of the stone was visible.

He also had the inner sanctuary made within the Temple where the Ark of the Lord's Agreement would be placed. The inner sanctuary measured twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high. He had the interior covered with a coating with pure gold, as well as the altar of cedar. Solomon had the whole of the inside of the Temple covered with pure gold, He had gold chains stretched across the front of the inner sanctuary, which was also covered with gold. He covered the whole inside of the Temple with a coating of gold until it was all finished. He also covered with gold the entire altar for the inner sanctuary.

He had two cherubim made out of olive wood for the inner sanctuary, each one ten cubits tall. Both wings of the cherub measured five cubits, making a total wingspan of ten cubits. The other cherub was also ten cubits tall, since they were identical both in size and shape. Both cherubs were ten cubits tall. He had the cherubim placed inside the inner sanctuary of the Temple. Since their wings were fully spread, a wing of the first cherub touched one wall, a wing of the second cherub touched the other wall, and in the middle of the Temple their wings touched. The cherubim were also covered with a gold coating. He had all the Temple walls, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, carved with designs of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. He also had the floor of the Temple covered with gold, both the inner and outer sanctuaries.

He had doors of olive wood made for the entrance to the inner sanctuary, together with a lintel and doorposts that had five sides. These olive wood double doors had carved into them designs of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers. The cherubim and palm trees carvings were covered with beaten gold. Similarly he had four-sided doorposts of olive wood made for the entrance to the sanctuary. Its doors were made of cypress wood, each with two hinged panels. He had them carved with designs of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and covered them with gold beaten evenly over the carvings. Solomon had the inner courtyard built with three courses of dressed stone and one of cedar beams. The foundation of the Lord's Temple was laid in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, in the month of Ziv. The Temple was finished exactly as specified and planned in Solomon's eleventh year, in the eighth month, the month of Bul. So it took him seven years to build the Temple.

However, it took Solomon thirteen years to finish building the whole of his palace. He built the House of the Forest of Lebanon— a hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. There were four rows of cedar pillars that supported cedar beams. The cedar roof of the house was on top of the beams that rested on the pillars. There were forty-five beams, fifteen in each row. The windows were placed high up, in three rows facing each other. All the doorways and door casings had rectangular frames, the openings facing each other in sets of three.

He also had the Hall of Columns made—forty cubits long and thirty cubits wide. It had a porch in front, its canopy also supported by columns. The throne room where he sat as judge was called the Hall of Justice, lined with cedar panels from floor to ceiling.

Solomon's own palace where he lived was in a courtyard behind the porch, made in a similar way to the Temple. He also had a palace made for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he'd married.

All these buildings were built using stone blocks that were expensive to produce. They were cut to size and trimmed with saws on the inside and outside. These stones were used from the foundation to the eaves, from the outside of the building all the way to the great courtyard. The foundations were laid with very large top-quality stones, between eight and ten cubits long. On these were placed top-quality stones, cut to size, along with cedar timber. Around the great courtyard, the inner courtyard, and the porch of the Lord's Temple were three courses of dressed stone and a course of cedar beams.

King Solomon sent for Hiram from Tyre. He was the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was from Tyre, a craftsman who worked in bronze. Hiram had great expertise, understanding and being familiar with all kinds of bronze work. He came to King Solomon and carried out all that the king required.

He cast two columns in bronze. They were both eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference. He also cast two capitals in bronze to place on top of the columns. Each capital was five cubits high. He made a network of lattice using interlinked chains for both capitals, seven for each one. Around the lattice network he made two rows of ornamental pomegranates to cover the capitals on the top of both the columns. The capitals placed on top of columns in the porch were in the shape of lilies, four cubits high. On the capitals of both columns were the two hundred pomegranates in rows that encircled them, just above the rounded part that was next to the chain network. He erected the columns at the entrance porch of the Temple. The southern column he named Jachin, and the northern column he named Boaz. The capitals on the columns were in the shape of lilies. And so the work on the columns was finished.

Then he made the Sea of cast metal. Its shape was circular, and measured ten cubits from edge to edge, five cubits in height, and thirty cubits in circumference. Below the edge it was decorated with ornamental gourds that encircled it, ten per cubit all the way around. They were in two rows cast as one piece with the Sea. The Sea stood on twelve metal bulls. Three faced to the north, three to the west, three to the south, and three to the east. The Sea was placed on them, with their rears toward the center. It was as thick as the width of a hand, and its edge was like the flared edge of a cup or a lily flower. It held two thousand baths.

He also made ten carts to carry basins. The carts measured four cubits long, four cubits wide, and three cubits high. This is how they were put together: side panels were attached to uprights. Both the side panels and the uprights were decorated with lions, bulls, and cherubim. Above and below the lions and the bulls were decorative wreaths.

Each cart had four bronze wheels with bronze axles. A basin rested on four supports that had decorative wreaths on each side. At the top of each cart was a round opening like a pedestal to hold the basin. The opening was one cubit deep, and one and a half cubits wide. The opening had carvings around it. The panels of the cart were square, not round. The four wheels were under the panels, and the axles of the wheels were attached to the cart. Each wheel measured one and a half cubits in diameter. The wheels were made in the same way as chariot wheels; their axles, rims, spokes, and hubs were all made by casting.

Each cart had four handles, one on each corner, made as part of the stand. There was a ring on the top of the cart a half cubit wide. The supports and panels were cast as one piece with the top of the cart. He had designs of cherubim, lions, and palm trees engraved on the panels, supports, and frame, wherever there was space, with decorative wreaths all around. This is how he made the ten carts, with the same casts, size, and shape. Then he made ten bronze basins. Each one held forty baths and measured four cubits across, one basin for each of the ten carts. He placed five carts on the south side of the Temple and five on the north side. He placed the Sea on the south side, by the southeast corner of the Temple. He also made the pots, shovels, and bowls.

So Hiram finished making everything required by King Solomon for the Temple of the Lord: the two columns; the two capitals shaped like bowls on top the columns; the two chain networks that covered the capitals shaped like bowls on top of the columns; the four hundred ornamental pomegranates for the chain networks (in two rows for the chain networks that covered the capitals on top of the columns); the ten carts; the ten basins on the carts; the Sea; the twelve bulls under the Sea; and the pots, shovels, and bowls. Everything that Hiram made for King Solomon in the Temple of the Lord was made of polished bronze. The king had them cast in molds made of clay in the Jordan valley between Succoth and Zarethan. Solomon did not weigh anything that had been made because there was just so much —the weight of bronze used could not be measured. Solomon also had made all the items for the Temple of the Lord: the golden altar; the golden table where the Bread of the Presence was placed; the lampstands made of pure gold that stood in front of the inner sanctuary, five on the right and five on the left; the flowers, lamps, and tongs that were all made of pure gold; the basins, wick trimmers, bowls, ladles, and censers that again were all made of pure gold; and the gold hinges for the doors of the inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place, in addition to the doors of the main hall of the Temple. In this way all King Solomon's work for the Temple of the Lord was completed. Then Solomon brought in the items his father David had dedicated, the special objects made of silver, the gold, and the Temple furnishings, and he placed them in the treasuries of the Temple of the Lord.

Then Solomon summoned before him in Jerusalem the elders of Israel, including all the heads of the tribes and the family leaders of the Israelites. He instructed them to bring up with them the Ark of the Lord's Agreement from Zion, the City of David. All the men of Israel assembled before King Solomon at the festival which is held in the seventh month, the month of Ethanim.

When all the elders of Israel had gathered, the priests picked up the Ark and brought the Ark of the Lord and the Tent of Meeting with all its holy items. The priests and Levites carried them up. In front of the

Ark, King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel who had gathered there with him sacrificed many, many sheep and bulls—so numerous they couldn't be counted! Then the priests carried the Ark of the Lord's Agreement to its place in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the Most Holy Place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the place where the Ark was, covering the Ark and its carrying poles. The poles were so long that the ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside. They are there to this day.

There was nothing in the Ark apart from the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord had made an agreement with the Israelites after they came out of the land of Egypt. When the priests left the Holy Place, the cloud filled the Temple of the Lord. Due to the cloud, the priests could not stay there to carry out their service, for the glory of the Lord had filled the Lord's Temple. Then Solomon said: “Lord, you said that you would live in the thick cloud. Now I have built for you a majestic Temple, a place where you may live for ever.”

The king turned around to the whole assembly of Israel who were standing there, and blessed them, saying, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who by his own power has fulfilled the promise he made to my father David when he said, ‘Since the day I brought my people Israel out of Egypt I have not chosen any town of the tribes of Israel as the place to build a Temple to honor me. But I have chosen David as king over my people Israel.’

My father David really wanted to build a Temple to honor the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord told my father David, ‘You had the desire to build a Temple to honor me, and it was good that you really wanted to do this. But it won't be you who will build this Temple, but your son who is to be born to you—he will build the Temple to honor me.'

Now the Lord has kept his promise that he made. I have succeeded my father David, and I sit on the throne of Israel, just as the Lord promised. I have built the Temple to honor the Lord, the God of Israel. I have provided a place there for the Ark, which contains the agreement of the Lord that he made with our forefathers when he led them out of the land of Egypt.”

Then Solomon stood in front of the altar of the Lord before the whole assembly of Israel and held out his hands toward heaven. He said, “Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below. You keep your agreement of trustworthy love with your servants, those who are totally committed to following you. You have kept the promise you made to your servant David, my father. You yourself promised, and by your own power you have fulfilled it today. So now, Lord, God of Israel, please also keep the promise you made to your servant, my father David, when you said: ‘You will never fail to have a descendant sit in my presence on the throne of Israel, as long as they make sure to follow me as you have done.’ Now, God of Israel, please keep the promise you made to your servant, my father David.

But will God really live here on earth? The heavens, even highest heaven, cannot contain you, much less this Temple I have built! Please hear the prayer of your servant and his request, Lord my God. Please hear the appeals and the prayers that your servant is presenting before you today. May you watch over this Temple day and night, caring for the place where you said you would be honored. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place, and may you hear the request of your servant and your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Please hear from heaven where you live. May you hear and forgive.

When someone sins against another and is required to take an oath before your altar in this Temple, listen from heaven—act and judge your servants. Pay back the guilty; vindicate and reward those who do right.

When your people Israel are defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they come back in repentance to you, praying for forgiveness in this Temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave to them and their forefathers.

If the skies are closed shut and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and if they come back in repentance to you, turning away from their sin because you have punished them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the good way so that they can walk in it, and send rain on the earth that you have given to your people as their possession.

If there is famine in the land, or disease, or blight or mildew on the crops, or if there are locusts or caterpillars, or if an enemy comes to lay siege to the towns in the land—it can be whatever kind of plague or whatever kind of disease— then whatever kind of prayer or whatever kind of appeal is made by anyone or all your people Israel, (in fact anyone who, knowing their problems and pains, prays toward this Temple), then hear from heaven, the place where you live, and forgive. Give according to the way they live their lives, for you know what people are really like inside, and you alone know the true character of people. Then they will respect you and follow your ways all the time they live in the land you gave to our forefathers.

As for the foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel but who come from a distant land, having heard of your great nature and power and ability to help, when they come and pray toward this Temple, then hear from heaven, the place where you live, and give them what they're asking. That way, everyone on earth will come to know and respect you, just as your own people Israel do. They will also know that this Temple I have built is dedicated to you.

When your people go to fight against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to you towards the city you have chosen and the house I have built to honor you, then hear from heaven what they are praying and asking for, and support their cause.

If they sin against you—and there is nobody who does not sin—you may become angry with them and hand them over to an enemy who takes them away as

prisoners to a foreign land, near or far away. But if they think again in their land of captivity and repent and plead for mercy from you, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly,' and they come back to you with complete sincerity in their thoughts and attitudes there in their land of captivity; and they pray towards the land you gave their forefathers, the city you chose, and the Temple I have built to honor you, then hear from heaven, the place where you live, respond and support their cause. Forgive your people who have sinned against you, all the rebellious acts they have committed against you. Please make those who have captured them show mercy to them. For they are your people—they belong to you! You led them out of Egypt, out of the middle of a furnace used for smelting iron.

May you pay attention to the requests of your servant, and to the requests of your people Israel, and may you respond whenever they call out to you. For you set them apart from all the nations of the world as a people who belonged to you, just as you declared through your servant Moses when you led our fathers out of Egypt."

After Solomon finished praying all these prayers and requests to the Lord, he stood up before the altar of the Lord, where he had been kneeling with his hands held out toward heaven.

Solomon stood, and in a loud voice he blessed the whole assembly of Israel, saying, "Praise the Lord, who has given rest to his people Israel in accordance with everything he promised. Not a single word has failed among all the good promises he made through his servant Moses. May the Lord our God be with us in the same way he was with our forefathers. May he never leave us or abandon us. May he help us to come to him, to follow all his ways and to keep the commandments, statutes, and regulations he ordered our forefathers to observe. May these words of mine I have used to make my request in the Lord's presence be before the Lord our God day and night. In that way he may support the cause of his servant and of his people Israel as is needed every day, in order that everyone on the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is no other! So make sure you are completely committed to the Lord our God just as you are today, and be careful to follow his statutes and to keep his commandments."

Then the king together with all of Israel offered sacrifices before the Lord. Solomon presented as friendship offerings to the Lord 22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep. In this way the king and all the people of Israel dedicated the Lord's Temple.

On that same day, the king dedicated the center of the courtyard in front of the Lord's Temple. There he presented burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the friendship offerings, since the bronze altar in the Lord's presence was too small to hold all these offerings.

Then Solomon together with all of Israel observed the festival before the Lord our God for seven days, and then another seven days—fourteen days in all. It was a large assembly of people, who came from as far away as Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. One day later Solomon sent the people home. They blessed the king and went home, full of joy and happy for all the good things that the Lord had done for his servant David and for his people Israel.

After Solomon had finished the Lord's Temple and the royal palace, having accomplished everything he'd wanted to do, the Lord appeared to him a second time, as he had appeared to him at Gibeon. The Lord told him, "I have heard your prayer and your request to me. I have dedicated this Temple you have built by placing my name on it forever; I will always watch over it and take care of it.

As for you, if you follow my ways as your father David did, doing everything I've told you to do, and if you keep my laws and regulations, then I will make your throne secure forever. I made this agreement with your father David, telling him, 'You will always have a descendant to rule over Israel.'

But if you or your descendants turn away and do not keep the laws and the commandments I have given you, and if you go and serve and worship other gods, then I will cut Israel off from the land I have given them. I will banish from my presence this Temple I have dedicated to my honor, and I will make it an object lesson of ridicule among the nations. This Temple will become a pile of rubble. All who pass by it will be appalled and will hiss, saying, 'Why has the Lord acted in such a way to this land and this Temple?' The answer will come, 'Because they abandoned the Lord their God, who brought their forefathers out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshiping them and serving them. That's why the Lord has brought all this trouble upon them.'"

It took twenty years for Solomon to construct the two buildings—the Temple of the Lord and his own palace. After this, King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram king of Tyre, because Hiram had provided him with all the cedar and juniper and gold he wanted. But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the cities that Solomon had given him, he was not happy with them. "What are these towns you have given me, my brother?" asked Hiram. He called them the land of Cabul, the name they are known by to this day. Even so, Hiram sent the king 120 talents of gold in payment.

Here is the account of the forced labor that King Solomon imposed to build the Lord's Temple, his own palace, the terraces, and the wall of Jerusalem, as well as Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had attacked and captured Gezer. He had set it on fire, and killed the Canaanites living in the town. He had then given it as a wedding dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife. Solomon rebuilt Gezer and lower Beth-horon, Baalath and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land of Judah, and all of Solomon's towns for storage, and the towns for his chariots and for his horsemen, plus whatever Solomon wanted to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and throughout his entire kingdom.

The descendants of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites (people who were not Israelites) who remained in the land—those whom the Israelites were unable to destroy completely—were conscripted by Solomon to work as forced laborers, as they continue to do to this day. But Solomon did not enslave any of the Israelites. They were his soldiers, officials, commanders, captains, chariot commanders,

and horsemen. They were also the chief officers in charge of Solomon's programs: 550 in command of the people who carried out the work.

Once Pharaoh's daughter had moved from the City of David to the palace that Solomon had built for her, he built the city terraces.

Three times each year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and friendship offerings on the altar he had built for the Lord, burning incense before the Lord with them, and so fulfilled what was required at the Temple.

King Solomon built a fleet of ships at Ezion-geber, which is near Eloth on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. Hiram sent his sailors who knew the sea to serve in the fleet with Solomon's men. They sailed to Ophir and brought back 420 talents of gold from there and delivered it to Solomon.

The queen of Sheba heard how famous Solomon was, so she came to Jerusalem to test him with tough questions. She brought with her a very large entourage, with camels loaded with spices, large amounts of gold, and precious gemstones. She came to Solomon and asked him about everything she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing he couldn't explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw Solomon's wisdom, and the palace he had built, the food on the table, how his officials lived, how his servants operated and how they were dressed, the clothes of the waiters, and the burnt offerings he presented at the Lord's Temple, she was so astonished she could hardly breathe.

She told the king, “It's true what I heard in my own country about your proverbs and your wisdom! But I didn't believe what they told me until I came and saw with my own eyes. In fact, I wasn't told the half of it—the extent of your wisdom far exceeds what I heard! How happy your people must be! How happy those who work for you, who stand here every day listening to your wisdom! Praise the Lord your God who is so pleased with you, who placed you on his throne as king to rule on his behalf. Because of the love of your God for Israel he has made them secure forever, and he has made you king over them to do what is fair and right.”

She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold, huge amounts of spices and precious stones. Never before had there been spices like those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(Hiram's fleet of ships brought gold from Ophir, and also carried algum wood and precious stones. The king used the algum wood to make steps for the Temple and for the royal palace, and into lyres and harps for the musicians. Nothing like them had ever been seen before in the land of Judah.)

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she wanted, whatever she asked for. This was in addition to the usual gifts he had generously given her. Then she and her attendants returned home to her own country.

The weight of gold that Solomon received each year was 666 talents, not including that received from traders and merchants, and all the kings of Arabia and governors of the land.

King Solomon made two hundred shields of hammered gold. Each shield required six hundred shekels of hammered gold. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold. Each of these shields required three gold minas. The king placed them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

The king also made a great throne of ivory, and covered it with pure gold. The throne had six steps, with a rounded top at the back. There were armrests on both sides of the seat, with lions standing beside the armrests. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one on opposite ends of each step. Nothing like this had ever been made for any kingdom.

All of King Solomon's drinking cups were gold, and all the utensils of the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. No silver was used, because it was not valued in the days of Solomon.

The king had a fleet of ships from Tarshish crewed by Hiram's sailors. Once every three years the ships of Tarshish would arrive with a cargo of gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

King Solomon was greater than any other king on earth in wealth and wisdom. The whole world wanted to meet Solomon to hear the wisdom that God had placed in his mind. Year after year, every visitor would bring gifts—articles of silver and gold, clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

Solomon accumulated 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen. He kept them in the chariot towns, and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar wood as plentiful as sycamore-figs in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and Kue—the royal merchants purchased them in Kue. A chariot imported from Egypt cost six hundred shekels of silver, and a horse a hundred and fifty. They also exported them to all the Hittite kings, and to the Aramean kings.

King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, there were women from the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from the nations that the Lord had warned the Israelites, “You must not intermarry with them, for they will undoubtedly convince you to worship their gods.” Yet Solomon because of his love for women held on to them. He had seven hundred wives of noble birth and three hundred concubines. His wives did convince him to turn away from the Lord.

As Solomon grew old, his wives led him to follow other gods, and he did not commit himself wholeheartedly to the Lord as his father David had done. Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the vile god of the Ammonites. This was how Solomon did evil in the Lord's sight, and was not completely dedicated to the Lord as his father David was.

It was then that Solomon built a high place of worship for Chemosh, the vile god of the people of Moab, and for Molech, the vile god of the Ammonites, on a hill east of Jerusalem. He built places of worship for all his foreign wives where they burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.

The Lord became angry with Solomon because he had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. The Lord had warned Solomon about this—that he should not worship other gods. But Solomon did not listen to the Lord's warning. So the Lord told him, “Since this is what you have done,

and since you have not kept my agreement and my laws that I commanded, I will definitely take the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. However, for the sake of your father David, I will not do this in your lifetime—I will take it away from your son. Even then I will not take away the whole kingdom. I will leave your son with one tribe for the sake of my servant David, and for the sake of my chosen city Jerusalem."

Then the Lord encouraged Hadad the Edomite of Edom's royal family to oppose Solomon. Previously, when David was in Edom, Joab the commander of the Israelite army had gone to bury some of his soldiers who had been killed, and had slaughtered every male in Edom. Joab and the whole Israelite army had spent six months there destroying them all.

But Hadad and some Edomites who had been his father's officials had run away to Egypt—Hadad was just a boy at the time. They left Midian and went to Paran. Then, along with some people from Paran, they went to Egypt, to Pharaoh king of Egypt. He provided Hadad with a house and food, and also assigned him land as a gift. Pharaoh became very friendly with Hadad, and he gave him the sister of his own wife to marry, Queen Tahpenes' sister. She gave birth to his son called Genubath. Tahpenes brought him up in Pharaoh's palace with Pharaoh's own children.

However, when news reached Hadad in Egypt that both David and Joab, the commander of the army, had died, Hadad said to Pharaoh, "Let me leave and return to my own country."

Pharaoh asked him, "Is there anything that you have lacked here with me that now you want to go back to your own country?"

"No, there's nothing," Hadad replied, "but please just let me go home."

God also encouraged Rezon, son of Eliada, to oppose Solomon. He had run away from his master Hadadezer, king of Zobah. After David had destroyed Zobah's army, Rezon gathered around him a rebel band, and became their leader. They went and settled in Damascus, where they took over. Rezon was Israel's enemy throughout Solomon's lifetime which added to the trouble Hadad caused. Rezon really hated Israel, and was the ruler of Aram.

In addition, Jeroboam, son of Nebat, rebelled against the king. One of Solomon's officials, he was an Ephraimite from Zeredah. His mother was a widow called Zeruah.

This is why he rebelled against the king: Solomon had built the terraces and had closed the gap in the wall of the city of his father David. Jeroboam was a man of ability, and when Solomon realized how successful he was in what he did, he placed him in command of all the forced labor of the tribes of Joseph.

Around that time the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite met Jeroboam on the road as he was leaving Jerusalem. Ahijah had wrapped himself in a new cloak, and the two of them were by themselves in the countryside. Ahijah took the new cloak he was wearing and ripped it up into twelve pieces. He said, "Jeroboam, take ten pieces. This is what the Lord God of Israel says. 'Jeroboam, I am the Lord, the God of Israel, and I am going to take Solomon's kingdom from him and give you ten of the tribes. One tribe will be left for the sake of my servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city I chose from among all the tribes of Israel. This is because they have abandoned me and bowed down in worship of Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh, god of the Moabites, and Molech, god of the Ammonites. They have not followed my ways; they have not done what is right in my sight; they have not kept my commandments and laws as David, Solomon's father, did.

Even so, I'm not going to take the whole kingdom from Solomon, because I made him ruler for his lifetime for the sake of my servant David. I chose him because he kept my commandments and laws. But I will take from his son's kingdom ten tribes and give them to you. I will give his son one tribe, so that my servant David will always have a descendant like a lamp before me in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to be honored. I will take you, and you shall reign over everything that you want. You will be king over Israel. If you accept everything that I command you, if you follow my ways, if you do what is right in my sight, keeping my laws and commandments as my servant David did, then I will be with you. I will set up for you a dynasty that lasts, just as I did for David, and I will give Israel to you. I will punish David's descendants because of this, but not forever.'"

So Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam. But Jeroboam ran away to Egypt, to Shishak king of Egypt. He remained there until Solomon's death.

The record of the rest of the acts of Solomon, including everything he did, and his wisdom, are written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon. Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all of Israel for a total of forty years. Solomon died and was buried in the city of his father David. His son Rehoboam succeeded him as king.

Rehoboam went to Shechem because that is where the whole of Israel had gone to make him king. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was still in Egypt when he heard about this. (He had run away to Egypt to escape from King Solomon and was living there.) The Israelite leaders sent for him. Jeroboam and the whole assembly of Israelites went to talk with Rehoboam. "Your father placed a heavy burden on us," they told him. "But now if you lighten the load from when we served your father and the heavy demands he imposed on us, we will serve you."

Rehoboam answered, "Go away and come back in three days' time." So the people left.

King Rehoboam asked for advice from the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was alive. "How do you advise me to reply to these people about this?" he asked.

They replied, "If you are a servant to these people today, if you serve them and answer them, by speaking kindly to them, they will always serve you."

But Rehoboam dismissed the advice of the elders. Instead he consulted the young men he had grown up with, and who were close to him. He asked them, "What response do you advise that we send back to these people who have told me, 'Lighten the burden your father put on us'?"

The young men he had grown up with told him, "This is what you have to tell these people who said

to you, 'Your father made our burden heavy, but you should make it lighter.' This is what you should answer them: 'My little finger is thicker than my father's waist! My father placed a heavy burden on you, and I will make it even heavier. My father punished you with whips; I will punish you with scorpions.'"

Three days' later, Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, because the king had told them, "Come back in three days time."

The king answered the people sharply. Dismissing the advice of the elders, he replied using the advice of the young men. He said, "My father placed a heavy burden on you, and I will make it even heavier. My father punished you with whips; I will punish you with scorpions."

The king did not listen to what the people said, for this change in circumstances was from the Lord, to fulfill what the Lord had told Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

When all the Israelites saw that the king wasn't listening to them, they told the king: "What share do we have in David, and what part do we have in the son of Jesse? Go home, Israel! You're on your own, house of David!"

So all the Israelites went home. However, Rehoboam still ruled over the Israelites who lived in Judah.

Then King Rehoboam sent out Hadoram, who was in charge of forced labor, but the Israelites stoned him to death. King Rehoboam quickly jumped into his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem.

As a result, Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

When all the Israelites heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent for him, summoning him to the assembly and made him king over all Israel. Only the tribe of Judah was left to the house of David.

When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered the men from the households of Judah and Benjamin— 180,000 chosen warriors—to go and fight against Israel to bring the kingdom back to Rehoboam, son of Solomon. But a message from the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God that said, "Say to Rehoboam, son of Solomon, king of Judah, to Judah and Benjamin, and to the rest of the people: 'This is what the Lord says. Don't fight against your Israelite relatives. Every one of you, go home! For it was me that made this happen.'" So they obeyed what the Lord told them and went home, as the Lord had said.

Jeroboam strengthened the town of Shechem in the hill country of Ephraim and lived there. From there he went and built Penuel.

Jeroboam said to himself, "The kingdom could easily return to the house of David. When people from here go to offer sacrifices at the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem, they will transfer their loyalty back to Rehoboam, king of Judah. Then they will kill me and go back to King Rehoboam."

So after taking advice, the king had two golden calves made, and he told the people, "Don't bother going to Jerusalem any more. Look, Israel, here are your gods who led you out of the land of Egypt." He placed one in Bethel, and the other in Dan. This action brought about sin, because the people went as far north as Dan to worship the idol there.

In addition Jeroboam had shrines built on high places and appointed as priests all kinds of people who were not Levites. Jeroboam initiated a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, just like the festival held in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar. He made this offering in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves he had made, and appointed priests in Bethel for the high places he had built. So on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, a month he had chosen himself, Jeroboam offered sacrifices on the altar he had set up in Bethel. In this way he instituted a festival for the Israelites, offering sacrifices on the altar and burning incense.

The Lord ordered a man of God from Judah to go to Bethel. He arrived just as Jeroboam was standing beside the altar about to present a burnt offering. He shouted out the Lord's condemnation of the altar: "Altar, altar, this is what the Lord says. A son will be born to the house of David. His name will be Josiah, and on you he will sacrifice the priests of the high places who burn offerings on you, and human bones will be burned on you." The same day the man of God gave a sign, saying, "This is the sign to prove that the Lord has spoken. Look! The altar will be split apart, and the ashes on it will spill out."

When King Jeroboam heard the condemnation the man of God had shouted out against the altar in Bethel, he pointed his hand at him and said, "Arrest him!" But the hand the king had pointed at him had become paralyzed and he couldn't draw it back. The altar split apart, and the ashes spilled out from it, fulfilling the sign that the man of God had given from the Lord.

Then the king said to the man of God, "Please plead with the Lord your God—pray for me that I may have my hand back!" The man of God pleaded with the Lord, and the king was given back the use of his hand as it was before.

Then the king said to the man of God, "Come to my home and have a meal so I can give you a present."

But the man of God told the king, "Even if you gave me half of everything you own, I still wouldn't go with you. In fact I refuse to eat or drink anything in this place. The Lord ordered me not to eat or drink anything, and not to return by the way I came." So he went a different way—he did not return the way he had come to Bethel.

It so happened that an old prophet lived in Bethel. His sons came and told him everything the man of God had done that day in Bethel. They also told their father what the man had said to the king. "Which way did he go?" their father asked them. So his sons showed him the way taken by the man of God from Judah. "Saddle up a donkey for me," he told his sons. They saddled up a donkey and he got on.

He rode after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak tree. "Are you the man of God who came from Judah?" he asked him. "Yes I am," the man replied.

"Come home with me and have something to eat," he told him.

"I can't turn around and go with you, and I won't eat or drink with you in this place," the man of God replied. "The Lord ordered me, saying 'You must not

eat or drink anything there, or return by the way you came.'"

But the old prophet told him, "I am also a prophet, just like you. An angel told me God said, 'Take him home with you so that he can have something to eat and drink'" But he was lying to him.

So the man of God went back with him, and ate and drank in his house. As they were sitting at the table, a message from the Lord came to the prophet who had brought him back. He called out to the man of God who had come from Judah, "This is what the Lord says: Because you have disobeyed the word of the Lord and have not followed the orders that the Lord your God gave you, instead you went back and ate and drank in the place where he told you not to, your body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers."

After the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his own donkey for him. But as he went on his way a lion came across him on the road and killed him. His body was left lying in the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it. Some passers-by saw the body lying in the road with the lion standing beside it, so they went and let people know about it in the town where the old prophet lived.

When the old prophet who had led the other astray heard what had happened, he said, "It's the man of God who disobeyed the Lord's orders. That's why the Lord put him in the path of the lion, and it has mauled him and killed him, just as the Lord told him would happen."

The prophet told his sons, "Saddle up a donkey for me." So they saddled a donkey, and he went and found the body. It was still lying in the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey. The prophet picked up the body of the man of God, placed it on the donkey, and brought it back to his own town to mourn over him and bury him. He laid the body in his own tomb, and they mourned over him, crying, "My poor brother!"

After he'd buried him, he told his sons, "When I die, bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried. Lay my bones beside his bones. For the message from the Lord that he gave in condemnation against the altar in Bethel, and against all the shrines on the high places in the towns of Samaria, will definitely happen."

But even after all this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways. He went on choosing priests from all kinds of people. He appointed anyone who wanted to be a priest of the high places. It was because of this sin that the house of Jeroboam was wiped out, completely destroyed from the face of the earth.

It was at that time that Abijah, Jeroboam's son, fell ill. So Jeroboam told his wife, "Please go and disguise yourself so nobody will know you're Jeroboam's wife. Then go to Shiloh and look for Ahijah the prophet. He was the one who told me I would become king over this people. Take with you ten loaves of bread, some cakes, and a jar of honey for him. He will explain to you what will happen to the boy."

Jeroboam's wife did as she was told. She got up and went to Ahijah's house in Shiloh. Ahijah could not see —he had become blind because of his age. But the Lord had told Ahijah, "Look, Jeroboam's wife is coming to ask you about her son, because he's ill. This is what you are to tell her, because she'll come in disguise."

So as soon as Ahijah heard her footsteps at the door, he called out, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam! Why do you bother coming in disguise? I have been given some bad news for you. Go and tell Jeroboam this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I picked you from the masses and I made you ruler over my people Israel. I took the kingdom from the house of David and gave it to you. But you were not like my servant David, who kept my commandments and was totally committed to following me, only doing what was right in my sight. You have done more evil than all those who lived before you. You have gone and made other gods for yourself, idols made of molten metal that made me angry. You have tossed me aside. Now pay attention, because as a result of this I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will totally exterminate every one of your descendants in Israel, whether slave or free. I will burn the house of Jeroboam like a man burning refuse until it's all gone. Those of Jeroboam's family who die in the town will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the countryside will be eaten by birds. For the Lord has spoken.

As for you, get up and go home. As soon as you arrive in the city, the child will die. All of Israel will mourn for him, and they will bury him. He alone of Jeroboam's family will be buried in a tomb because only in him has the Lord, the God of Israel found anything good— of the whole family of Jeroboam. The Lord will choose for himself a king to rule over Israel who will destroy the house of Jeroboam. This is starting to happen even now! The Lord will strike Israel like a reed jerked to and fro by the water. He will pull up Israel by the roots from this good land that he gave their forefathers and scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have made their pagan Asherah poles, making the Lord angry. He will abandon Israel because of the sins of Jeroboam, those that he committed himself, and those he made Israel commit."

Jeroboam's wife got up and left for Tirzah. As soon as she stepped through the doorway of her home, the boy died. All of Israel buried him and mourned for him, just as the Lord had said through his servant Ahijah the prophet. The rest of what Jeroboam did, how he engaged in warfare and how he reigned, they are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Jeroboam reigned for twenty-two years, and then he died. His son Nadab succeeded him as king.

Rehoboam, son of Solomon, reigned in Judah. He was forty-one when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen from all the tribes of Israel where he would be honored. The name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonite.

Judah did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and because of the sins they committed they made his jealous anger even greater than all their fathers had done. They also set up for themselves high places, sacred pillars, and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree. There were even cult prostitutes in the land.

They followed all the disgusting practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.

In the fifth year of King Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem. He took the treasures of the Lord's Temple and the royal palace. He took everything, including all the gold shields Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and handed them over to the captains of the guard to look after. They stood on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. Whenever the king went to the Lord's Temple, the guards would carry the shields. Afterwards they returned them to the guardroom.

The rest of what happened in Rehoboam's reign and everything that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Rehoboam and Jeroboam were always at war with each other. Rehoboam died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. The name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonite. His son Abijam succeeded him as king.

Abijam became king of Judah in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Jeroboam, son of Nebat. He reigned in Jerusalem for three years. His mother's name was Maacah, daughter of Abishalom.

Abijam committed all the sins his father had before him. He was not wholly dedicated to the Lord his God as his forefather David had been. Even so, for David's sake, the Lord his God let his descendants continue to rule like a lamp, a son to rule after him and to make Jerusalem strong. For David had done what was right in the Lord's sight, and had not deviated from anything the Lord commanded throughout his lifetime, except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.

(Rehoboam and Jeroboam were always at war with each other.) The rest of what happened in Abijam's reign and everything that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Abijam and Jeroboam were always at war with each other. Abijam died and was buried in the City of David. His son Asa succeeded him as king.

Asa became king of Judah in the twentieth year of the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His grandmother's name was Maacah, daughter of Abishalom.

Asa did what was right in the Lord's sight, as his forefather David had done. He expelled the cult prostitutes from the land and got rid of all of the idols that his forefathers had made. He even dismissed his grandmother Maacah as queen mother, because she had made a disgusting idol. Asa had the idol chopped down and burned in the Kidron Valley. Though the high places were not removed, Asa was completely committed to the Lord all his life. He brought into the house of the Lord the silver and gold and the other items that he and his father had dedicated.

Asa and Baasha, king of Israel, were always at war with each other. Baasha, king of Israel, attacked Judah and fortified Ramah to stop people coming from or going to Asa, king of Judah.

So Asa took all the silver and gold that was left in the treasuries of the Lord's Temple and of the royal palace. He handed it over to his servants and sent them to Ben-hadad, son of Tabrimmon, the son of Hezion, king of Aram, who lived in Damascus, along with this message: “Let us make a treaty between us, just as there was between my father and your father. Look, I've sent you a gift of silver and gold. Go and break your treaty with Baasha, king of Israel, so that he will retreat and leave me alone.”

Ben-hadad accepted Asa's proposal and sent his army with its commanders to attack the towns of Israel. They captured the towns of Ijon, Dan, Abel-beth-maacah, and all Kinnereth, including all the land of Naphtali. When Baasha heard about this, he stopped fortifying Ramah and retreated to Tirzah. Then King Asa issued a proclamation throughout all Judah, with no exception. The people obeyed, and carried away the stones and the timbers Baasha had used for building up Ramah. King Asa used these building materials to strengthen Geba of Benjamin, as well as Mizpah.

The rest of what happened in Asa's reign, all his achievements, everything that he did, and the towns he built, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. But when he grew old he had disease in his feet. Asa died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. His son Jehoshaphat succeeded him as king.

Nadab, son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in the second year of the reign of King Asa of Judah. He reigned in Israel for two years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He followed the ways of his father and committed the same sins his father had made Israel commit.

Baasha, son of Ahijah of the tribe of Issachar, plotted a rebellion against him. Baasha murdered Nadab at the Philistine town of Gibbethon while Nadab and the whole Israelite army were besieging it. Baasha killed Nadab and took over as king in the third year of the reign of King Asa of Judah.

As soon as he became king he killed all the rest of Jeroboam's family. He did not leave any of Jeroboam's descendants alive—he destroyed them all, as the Lord had said through his servant Ahijah the Shilonite. This happened because of the sins Jeroboam had committed and had made Israel commit, and because he had made the Lord, the God of Israel, angry.

The rest of what happened in Nadab's reign and everything that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Asa and Baasha, king of Israel, were always at war with each other. Baasha, son of Ahijah, became king over all of Israel in the third year of the reign of King Asa in Judah. Baasha reigned in Tirzah for twenty-four years. Baasha did what was evil in the Lord's sight and followed the way of Jeroboam and his sin, which he had made Israel commit.

Then this message from the Lord came to the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, condemning Baasha. “Even though I lifted you out of the dust to make you ruler over my people Israel, you have followed the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel sin, making me angry by their sins. Now I'm going to destroy Baasha and his family. Baasha, I will make your family like that of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Those of Baasha's family who die in the town will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the countryside will be eaten by birds.”

The rest of the events of Baasha's reign, everything that he did and what he accomplished, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Baasha died and was buried in Tirzah. His son Elah succeeded him as king.

The message from the Lord condemning Baasha and his family came to the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani. It came because Baasha had done what was evil in the Lord's sight, in the same way as the family of Jeroboam had done, and also because Baasha had killed Jeroboam's family. The Lord was angry because of Baasha's sins.

Elah, son of Baasha, became king of Israel in the twenty-sixth year of the reign of King Asa of Judah. He reigned in Tirzah for two years.

One of Elah's officials called Zimri who was in charge of half his chariots plotted a rebellion against him. One time Elah was in Tirzah, getting himself drunk at the home of Arza, the palace manager at Tirzah. Zimri went up to him, attacked him, and killed him. This was in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Asa, king of Judah. Then he took over from him as king.

As soon as he became king and was installed on his throne, he killed all of Baasha's family. He did not leave a single male alive, whether of his relatives or of his friends. So Zimri destroyed the entire household of Baasha, as the Lord had said in his condemnation of Baasha through Jehu the prophet. This was because of all the sins Baasha and his son Elah had committed and had made Israel to commit. Their worship of their useless idols had angered the Lord, the God of Israel.

The rest of what happened in Elah's reign and everything that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Zimri became king of Israel in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of King Asa of Judah. He reigned in Tirzah seven days. At that time the Israelite army was attacking the Philistine town of Gibbethon. When the troops who were camped there learned that Zimri had plotted rebellion against the king and had murdered him, they made Omri, the army commander, king of Israel that same day in the army camp. Omri and the whole Israelite army left Gibbethon and went and besieged Tirzah. When Zimri saw that the city had been taken he went into the fortress of the royal palace and set it on fire around him, and he died, because of the sins he had committed. He did evil in the Lord's sight and followed the way of Jeroboam and his sin which he had made Israel commit.

The rest of what happened in Zimri's reign and his rebellion are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

After this the people of Israel were divided. Half supported Tibni, son of Ginath, as king, while the other half supported Omri. However, those on Omri's side defeated Tibni's supporters. Tibni was killed and Omri became king.

Omri became king of Israel in the thirty-first year of the reign of King Asa of Judah. He reigned for a total of twelve years (six of them were in Tirzah). He purchased the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver. He fortified the hill, and named the city that he built Samaria, after Shemer, the previous owner of the hill.

Omri did what was evil in the Lord's sight—in fact he did more evil than those who lived before him. For he followed all the ways of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and in his sins which he made Israel commit, worshiping their useless idols which angered the Lord, the God of Israel.

The rest of what happened in Omri's reign, what he did, and his achievements are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Omri died and was buried in Samaria. His son Ahab succeeded him as king.

Ahab, son of Omri, became king of Israel in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of King Asa of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for twenty-two years. Ahab, son of Omri, did evil in the Lord's sight, more than those who lived before him. He didn't see anything to worry about in following the sins of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and he even married Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and started to serve and worship Baal. Ahab made an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he had built in Samaria. Then he put up an Asherah pole. In this way Ahab did more to anger the Lord, the God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel before him.

During Ahab's reign Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He sacrificed Abiram his firstborn son when he laid its foundation, and sacrificed Segub his youngest son when he constructed its gates. This fulfilled the message the Lord had given through Joshua, son of Nun.

Elijah the Tishbite (from Tishbe in Gilead), told Ahab, “As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, the one I serve, in the years to come there will not be any dew or rain unless I say so!”

Then the Lord told Elijah, “Leave here and go east. Hide in the valley of the Cherith brook where it meets the Jordan. You can drink from the brook, and I have ordered ravens to bring you food there.”

So Elijah did what the Lord told him. He went to the valley of the Cherith brook, where it meets the Jordan, and stayed there. Ravens brought him bread and meat both in the morning and in the evening, and he drank from the brook. A while later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land.

Then the Lord told Elijah, “Leave here and go to Zarephath near Sidon and stay there. I have given instructions to a widow there to provide you with food.”

So he left for Zarephath. When he arrived at the entrance to the town, he saw a woman, a widow, gathering sticks. He called her over and asked her, “Could you bring me a little water in a cup so I can have a drink?” As she was going to get it, he called after her and said, “Oh, and please bring me a piece of bread.”

She replied, “As the Lord your God lives, I have no bread, only a handful of flour is left in a jar and a little bit of olive oil in a jug. Right now I am gathering a few sticks so I can go and cook what's left for myself and my son so we can eat it, and then we'll die.”

Elijah said to her, “Don't be afraid. Go home and do what you said. But first make me a small loaf of bread from what you have and bring it to me. Then make something for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not become empty and the jug of olive oil will not run out until the day the Lord sends rain to water the ground.’”

She went and did as Elijah had told her, and Elijah, the widow, and her household were able to eat for many days. The jar of flour did not become empty and the jug of olive oil did not run out, just as the Lord had said through Elijah.

Later on the woman's son fell sick. (She was the one who owned the house.) He went from bad to worse, and finally he died.

"What are you doing to me, man of God?" the woman asked Elijah. "Have you come to remind me about my sins and cause my son to die?"

"Give me your son," Elijah replied. He picked him up from her arms, carried him upstairs to the room where he was staying, and laid him on his bed. Then he cried out to the Lord, saying, "Lord my God, why have you allowed this to happen to this widow who has opened her home to me, this terrible tragedy of causing her son to die?"

He stretched himself out on the boy three times, and cried out to the Lord, "Lord my God, please let this boy's life return to him!" The Lord responded to Elijah's cry. The boy's life returned to him, and he lived!

Elijah took the boy and brought him down from the room into the house, and gave him to his mother. "See, your son is alive," Elijah told her.

"Now I'm convinced that you are a man of God, and that what the Lord speaks through you is the truth," the woman replied.

Sometime later, during the third year, a message from the Lord came to Elijah: "Go and appear before Ahab, and I will send rain on the earth." So Elijah went to appear before Ahab. In the meantime the famine had become severe in Samaria. Ahab summoned Obadiah, the manager of his palace (Obadiah was a very sincere believer in the Lord. While Jezebel was busy killing the Lord's prophets, Obadiah had taken one hundred prophets and hidden them, fifty in each of two caves, and had provided them with food and water.) Ahab told Obadiah, "Go throughout the country and check all the springs and valleys. Perhaps we can find some grass to keep the horses and mules alive so we will not lose any of the animals." So they divided the land between them. Ahab went in one direction, and Obadiah the other.

As Obadiah went on his way, Elijah came to meet him. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down to the ground, and said, "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"

"It's me," Elijah replied. "Go and tell your master, 'Elijah is here.'"

"How have I sinned that you are handing me, your servant, over to Ahab to be killed? As the Lord your God lives, there's no nation or kingdom where my master hasn't sent someone to search for you. When a nation or kingdom said you weren't there, he made them swear that they couldn't find you. And now you're telling me to go to my master and announce, 'Elijah is here!' I have no idea where the Spirit of the Lord will take you after I leave you. If I go and tell Ahab and then he can't find you, he's going to kill me, even though I, your servant, have worshiped the Lord since I was young. Didn't you hear, my lord, what I did when Jezebel was busy killing the Lord's prophets? I hid a hundred of the Lord's prophets, fifty in each of two caves, and provided them with food and water. And now you're telling me to go to my master and announce, 'Elijah is here.' He's going to kill me!"

Elijah replied, "As the Lord Almighty lives, the one I serve, I will definitely appear before Ahab today."

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and then Ahab went to meet Elijah. When Ahab saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you—you who are causing trouble for Israel?"

"I'm not causing trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "It's you and your father's family! You have rejected the Lord's commands and are worshiping the Baals. Now call together all of Israel and meet me on Mount Carmel, along with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who are supported by Jezebel."

So Ahab summoned all of Israel and also gathered the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah approached the people and asked them, "How long will you hobble along, hesitating between two opposite beliefs? If the Lord is God, then follow him. But if Baal is God, then follow him." But the people didn't answer.

Then Elijah told them, "I am the only one left of the Lord's prophets—just me alone—but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Provide us with two bulls. Let the prophets of Baal choose for themselves the one they want, and have them cut it into pieces and place it on the firewood. But don't set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and place it on the firewood but I won't set fire to it. Then you call on your god by name, and I will call on the Lord by name. The god who replies by sending fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "We agree to what you say."

Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "You choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, because there are so many of you. Call on your god by name, but don't light the fire." So they took the bull provided and prepared it. Then they called on Baal by name from morning until noon. "Baal, answer us!" they pleaded. But no voice was heard, no one answered. They hobbled in a dance around the altar they had made.

At noon Elijah began to mock them. "Shout really loud!" he said. "Isn't he meant to be a god? Maybe he's meditating, or he's gone to the bathroom, or he's away on a trip! Maybe he's asleep and has to be woken up!"

They shouted even louder and cut themselves with swords and spears until they bled. This was their usual way of worshiping. Noon came and went, and they went on with their manic "prophesying" until the time of the evening sacrifice. But no voice was heard, no one answered, no one was listening.

Then Elijah told everyone, "Come over here to me." They went over to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord that had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones to represent the tribes of the sons of Jacob. (Jacob was the one who received the Lord's message that said, "Israel shall be your name.") With the stones he built an altar in the Lord's name. He dug a ditch around it that could hold two seahs of seed. He put the wood in place, cut the bull into pieces, and laid it on the wood. Then he told them, "Fill up four large jars with water and pour it over the offering and the wood."

"Do it again," he said. So they did. "Do it for a third time," he said. So they did it for the third time. The

water ran down all over the altar and even filled the ditch.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, the prophet Elijah went over to the altar and prayed: “Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, demonstrate today that you are God in Israel, that I am your servant, and that everything I have done has been at your command. Answer me, Lord! Answer me, so that these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are bringing them back to you.”

Then the fire of the Lord came down and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the soil—it even licked up the water in the ditch!

When all the people saw this, they fell facedown on the ground and shouted, “The Lord, he is God! The Lord, he is God!”

Then Elijah ordered them, “Grab hold of the prophets of Baal. Don't let any escape!” They grabbed them, and Elijah brought them down to the Kishon Valley and killed them there.

Elijah told Ahab, “Go and eat and drink, for I hear the sound of a heavy rain coming.” So Ahab went to eat and drink, but Elijah went to the top of Carmel. There he bent down to the ground, putting his face between his knees.

“Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. The man went and looked. “There's nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah told him, “Go and look again.”

The seventh time the servant came back and said, “I saw a small cloud the size of a man's hand coming up from the sea.” So Elijah said, “Run to Ahab and tell him, ‘Get your chariot ready and go down before the rain stops you.’”

Very quickly the sky grew dark with clouds, the wind blew, heavy rain started falling, and Ahab rode down to Jezreel. The Lord gave his power to Elijah—he tucked his cloak into his belt and ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel.

Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done and that he had killed all the prophets of Baal with the sword. Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, “May the gods do as much to me and more if by tomorrow I haven't made your life like the lives of those you killed!”

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he arrived in Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there and traveled another day's journey into the desert. He sat down under a broom tree and asked to die. “I've had enough now, Lord,” he said. “Take my life! I'm no better than my forefathers.”

He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree. All of a sudden an angel touched him and said, “Get up, and eat.” He looked around, and there beside his head was some bread baking over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and lay down again.

The angel of the Lord returned a second time and touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.”

So he got up and ate and drank, and with the strength the food gave him he was able to walk forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. There he entered a cave and spent the night.

The Lord spoke to Elijah, and asked him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

“I have worked passionately for the Lord God Almighty,” he replied. “But the Israelites have abandoned your agreement, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I am the only one who's left, and they are trying to kill me as well.”

Then the Lord told him, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” Right then the Lord passed by. A tremendously powerful wind ripped into the mountains and smashed rocks before the Lord, but the Lord wasn't in the wind. After the wind there came an earthquake, but the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. After the earthquake there came a fire, but the Lord wasn't in the fire. And after the fire came a voice speaking in a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his cloak around his face and went out and stood at the cave entrance. Immediately a voice spoke to him and asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

“I have worked passionately for the Lord God Almighty,” he replied. “But the Israelites have abandoned your agreement, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I am the only one who's left, and they are trying to kill me as well.”

The Lord told him, “Go back the way you came to the desert of Damascus. When you get there, go and anoint Hazael king of Aram. Also anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king of Israel and Elisha, son of Shaphat, from Abel-meholah, to take over from you as prophet.

Jehu will execute anyone who escapes the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will execute anyone who escapes the sword of Jehu. I still have seven thousand left in Israel, all those who have not bowed their knees to worship Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

So Elijah left, and went and found Elisha, son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve pairs of oxen, and he was with the twelfth pair. Elijah went over to him and threw his cloak around him. Elisha left the oxen, ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me go and kiss my father and mother goodbye, and then I will follow you.” “Go on home,” Elijah replied. “I've never done anything for you.”

Elisha left him, took his pair of oxen, and slaughtered them. Using the wood of the oxen's yoke as fuel, he cooked the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate it. Then he left to follow and serve Elijah.

Ben-hadad, king of Aram, called up his entire army. Together with thirty-two kings and their assembled horses and chariots, he marched to besiege Samaria, to fight against it. He sent messengers to Ahab, king of Israel, in the city to tell him, “This is what Ben-hadad says: Your silver and gold belong to me now, and your best wives and children also belong to me!”

“It's as you say, my lord the king,” the king of Israel replied. “I am yours, as well as everything that belongs to me.”

The messengers returned and said, “This is what Ben-hadad says: I have sent you a message demanding you give me your silver, your gold, your wives, and your children. But around this time tomorrow I'm going to send my men to search your palace and the homes of your officials. They will take and carry away everything you see as valuable.”

The king of Israel called all the elders of the land and told them, “Look how this man is trying to cause

trouble! When he demanded my wives and my children, my silver and my gold, I didn't say no."

All the elders and all the people present responded, "Don't listen to him. Don't agree to his demands."

So the king told Ben-hadad's messengers, "Tell my lord the king: Everything you demanded at first your servant will do, but I cannot agree to this latest demand." The messengers took the reply back to him.

Ben-hadad responded to him, "May the gods do as much to me and more if there remains enough dust in Samaria to give my subjects a handful each!"

The king of Israel replied, "Tell him this: A man putting on his armor should not brag like one who is taking it off."

Ben-hadad received this message while he and the kings were drinking in their tents. He immediately gave the order to his officers, "Get ready to attack!" So they prepared to attack the city.

At the same time a prophet came up to Ahab, king of Israel, and told him, "This is what the Lord says: You see this massive army? Just watch, because I will make you victorious today, and you will be convinced that I am the Lord."

"But who's going to do this?" Ahab asked. The prophet answered, "This is what the Lord says: It will be the young officers under the district commanders."

"And who's going to start the battle?" he asked. The prophet replied, "You are!"

So Ahab called up the 232 young officers of the district commanders, and assembled the 7,000 soldiers that made up Israel's army. They left at noon while Ben-hadad and the thirty-two kings with him were busy getting drunk in their tents. The young officers of the district commanders took the lead. The scouts Ben-hadad had sent out came and reported to him, "Enemy soldiers are advancing from Samaria."

"If they're coming in peace, take them alive," he ordered. "If they're coming to attack, take them alive."

The young officers of the district commanders advanced from the city, followed by the army. Each man killed his opponent, and the Arameans ran away. The Israelites chased them, but Ben-hadad, king of Aram, escaped on horseback with his cavalry. Then the king of Israel came out and attacked the horses and chariots. He inflicted a great defeat on the Arameans.

Later on the prophet came to the king of Israel and told him, "Go and reinforce your defenses, and check what you need to do, because in the spring the king of Aram will come and attack you again."

In the meantime the king of Aram's officers told him, "Their gods are gods of the mountains. That's why they could defeat us. But if we fight them in the lowlands, we can beat them. You should do this: remove each of the kings from their positions and replace them with commanders. You also have to raise another army to replace the one you lost—horse for horse, chariot for chariot. Then we can fight them in the lowlands and we will definitely beat them." Ben-hadad listened to their advice and did as they said.

When spring came Ben-hadad called up the Aramean army and went to attack Israel at Aphek. The Israelite army was also called up and provided with supplies. They went to confront the Arameans. But when the Israelites set up their camp opposite the enemy they looked like two little flocks of goats in comparison with the Aramean army that filled the whole land.

Then the man of God came to the king of Israel and said, "This is what the Lord says: Because the Arameans have said, 'The Lord is only a god of the mountains and not of the valleys,' I will make you victorious over the whole of this massive army. Then you will be convinced that I am the Lord."

The armies camped opposite each other for seven days. On the seventh day the battle took place. The Israelites killed 100,000 of the Aramean infantry in one day. The rest ran away to the town of Aphek, where a wall collapsed on 27,000 of those that remained. Ben-hadad also ran to the town and hid in an inside room.

Ben-hadad's officers said to him, "Look, we've heard that the Israelite kings are merciful. Let's surrender to the king of Israel, wearing sackcloth around our waists and ropes on our heads. Maybe he will let you live."

So wearing sackcloth around their waists and ropes on their heads, they went and surrendered to the king of Israel, and told him, "Your servant Ben-hadad asks, 'Please let me live.'" The king replied "Is he still alive? I think of him as my brother."

The men thought this was a good sign and they immediately took the king at his word, saying, "Yes, Ben-hahad is your brother."

"Go and fetch him!" said the king. So Ben-hadad came out of hiding and surrendered to Ahab, who pulled him up into his chariot.

Ben-hadad said to him, "I will return the towns my father took from your father, and you can organize your own places for trade in Damascus, like my father did in Samaria."

"By making this agreement I set you free," Ahab replied. He made a treaty with Ben-hadad and let him go.

Following a message he received from the Lord, one of the sons of the prophets said to his colleague, "Please hit me." But the man refused to hit him. So the prophet told him, "Since you have not done what the Lord said, once you leave me a lion is going to kill you." When the man left, a lion came and killed him.

The prophet found another man and said, "Please hit me!" So the man hit him, wounding him.

Then the prophet went and stood beside the road, waiting for the king. He had disguised himself with a bandage over his eyes.

As the king was passing by, he shouted out to the king: "Your servant had gone out fighting right in the middle of the battle, when all of a sudden a man came over with a prisoner and told me, 'Guard this man! If for any reason he escapes, you will pay for his life with your life, or you will be fined a talent of silver.' But while your servant was busy with other things, the man got away."

"So that will be your punishment then," the king of Israel told him. "You have sentenced yourself."

Then the prophet quickly took off the bandage from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized he was one of the prophets. He told the king, "This is what the Lord says: You have let go a man I had decided should

die. Therefore you will pay for his life with your life, your people for his people."

The king of Israel went home to Samaria, sulking and infuriated.

Sometime later this happened: There was a man named Naboth from Jezreel, who owned a vineyard in Jezreel close to King Ahab's palace in Samaria. Ahab went to Naboth and said, "Give me your vineyard so I can turn it into a vegetable garden, because it's close to my palace. In return I'll give you a better vineyard, or if you want I'll pay you for it in cash."

But Naboth replied, "The Lord curse me if I should give you my forefathers' inheritance."

Ahab went home sulking and infuriated because Naboth from Jezreel had said, "I will not give you my forefathers' inheritance." He went to bed, wouldn't look at anyone, and refused to eat.

His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "What are you so upset about that you don't want to eat?"

Ahab replied, "It's because I talked with Naboth from Jezreel and I asked him, 'Give me your vineyard for cash, or if you want, I'll give you another vineyard instead.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"

"Aren't you the king of Israel?" his wife Jezebel replied. "Get up, have something to eat, and cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth from Jezreel."

So she wrote some letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal. She sent the letters to the elders and leaders in the town where Naboth lived. In the letters she wrote to tell them, "Announce a religious fast, and give Naboth a seat of honor. But seat two bad men opposite him and have them accuse him, saying, 'You have cursed God and the king!' Then take him out and stone him to death."

So the elders and leaders who lived in Naboth's town did as Jezebel had said in the letters she had written and sent to them. They announced a religious fast, and gave Naboth a seat of honor. Two bad men came and sat opposite him, and accused him in front of the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed God and the king." So they took him outside the town and stoned him to death.

Then they sent a message to Jezebel, saying, "Naboth has been stoned. He's dead."

As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and he was dead, Jezebel told Ahab, "Get up, go and claim ownership of the vineyard of Naboth from Jezreel, which he refused to sell you, for Naboth is no longer alive, but dead."

When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went to claim ownership of Naboth's vineyard.

Then the Lord sent a message to Elijah the Tishbite: "Go and meet Ahab, king of Israel, in Samaria. He is right now in Naboth's vineyard, where he has gone to claim ownership of it. Tell him: This is what the Lord says: Have you murdered a man and robbed him? Then tell him: This is what the Lord says: In the very spot where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, dogs will lick up your own blood."

"So have you come to find me, my enemy?" Ahab asked Elijah.

"I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do what is evil in the Lord's sight," Elijah replied.

He says, "Watch out! I'm going to bring disaster on you and destroy your descendants. I will kill every male of Ahab's line, both slave and free, throughout the whole of Israel. I will make your house like that of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and like that of Baasha, son of Ahijah, because you have angered me and made Israel sin. And as far as Jezebel is concerned, the Lord says, 'Dogs will eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' Those of Ahab's family who die in the town will be eaten by dogs, and those who die in the countryside will be eaten by birds."

(No one else was so bad as Ahab, who sold himself to do what is evil in the Lord's sight, because his wife Jezebel encouraged him. He did the most despicable things, worshiping idols like the Amorites the Lord had driven out before Israel.)

As soon as Ahab heard this message, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted. He even went to bed in sackcloth, and walked around repentantly.

Then the Lord sent a message to Elijah the Tishbite: "Have you seen how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself before me, I will not bring the disaster during his lifetime, but I will bring down disaster on his family in the lifetime of his son."

For three years Aram and Israel were not at war. But in the third year Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went to visit the king of Israel. The king of Israel had said to his officers, "Aren't you aware that Ramoth-gilead really belongs to us and yet we haven't done anything to take it back from the king of Aram?"

So he asked Jehoshaphat, "Will you join me in an attack to recapture Ramoth-gilead?"

Jehoshaphat replied to the king of Israel, "You and I are as one, my men and your men are as one, and my horses and your horses are as one." Then Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "But first though, please find out what the Lord says."

So the king of Israel brought out the prophets—four hundred of them—and he asked them, "Should I go up and attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I not?"

"Yes, go ahead," they replied, "for the Lord will hand it over to the king."

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there another prophet of the Lord here that we can ask?"

"Yes, there's another man who could consult the Lord," the king of Israel replied, "but I don't like him because he never prophesies anything good for me—it's always bad! His name is Micaiah, son of Imlah."

"You shouldn't talk like that," said Jehoshaphat.

The king of Israel called over one of his officials and told him, "Bring me Micaiah, son of Imlah, right away."

Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor beside the gate of Samaria, with all of the prophets prophesying in front of them. One of them, Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, had made himself iron horns. He announced, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these horns you will gore the Arameans until they're dead!'"

All the prophets were prophesying the same thing, saying, "Go ahead, attack Ramoth-gilead; you will be successful, for the Lord will hand it over to the king."

The messenger who went to call Micaiah told him, “Look, all the prophets are unanimous in prophesying positively to the king. So please make sure to speak positively like them.”

But Micaiah replied, “As the Lord lives, I can only say what my God tells me.”

When he came before the king, the king asked him, “Should we go up and attack Ramoth-gilead, or should we not?”

“Yes, go ahead and be victorious,” Micaiah replied, “for the Lord will give it into the king's hand.”

But the king said to him, “How many times must I make you swear to tell me only the truth in the name of the Lord?”

So Micaiah answered, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord said, ‘These people have no master; let each of them go home in peace.’”

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Didn't I tell you he never prophesies anything good for me, only bad?”

Micaiah went on to say, “So listen to what the Lord says. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, surrounded by the whole army of heaven standing to his right and to his left. The Lord asked, ‘Who will trick Ahab, king of Israel, into attacking Ramoth-gilead so he will be killed there?’

One said this, another said that, and another said something else. Finally a spirit came and approached the Lord and said, ‘I will trick him.’

‘How are you going to do that?’ the Lord asked.

‘I will go and be a lying spirit and make all his prophets tell lies,’ the spirit replied.

‘That will work,’ the Lord responded. ‘Go and do it.’

As you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit into these prophets of yours, and the Lord has pronounced your death sentence.”

Then Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, went and slapped Micaiah in the face, and demanded, “Which way did the Spirit of the Lord go when he left me to speak to you?”

“You'll soon find out when you try and find some secret place to hide!” Micaiah replied.

The king of Israel ordered, “Place Micaiah under arrest and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to my son Joash. Tell them these are the king's instructions: ‘Put this man in jail. Give him only bread and water until my safe return.’”

“If you do in fact return safely then the Lord has not spoken through me,” Micaiah declared. “Pay attention everyone to all I've said!”

The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went to attack Ramoth-gilead. The king of Israel told Jehoshaphat, “When I go into battle I will be in disguise, but you should wear your royal robes.” So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

The king of Aram had already given these orders to his chariot commanders: “Head straight for the king of Israel alone. Don't fight with anyone else, whoever they are.”

So when the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they shouted, “This must be the king of Israel!” So they turned to attack him, but when Jehoshaphat called out for help, the chariot commanders saw it wasn't the king of Israel and stopped chasing him.

However, an enemy archer shot an arrow at random, hitting the king of Israel between the joints of his armor by his breastplate. The king told his charioteer, “Turn around and get me out of the fight, because I've been wounded!”

The battle lasted all day. The king of Israel was propped up in his chariot to face the Arameans, but in the evening he died. The blood had poured out of his wound onto the floor of the chariot. At sunset, a shout went out from the lines: “Retreat! Every man back to his town, every man back to his own country!”

So the king died. He was taken back to Samaria where they buried him. They washed his chariot at a pool in Samaria where the prostitutes came to bathe, and dogs licked up his blood, just as the Lord had said.

The rest of what happened in Ahab's reign, all that he did, the ivory palace he constructed and all the cities he built are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Ahab died and his son Ahaziah succeeded him as king.

Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, became king of Judah in the fourth year of the reign of Ahab, king of Israel. Jehoshaphat was thirty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. He followed all the ways of his father; he did not depart from them, and he did what was right in the Lord's sight. However, the high places were not removed and the people still sacrificed and presented offerings there. Jehoshaphat also made peace with the king of Israel.

The rest of what happened in Jehoshaphat's reign, his great achievements and the wars he fought are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. He expelled from the land any cult prostitutes who were left from the time of his father Asa. (At that time there was no king in Edom; only a deputy who served as king.) Jehoshaphat built seagoing ships to sail to Ophir for gold, but they didn't go because they were wrecked at Ezion-geber. During that time Ahaziah, son of Ahab, asked Jehoshaphat, “Let my men sail with your men,” but Jehoshaphat refused.

Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his forefathers in the City of David. His son Jehoram succeeded him as king.

Ahaziah, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and he reigned over Israel for two years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight and followed the ways of his father and mother, and of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. He served Baal and worshiped him, and angered the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had.

2 Kings

Second Book of Kings

After Ahab died, Moab rebelled against Israel. Ahaziah had fallen through the lattice-work of his upper room in Samaria and had hurt himself badly. So he sent out messengers, telling them: “Go and ask Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I will get better from this injury.”

But the angel of the Lord told Elijah the Tishbite, “Go and meet the messengers of the king of Samaria and ask them, ‘Is it because there's no God in Israel that you're going to ask advice from Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?’ So this is the Lord's answer: ‘You will not leave the bed on which you are lying. You're definitely going to die.’” And Elijah left.

The messengers returned to the king, and he asked them, “Why have you come back?”

“A man came and met us,” they replied. “He told us, ‘Go back to the king who sent you, and tell him, This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are sending to ask advice from Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? As a result you will not leave the bed on which you are lying. You're definitely going to die.’”

“What was he like, this man who met you and told you all this?” the king asked.

“He was a hairy man wearing a leather belt around his waist,” they replied.

“It's Elijah the Tishbite,” said the king.

Then the king sent an army captain with fifty men to Elijah. The captain went up to Elijah, who was sitting on the top of a hill, and told him, “Man of God, the king orders you, ‘Come down!’”

Elijah replied to the captain, “If I am a man of God, then let fire fall from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men.” Fire fell from heaven and burned up the captain and his men.

So the king sent another captain with his fifty men to Elijah. The captain said to Elijah, “Man of God, the king orders you, ‘Come down immediately!’”

Elijah replied to the captain, “If I am a man of God, then let fire fall from heaven and burn up you and your fifty men.” Fire fell from heaven and burned up the captain and his men.

So the king sent a third captain with his fifty men. The third captain went up, kneeled before Elijah, and pleaded with him, “Man of God, please value my life and the lives of these fifty men. Yes, fire has fallen from heaven and burned up the first two captains of fifty, along with all their men. But now please value my life!”

Then the angel of the Lord told Elijah, “Go down with him. You don't have to be afraid of him.” So Elijah got up and went down with him to the king.

Elijah told the king, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Is it because there's no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to ask advice of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron? As a result you will not leave the bed on which you are lying. You're definitely going to die.’”

Ahaziah died just as the Lord had said through Elijah. Because he had no son, Joram succeeded him as king in the second year of the reign of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah.

The rest of what happened in Ahaziah's reign and what he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Just before the Lord took Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were walking together on their way from Gilgal. Elijah said to Elisha, “Please stay here, for the Lord has sent me to Bethel.”

But Elisha replied, “As the Lord lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Bethel.

The sons of the prophets who lived in Bethel came to Elisha and told him, “You do know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today, don't you?”

“Yes, I know,” he replied. “Don't talk about it.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, Elisha, for the Lord has sent me to Jericho.”

He replied, “As the Lord lives, and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they went to Jericho.

The sons of the prophets who lived in Jericho came to Elisha and told him, “You do know that the Lord is going to take your master away from you today, don't you?”

“Yes, I know,” he replied. “Don't talk about it.”

Then Elijah said to him, “Please stay here, Elisha, for the Lord has sent me to the Jordan.”

He replied, “As the Lord lives, and as you live, I will not leave you.” So they traveled on together.

Then a group of fifty of the sons of the prophets went and stood facing Elijah and Elisha at a distance as the two of them stood by the Jordan. Elijah took his cloak, rolled it up, and hit the water. It divided to the one side and to the other and both of them crossed over on dry ground.

When they arrived on the other side, Elijah asked Elisha, “What can I do for you before I'm taken from you?”

“Please let me have a double amount of your spirit,” Elisha replied.

“What you have asked for is hard,” Elijah responded. “But if you see me when I am taken from you, you will have it, otherwise not.”

As they were walking along, talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire came between them, and Elijah was taken up in the whirlwind to heaven.

Elisha saw what happened and cried out, “My father! My father! Look! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” Then Elisha couldn't see him anymore. He took his clothes and ripped them to pieces.

Then Elisha picked up Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took Elijah's cloak that had fallen from him, hit the water, and cried out, “Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?” When he hit the water, it divided to the one side and to the other and Elisha crossed over.

The sons of the prophets who lived in Jericho saw him from the opposite side and shouted out, “Elijah's spirit now rests upon Elisha!” They went over to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him.

"Look," they said to Elisha, "we your servants have fifty good men here. Please allow them to go and search for your master. Maybe the Spirit of the Lord has taken him and put him down on a mountain or in a valley somewhere."

"Don't bother sending them," Elisha replied.

But they went on trying to persuade him until he was too embarrassed to say no. "Go ahead and send them," he told them. So they sent fifty men, who searched for Elijah for three days but couldn't find him.

When they returned to Elisha, who was staying in Jericho, he said to them, "Didn't I tell you not to bother going?"

The townspeople said to Elisha, "Look, sir, while our town has a good location as you can see, the water is bad and the soil is poor."

"Bring me a brand new bowl and put some salt in it," he replied. So they brought it to him. Then Elisha went to the spring, threw the salt into it, and said, "This is what the Lord says: 'I have purified this water. It won't cause death or miscarriages anymore.'" The water there is still pure to this very day, just as Elisha said it would be.

Elisha went on from there to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, a group of youths came from the town. They made fun of him, calling out, "Go on up, baldy! Go on up, baldy!"

Turning around, he looked at them and called down a curse on them in the Lord's name. Suddenly two female bears came out of the forest and mauled forty-two of them. Elisha carried on to Mount Carmel, and from there he went back to Samaria.

Joram, son of Ahab, became king of Israel in the eighteenth year of the reign of King Jehoshaphat of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for twelve years. He did evil in the Lord's sight, but not like his father and mother had done, for he got rid of the stone image of Baal that his father had made. However, he still held on to the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit—he did not give them up.

Mesha, king of Moab, was a sheep breeder. He used to provide a tribute to the king of Israel of one hundred thousand lambs and the wool of one hundred thousand rams. But after Ahab died, the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. Immediately King Joram called up the whole Israelite army and left Samaria. On his way he sent a message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, saying, "The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you join me in an attack on Moab?"

Jehoshaphat replied, "Yes, I will join you. You and I are as one, my men and your men are as one, and my horses and your horses are as one."

Then he asked, "Which way shall we go?"

"We'll take the road through the desert of Edom," he replied.

So the king of Israel, the king of Judah, and the king of Edom set off. Having followed an indirect route for seven days, they ran out of water for their army and for their animals.

"What are we doing?" complained the king of Israel. "The Lord has brought us three kings here to hand us over to the Moabites!"

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the Lord here with us? Let us consult the Lord through him."

One of the king of Israel's officers answered, "Elisha, son of Shaphat, is here. He was Elijah's assistant."

Jehoshaphat agreed, "The Lord communicates by him." So the king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, and the king of Edom went to see him.

Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What have I got to do with you? Go to your own prophets, those of your father and your mother." But the king of Israel said to him, "No—because it's the Lord who has brought these three kings here to hand them over to the Moabites!"

Elisha replied, "As the Lord Almighty lives, the one I serve, if I didn't respect the fact that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, is here, I wouldn't even look in your direction or acknowledge you. Now bring me a musician."

While the musician played, the Lord's power came upon Elisha, and he announced, "This is what the Lord says: This valley will be filled with pools of water. For the Lord says: You won't see any wind, you won't see any rain, but even so this valley will be filled with water. You will drink, and your cattle, and your animals. The Lord views this as something trivial to do; and he will also make you victorious over the Moabites. You will conquer every fortified town, and every important town. You will chop down every good tree, block up every spring, and spoil every good field by throwing stones on them."

The next day, around the time of the morning sacrifice, water suddenly flowed from the direction of Edom, filling the whole countryside with water. All the Moabites had heard that the kings had come to attack them. So everyone who could wear a sword, young and old, was called up and went to guard the border. But the next morning when they got up the sun was shining on the water, and to the Moabites on the other side it looked blood red. "This is blood!" they said. "The kings and their armies must have attacked and killed each other! Moabites, let's grab the plunder!"

But when the Moabites arrived at the Israelite camp, the Israelites ran out and attacked them, and they ran away from them. So the Israelites invaded their country and killed the Moabites. They destroyed the towns, and each soldier threw stones on every good field until it was covered. They blocked up every spring and chopped down every good tree. Only Kir-haraseth still had its walls, but soldiers using slingshots surrounded it and attacked it as well.

When the king of Moab realized he'd lost the battle, he led seven hundred swordsmen in an attempt to break through and attack the king of Edom, but they weren't able to do so. So the king of Moab took his firstborn son, who was meant to succeed him, and sacrificed him as a burnt offering on the town wall. Great anger came upon the Israelites, so they left and went back to their own country.

The wife of one of the sons of the prophets appealed to Elisha, "My husband, your servant, is dead, and you know that he honored the Lord. But now to pay his debts his creditor is coming to take my two sons as his slaves!"

“What can I do to help you?” asked Elisha. “Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“I, your servant, don't have anything in my house except a jar of olive oil,” she replied.

“Go and borrow empty jars from your neighbors —as many as possible, not just a few,” Elisha told her. “Then go inside, shut the door behind you and your sons, and start pouring olive oil into all these jars, placing the full jars to one side.”

She left Elisha, went home, and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept on pouring. When all the jars were full, she told her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There aren't any jars left.” Then the olive oil stopped flowing.

She went and told the man of God what had happened, and he said, “Go and sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on what's left.”

One day as Elisha was passing through Shunem, a wealthy woman who lived there convinced him to have a meal. After that, whenever he was passing by he would stop there to eat.

She told her husband, “I'm sure that this man who regularly visits us is a holy man of God. Please let's make a small room on the roof,. We can put a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp in it for him. Then he can stay there whenever he visits us.”

One day Elisha arrived and went up to his room and lay down. He said to his servant Gehazi, “Ask the Shunammite woman to come here.” Gehazi called her and she came to see Elisha.

Elisha said to Gehazi, “Please tell her, ‘You have gone to a lot of trouble on our behalf. Now what can we do for you? Do you want us to speak for you to the king or the army commander?’”

“I live with my own people,” she replied.

After she had left, Elisha asked, “What can we do for her?”

“She doesn't have a son, and her husband is old,” Gehazi replied.

Elisha said, “Ask her to come back.” So Gehazi called her, and she came and stood by the door. Elisha told her, “Around this time next year, you will be holding a son in your arms.”

“No, my lord!” she responded. “Man of God, don't tell your servant lies!”

But the woman did indeed become pregnant, and the next year around that same time she gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had promised her.

The child grew up, but one day when he went out to see his father who was with the reapers, he complained to his father, “My head hurts! My head hurts!”

His father told one of his servants, “Carry him back to his mother.” The servant picked him up and took him back to his mother. The boy sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. She went upstairs and laid him on the bed of the man of God. Then she shut the door behind her and left.

She called her husband and said, “Please send me one of the servants and a donkey so I can run to the man of God and come back.”

“Why do you need to go and see him today?” he asked. “It's not the New Moon or the Sabbath.”

“Don't worry about it,” she replied.

She put the saddle on the donkey and told her servant, “Let's go quickly! Don't slow down for me unless I tell you to!” So she set off, and went to the man of God who was at Mount Carmel.

When he saw her way in the distance, the man of God told his servant Gehazi, “Look! There's the Shunammite woman! Please run to meet her and ask her, ‘Is everything fine with you, your husband, and your boy?’”

“Everything's fine,” she replied.

But when she got to the man of God at the mountain, she grabbed hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, “Leave her alone, for she's in terrible misery, but the Lord has hidden it from me and has not explained it to me.”

“Did I ask you for a son, my lord?” she asked. “Didn't I tell you, ‘Don't tell me lies’?”

Elisha said to Gehazi, “Tie up your cloak in your belt, pick up my staff, and go! Don't even say hello to anyone you meet, and if anyone says hello to you, don't reply. Place my staff on the boy's face.”

But the boy's mother said, “As the Lord lives and as you live, I'm not leaving without you!” So he got up and went with her.

Gehazi ran on ahead and placed the staff on the boy's face, but there was no sound or sign of life. So Gehazi went back to meet Elisha and told him, “The boy hasn't woken up.”

When Elisha got to the house, there was the boy, lying dead on his bed. He went in, shut the door behind them both, and prayed to the Lord. Then he got on the bed and lay on top of the boy, and put his mouth on the boy's mouth, his eyes on the boy's eyes, his hands on the boy's hands. As he stretched out on him, the boy's body warmed up. Elisha got up, walked back and forth once in the room, and then got back on the bed and stretched out on him again. The boy sneezed seven times and then opened his eyes.

Elisha called Gehazi and said, “Ask the Shunammite woman to come.” So he did. When she arrived, Elisha said to her, “Here's your son. You can pick him up.” She came in, fell at his feet, and bowed to the ground. Then she picked up her son and left.

When Elisha went back to Gilgal, there was a famine in that area. The sons of the prophets were sitting at his feet, and he said to his servant, “Use the large pot and boil some stew for the sons of the prophets.”

One of them went out into the countryside to pick herbs. He found a wild vine and picked as many wild gourds as his cloak could hold. Then he came back and chopped them up into the pot of stew. But nobody knew they were dangerous to eat.

They served it to the men to eat, but when they tasted the stew they shouted, “There's death in the pot, man of God!” They couldn't eat it.

Elisha said, “Get some flour.” He threw it into the pot, and said, “Serve it to the people to eat.” There was nothing bad to eat in the pot.

A man from Baal-shalishah came to the man of God with a sack of firstfruits—the first grain of the year, along with twenty loaves of barley bread. “Give it to the people to eat,” said Elisha.

"How can I serve just twenty loaves to a hundred men?" his servant asked.

"Give it to the people to eat," said Elisha, "for this is what the Lord says: 'They will eat and there will still be some left over.'"

So he served the bread to them. They ate, and had some left over, just as the Lord had said.

Naaman, the king of Aram's army commander was considered a great man by his master and highly respected, for through him the Lord had made the Arameans victorious. He was a mighty warrior, but he was a leper.

Some Arameans had gone on a raid and had captured a young girl from the land of Israel. She had been made a servant to Naaman's wife. She told her mistress, "If only my master would go and see the prophet who lives in Samaria. I'm sure he could cure him of his leprosy."

Naaman went to his master and explained what the Israelite girl had said.

"You can go," said the king of Aram, "and I will send a letter with you to the king of Israel." So Naaman left. He took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of clothing.

The letter he took to the king of Israel read: "This letter accompanies my servant Naaman, sent to you so you can heal him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter, he ripped his clothes in panic and said, "Does this man think I'm God, having power over life and death, sending me a leper to heal? Obviously he's just trying to invent an excuse to attack me, as anyone can see!"

But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had ripped his clothes in panic, he sent a message to the king, saying: "What did you rip your clothes for? Please send the man to me, so he will be convinced there is a prophet in Israel."

So Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots and stood waiting at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan. Then your body will be healed, and you will be clean."

But Naaman got angry and left, saying, "I expected he would at least come out, stand there and invoke the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over where my leprosy is and heal it. Aren't the rivers of Damascus, Abanah and Pharpar, better than any of these streams of Israel? Couldn't I have washed in them and been healed?" So he turned around and went off in a rage.

But Naaman's officials went to him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you that you had to do something extraordinary, wouldn't you have done it? How much easier is it to do what he says, 'Wash and you'll be healed'?"

So Naaman went down and plunged himself underwater in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him. His body was healed, his skin became like a baby's, and he was clean.

Then Naaman and his whole entourage went back to the man of God, stood before him, and Naaman announced, "Now I'm convinced that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept a gift from me, your servant."

But Elisha replied, "As the Lord lives, the one I serve, I will not accept anything." Even though Naaman tried to persuade him to take the gift, he refused.

So Naaman said, "If you won't, please let me, your servant, take back with me two mule loads of earth, for I will never again bring a burnt offering or make a sacrifice to any other god but the Lord. In addition, may the Lord forgive me for doing this: When my master goes into the temple of Rimmon to worship there, and I assist him, and I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive me for doing so."

"Go in peace," said Elisha, and Naaman left. But he had only gone a short way when Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "Just look how my master has let this Naaman the Syrian off the hook by not accepting the gifts he brought! As the Lord lives, I'll run after him and get something from him."

So Gehazi chased after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running after him, he jumped down from the chariot to meet him and asked, "Is everything all right?"

"Everything's fine," Gehazi replied. "My master sent me to tell you, 'I've just found out that two young men have arrived to see me from the sons of the prophets who live in the hill country of Ephraim. Please let them have a talent of silver and two sets of clothing.'"

But Naaman replied, "Please, take two talents." He insisted that Gehazi accept them. Then he tied up two talents of silver in two bags as well as two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, who carried them for Gehazi.

When Gehazi arrived at the hill fortress, he took the gifts from the servants and put them in the house. He told the men they could go, and they left.

When Gehazi got back and attended his master, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?"

"Your servant hasn't been anywhere," he replied.

But Elisha told him, "Didn't I see you in my mind's eye when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money and clothing, olive groves and vineyards, sheep and oxen, male and female servants? Consequently Naaman's leprosy will stick to you and your descendants forever!" As Gehazi left him, he had leprosy—he looked as white as snow.

The sons of the prophets told Elisha, "Look, the place we meet with you is too small for us. Let's go to the Jordan and each of us can carry one log back. We can build a new place there for us to meet."

"Go ahead," said Elisha.

One of them asked, "Please come with your servants."

"I'll come," he replied.

So he went with them. When they got to the Jordan, they started cutting down trees. But as one of them was cutting down a tree, the iron ax head fell into the water. "Oh no! My master, it was one that was borrowed!" he shouted.

"Where did it fall?" the man of God asked. When he showed him the place, the man of God cut a stick, threw it in there, and made the iron ax head float.

"Pick it up," Elisha told the man. So he reached out his hand and picked it up.

The Aramean king was at war with Israel. After consulting with his officers, he said, “I will set up my camp in this particular place.”

Then the man of God sent a warning to the king of Israel: “Watch out if you go near this place, because the Arameans are going to be there.”

So the king of Israel sent a warning to the place the man of God had indicated. Elisha repeatedly warned the king, so that he was on the alert in those places.

This made the Aramean king really mad. He summoned his officers, demanding an answer: “Tell me, which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?”

“It's none of us, my lord the king,” one of his officers replied. “It's Elisha, the prophet who lives in Israel—he tells the king of Israel even what you say in your bedroom.”

So the king gave the order, “Go and find out where he is so I can send soldiers to capture him.”

He was told, “Elisha is in Dothan.” So he sent horses, chariots, and a large army. They came at night and surrounded the town.

Early in the morning when the servant of the man of God got up, he went out and saw that an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. “Oh, my master, what are we going to do?” he asked Elisha.

Elisha replied, “Don't be afraid, for there are many more who are with us than there are with them!” Elisha prayed, saying, “Lord, please open his eyes so he can see.” The Lord opened the servant's eyes, and when he looked he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

As the army descended on him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, “Please strike these people with blindness.” So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

Then Elisha went and told them, “This isn't the right road, and this isn't the right town. Follow me, and I'll take you to the man you're looking for.” He led them to Samaria.

After they had entered Samaria, Elisha prayed, “Lord, open the eyes of these men so they can see.” The Lord opened their eyes, and they looked around and saw that they were in Samaria.

When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?”

“No, don't you kill them!” he replied. “Would you kill prisoners you captured with your own sword or bow? Give them some food and water so that they may eat and drink, and then let them go back to their master.”

So the king had a great feast prepared for them, and once they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them back to their master. The Aramean raiders did not enter the land of Israel again.

Sometime after this Ben-hadad king of Aram called up all his army and went to lay siege to Samaria. So there was a major famine in Samaria. In fact the siege lasted so long that a donkey's head cost eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter cab of dove's dung cost five shekels of silver.

As the king of Israel was walking by on the city wall, a woman called out to him, “Help me, my lord the king!”

“If the Lord doesn't help you, why would you think I can help you?” the king replied. “I don't have grain from the threshing floor, or wine from the winepress.” But then he asked her, “What's the problem?”

“This woman told me, ‘Give up your son and we'll eat him today, and tomorrow we'll eat my son,’” she answered. “So we cooked my son and we ate him. The next day I said to her, ‘Give up your son so we can eat him,’ but she's hidden her son.”

When the king heard what the woman said he ripped his clothes. As he walked by on the wall, the people saw that he was wearing sackcloth under his clothes next to his skin. “May God punish me very severely if the head of Elisha, son of Shaphat, remains on his shoulders today!” he declared.

Elisha was sitting in his house with the elders. The king had sent a messenger on ahead, but before he got there, Elisha told the elders, “Can you see how this murderer is sending someone to cut off my head? So, as soon as the messenger arrives, close the door and hold it shut against him. Isn't that the sound of his master's footsteps following him?”

While Elisha was still speaking with them, the messenger arrived. The king said, “This disaster is from the Lord. Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?”

Elisha replied, “Listen to the message from the Lord. This is what the Lord says: Around this time tomorrow a seah of the best flour will sell for a shekel, and two seahs of barley will sell for a shekel at the gate of Samaria.”

The officer who was the king's assistant said to the man of God, “Look, even if the Lord opened windows in heaven what you say couldn't happen!”

Elisha replied, “You'll see it with your own eyes, but you won't get to eat any of it.”

There happened to be four men with leprosy at the entrance of the city gate. They said to each other, “Why are we sitting around here until we die? If we say, ‘Let's go into the city,’ we'll die because of the famine there; but if we go on sitting here, we'll die too. So come on, let's go to the camp of the Arameans and surrender to them. If they let us live, we'll live; if they kill us, we'll die.”

So they set off when it was getting dark and went to the camp of the Arameans. But when they arrived at the edge of the camp, nobody was there! For the Lord had made the Arameans hear the sound of chariots, horses, and a large army approaching, so they said to each other, “The king of Israel has hired the kings of the Hittites and Egyptians to come and attack us.” So they jumped up and ran away into the night, leaving behind their tents, their horses, and their donkeys. In fact the camp was left just as it was when they ran for their lives.

When the lepers got to the edge of the camp, they went into a tent and ate and drank. Then they took the silver, gold, and clothes, and hid them. After that they went back to another tent, took some things from there, and hid them. Then they said to each other, “It's not right what we're doing. This is a day of good news, and if we keep quiet about it and wait until it gets light, we're sure to be punished. So let's go right away and let them know at the king's palace.”

They went and called to the gatekeepers of the city, “We went over to the Aramean camp and no one was

there, not a sound of anybody! There were just horses and donkeys tied up, and the tents just as they were."

The gatekeepers shouted out the news, and reports reached the royal palace. The king got up in the night and said to his officers, "Let me tell you the trick the Arameans are trying to play on us. They know we're starving, so they have left the camp and hidden in the field, thinking, 'When they leave the city, we'll take them alive and be able to enter the city.'"

One of his officers suggested, "Have some men take five of the remaining horses in the city. What happens to them will be the same as that of all the Israelites left here, All the Israelites here are doomed. Let's send them to find out what's going on."

So they got two chariots ready with their horses, and the king sent them out to the Aramean camp, telling them "Go and take a look."

They went after them as far as the Jordan, and the whole way was full of clothing and equipment the Arameans had thrown aside as they ran away. The messengers returned and reported to the king. Then the people went out and looted the camp of the Arameans. So a seah of the best flour sold for a shekel, and two seahs of barley sold for a shekel, just as the Lord had predicted.

The king had put the officer who was his assistant in charge of the gate. In their rush the people trampled him in the gateway and he died, just as the man of God had said when the king visited him. What the man of God had told the king also came true when he said, "Around this time tomorrow a seah of the best flour will sell for a shekel, and two seahs of barley will sell for a shekel at the gate of Samaria."

Also the officer who was the king's assistant had said to the man of God, "Look, even if the Lord opened windows in heaven what you say couldn't happen!" Elisha had replied, "You'll see it with your own eyes, but you won't get to eat any of it." This is what happened to him. The people trampled him in the gateway and he died.

Elisha told the woman whose son he had brought back to life, "You and your family need to pack up and leave, and live where you can somewhere else like a foreigner. For the Lord announced a famine will come to the land and will last seven years."

The woman packed up and did what the man of God had told her. She and her family went and lived as foreigners for seven years in the country of the Philistines.

When the seven years were over, she came back from the country of the Philistines and went to the king to appeal for the return of her house and lands. The king was talking with Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, asking him, "Please tell me about all the wonderful things Elisha did." It so happened that right then Gehazi was telling the king the story of how Elisha had brought the dead boy back to life when his mother arrived to make her appeal to the king for the return of her house and lands.

"My lord the king," Gehazi called out, "this is the woman, and this is her son that Elisha brought back to life."

The king asked the woman about it and she explained the whole story to him. The king gave orders to an official, saying, "Make sure everything that belonged to her is returned to her, together with all the profit from her lands from the day that she left the country until now."

Elisha went to Damascus when Ben-hadad king of Aram was ill. The king was informed, "The man of God has arrived in town."

The king ordered Hazael, "Take a gift with you and go and meet the man of God. Ask him to ask the Lord, 'Will I recover from this illness?'"

So Hazael went to meet Elisha. He took with him a gift of all the best things from Damascus—forty camel loads of goods. He came in and stood before him and said, "Your son Ben-hadad, king of Aram, has sent me to you to ask, 'Will I recover from this illness?'"

"Go and tell him, 'You will definitely recover.' But the Lord has shown me that definitely he is going to die," Elisha replied.

Elisha stared at him for a long time until Hazael became uncomfortable. Then the man of God started to cry.

"Why are you crying, my lord?" asked Hazael.

"Because I know the evil things you are going to do to the Israelites," Elisha replied. "You will set their fortresses on fire, kill their young men with the sword, dash to pieces their little ones, and rip open their pregnant women."

"But how could someone like me who's just a 'dog' achieve anything like that?" Hazael asked.

"The Lord has shown me that you are going to be the king of Aram," Elisha replied.

Hazael left Elisha and went to his master, who asked him, "What did Elisha tell you?"

Hazael replied, "He told me you would definitely recover."

But the following day Hazael took the bed cover, soaked it in water, and spread it over the king's face until he died. Then Hazael took over from him as king.

Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, began his reign as king of Judah in the fifth year of the reign of Joram, son of Ahab, king of Israel, while Jehoshaphat was still king of Judah. He was thirty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eight years. Jehoram followed the ways of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab and did what was evil in the Lord's sight. But for the sake of David his servant the Lord didn't want to destroy Judah since he had promised him that there would always be a ruler from his descendants, like a lamp forever.

During Jehoram's time as king, Edom rebelled against Judah's rule and chose their own king. So Jehoram went over to Zair with all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he took action and attacked at night. But his army ran back to their homes. As a result Edom has been in rebellion against Judah's rule to this day. At the same time Libnah also decided to rebel.

The rest of what happened in Jehoram's reign and all that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Jehoram died and was buried with

his forefathers in the City of David. His son Ahaziah succeeded him as king.

Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, became king of Judah in the twelfth year of the reign of Joram, son of Ahab, king of Israel. Ahaziah was twenty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri, king of Israel. Ahaziah also followed the evil ways of the family of Ahab, and did what was evil in the Lord's sight as the family of Ahab had done, for he was related to them by marriage.

Ahaziah went with Joram, son of Ahab, to fight against Hazael, king of Aram, at Ramoth-gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram, and he returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he'd received in Ramah fighting against Hazael king of Aram. Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went to Jezreel to visit Joram, son of Ahab, because Joram was wounded.

Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets and told him, “Put your cloak into your belt, take this flask of olive oil, and go to Ramoth-gilead. Once you get there, look for Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi. Go in, get him away from his companions, and take him to an inner room. Get him to leave his friends, lead him to a private room, take the flask of olive oil, and pour it on his head. Tell him, ‘This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king of Israel.’ Then open the door and run away! Don't wait around!”

So the young prophet went to Ramoth-gilead. When he arrived, he saw the army commanders sitting around. “I've got a message for you, commander,” he said.

“For which one of us?” Jehu asked.

“For you, commander,” he replied.

Jehu got up and went inside, where the young prophet poured the olive oil on his head and announced to him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anoint you king over the Lord's people Israel. You are going to destroy the family of Ahab, your master. You will avenge the blood of my prophets and the blood of all the Lord's servants killed by Jezebel. The whole house of Ahab will be eradicated—I will destroy all the males of Ahab's family in Israel, both slave and free. I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha, son of Ahijah. Dogs will eat Jezebel, Ahab's wife, at the plot of ground in Jezreel, and no one will bury her.’” Then the young prophet opened the door and ran away.

When Jehu went back out to the other officers of his master, they asked him, “Is everything fine? Why did this crazy man come to you?”

“You know what he's like, and how he goes on and on,” he replied.

“Liar!” they said. “Please tell us what's going on.”

“Well, he talked to me about this and that, and he told me, ‘This is what the Lord says: I anoint you king over Israel.’”

They quickly grabbed their cloaks and spread them on the bare steps. They blew the trumpet and shouted, “Jehu is king!”

So Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, son of Nimshi, plotted rebellion against Joram. Joram and the whole Israelite army had been defending Ramoth-gilead against Hazael, king of Aram. But Joram had returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he'd received fighting against Hazael, king of Aram. So Jehu said, “If you commanders want to make me king, don't let anyone leave town and go and announce it in Jezreel.”

Jehu got on his chariot and went to Jezreel, for Joram was recuperating there. Ahaziah, king of Judah, was there too because he had come to visit Joram. The watchman on the tower in Jezreel saw Jehu's soldiers approaching, and he shouted out, “I see soldiers coming!”

“Choose a horseman,” Joram ordered. “Send him out to meet them and ask, ‘Do you come in peace?’”

So a horseman rode off to meet Jehu, and said, “This is what the king asks: ‘Do you come in peace?’”

“What has peace got to do with you?” Jehu replied. “Turn around and follow me.”

The watchman reported, “The messenger has reached them, but he's not returning.”

The king sent out a second horseman. He went up to them and said, “This is what the king asks: ‘Do you come in peace?’”

“What has peace got to do with you?” Jehu replied. “Turn around and follow me.”

The watchman reported, “The messenger has reached them, but he's not returning. The driving looks like the driving of Jehu, son of Nimshi—he's a crazy driver!”

“Prepare my chariot!” Joram shouted, and they had his chariot ready. Then Joram, king of Israel, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, set off in their separate chariots, and met Jehu on the plot of ground that was previously owned by Naboth from Jezreel.

When Joram saw Jehu, he asked him, “Do you come in peace, Jehu?”

“What peace can there be with so much prostitution and witchcraft caused by your mother Jezebel?” Jehu replied.

Joram turned around and raced away, shouting out to Ahaziah, “It's treason, Ahaziah!”

Jehu picked up his bow and shot Joram between the shoulders. The arrow went through his heart and he collapsed dead in his chariot.

Jehu said to Bidkar his officer, “Pick him up and throw him into the field of Naboth from Jezreel. Remember when you and I were riding together behind his father Ahab how the Lord made this prophecy against him: ‘In the same way as I saw the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons yesterday, says the Lord, so I will certainly repay you on this same plot of ground, says the Lord.’ Now then, following what the Lord has said, pick him up and throw him on the plot of ground.”

When Ahaziah, king of Judah, saw what happened, he raced up the road toward Beth-haggan. But Jehu chased after him, shouting, “Kill him too!” So they killed Ahaziah in his chariot on the way up to Gur, near Ibleam. He managed to escape to Megiddo but he died there. His servants took him by chariot to Jerusalem and buried him with his forefathers in his tomb in the City of David. Ahaziah became king of Judah in the eleventh year of the reign of Joram, son of Ahab.

When Jezebel heard that Jehu had arrived in Jezreel, she put on her black eye shadow, placed jewelry in her hair, and watched from a window. As Jehu came

in through the gate, she shouted down, “Do you come in peace? Or are you like Zimri, a murderer of your master?”

Jehu looked up at the window and shouted out, “Who is on my side? Anyone?” Two or three eunuchs looked down at him.

“Throw her down!” he shouted. And they threw her down. Her blood spattered on the wall and on the horses which then trampled her.

Jehu went inside and ate and drank. Then he said, “Please deal with that cursed woman and bury her, for she was a king's daughter.”

They went out to bury her but all they found were her skull, her feet, and her hands.

They went back and told Jehu, who said, “This is what the Lord said through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: ‘Dogs will eat Jezebel's flesh on the plot of ground at Jezreel. Jezebel's body will lie like manure in the field on the plot of ground at Jezreel, so that no one can say: This is where Jezebel is buried.’”

There were seventy sons of the house of Ahab living in Samaria. So Jehu wrote letters and sent them to the officials of Samaria, to the elders, and to the guardians of the sons of Ahab, saying: “Since your master's sons are with you, and you have at your disposal chariots, horses, a fortified city, and weapons, when you receive this letter, choose the best and most appropriate son of your master, place him on his father's throne, and fight for your master's house.”

But they were extremely frightened, and said to themselves, “If two kings couldn't defeat him, how could we?”

So the palace and the city leaders, the elders, and the guardians sent a message to Jehu: “We are your servants, and we will do whatever you tell us. We're not going to make anyone king. Do what you think is best.”

Then Jehu wrote them a second letter, saying, “If you are on my side, and if you are going to obey what I say, bring the heads of your master's sons to me in Jezreel by this time tomorrow.” The seventy king's sons were being raised by the leading men of the city. When the letter arrived, they seized the king's sons and killed all seventy of them, placed their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jehu at Jezreel.

A messenger came in and told Jehu, “They have brought the heads of the king's sons.”

Jehu gave the order, “Put them in two piles at the entrance to the city gate until the morning.”

In the morning Jehu went out to speak to the people who had gathered. “You haven't done anything wrong,” he told them. “I was the one who plotted against my master and killed him. But who killed all these? Rest assured that nothing of what the Lord has prophesied against the house of Ahab will fail, for the Lord has done what he promised through his servant Elijah.”

So Jehu killed everyone in Jezreel who was left of the house of Ahab, as well as all his high officials, close friends, and priests. This left Ahab without a single survivor.

Then Jehu left and went to Samaria. At Beth-eked of the Shepherds, he met some relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah.

“Who are you?” he asked them.

“We're relatives of Ahaziah,” they replied. “We've come to visit the sons of the king and of the queen mother.”

“Take them alive!” Jehu ordered. So they took them alive, then killed them at the well of Beth-eked. There were forty-two men. He didn't allow any of them to live.

He left there and came across Jehonadab, son of Rechab, who was coming to meet him. Jehu greeted him and asked him, “Are you as committed to me, as I am to you?”

“Yes I am,” Jehonadab replied.

“In that case, give me your hand,” said Jehu. So he stretched out his hand, and Jehu helped him up into the chariot.

“Come with me and see how dedicated I am to the Lord!” Jehu said, and had him ride in his chariot.

When Jehu arrived in Samaria, he went around killing everyone who was left of Ahab's family until he had killed all of them, just as the Lord had said through Elijah.

Jehu had all the people gather together and told them, “Ahab worshiped Baal a little, but Jehu will worship him a lot. So summon all the prophets of Baal, all his servants and all his priests. Make sure no one is missing, because I'm organizing a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who doesn't attend will be executed.” But Jehu's plan was a trick to destroy the followers of Baal.

Jehu gave the order, “Call a religious assembly to honor Baal!” So they did so. Jehu sent the announcement through the whole of Israel. All the followers of Baal came—not a single man was missing. They went into the temple of Baal, filling it from end to end. Jehu said to the keeper of the wardrobe, “Distribute clothes for all the servants of Baal.” So he brought out clothes for them.

Then Jehu and Jehonadab, son of Rechab, went into the temple of Baal. Jehu told the followers of Baal, “Look around and make sure that no one who follows the Lord is here with you, only the worshipers of Baal.”

They were inside presenting sacrifices and burnt offerings. Now Jehu had positioned eighty men outside and cautioned them, “I'm handing these men over to you. If you let any of them escape, you will pay for his life with yours.”

As soon as Jehu had finished presenting the burnt offering, he ordered his guards and officers, “Go in and kill them all! Don't let even one escape!” So they killed them with their swords. The guards and officers threw their bodies outside, and then they went into the inner sanctuary of the temple of Baal. They dragged out the idol pillars and burned them. They smashed the sacred pillar of Baal, and tore down the temple of Baal and turned it into a toilet, which it still is to this day.

This was how Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel, but he did not end the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

The Lord said to Jehu, “Since you have done well, and have carried out what is right in my sight, and have accomplished all that I planned for the house of Ahab, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.”

But Jehu was not completely committed to following the law of the Lord, the God of Israel. He did not end the sins that Jeroboam had made Israel commit.

At that time the Lord began to reduce the extent of Israel. Hazael defeated the Israelites throughout their territory east of the Jordan, all the land of Gilead (the region occupied by Gad, Reuben, and Manasseh), and from Aroer through the Arnon Valley up to Gilead and Bashan.

The rest of what happened in Jehu's reign, all that he did and what he accomplished, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Jehu died and was buried in Samaria. His son Jehoahaz succeeded him as king. Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria for twenty-eight years.

When Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah, saw that her son was dead, she had all the rest of the royal family murdered. But Jehosheba, daughter of King Jehoram, sister of Ahaziah, took Ahaziah's son Joash, stealing him away from the rest of the sons of the king who were being killed. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah, and he was not murdered. Joash stayed hidden in the Lord's Temple for six years while Athaliah ruled the country.

In the seventh year, Jehoiada sent for the commanders of hundreds, the Carites, and the guards, and brought them into the Lord's Temple. He made an agreement with them and made them swear an oath. There in the Lord's Temple he showed them the king's son and ordered them, “This is what you are going to do: One third of you who come on duty on the Sabbath will guard the royal palace. One third will be at the Sur Gate, and one third at the gate behind the guards. You will alternate in guarding the palace. The two divisions that would normally go off duty on the Sabbath will guard the Lord's Temple for the king. Surround the king with weapons drawn, and anyone who approaches this line must be killed. Stay close to the king wherever he goes.”

The commanders of hundreds followed all the instructions that Jehoiada the priest had given. They each took their own men, those who were coming on duty on the Sabbath and those going off duty, and came to Jehoiada the priest. Then the priest handed over to the commanders of hundreds the spears and shields that had belonged to King David which were kept in the Lord's Temple. The guards stood with weapons drawn surrounding the king by the altar, and in a line around the Temple, from the south side to the north side of the Temple.

Then Jehoiada led out the king's son, placed the crown on him, and handed him a copy of God's Law. They proclaimed him king and anointed him. The people clapped, and shouted, “Long live the king!”

When Athaliah heard the noise of the guards and the people, she rushed to the crowds at the Lord's Temple. She saw the king standing by his pillar as the custom was. The commanders and trumpeters were with the king, and everyone was celebrating and blowing trumpets. Athaliah ripped her clothes and screamed out, “Treason! Treason!”

Jehoiada ordered the army commanders, “Bring her to the men standing in front of the Temple, and kill anyone who follows her.” Earlier the priest had made it clear, “She must not be killed in the Lord's Temple.” They grabbed hold of her, took her to where the horses enter the palace grounds and they killed her there.

Then Jehoiada made a solemn agreement between the Lord, the king, and the people that they would be the Lord's people. He also made an agreement between the king and the people. Everyone went to the Temple of Baal and tore down its altars and smashed the idols to pieces. They killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, right in front of the altar.

Then Jehoiada the priest had guards posted at the Lord's Temple. Along with the commanders, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people, he led the king in a procession down from the Lord's Temple, entering through the upper gate to the royal palace. There they set the king on the royal throne.

All throughout the land people celebrated, and Jerusalem was at peace, because Athaliah had been killed by the sword at the palace.

Joash was seven when he became king.

Joash became king in the seventh year of the reign of Jehu, and he reigned in Jerusalem for forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. Joash did what was right in the Lord's sight during the years that Jehoiada the priest advised him. Even so, the high places were not removed—the people went on sacrificing and presenting burnt offerings at these places.

Joash told the priests, “Collect together all the money that is brought as holy offerings to the Lord's Temple, whether the census money, the money from individual vows, or the money brought as a voluntary donation to the Lord's Temple. Let each priest receive the money from those who give, and use it to repair whatever damage is discovered in the Temple.”

But by the twenty-third year of the reign of Joash, the priests still had not repaired the damage to the Temple. So King Joash called together Jehoiada and the other priests and asked, “Why haven't you repaired the damage in the Temple? Don't use any more money you're given for yourselves, instead hand it over to others to repair the Temple.”

The priests agreed not to receive any more money from the people, and that they wouldn't carry out the repairs to the Temple themselves.

Jehoiada the priest took a large wooden box, cut a hole in its lid, and placed it on the right side of the altar next to the entrance to the Lord's Temple. There the priests who guarded the doorway put all the money brought into the Lord's Temple into the collection box. Whenever they saw there was a lot of money in the box, the king's secretary and the high priest would come, count the money brought into the Lord's Temple, and put it into bags. Then they weighed out the money and gave it to the supervisors of the work on the Lord's Temple. They paid the ones doing the work—the carpenters, builders, masons, and stonecutters. They also bought the timber and blocks of cut stone needed for the repair of the Lord's Temple, and paid all the other costs of restoring the Temple.

However, the money collected for the Lord's Temple was not used for making silver basins, lamp trimmers, bowls, trumpets, or any items of gold or silver for the Lord's Temple. It was used to pay the workers doing

the repairs to the Lord's Temple. No accounts were demanded from the men who received the money to pay the workers because they did everything honestly. The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings was not collected for the Lord's Temple because it belonged to the priests.

Around this time Hazael, king of Aram, went and attacked Gath, and captured it. Then he marched to attack Jerusalem. So King Joash of Judah took all the holy objects dedicated by his forefathers Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, the kings of Judah, along with all the items he had dedicated himself, and all the gold found in the treasuries of the Lord's Temple and the royal palace, and he sent everything to Hazael, king of Aram. So Hazael retreated from Jerusalem.

The rest of what happened in Joash's reign and all that he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. His officials plotted against him and murdered him at Beth Millo, on the road that goes down to Silla. The officials who attacked and killed him were Jozacar, son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad, son of Shomer. They buried him with his forefathers in the City of David. His son Amaziah succeeded him as king.

Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, became king of Israel in the twenty-third year of the reign of Joash, son of Ahaziah, king of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for seventeen years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, and followed the sins that Jeroboam son of Nebat, had made Israel commit; he did not end them. So the Lord was angry with Israel, and he repeatedly allowed them to be defeated by Hazael, king of Aram, and his son Ben-hadad.

Jehoahaz asked the Lord for help, and the Lord responded to his request because he saw how badly the king of Aram was treating Israel. The Lord gave Israel someone who would save them so they no longer were under Aramean rule. Then the Israelites were able to go back to living in safety as before.

Even so they did not end the sins that the house of Jeroboam had made Israel commit—they continued to follow them. The Asherah idol still stood in Samaria.

All that was left of Jehoahaz's army were fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand soldiers, for the king of Aram had destroyed the rest, turning them into dust like that when grain is threshed.

The rest of what happened in Jehoahaz's reign, all he did, and his great achievements are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Jehoahaz died and was buried in Samaria. His son Jehoash succeeded him as king.

Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, became king of Israel in Samaria in the thirty-seventh year of the reign of King Joash of Judah, and he reigned for sixteen years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight and did not end all the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit—he continued to follow them.

The rest of what happened in Jehoash's reign, all he did, and his great achievements such as his war against Amaziah, king of Judah, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Jehoash died, and Jeroboam sat on his throne. Jehoash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

Elisha had become ill with a disease that would eventually kill him. Jehoash, king of Israel, went to visit him, and wept over him, saying, “My father, my father, the chariots and the horsemen of Israel!”

Elisha told him, “Find a bow and some arrows.” So Jehoash found a bow and some arrows.

Then Elisha said to the king of Israel, “Pick up the bow.” So the king picked up the bow. Elisha placed his hands on the king's hands.

“Open the east window,” he told him. So the king opened it and Elisha said, “Shoot!” So he fired an arrow.

Then Elisha explained, “This is the Lord's victory arrow representing the arrow of victory over the Arameans. You will attack the Arameans in Aphek and finish them off.”

Then Elisha said, “Pick up the arrows!” So he picked them up.

Elisha told the king of Israel, “Hit the ground with them!” He hit the ground three times, and then stopped.

The man of God got angry with him, telling him, “You should have hit the ground five or six times. Then you would have attacked the Arameans until you had completely destroyed them. But now you will only attack the Arameans three times.”

Elisha died and was buried.

Raiders from the country of Moab used to invade Israel every spring. One time some Israelites were burying a man when suddenly they saw some raiders coming, so they quickly threw the man into Elisha's tomb. As soon as he touched Elisha's bones, the man came back to life and stood up.

Hazael, king of Aram, caused problems for Israel through all Jehoahaz's reign. But the Lord graciously helped them and was kind to them. He looked after them because of his agreement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even to this day he's been unwilling to destroy them or to throw them out of his presence.

When Hazael, king of Aram, died, his son Ben-hadad succeeded him as king. Then Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, recovered from Ben-hadad son of Hazael, the towns that Hazael had captured from his father Jehoahaz. Jehoash defeated Ben-hadad three times, and so recaptured the Israelite towns.

Amaziah, son of Joash, became king of Judah in the second year of the reign of Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. He was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, but not in the same way as his forefather David had. He did everything just as his father Joash had done. But the high places were not removed. The people still were sacrificing and presenting burnt offerings in those places.

Once he was secure on the throne he executed the officials who had murdered his father the king. But he did not execute the murderers' children, following the Lord's command in the law of Moses that “Fathers must not be put to death for their children's sins, and children must not be put to death for their father's sins. Everyone is to die for their own sin.”

Amaziah killed ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He attacked and captured Sela and renamed it Joktheel, which is what it is called to this very day.

Amaziah sent messengers to the king of Israel, Jehoash, son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, telling him, “Let's fight, face to face!”

Jehoash, king of Israel, replied to Amaziah, king of Judah: “In Lebanon a thistle sent a message to a cedar, saying, ‘Give your daughter as a wife to my son.’ But a wild animal of Lebanon came by and trampled down the thistle. You may indeed have defeated Edom. Now you've become arrogant. Stay home and enjoy your victory! Why provoke trouble that will bring you down, and Judah with you?”

But Amaziah refused to listen, so Jehoash, king of Israel, came to attack him. He and Amaziah, king of Judah, met face to face at Beth Shemesh in Judah. The army of Judah was defeated by Israel, and ran away home. Jehoash, king of Israel, captured Amaziah, king of Judah, the son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth Shemesh.

Then Jehoash attacked Jerusalem and knocked down the city wall from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate, about four hundred cubits in length. He removed all the gold and silver, and all the items found in the Lord's Temple and in the treasuries of the royal palace, and also some hostages. Then he went back to Samaria.

The rest of what happened in Jehoash's reign, all he did, and his great achievements and his war with Amaziah, king of Judah, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Jehoash died and was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel. His son Jeroboam succeeded him as king.

Amaziah, son of Joash, king of Judah, lived for fifteen more years after the death of Joash, son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. The rest of the events that happened in Amaziah's reign are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

A conspiracy against Amaziah took place in Jerusalem, and he ran away to Lachish. But men were sent after him and they murdered him there. They brought him back on horses and buried him in Jerusalem with his forefathers in the City of David. Then all the people of Judah made Amaziah's son Azariah king to replace his father. Azariah was sixteen years old. Azariah recaptured Elath for Judah and rebuilt it after his father's death.

Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, became king of Israel in the fifteenth year of the reign of Amaziah, son of Joash, king of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for forty-one years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight and did not end all the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit. He restored the border of Israel to where it had been, from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, as the Lord, the God of Israel, had said through his servant Jonah, son of Amittai, the prophet, who came from Gath-hepher.

The Lord had seen how badly the Israelites were suffering, both slave and free. No one was there to help Israel. However, since the Lord had said that he would not wipe out Israel, he saved them through Jeroboam, son of Jehoash. The rest of what happened in Jeroboam's reign, all he did, his great achievements and the battles he fought, and how he recovered for Israel both Damascus and Hamath, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Jeroboam died and was buried with the kings of Israel. His son Zechariah succeeded him as king.

Azariah, son of Amaziah, became king of Judah in the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel. He was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, just as his father Amaziah had done. But the high places were not removed. The people still were sacrificing and presenting burnt offerings in those places. The Lord touched the king and he had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in isolation in a separate house. His son Jotham was in charge of the palace and was the country's actual ruler.

The rest of what happened in Azariah's reign and all he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Azariah died and was buried with his forefathers in the City of David. His son Jotham succeeded him as king. Zechariah, son of Jeroboam, became king of Israel in the thirty-eighth year of the reign of Azariah, king of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for six months. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, as his forefathers had done. He did not end the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit. Then Shallum, son of Jabesh, plotted against Zechariah. He attacked him, murdering him in front of the people, and took over as king.

The rest of the events of Zechariah's reign are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. In this way what the Lord told Jehu came true: “Your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.”

Shallum, son of Jabesh, became king in the thirty-ninth year of the reign of King Uzziah of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for one month. Then Menahem, son of Gadi, went from Tirzah to Samaria, attacked and murdered Shallum, son of Jabesh, and took over as king.

The rest of the events of Shallum's reign and the rebellion he plotted are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

At that time Menahem, starting from Tirzah, attacked Tiphsah and the region nearby, because they would not surrender the town to him. So he destroyed Tiphsah and ripped open all the pregnant women.

Menahem, son of Gadi, became king of Israel in the thirty-ninth year of the reign of King Azariah of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for ten years. Throughout his reign he did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He did not end the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit.

Pul, king of Assyria, invaded the country. Menahem paid Pul a thousand talents of silver to support Menahem in consolidating his power over the kingdom. Menahem demanded payment from all the wealthy men of Israel, fifty shekels of silver each, to give to the king of Assyria. So the king of Assyria retreated and did not stay in the country.

The rest of what happened in Menahem's reign and all he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel. Menahem died, and his son Pekahiah succeeded him as king.

Pekahiah, son of Menahem, became king of Israel in Samaria in the fiftieth year of the reign of King Azariah of Judah, and he reigned for two years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He did not end the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit.

Pekah, son of Remaliah, one of his officers plotted against him together with Argob, Arieh, and fifty men from Gilead. Pekah attacked and killed Pekahiah in the fortress of the king's palace in Samaria, and took over as king.

The rest of what happened in Pekahiah's reign and all he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Pekah, son of Remaliah, became king of Israel in the fifty-second year of the reign of King Azariah of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for twenty years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight. He did not end the sins that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made Israel commit.

During the reign of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, invaded and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali, and he took the people to Assyria as prisoners.

Then Hoshea, son of Elah, plotted against Pekah, son of Remaliah. In the twentieth year of the reign of Jotham, son of Uzziah, Hoshea attacked Pekah, killed him, and took over as king.

The rest of what happened in Pekah's reign and all he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Israel.

Jotham, son of Uzziah, became king of Judah in the second year of the reign of Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel. He was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerusha, daughter of Zadok. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, just as his father Uzziah had done. But the high places were not removed. The people still were sacrificing and presenting burnt offerings in those places. He rebuilt the upper gate of the Lord's Temple. The rest of the events of Jotham's reign are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

During that time the Lord started sending Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, to attack Judah.

Jotham died and was buried with his forefathers in the City of David, his ancestor. His son Ahaz succeeded him as king.

Ahaz, son of Jotham, became king of Judah in the seventeenth year of the reign of Pekah, son of Remaliah. Ahaz was twenty when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. But unlike David his forefather, he did not do what was right in the sight of the Lord his God. He followed the ways of the kings of Israel, and he even sacrificed his son in the fire, participating in the disgusting practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He sacrificed and presented burnt offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

Rezin, king of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came and attacked Jerusalem. They besieged Ahaz but couldn't defeat him. This was when Rezin, king of Aram, recovered Elath for Edom. He expelled the people of Judah, and sent Edomites to Elath, where they still live to this day.

Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, saying, “I'm your servant, and your son. Please come and rescue me from the kings of Aram and Israel who are attacking me.” Ahaz took the silver and gold from the Lord's Temple and from the treasuries of the king's palace, and he sent it to the king of Assyria as a gift.

The king of Assyria responded positively to him. He went and attacked Damascus, and captured it. He deported its inhabitants to Kir and executed Rezin.

King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria. During his visit he saw an altar in Damascus, and he sent Uriah the priest a drawing of the altar, along with instructions how to build it. So Uriah the priest built an altar following all the instructions King Ahaz had sent from Damascus, completing it before King Ahaz returned.

When the king came back from Damascus he saw the altar. He went over to it and made offerings on it. He presented his burnt offering and his grain offering, he poured out his drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his friendship offerings on it. He also moved the bronze altar that stood before the Lord from the front of the Temple, between the new altar and the Lord's Temple, and he placed it to the north of the new altar.

Then King Ahaz ordered Uriah the priest: “Use this new important altar to offer the morning burnt offering, the evening grain offering, the king's burnt offering and grain offering, and the burnt offering of all the people, and their grain offerings and their drink offerings. Sprinkle on this altar the blood of all the burnt offerings and sacrifices. The old bronze altar I'll use for divination.”

Uriah the priest followed King Ahaz's orders. King Ahaz also removed the frames of the movable carts, and also took out the bronze basin from each of them. He removed the Sea from the bronze bulls it rested on and placed it on a stone pedestal. He took down the Sabbath canopy they had built in the Temple, as well as the king's outer entrance to the Lord's Temple. He did this to please the king of Assyria.

The rest of what happened in Ahaz's reign and all he did are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Ahaz died and was buried with his forefathers in the City of David. His son Hezekiah succeeded him as king.

Hoshea, son of Elah, became king of Israel, in the twelfth year of the reign of King Ahaz of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for nine years. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, but not in the same way as the kings of Israel who were before him.

Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, came and attacked him, and Hoshea submitted to him and paid him tribute.

But then the king of Assyria discovered that Hoshea was being disloyal. Hoshea had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, asking for help, and he also had stopped sending annual tribute to the king of Assyria as he had done previously. So the king of Assyria arrested Hoshea and put him in prison.

Then the king of Assyria invaded the whole country, and attacked Samaria, besieging it for three years. In the ninth year of the reign of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the towns of the Medes.

All this happened because the people of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, the one who had led them out of Egypt, saving them from the power of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. They had worshiped other gods, adopting the ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites, and the pagan practices introduced by the kings of Israel. Secretly the Israelites did things that were not right against the Lord their God. They built high places in all their towns, from watchtowers to fortified cities. They set up pagan stone pillars and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every green tree. They offered sacrifices on all the high places, just like the nations the Lord drove out before them. They did evil things, angering the Lord. They worshiped idols, even though the Lord had told them, “You are not to do this.”

Yet the Lord had warned Israel and Judah repeatedly through all his prophets and seers, saying, “Leave your wicked ways and keep my commandments and instructions. Follow the whole law that I ordered your forefathers to obey, and gave to you through my servants the prophets.”

But they refused to listen, and they were as stubborn as their forefathers who did not trust the Lord their God. They gave up on his regulations and the covenant he had made with their forefathers, as well as the decrees he had given them. They followed pointless idols and they became pointless themselves, copying the nations around them that the Lord ordered them not to copy. They ignored all the commandments of the Lord their God, and they made themselves two metal idols of calves and an Asherah pole. They bowed down in worship to the sun, moon, and stars and served Baal. They sacrificed their sons and daughters as pagan burnt offerings, and practiced fortune-telling and witchcraft. They gave themselves over to doing what was evil in the Lord's sight, making him angry.

So the Lord was extremely angry with Israel, and he banished them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, but even Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but followed the idolatry that Israel had introduced. The Lord gave up on all the descendants of Israel. He punished them and handed them over to their enemies, until he had banished them from his presence.

When the Lord ripped Israel away from the house of David, they made Jeroboam, son of Nebat, their king. Jeroboam led Israel away from the Lord and made them commit terrible sins. The Israelites continued to practice all the sins that Jeroboam committed. They did not stop doing them, so the Lord eventually expelled them from his presence, just as he had said he would through all his servants, the prophets. So the Israelites were deported from their land and taken to Assyria, where they are to this day.

The king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Kuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and settled them in the towns of Samaria instead of the Israelites. They took over ownership of Samaria and lived in its towns. When they first started living there they did not worship the Lord, so he sent lions there among them, killing some of them.

The king of Assyria was told, “The people that you brought and settled in the towns of Samaria they don't know the rules of the God of the land. As a result, he has sent lions among them, which are killing them off because they don't know what the God of the land requires.”

The king of Assyria gave the order: “Send back one of the priests you deported from Samaria, and let him go back and live there and teach the rules of the God of the land.” So one of the priests who had been deported from Samaria returned to live in Bethel, and taught them how to worship the Lord.

But the people of the different nations went on making their own gods in the towns where they had settled, and they placed them in the shrines of the high places that the people of Samaria had made. Those from Babylon made Sukkoth Benoth, those from Kuthah made Nergal, and those from Hamath made Ashima. The Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak, and the Sepharvites sacrificed their children as burnt offerings to their gods Adrammelech and Anammelech.

While they worshiped the Lord, they also appointed priests from all kinds of their own people to offer sacrifices for them in the shrines of the high places. So even though they worshiped the Lord, they also worshiped their own gods following the practices of the nations they had come from. Even to this day they are still following their former practices. None of them truly worships the Lord or observes the regulations, requirements, laws, and commandments that the Lord gave to the descendants of Jacob, the one he named Israel.

For the Lord had made an agreement with the Israelites, ordering them, “Don't worship other gods or bow down to them; don't serve them or offer sacrifices to them. You must worship only the Lord, who led you out of Egypt, helping you with his great power and strong arm. Only bow down to him; only offer sacrifices to him. Always pay attention to observe the regulations, requirements, laws, and commandments he gave you in writing, and don't worship other gods. Don't forget the agreement I have made with you, and don't worship other gods. You must worship only the Lord your God, and he will save you from all your enemies.”

But they refused to listen, and continued their former idolatrous practices. Even while these people from different nations were worshiping the Lord, they were actually worshiping their idols. Their children and grandchildren continue to do as their forefathers did to this day.

Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, became king of Judah in the third year of the reign of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel. He was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abi, daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, following all that his forefather David had done. He removed the high places, smashed the stone idols, and cut down the Asherah

poles. He ground to pieces the bronze snake Moses had made, because up to then the Israelites had been sacrificing offerings to it. It was called Nehushtan.

Hezekiah put his trust in the Lord, the God of Israel. Among the kings of Judah there was no one like him, neither before him nor after him. He stayed faithful to the Lord and did not give up following him. He kept the commandments that the Lord had given Moses. The Lord was with him; he was successful in everything he did. He defied the king of Assyria and refused to submit to him. He defeated the Philistines all the way to Gaza and the surrounding area, from watchtower to fortified town.

In the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign, equivalent to the seventh year of the reign of Hoshea, son of Elah, king of Israel, Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, attacked Samaria, besieging it. The Assyrians conquered it after three years. This was during the sixth year of Hezekiah, equivalent to the ninth year of Hoshea, king of Israel. The king of Assyria deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River, and in the towns of the Medes. This happened because they refused to listen to the Lord their God and broke his agreement—all that Moses, the Lord's servant, had commanded. They refused to listen and did not obey.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked and conquered all the fortified towns of Judah in the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah. So Hezekiah, king of Judah, sent a message to the king of Assyria who was at Lachish, saying, "I've made a terrible mistake! Please retreat and leave me alone, and I'll pay you whatever you want!" The king of Assyria demanded Hezekiah, king of Judah, pay three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah paid him using all the silver from the Lord's Temple and the treasuries of the royal palace. He even stripped the gold he had used to overlay the doors and doorposts of the Lord's Temple and gave everything to the king of Assyria.

Even so, the king of Assyria sent his commander-in-chief, his head officer, and his army general, along with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. They approached Jerusalem and made camp beside the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to where laundry is washed. They called for the king. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace manager, Shebnah the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the record-keeper, went out to speak with them.

The Assyrian army general said to them, "Tell Hezekiah this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: What are you trusting in that gives you such confidence? You say you have a strategy and are ready for war, but these are empty words. Who are you relying on, now that you have rebelled against me? Now look! You're trusting in Egypt, a walking stick that's like a broken reed that will cut the hand of anyone leaning on it. That's what Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is like to everyone who trusts in him.

If you tell me, 'We're trusting in the Lord our God,' well didn't Hezekiah remove his high places and his altars, telling Judah and Jerusalem: 'You have to worship at this altar in Jerusalem'?

Why don't you accept a challenge from my master, the king of Assyria? He says, I'll give you two thousand horses, if you can find enough riders for them! How could you defeat even a single officer in charge of the weakest of my master's men when you're trusting in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? More than that—would I have come to attack this place without the Lord's encouragement? It was the Lord himself who told me, 'Go and attack this land and destroy it.'"

Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, together with Shebnah and Joah, said to the army general, "Please speak to us, your servants, in Aramaic, for we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew while the people on the wall are listening."

But the army general replied, "Did my master only send me to say these things to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall? They too, just like you, are going to have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine!"

Then the army general shouted out in Hebrew, "Listen to this from the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: Don't let Hezekiah trick you! He can't save you from me! Don't believe Hezekiah when he tells you to trust in the Lord, saying, 'I'm certain the Lord will save us. This city will never fall into the hands of the king of Assyria.' Don't listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king says: Make a peace treaty with me and surrender to me. That way everyone will eat from their own vine and their own fig tree, and drink water from their own well! I will come and take you to a land that's like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey. Then you will live and not die.

But don't listen to Hezekiah, for he's tricking you when he says, 'The Lord will deliver us.' Have any of the gods of any nation ever saved their land from the power of the king of Assyria? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where were the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Were they able to save Samaria from me? Which one of all the gods of these countries has saved their land from me? How then could the Lord save Jerusalem from me?"

But the people remained silent and didn't say anything, for Hezekiah had given the order, "Don't answer him."

Then Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace manager, Shebna the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the record-keeper, went to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and they told him what the Assyrian army general had said.

When Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the Lord's Temple. He sent Eliakim the palace manager, Shebna, the scribe, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to see the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of trouble, of punishment and disgrace. It's like when babies arrive at the entrance to the birth canal but there's no strength to deliver them. Maybe the Lord your God, hearing the message the army commander delivered on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria—a message sent to insult the living God—will punish him for his words. Please say a prayer for the remnant of us who still survive."

After Hezekiah's officials delivered his message to Isaiah, Isaiah replied to them, "Tell your master, This is what the Lord says: 'Don't be frightened by the words

that you have heard, the words used by the servants of the king of Assyria to blaspheme me. Look, I'm going to scare him—he'll hear a rumor, and he'll have to return to his own country. When he's there I'll have him killed by the sword.'"

The Assyrian army commander left and went back to join the king of Assyria, having heard the king had left Lachish and was attacking Libnah.

Sennacherib had received a message about Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, that said, "Watch out! He has set out to attack you." So Sennacherib sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, "Tell Hezekiah, king of Judah: 'Don't let your God, the one you're trusting in, fool you by saying that Jerusalem won't fall into the hands of the king of Assyria. Look! You've heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries they've invaded— they destroyed them completely! Do you really think you'll be saved? Did the gods of the nations my forefathers destroyed save them—the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who lived in Telassar? Where today is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?'"

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the Lord's Temple and opened it out before the Lord. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying, "Lord, God of Israel, you who live above the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, you are Creator of heaven and earth. Please listen with your ears, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to the message that Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.

Yes, it's true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have destroyed these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire because they are not really gods—they are just the work of human hands, made of wood and stone so they could destroy them. Now, Lord our God, please save us from him, in order that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that only you, Lord, are God."

Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent a message to Hezekiah, saying, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer about Sennacherib, king of Assyria. This is the word the Lord condemning him: The virgin daughter of Zion scorns you and mocks you; the daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head as you run away. Who have you been insulting and ridiculing? Who did you raise your voice against? Who did you look at with so proud eyes? It was against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have mocked the Lord. You said: 'With my many chariots I have ascended to the high mountains, to the farthest peaks of Lebanon. I have chopped down its tallest cedars, the best of its cypress trees. I have reached its most distant outposts, its deepest forests. I have dug wells and drunk water in foreign lands. With the soles of my feet I dried up all the rivers in Egypt.'"

The Lord replies, "Haven't you heard? I decided it long ago; I planned it in the olden days. Now I am making sure it happens—that you are to knock down fortified towns into piles of rubble. Their people, powerless, are terrified and humiliated. They're like plants in a field, like soft green shoots, like grass that sprouts on rooftop—scorched before it can even grow.

But I know you very well—where you live, when you come in, when you leave, and your furious anger against me. Because of your furious anger against me, and because I know how you disrespect me, I'm going to put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will force you to return the same way you came."

"Hezekiah, this will be a sign to prove this is true: This year you'll eat what grows by itself. The second year you'll eat what grows from that. But in the third year you'll sow and reap, you'll plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The remnant that's left of Judah will revive again, sending roots below and bearing fruit above. For a remnant will come out of Jerusalem, and survivors will come from Mount Zion. The intense determination of the Lord will make sure this happens. This is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria: He shall not enter this city or shoot an arrow at it. He shall not advance towards it with a shield, or build a siege ramp against it. He shall return the same way he came, and he shall not enter this city, says the Lord. I will defend this city and save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

That night the angel of the Lord went to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000. When the survivors woke up in the morning, they were surrounded by dead bodies. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, gave up and left. He returned home to Nineveh and stayed there. While he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword and then ran away to the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him as king.

About this time Hezekiah fell very sick and was about to die. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your affairs in order, because you are going to die. You won't recover."

When Hezekiah heard this, he went to pray privately to the Lord, saying "Please remember Lord how I have followed you faithfully with all my heart. I have done what is good in your sight." Then Hezekiah cried and cried.

Before Isaiah had left the middle courtyard, the Lord spoke to him, saying, "Go back in and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, This is what the Lord, the God of your forefather David, says: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Look! I am going to heal you. In three days time you will go to the Lord's Temple. I will add fifteen years to your life. I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David."

Then Isaiah said, "Prepare a dressing from figs." Hezekiah's servants did so and put it on the skin sores, and Hezekiah got better.

Hezekiah had previously asked Isaiah, "What is the sign to confirm that the Lord is going heal me and that I will go to the Lord's Temple in three days time?"

Isaiah replied, "This is the sign from the Lord to you that the Lord will do what he promised: Do you want the shadow to go forward ten steps, or back ten steps?"

"It's easy enough for the shadow to go forward ten steps, but not to go back ten steps," Hezekiah answered. So Isaiah the prophet asked the Lord, and he moved the shadow back the ten steps it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz.

At the same time Merodach-baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. Hezekiah welcomed the visitors and showed them everything in his treasury—all the silver, the gold, the spices, and the expensive oils. He also showed them his armory and all that he had in his storehouses. In fact there wasn't anything in his palace or in the whole of his kingdom that Hezekiah didn't show them.

Then the prophet Isaiah went to King Hezekiah and asked him, "Where did those men come from, and what did they tell you?"

"They came from a long way away, from Babylon," Hezekiah replied.

"What did they see in your palace?" Isaiah asked.

"They saw everything in my palace," replied Hezekiah. "There wasn't anything in all my storehouses I didn't show them."

Isaiah told Hezekiah, "Listen to what the Lord says: You can be certain that the time is coming when everything in your palace, and everything that your forefathers have saved up until now, will be taken away to Babylon. There will be nothing left, says the Lord. Some of your sons, your own offspring, will be taken to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon."

Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The message from the Lord that you have told me is fine." For he said to himself, "Why not, if there'll be peace and safety in my lifetime."

The rest of what happened in Hezekiah's reign, all he did, and how he made the pool and the tunnel to bring water into the city, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Hezekiah died, and his son Manasseh succeeded him as king.

Manasseh was twelve when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. His mother's name was Hephzibah. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight by following the disgusting pagan practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had destroyed, and he erected altars for Baal. He made an Asherah idol pole, just as Ahab, king of Israel, had done, and he worshiped and served the sun, moon, and stars.

He set up pagan altars in the Lord's Temple, right where the Lord had said, "I will place my name in Jerusalem forever." He set up altars to worship the sun, moon, and stars in the two courtyards of the Lord's Temple. He even he sacrificed his own son as a burnt offering, and used fortune-telling and witchcraft, and he dealt with mediums and with spiritists. He did a great deal of evil in the Lord's sight, making the Lord angry.

He took the Asherah idol pole he had made and placed in the Temple. This was the place referred to by the Lord when he told David and Solomon, his son, "In this Temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I will place my name forever. I will never again make the Israelites wander from the land I gave their forefathers if they are careful to follow everything I have ordered them to do—the whole law that my servant Moses gave them." The people refused to listen and Manasseh led them to sin so that the evil they did was even worse than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites.

The Lord said through his servants the prophets: "Since Manasseh, king of Judah, has committed all these disgusting sins, doing even more evil things than the Amorites who lived before him, and by his encouragement of idol worship has made Judah sin, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Watch out! I am going to bring down upon Jerusalem and Judah such a disaster that it will cause ringing in the ears of everyone who hears it. I will extend over Jerusalem the measuring line used against Samaria and the plumb line used against the house of Ahab, and I will wipe away Jerusalem as people wipe clean a bowl, wiping it and turning it upside down. I will give up on the remnant of my special people and hand them over to their enemies. They will be plunder and loot to all their enemies, because they have done what is evil in my sight, and have made me angry from the day their fathers left Egypt until today."

On top of that, Manasseh murdered so many innocent people that Jerusalem was filled from one side to the other with their blood. This was in addition to the sin that he had made Judah commit, doing evil in the Lord's sight.

The rest of what happened in Manasseh's reign, all he did, as well as the sins he committed, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Manasseh died, and was buried in his palace garden, the garden of Uzza. His son Amon succeeded him as king.

Amon was twenty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for two years. His mother's name was Meshullemeth, daughter of Haruz. She came from Jotbah.

He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as his father Manasseh had done. He followed all the ways of his father, and he served the idols his father had served, bowing down in worship to them. He rejected the Lord, the God of his forefathers, and did not follow the way of the Lord. Amon's officials plotted against him and murdered him in his royal palace.

But then the people of the land killed everyone who had plotted against King Amon, and they chose his son Josiah king to succeed him.

The rest of what happened in Amon's reign, and all he did, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. He was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza, and his son Josiah succeeded him as king.

Josiah was eight when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. His mother's name was Jedidah, daughter of Adaiah. She came from Bozkath. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, and followed all the ways of David his forefather—he did not deviate to the right or to the left.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, Josiah sent Shaphan, son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, to the Lord's Temple. He said, "Go to Hilkiah the high priest and have him count the money the doorkeepers have

collected from the people coming to the Lord's Temple. Then hand it over to those who are supervising the work on Lord's Temple, and have them pay the workmen doing the repairing of the Lord's Temple, the carpenters, the builders and the masons. In addition have them purchase timber and cut stone to repair the Temple. Don't ask for any accounts from the men who received the money because they deal honestly."

Hilkiah the high priest told Shaphan the scribe, "I've found the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple." He gave it to Shaphan who read it.

Shaphan the scribe went to the king to give him a report, saying, "Your officials have paid out the money that was in the Lord's Temple and have handed it over to those appointed to supervise the work at the Lord's Temple."

Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." Shaphan read it to the king.

When the king heard what was in the book of the Law, he tore his clothes. Then he gave orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Acbor, son of Micaiah, Shaphan, the scribe, and Asaiah the king's assistant, saying, "Go and talk to the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all of Judah, about what is said in the book that's been found. For the Lord must be really angry with us, because our forefathers have not obeyed the Lord's instructions in this book; they have not been doing what is written there for us to do."

Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went and spoke to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, custodian of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the city's second quarter.

She told them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, this is what the Lord says: I am about to bring disaster down on this place and on its people, in accordance with everything written in the book that has been read to the king of Judah. They have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to other gods, making me angry by everything they've done. My anger will be poured out upon this place and will not be stopped.

But tell the king of Judah who sent you to ask the Lord, tell him this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: As for what you heard read to you— because you were receptive and repentant before God when you heard his warnings against this place and against its people—that would become desolate and a curse—and because you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I have also heard you, declares the Lord. All this will not happen until after you have died, and you will die in peace. You will not see all the disaster that I'm going to bring down on this place." They went back to the king and gave him her response.

Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went to the Lord's Temple with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, together with the priests and the Levites, all the people from the least to the greatest, and he read to them the whole Book of the Agreement that had been discovered in the Lord's Temple. The king stood by the pillar and made a solemn agreement before the Lord to follow him and to keep his commandments, laws, and regulations with total dedication, and to observe the requirements of the agreement as written in the book. All the people entered into the agreement.

Then the king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests of second rank, and the doorkeepers to remove from the Lord's Temple everything made for Baal, Asherah, and the worship of sun, moon, and stars. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the Kidron fields and took their ashes to Bethel. He also dismissed the priests appointed by the kings of Judah to present burnt offerings on the high places of the towns of Judah and in the places all around Jerusalem, those who had sacrificed to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations, and to all the powers of heaven. He removed the Asherah pole from the Lord's Temple and took it to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem. He burned it there, ground it into dust, and threw its dust over the graves of the ordinary people. He also demolished the quarters of the cult prostitutes that were in the Lord's Temple, where the women used to weave tapestries for the Asherah pole. Josiah brought to Jerusalem all the priests from the towns of Judah and defiled the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had sacrificed burnt offerings. He demolished the high places of the gates, near to the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the governor of the city, which was left of the town gate. Though the priests of the high places did not serve at the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, they did eat unleavened bread with their brother priests.

He defiled the Topheth altar in the Valley of Benhinnom so that no one could sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire to Molech. He removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun from the entrance to the Lord's Temple. They were in the courtyard near the room of a eunuch named Nathanmelech. Josiah also burned the chariots dedicated to the sun. He demolished the altars that the kings of Judah had set up on the roof near the upper chamber of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had placed in the two courtyards of the Lord's Temple. The king smashed them to pieces and scattered them in the Kidron Valley. The king also defiled the high places to the east of Jerusalem, to the south of the Mount of Corruption, the places which King Solomon of Israel had built for Ashtoreth, the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh, the vile god of the Moabites, and for Molech, the vile god of the Ammonites. He smashed the sacred stone pillars to pieces, chopped down the Asherah poles, and covered the places with human bones.

He also demolished the altar at Bethel, the high place set up by Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who had made Israel sin. Then he burned the high place, ground it to dust, and burned the Asherah pole. As Josiah looked around he saw some tombs there on the hill. He had the bones taken from the tombs, and he burned them on the altar to defile it, just as the Lord had said through the man of God who had prophesied these things.

Then he asked, "Whose gravestone is this that I see?"

"It's the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed exactly what you have done to the altar of Bethel," the townspeople replied.

"Let him rest in peace," said Josiah. "Don't anyone touch his bones." So they left his bones undisturbed, together with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria.

Josiah destroyed, just as he did at Bethel, all the shrines of the high places in the towns of Samaria that the kings of Israel had built that had angered the Lord. Josiah slaughtered all the priests who were there at the high places on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

The king sent out an order to all the people, "Observe the Passover of the Lord your God, as it is written in this Book of the Agreement." Such a Passover as this had not been observed from the days of the judges who ruled Israel on through all the days of the kings of Israel and Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was observed to honor the Lord in Jerusalem.

In addition, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, and all the disgusting practices that were present in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem. He did this to fulfill the words of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had found in the Lord's Temple.

Never before was there a king like him who committed himself to the Lord in all his thoughts and attitudes, and with all his strength, keeping all the Law of Moses. There was no king like him afterwards either.

However, the Lord had not given up his furious hostility, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to anger him. So the Lord announced, "I'm also going to banish Judah from my presence, just as I banished Israel. I will abandon this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the Temple regarding which I said, My name will be there."

The rest of what happened in Josiah's reign, and all he did, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah.

While Josiah was still king, Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, led his army to help the king of Assyria at the Euphrates River. King Josiah took his army to fight him at Megiddo, but when Neco saw Josiah he killed him. His servants put his body in a chariot, brought him back from Megiddo to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. Then the people of the land chose Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in succession to his father.

Jehoahaz was twenty-three when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months. His mother's name was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah. She came from Libnah. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as all his forefathers had done. Pharaoh Neco imprisoned Jehoahaz at Riblah in the land of Hamath to stop him ruling in Jerusalem. He also imposed on Judah a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Pharaoh Neco made Eliakim, son of Josiah, king in succession to his father Josiah, and he changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt, where he died.

Jehoiakim paid the silver and gold to Pharaoh Neco, but in order to meet Pharaoh's demand he taxed the land and required payment of the silver and the gold from the people, each in proportion to their wealth.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Zebidah, daughter of Pedaiah She came from Rumah. He did evil in the Lord's sight, just as his forefathers had done.

During the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded the country and Jehoiakim submitted to him. But after three years Jehoiakim rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Then the Lord sent bands of raiders against Judah to destroy them. They came from Babylonia, Aram, Moab, and Ammon, just as the Lord had said through his servants the prophets. The Lord spoke against Judah to banish them from his presence because of all the sins that Manasseh had committed, and the innocent people he had killed, filling Jerusalem with their blood. The Lord was not willing to forgive this.

The rest of what happened in Jehoiakim's reign, and all he did, are recorded in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah. Jehoiakim died, and his son Jehoiachin succeeded him as king.

The king of Egypt didn't leave his country again for the king of Babylon had taken all the territory that used to belong to him, from the Wadi of Egypt all the way to the Euphrates River.

Jehoiachin was eighteen when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months. His mother was Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan. She came from Jerusalem. Jehoiachin did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as his father had done.

At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon attacked Jerusalem and besieged it. Then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon came himself while his officers were besieging the city. Jehoiachin, king of Israel, surrendered to the king of Babylon, along with his mother, his officers, his commanders, and his officials.

It was in the eighth year of his reign that Nebuchadnezzar captured Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures from the Lord's Temple and the royal palace, and he cut up all the gold items that Solomon, king of Israel, had made for the Lord's Temple, as the Lord had said would happen. He deported all of Jerusalem, all the commanders and experienced soldiers, all the craftsmen and metal-workers, a total of ten thousand prisoners. Only the very poor people of the land were left.

He took Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon, as well as the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he deported them all from Jerusalem to Babylon. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon all seven thousand fighting men and one thousand craftsmen and metal-workers, who were all strong and ready for battle.

The king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king instead of him, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was twenty-one when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah. She came from Libnah. He did evil in the Lord's sight, just as Jehoiakim had done.

All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, because of the Lord's anger, until he eventually banished them from his presence.

Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem with his entire army. He set up camp around the city and built siege ramps against the walls. The city remained under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city was so bad that the people had nothing left to eat. Then the city wall was broken through, and all the soldiers escaped at night through the gate between the two walls by the king's garden, even though the Babylonians had the city surrounded. They ran away in the direction of the Arabah, but the Babylonian army chased after the king and caught up with him on the plains of Jericho. His whole army had scattered and left him.

They captured the king and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where he was sentenced. They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons while he watched, and then gouged out his eyes, bound him in bronze shackles, and took him to Babylon.

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, an officer of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. He burned down the Lord's Temple, the royal palace, and all the large buildings of Jerusalem. The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the guard knocked down the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, deported those who were left in the city, even those who had gone over to the side of the king of Babylon, as well as the rest of the population. But the commander of the guard allowed the poor people who were left in the country to stay and take care of the vineyards and the fields.

The Babylonians broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the movable carts, and the bronze Sea that belonged to the Lord's Temple, and they took all the bronze to Babylon. They also took all the pots, shovels, lamp snuffers, dishes, and all the other bronze items used in the Temple service. The commander of the guard removed the censers and bowls, anything that was made of pure gold or silver.

The amount of bronze that came from the two columns, the Sea and the movable carts, which Solomon had made for the Lord's Temple, all of this weighed more than could be measured. Each column was eighteen cubits tall. The bronze capital on top of one column was three cubits high, with a network of bronze pomegranates around it. The second column was the same, and also had a decorative network.

The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah, the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest, second in rank, and the three Temple doorkeepers. From those left in the city he took the officer in charge of the soldiers, and five of the king's advisors. He also took the secretary to the army commander who was in charge of calling up the people for military service, and sixty other men who were present in the city. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, took them and brought them before the king of Babylon at Riblah. The king of Babylon had them executed at Riblah in the land of Hamath.

So the people of Judah had to leave their land.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, as governor over the people he had left in the land of Judah. When all the army officers of Judah and their men learned that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah as governor, they and their men met with Gedaliah at Mizpah. They included: Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan, son of Kareah, Seraiah, son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, Jaazaniah, son of the Maakathite.

Gedaliah swore an oath to them and their men, telling them, “Don't be afraid of the Babylonian officials. Stay here in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and you'll be fine.”

But in the seventh month, Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of royal blood, came with ten men. They attacked and killed Gedaliah, along with the men of Judea and Babylonians who were with him at Mizpah.

As a result, all the people, from the least to the greatest, along with the army commanders, ran away to Egypt, terrified of what the Babylonians would do.

In the year Evil-merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin, king of Judah, from prison. This happened on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month of the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin, king of Judah. The king of Babylon treated him well and gave him a position of honor higher than the other kings there with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin was able to remove his prison clothes, and he ate frequently at the king's table for the rest of his life. The king provided Jehoiachin with a daily allowance for the rest of his life.

1 Chronicles

First Book of Chronicles

Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, Noah.

The sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

The sons of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

The sons of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, Rodanim.

The sons of Ham: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

The sons of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabta, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan.

Cush was the father of Nimrod, who became the world's first tyrant.

Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites, and Caphtorites (ancestors of the Philistines),.

Canaan was the father of his firstborn son, Sidon, and of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.

The sons of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech.

Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber.

Eber had two sons. One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; the name of his brother was Joktan.

Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. These were all Joktan's sons.

Shem, Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and Abram (also called Abraham).

The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael.

These were their descendants: Nebaioth was the firstborn son of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were Ishmael's sons.

The sons born to Keturah, Abraham's concubine. She gave birth to: Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan: Sheba and Dedan.

The sons of Midian: Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. These were all descendants of Keturah.

Abraham was the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel.

The sons of Esau: Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

The sons of Eliphaz: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz; and Amalek through Timna.

The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah.

The sons of Seir: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer and Dishan.

The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Lotan's sister was Timna.

The sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam. The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah.

The son of Anah: Dishon. The sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Keran.

The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan. The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

These were the kings who reigned over Edom before any Israelite king reigned over them: Bela son of Beor, the name of whose city was Dinhabah. When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah took over as king. When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites took over as king.

When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, took over as king. He was the one who defeated Midian in the country of Moab. The name of his city was Avith. When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah took over as king. When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the River took over as king. When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan, son of Acbor, took over as king. When Baal-Hanan died, Hadad took over as king. The name of his city was Pau. The name of his wife was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, the daughter of Me-Zahab. Then Hadad died. The chiefs of Edom were: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, and Iram. These were Edom's chiefs.

These were the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, and Shelah—these three the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite woman, bore to him. Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, so he put him to death. Tamar was Judah's daughter-in-law, and she bore him Perez and Zerah. Judah had a total of five sons.

The sons of Perez: Hezron and Hamul.

The sons of Zerah: Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Darda—a total of five.

The son of Carmi: Achar, who caused trouble for Israel by being unfaithful in taking what was consecrated to the Lord.

The son of Ethan: Azariah.

The sons that were born to Hezron: Jerahmeel, Ram and Caleb.

Ram was the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, a leader of Judah's descendants. Nahshon was the father of Salmon, Salmon was the father of Boaz, Boaz was the father of Obed, and Obed was the father of Jesse.

Jesse was the father of his firstborn son Eliab; the second son was Abinadab, the third Shimea, the fourth Nethanel, the fifth Raddai, the sixth Ozem, and the seventh David. Their sisters were Zeruiah and Abigail. The sons of Zeruiah's were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, three in total. Abigail gave birth to Amasa, and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmaelite.

Caleb son of Hezron had children by his wife Azubah, and also by Jerioth. These were her sons: Jesher, Shobab, and Ardon. When Azubah died, Caleb took Ephrath to be his wife, and she bore him Hur. Hur was the father of Uri, and Uri the father of Bezalel.

Later on Hezron slept with the daughter of Makir the father of Gilead, whom he married when he was sixty years old, and she bore him Segub. Segub was the father of Jair, who had twenty-three towns in Gilead. But Geshur and Aram took from them Havvoth Jair,

along with Kenath and its towns, a total of sixty towns. These were all descendants of Makir the father of Gilead.

After Hezron died in Caleb Ephrathah, his wife Abijah bore him Ashhur the father of Tekoa.

The sons of Jerahmeel the firstborn of Hezron: Ram (firstborn), Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. Jerahmeel had another wife called Atarah. She was the mother of Onam.

The sons of Ram the firstborn of Jerahmeel: Maaz, Jamin and Eker.

The sons of Onam: Shammai and Jada.

The sons of Shammai: Nadab and Abishur. Abishur's wife was called Abihail, who bore him Ahban and Molid.

The sons of Nadab: Seled and Appaim. Seled died without having children.

The son of Appaim: Ishi, the father of Sheshan. Sheshan was the father of Ahlai.

The sons of Jada, the brother of Shammai: Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without having children.

The sons of Jonathan: Peleth and Zaza. These are all the descendants of Jerahmeel.

Sheshan had no sons, he only had daughters, but he did have an Egyptian servant named Jarha. So Sheshan gave his daughter in marriage to his servant Jarha, and she bore him Attai.

Attai was the father of Nathan. Nathan was the father of Zabad, Zabad was the father of Ephlal, Ephlal was the father of Obed, Obed was the father of Jehu, Jehu was the father of Azariah, Azariah was the father of Helez, Helez was the father of Eleasah, Eleasah was the father of Sismai, Sismai was the father of Shallum, Shallum was the father of Jekamiah, and Jekamiah was the father of Elishama.

The sons of Caleb, the brother of Jerahmeel: Mesha his firstborn, who was the father of Ziph, and his son Mareshah, who was the father of Hebron.

The sons of Hebron: Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. Shema was the father of Raham, and Raham the father of Jorkeam. Rekem was the father of Shammai. Shammai's son was Maon, and Maon was the father of Beth Zur.

Ephah, Caleb's concubine, was the mother of Haran, Moza, and Gazez. Haran was the father of Gazez.

The sons of Jahdai: Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph.

Maacah, Caleb's concubine, was the mother of Sheber and Tirhanah. She was also the mother of Shaaph, the father of Madmannah, and of Sheva, the father of Macbenah and Gibea. Caleb's daughter was Acsah. These are all the descendants of Caleb.

The sons of Hur the firstborn of Ephrathah: Shobal, the father of Kiriath Jearim, Salma, the father of Bethlehem, and Hareph, the father of Beth Gader.

The descendants of Shobal the father of Kiriath Jearim were: Haroeh, half the Manahathites, and the families of Kiriath Jearim: the Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites, and Mishraites. From these descended the Zorathites and Eshtaolites.

The descendants of Salma: Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth Beth Joab, half the Manahathites, the Zorites, and the families of scribes who lived at Jabez: the Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites. These are the Kenites who descended from Hammath, the father of the house of Recab.

These were the sons of David born to him in Hebron: The firstborn was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel. The second was Daniel, whose mother was Abigail of Carmel. The third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. The fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. The fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. The sixth was Ithream, whose mother was his wife Eglah.

These were the six sons born to David in Hebron, where he reigned seven years and six months. David reigned in Jerusalem thirty-three more years, and these were the children born to him there:

Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon. Their mother was Bathsheba, daughter of Ammiel. In addition there were also Ibhar, Elishua, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet, a total of nine. These were all the sons of David, apart from his sons by his concubines. Their sister was Tamar.

The male lineage from Solomon was: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah.

The sons of Josiah: Johanan (firstborn), Jehoiakim (second), Zedekiah (third), Shallum (fourth).

The sons of Jehoiakim: Jehoiachin and Zedekiah.

The sons of Jehoiachin who were taken into captivity: Shealtiel, Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah.

The sons of Pedaiah: Zerubbabel and Shimei.

The sons of Zerubbabel: Meshullam and Hananiah. Their sister was Shelomith. Five additional sons were: Hashubah, Ohel, Berekiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-Hesed.

The sons of Hananiah: Pelatiah and Jeshaiah, and the sons of Rephaiah, the sons of Arnan, the sons of Obadiah, and the sons of Shecaniah.

The sons of Shecaniah: Shemaiah and his sons: Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and Shaphat—a total of six.

The sons of Neariah: Elioenai, Hizkiah and Azrikam—a total of three.

The sons of Elioenai: Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani—a total of seven.

The sons of Judah: Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal. Reaiah, son of Shobal, was the father of Jahath. Jahath was the father of Ahumai and Lahad. These were the families of the Zorathites.

These were the sons of Etam: Jezreel, Ishma, and Idbash. Their sister was called Hazzelelponi. Penuel was the father of Gedor, and Ezer was the father of Hushah. These were the descendants of Hur, Ephrathah's firstborn and father of Bethlehem.

Ashhur was the father of Tekoa and had two wives, Helah and Naarah.

Naarah was the mother of Ahuzzam, Hepher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. These were the sons of Naarah.

The sons of Helah: Zereth, Zohar, Ethnan, and Koz, who was the father of Anub and Hazzobebah and of the families of Aharhel, son of Harum.

Jabez was more faithful to God than his brothers. His mother had given him the name Jabez, saying, “I gave birth to him in pain.” Jabez begged the God of Israel, “Please bless me and expand my borders! Be with me and keep me safe from harm so I won't have pain.” And God gave him what he asked for.

Kelub, Shuhah's brother, was the father of Mehir, who in turn was the father of Eshton. Eshton was the father of Beth Rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah, the father of Ir Nahash. These were the men of Recah.

The sons of Kenaz: Othniel and Seraiah.

The sons of Othniel: Hathath and Meonothai. Meonothai was the father of Ophrah. Seraiah was the father of Joab, the father of Ge Harashim, so called because craftsmen lived there.

The sons of Caleb son of Jephunneh: Iru, Elah, and Naam.

The son of Elah: Kenaz.

The sons of Jehallelel: Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel.

The sons of Ezrah: Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon. One wife of Mered was the mother of Miriam, Shammai and Ishbah the father of Eshtemoa. (Another wife who came from Judah was the mother of Jered the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah.) These were the sons of Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter, whom Mered had married.

The sons of Hodiah's wife, Nathan's sister: one son was the father of Keilah the Garmite, and another the father of Eshtemoa the Maacathite.

The sons of Shimon: Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-Hanan, and Tilon.

The sons of Ishi: Zoheth and Ben-Zoheth.

The sons of Shelah son of Judah: Er, who was the father of Lecah, Laadah, who was the father of Mareshah, the families of the linen workers at Beth Ashbea, Jokim, the men of Cozeba, and Joash and Saraph, who ruled over Moab and Jashubi Lehem. (These are old records.) They were potters, inhabitants of Netaim and Gederah, who lived there and worked for the king.

The sons of Simeon: Nemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zerah, and Shaul. Shallum was the son of Shaul, Mibsam his son, and Mishma his son.

The sons of Mishma: Hammuel his son, Zaccur his son, and Shimei his son.

Shimei had sixteen sons and six daughters, but his brothers did not have many children; so their tribe was not as large as that of Judah. They lived in Beersheba, Moladah, Hazar Shual, Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad, Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, Beth Marcaboth, Hazar Susim, Beth Biri, and Shaaraim. These were their towns until David became king. They also lived in Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Token, and Ashan—a total of five towns, along with all the surrounding villages as far as Baal. These were the places where they lived and they recorded their genealogy.

Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah (son of Amaziah), Joel, Jehu (son of Joshibiah, son of Seraiah, son of Asiel), Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, and Ziza (son of Shiphi, son of Allon, son of Jedaiah, son of Shimri, son of Shemaiah).

These were the names of the leaders of their families whose lineage increased significantly. They went far as the border of Gedor on the east side of the valley to look for pasture for their flocks. They found good pastureland there, and the area was open, quiet, and peaceful, for those who used to live there were Ham's descendants.

In the time of Hezekiah, king of Judah, the leaders listed above by name came and attacked these descendants of Ham where they lived, along with the Meunites there and totally destroyed them, as is clear to this very day. Then they settled there, because there was pastureland for their flocks. Some of these Simeonites invaded Mount Seir—five hundred men led by Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. They destroyed the rest of the Amalekites who had escaped. They have lived there to this very day.

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. (Though he was the firstborn, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel because he had defiled his father's bed. That is why Reuben is not listed in the genealogy according to birthright, and even though Judah became the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the birthright belonged to Joseph.)

The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.

The sons of Joel: Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, Micah his son, Reaiah his son, Baal his son, and Beerah his son, the one whom Tiglath-Pileser the king of Assyria took into exile. He (Beerah) was a leader of the Reubenites.

Beerah's relatives are, listed in their genealogical records by family: Jeiel (chief), Zechariah, and Bela of Azaz, son of Shema, son of Joel. They lived from Aroer to Nebo and Baal Meon. On the eastern side they expanded into the land right up to the edge of the desert that continues to the Euphrates River, because their flocks had grown so big in Gilead.

In the time of Saul they went to war against the Hagrites, defeating them. They took over the places where the Hagrites had lived in all the regions east of Gilead.

Next to them the descendants of Gad lived in Basha, all the way to Salecah. Joel (chief), Shapham (second), and Janai and Shaphat, in Bashan.

Their relatives, according to family, were: Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber—a total of seven.

These were the sons of Abihail, son of Huri, son of Jaroah, son of Gilead, son of Michael, son of Jeshishai, son of Jahdo, son of Buz.

Ahi son of Abdiel, son of Guni, was their family chief.

They lived in Gilead, in Bashan and its towns, and throughout the pasturelands of Sharon all the way to their borders. They were all recorded in the genealogy during the time of Jotham, king of Judah, and Jeroboam, king of Israel.

The tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had 44,760 battle-ready strong warriors capable of using shields and swords and bows. They went to war against the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. They received help in fighting these enemies because they called out to God during the battles. In this way they were able to defeat the Hagrites and all who were with them. God answered their prayers

because they trusted in him. They captured their enemies' livestock—fifty thousand camels, two hundred fifty thousand sheep, and two thousand donkeys. They also captured one hundred thousand people, and many others were killed because the battle belonged to God. They took over the land and lived there until the exile.

The half-tribe of Manasseh had grown very large. They lived in the land from Bashan to Baal Hermon (otherwise known as Senir and Mount Hermon).

These were the family heads: Epher, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. They were strong warriors, famous men, heads of their families. But they were unfaithful to the God of their forefathers. They prostituted themselves by following the gods of the peoples of the land, those that God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel encouraged Pul, king of Assyria (otherwise known as Tiglath-Pileser king of Assyria), to invade the land. He took into exile the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh. He brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the river of Gozan, where they remain to this very day.

The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

The children of Amram: Aaron, Moses, and Miriam.

The sons of Aaron: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

Eleazar was the father of Phinehas, Phinehas was the father of Abishua, Abishua was the father of Bukki, Bukki was the father of Uzzi, Uzzi was the father of Zerahiah, Zerahiah was the father of Meraioth, Meraioth was the father of Amariah, Amariah was the father of Ahitub, Ahitub was the father of Zadok, Zadok was the father of Ahimaaz, Ahimaaz was the father of Azariah, Azariah was the father of Johanan, Johanan was the father of Azariah (he was the one who was serving as priest when Solomon built the Temple in Jerusalem), Azariah was the father of Amariah, Amariah was the father of Ahitub, Ahitub was the father of Zadok, Zadok was the father of Shallum, Shallum was the father of Hilkiah, Hilkiah was the father of Azariah, Azariah was the father of Seraiah, and Seraiah was the father of Jehozadak. Jehozadak was taken into captivity when the Lord used Nebuchadnezzar to send Judah and Jerusalem into exile.

The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

These are the names of the sons of Gershon: Libni and Shimei.

The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel.

The sons of Merari: Mahli, and Mushi.

These are the families of the Levites listed in order according to their fathers:

The descendants of Gershon: Libni his son, Jehath his son, Zimmah his son, Joah his son, Iddo his son, Zerah his son, and Jeatherai his son.

The descendants of Kohath: Amminadab his son, Korah his son, Assir his son, Elkanah his son, Ebiasaph his son, Assir his son, Tahath his son, Uriel his son, Uzziah his son and Shaul his son.

The descendants of Elkanah: Amasai, Ahimoth, Elkanah his son, Zophai his son, Nahath his son, Eliab his son, Jeroham his son, Elkanah his son, and Samuel his son.

The sons of Samuel: Joel (firstborn) and Abijah (second).

The descendants of Merari: Mahli, Libni his son, Shimei his son, Uzzah his son, Shimea his son, Haggiah his son, and Asaiah his son.

These are the musicians David appointed to direct the music in the house of the Lord once the Ark had been placed there. They led out in the music and singing before the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, until Solomon built the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem. They served following the regulations they had been given.

Here are the men who served, together with their sons: From the Kohathites: Heman, the singer, the son of Joel, the son of Samuel, the son of Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Eliel, the son of Toah, the son of Zuph, the son of Elkanah, the son of Mahath, the son of Amasai, the son of Elkanah, the son of Joel, the son of Azariah, the son of Zephaniah, the son of Tahath, the son of Assir, the son of Ebiasaph, the son of Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, the son of Israel. Asaph, Heman's relative, who served beside him on the right: Asaph son of Berekiah, the son of Shimea, the son of Michael, the son of Baaseiah, the son of Malkijah, the son of Ethni, the son of Zerah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Ethan, the son of Zimmah, the son of Shimei, the son of Jahath, the son of Gershon, the son of Levi. To Heman's left served sons of Merari: Ethan son of Kishi, the son of Abdi,

the son of Malluch, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Amaziah, the son of Hilkiah, the son of Amzi, the son of Bani, the son of Shemer, the son of Mahli, the son of Mushi, the son of Merari, the son of Levi.

The other Levites carried out all the other functions in the Tabernacle, the house of God.

However, it was Aaron and his descendants who were the ones who gave offerings on the altar of burnt offering and on the altar of incense and did all the work in the Most Holy Place, making atonement for Israel according to everything Moses the servant of God had commanded.

The descendants of Aaron were: Eleazar his son, Phinehas his son, Abishua his son, Bukki his son,

Uzzi his son, Zerahiah his son, Meraioth his son, Amariah his son, Ahitub his son, Zadok his son,

and Ahimaaz his son.

These were the places they were given to live as their territory allotted to descendants of Aaron, beginning with the Kohathite clan, because theirs was the first lot:

They received Hebron in Judah together with its surrounding pasturelands. But the fields and villages near the town were given to Caleb son of Jephunneh.

So the descendants of Aaron received Hebron, a town of refuge, Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Hilen, Debir, Ashan, Juttah and Beth Shemesh, together with their pasturelands. From the tribe of Benjamin they received Gibeon, Geba, Alemeth, and Anathoth, together with their pasturelands.

They had a total of thirteen towns among their families.

The rest of Kohath's descendants received by lot ten towns from the half tribe of Manasseh.

The descendants of Gershon, by family, received thirteen towns from the tribes of Issachar, Asher, and

Naphtali, and from the partial tribe of Manasseh in Bashan.

The descendants of Merari, by family, received twelve towns from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun.

So the people of Israel gave the Levites these towns and their pasturelands. They allotted the towns already mentioned by name from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin.

Some of the Kohathite families received as their territory towns from the tribe of Ephraim. They were given Shechem, a town of refuge, in the hill country of Ephraim, Gezer, Jokmeam, Beth Horon, Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon, together with their pasturelands.

From half the tribe of Manasseh the people of Israel gave Aner and Bileam, together with their pasturelands, to the rest of the Kohathite families.

The descendants of Gershon received the following. From the family of the half-tribe of Manasseh: Golan in Bashan, and Ashtaroth, together with their pasturelands;

from the tribe of Issachar: Kedesh, Daberath, Ramoth, and Anem, together with their pasturelands;

from the tribe of Asher: Mashal, Abdon, Hukok, and Rehob, together with their pasturelands;

and from the tribe of Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee, Hammon, and Kiriathaim, together with their pasturelands.

The rest of the descendants of Merari received the following. From the tribe of Zebulun: Jokneam, Kartah, Rimmono, and Tabor, together with their pasturelands;

from the tribe of Reuben on the east side of the Jordan opposite Jericho: Bezer (in the desert), Jahzah, Kedemoth, and Mephaath, together with their pasturelands;

and from the tribe of Gad: Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer, together with their pasturelands.

The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron—a total of four.

The sons of Tola: Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Samuel—leaders of their families. In the time of David, the descendants of Tola listed in their genealogy a total of 22,600 warriors.

The son of Uzzi: Izrahiah.

The sons of Izrahiah: Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah. All five were family heads. They had many wives and sons and so in their genealogy they list 36,000 battle-ready fighting men. The relatives who were warriors belonging to all the families of Issachar, according to their genealogy, were 87,000 in total.

Three sons of Benjamin: Bela, Beker, and Jediael.

The sons of Bela: Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri, leaders of their families—a total of five. They had 22,034 fighting men according to their genealogy.

The sons of Beker: Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. These were all the sons of Beker. Their genealogy included the family heads and 20,200 fighting men.

The son of Jediael: Bilhan.

The sons of Bilhan: Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Kenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. All these sons of Jediael were family heads. They had 17,200 battle-ready warriors.

Shuppim and Huppim were sons of Ir, and Hushim was the son of Aher.

The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shallum—the descendants of Bilhah.

The sons of Manasseh: Asriel whose mother was his Aramean concubine. She was also the mother of Makir, the father of Gilead. Makir found a wife for Huppim and a wife for Shuppim. His sister's name was Maacah. The second was called Zelophehad. She only had daughters.

Maacah, Makir's wife, had a son and called him Peresh. His brother was called Sheresh, and his sons were Ulam and Rakem.

The son of Ulam: Bedan.

These were all the sons of Gilead, son of Makir, son of Manasseh. His sister Hammoleketh was the mother of Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah.

The sons of Shemida were: Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

The descendants of Ephraim: Shuthelah, Bered his son, Tahath his son, Eleadah his son, Tahath his son, Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son. Ezer and Elead were killed by the men who were living in Gath when they went there to try and steal their livestock. Their father Ephraim mourned for them a long time, and his relatives came to comfort him. Then he slept with his wife again. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, whom he named Beriah because of this family tragedy. Sheerah, his daughter, founded Lower and Upper Beth Horon together with Uzzen Sheerah.

Rephah was his son, Resheph his son, Telah his son, Tahan his son, Ladan his son, Ammihud his son, Elishama his son, Nun his son and Joshua his son. The land they owned and the places they lived included Bethel and nearby towns, from Naaran to the east to Gezer and its towns to the west, and Shechem and its towns up to Ayyah and its towns. On the border with Manasseh were Beth Shan, Taanach, Megiddo, and Dor, along with their towns. These were the towns where the descendants of Joseph son of Israel lived.

The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah. Their sister was Serah.

The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malkiel, the father of Birzaith.

Heber was the father of Japhlet, Shomer, and Hotham, and of their sister Shua.

The sons of Japhlet: Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. These were all the sons of Japhlet.

The sons of Shomer: Ahi, Rohgah, Hubbah, and Aram.

The sons of his brother Helem: Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal.

The sons of Zophah: Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera.

The sons of Jether: Jephunneh, Pispah, and Ara.

The sons of Ulla: Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia.

These were all descendants of Asher—family heads, proven men, strong warriors, and great leaders. According to their genealogy, they had 26,000 battle-ready warriors.

Benjamin was the father of Bela (firstborn son), Ashbel (second), Aharah (third), Nohah (fourth), and Rapha (fifth).

The sons of Bela were: Addar, Gera, Abihud, Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, Gera, Shephuphan, and Huram.

These were the sons of Ehud, family heads living in Geba, and were exiled to Manahath: Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera. Gera was the one who exiled them. He was the father of Uzza and Ahihud.

Shaharaim had sons in Moab after he divorced his wives Hushim and Baara. He married Hodesh and had Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sakia, and Mirmah. These were all his sons, family heads. He also had sons with Hushim: Abitub and Elpaal.

The sons of Elpaal: Eber, Misham, Shemed (he built Ono and Lod with its nearby towns), and Beriah and Shema, who were family heads living in Aijalon and who drove away the people who lived in Gath.

Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth, Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, Michael, Ishpah, and Joha were the sons of Beriah.

Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab were the sons of Elpaal.

Jakim, Zicri, Zabdi, Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel, Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath were the sons of Shimei.

Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, Abdon, Zicri, Hanan, Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, Iphdeiah, and Penuel were the sons of Shashak.

Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah, Jaareshiah, Elijah, and Zicri were the sons of Jeroham. All these were family heads, according to their genealogy. They lived in Jerusalem.

Jeiel founded Gibeon and lived there. His wife was called Maacah. His firstborn son was Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, Gedor, Ahio, Zeker, and Mikloth. Mikloth was the father of Shimeah. They also lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.

Ner was the father of Kish, Kish was the father of Saul, and Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab and Esh-Baal.

The son of Jonathan: Merib-Baal, who was the father of Micah.

The sons of Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Jehoaddah, Jehoaddah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri, and Zimri was the father of Moza. Moza was the father of Binea. Raphah was his son, Eleasah his son, and Azel his son.

Azel had six sons. These were their names: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Shearіah, Obadiah and Hanan. These were all the sons of Azel.

The sons of his brother Eshek: Ulam (firstborn), Jeush (second), and Eliphelet (third). The sons of Ulam were strong warriors and skilled archers. They had many sons and grandsons—a total of 150. All of them were the sons of Benjamin.

All of the people of Israel were recorded in the genealogies written down in the book of the kings of Israel.

The people of Judah were taken away to captivity in Babylon because they had been unfaithful.

The first to return and reclaim their property and live in their towns were some Israelites, priests, Levites, and Temple servants. Some from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh returned to live in Jerusalem. They included:

Uthai son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, a descendant of Perez, son of Judah.

From the Shilonites: Asaiah (firstborn) and his sons.

From the Zerahites: Jeuel and relatives totaled 690.

From the Benjamites: Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah; Ibneiah son of Jeroham; Elah son of Uzzi, son of Micri; and Meshullam son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah.

All of them were family heads as recorded in their genealogies, and they totaled 956.

From the priests: Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin, Azariah son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub. (Azariah was the head official in charge of the house of God.)

Also Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malkijah, and Maasai son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer. The priests, who were family heads, totaled 1,760. They were strong and capable men who served in the house of God.

From the Levites: Shemaiah, son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, a descendant of Merari; Bakbakkar, Heresh, Galal, and Mattaniah, son of Mica, son of Zicri, son of Asaph; Obadiah son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun; and Berekiah son of Asa, son of Elkanah, who used to live in the villages of the Netophathites.

The gatekeepers of the Temple: Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman and their relatives. Shallum was the chief gatekeeper. They had the responsibility up until now of looking after the King's Gate on the east side. They were the gatekeepers of the camps of the Levites. Shallum was the son of Kore, son of Ebiasaph, son of Korah. He and his relatives, the Korahites, were responsible for guarding the entrances to the sanctuary in the same way their fathers had been responsible for guarding the entrance to the tented house of the Lord. Previously Phinehas son of Eleazar had been the leader of the gatekeepers. The Lord was with him. Zechariah son of Meshelemiah was the gatekeeper at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

In total there were 212 chosen to be gatekeepers at the entrances. They recorded their genealogies in their home towns. David and Samuel the prophet had selected their forefathers for their faithfulness. They and their descendants were responsible for guarding the entrance to the house of the Lord, also when it was a tent.

The gatekeepers were placed on four sides: east, west, north, and south. Their relatives in their towns came every seven days at certain times to help them. The four chief gatekeepers, who were Levites, were given the responsibility of looking after the rooms and treasuries in the house of God. They spent the night around the house of God because they had to guard it and they had the key to unlock it in the morning. Some of the gatekeepers were responsible for the articles that were used in worship services. They counted what was brought in and what was taken out. Others were given the job of looking after the furniture and equipment used in the sanctuary, as well as the special flour, wine, olive oil, incense, and spices. (However, some of the

priests were in charge of mixing the spices.) Mattithiah, a Levite, who was the firstborn son of Shallum the Korahite, was given the responsibility of baking the bread used in offerings. Other Kohathites were in charge of preparing the bread set out on the table every Sabbath. The musicians, heads of Levite families, lived in the rooms in the Temple and were not required to carry out other duties because they were on duty day and night. These were all heads of Levite families, leaders as recorded in their genealogies, and they lived in Jerusalem.

Jeiel was the father of Gibeon and he lived in Gibeon. His wife's name was Maacah. His firstborn son was Abdon, then Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah, and Mikloth. Mikloth was the father of Shimeam. They also lived near their relatives in Jerusalem.

Ner was the father of Kish, Kish was the father of Saul, and Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malki-Shua, Abinadab, and Esh-Baal.

The son of Jonathan: Merib-Baal, who was the father of Micah.

The sons of Micah: Pithon, Melech, Tahrea, and Ahaz.

Ahaz was the father of Jadah, Jadah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri, and Zimri was the father of Moza. Moza was the father of Binea; Rephaiah was his son, Eleasah his son, and Azel his son.

Azel had six sons. Their names were: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. These were the sons of Azel.

The Philistines attacked Israel and all the Israelites soldiers ran away from them. Many Israelites were cut down on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines chased down Saul and his sons. They killed Saul's sons Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. The battle raged intensely around Saul. The enemy archers saw where he was, and they wounded him. Saul told his armor bearer, “Take out your sword and kill me before these heathen come and torment me.” But his armor bearer refused —he was too afraid to do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell on his sword and died. So Saul and three of his sons died there, along with his royal line. When all the Israelites in the valley saw that their army had run away, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their towns and they also ran away. The Philistines came and occupied them.

The following day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they discovered the bodies of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa. They stripped him, cut off his head, and took his armor. Then they sent the news throughout the land of Philistia, to their idols and their people. They put Saul's armor in the temple of their idols and fixed his head to the temple of Dagon. However, when everyone in Jabesh-gilead heard everything the Philistines had done to Saul, all their fighting men went and recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons. They brought them back and buried them under the large tree in Jabesh. Then they fasted for seven days.

Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He did not keep the Lord's commands, and he also went to consult a medium. He did not consult the Lord, so the Lord put him to death and he handed over the kingship to David, son of Jesse.

All the Israelites gathered to meet with David in Hebron. They told him, “We are your flesh and blood. In recent times, even though Saul was king, you were the real leader of Israel. The Lord your God told you, ‘You will be the shepherd of my people, and you will be the leader of my people Israel.’” All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a solemn agreement with them before the Lord. There they anointed David as king of Israel, as the Lord had promised through Samuel. Then David and all the Israelites went to Jerusalem (formerly known as Jebus) where the Jebusites lived. The Jebusites told David, “You will not enter here!” But David did capture the fortress of Zion, now known as the City of David. David had said, “Whoever is first to attack the Jebusites will be my commander-in-chief.” Since Joab, son of Zeruiah, was the first, he became commander-in-chief.

David decided to live in the fortress, which is why they named it after him the City of David. He built up the city all around it, from the Millo in a circuit all around, while Joab repaired the rest of the city. David became more and more powerful, for the Lord Almighty was with him.

These were the leaders of David's powerful warriors who, along with all the Israelites, gave him strong support in becoming king, just as the Lord had promised would happen to Israel. This is the list of the leading warriors who supported David: Jashobeam, son of Hachmoni, leader of the Three. Using his spear, he once killed 300 men in a single battle. After him came Eleazar, son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the Three leading warriors. He was with David at Pas-dammin when the Philistines gathered for battle that took place in a field full of barley. The Israelite army ran away when the Philistines attacked, but David and Eleazar took a stand in the middle of the field, defending their ground and killing the Philistines. The Lord saved them by giving them a great victory.

Another time, the Three, who were part of the Thirty leading warriors, went down to meet David when he was at the cave of Adullam. The Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. At the time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was in Bethlehem. David was feeling really thirsty, and he said, “If only someone could bring me a drink of water from the well beside the entrance gate to Bethlehem!” The Three broke through the Philistine defenses, took some water from the well at Bethelehem's gate, and brought it back to David. But David refused to drink it, and poured it out as an offering to the Lord. “God forbid that I should do this!” he said. “It would be like drinking the blood of these men who risked their lives! They risked their lives to bring me a drink.” So he did not drink it. This is just some of the things the Three leading warriors did.

Abishai, Joab's brother, was leader of the second Three. Using his spear, he once killed 300 men, and became famous among the Three. He was the most highly regarded of the Three and was their commander, though he was not one of the first Three.

Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, a strong warrior from Kabzeel, did many amazing things. He killed two sons of Ariel of Moab. He also went after a lion into a pit in the snow and killed it. Another time he killed an Egyptian—a huge man who stood seven feet six inches tall. The Egyptian had a spear whose shaft was as thick as a weaver's rod. Benaiah attacked him with just a club, but he was able to grab the spear from the Egyptian's hand, and killed him with his own spear. These were the kind of things Benaiah did that made him as famous as the Three leading warriors. He was the most highly regarded of the Thirty, though he was not one of the Three. David put him in charge of his personal bodyguard.

Other leading warriors were: Asahel, Joab's brother; Elhanan, son of Dodo, from Bethlehem; Shammoth the Harorite; Helez the Pelonite; Ira, son of Ikkesh from Tekoa; Abiezer from Anathoth; Sibbecai the Hushathite; Ilai the Ahohite; Maharai of Netophah; Heled, son of Baanah of Netophah; Ithai, son of Ribai from Gibeah of the Benjamites; Benaiah the Pirathonite; Hurai from the valleys of Gaash; Abiel the Arbathite; Azmaveth the Baharumite; Eliahba the Shaalbonite; the sons of Hashem the Gizonite; Jonathan, son of Shagee the Hararite; Ahiam, son of Sachar the Hararite; Eliphal, son of Ur; Hepher the Mecherathite; Ahijah the Pelonite; Hezro the Carmelite; Naarai, son of Ezbai; Joel, Nathan's brother; Mibhar, son of Hagri; Zelek the Ammonite; Naharai the Beerothite; Joab's armor-bearer, son of Zeruiah; Ira the Ithrite; Gareb the Ithrite; Uriah the Hittite; Zabad son of Ahlai; Adina, son of Shiza the Reubenite, leader of the Reubenites, and the thirty who were with him; Hanan, son of Maacah; Joshaphat the Mithnite; Uzzia the Ashterathite; Shama and Jeiel, the sons of Hotham the Aroerite; Jediael, son of Shimri, and his brother, Joha the Tizite; Eliel the Mahavite; Jeribai and Joshaviah, the sons of Elnaam; Ithmah the Moabite; Eliel; Obed; and Jaasiel the Mezobaite.

The following is a list of the men who joined David when he was at Ziklag, still hiding from Saul, son of Kish. They were some of the leading warriors who fought on David's side. They were all skilled archers, and could shoot arrows or slingshots with their right or their left hands. They were relatives of Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. Ahiezer was their leader, then Joash; the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite; Jeziel and Pelet the sons of Azmaveth; Beracah; Jehu the Anathothite; Ishmaiah the Gibeonite (a strong warrior among the Thirty, and leader over the Thirty); Jeremiah; Jahaziel; Johanan; Jozabad the Gederathite; Eluzai; Jerimoth; Bealiah; Shemariah; Shephatiah the Haruphite; Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam (they were Korahites); and Joelah and Zebadiah, the sons of Jeroham from Gedor.

Some warriors from the tribe of Gad went over to David's side when he was at the stronghold in the desert. They were strong and experienced warriors, battle-hardened, experts in the use of shields and spears. Their faces looked as fierce as lions, and they ran as fast as gazelles in the mountains. Ezer was the leader, Obadiah (second), Eliab (third), Mishmannah (fourth), Jeremiah (fifth), Attai (sixth), Eliel (seventh), Johanan (eighth), Elzabad (ninth), Jeremiah (tenth), Machbannai (eleventh). These warriors from Gad were army officers. The least able of them was in charge of 100 men; the best was in charge of 1,000. These were ones who crossed the Jordan River in the first month of the year when it overflows its banks. They chased out all the people living in the valley, both to the east and to the west.

Some others from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah also came to join David at the stronghold. David went out to meet them and told them, “If you've come in peace to help me, we can be friends. But if you've come to betray me to my enemies, even though I've done no wrong, then may the God of our fathers see what you're doing and condemn you.”

Then the Spirit came upon Amasai, the leader of the Thirty. “We are yours, David, and we are with you, son of Jesse! May peace, prosperity, and success be yours and those who help you, for God is the one who is helping you.” So David allowed them to join him, and put them in charge of his bands of raiders.

Others came over to David's side from the tribe of Manasseh and joined him when he went with Philistines to attack Saul. However, the Philistine rulers eventually decided to send them away, saying to themselves, “It will cost us our heads if he deserts us and goes over to his master Saul.”

The following is a list of the men from Manasseh who went over to David's side as he returned to Ziklag: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai, leaders of thousands in Manasseh. They helped David against raiders for they were all strong and experienced warriors and commanders in the army. Men arrived daily to help David until he had a large army, like the army of God.

This is a list of the numbers of armed warriors who came and joined David in Hebron to turn over Saul's kingdom to him, as the Lord had said. From the tribe of Judah, 6,800 warriors carrying shields and spears. From the tribe of Simeon, 7,100 strong warriors. From the tribe of Levi, 4,600, including Jehoiada, leader of the family of Aaron, and with him 3,700, and Zadok, a strong young warrior, with 22 members of his family, all officers. From the tribe of Benjamin, from among Saul's relatives, 3,000, most of whom had remained loyal to Saul up until this time. From the tribe of Ephraim, 20,800 strong warriors, each highly regarded in his own clan. From the half-tribe of Manasseh, 18,000 men were designated by name to come and make David king. From the tribe of Issachar came leaders who knew and could understand the signs of the times and what Israel should do—a total of 200 leaders of the tribe together with their relatives. From the tribe of Zebulun, 50,000 warriors. They were fully armed and battle-ready, and totally dedicated. From the tribe of Naphtali, 1,000 officers and 37,000 warriors carrying shields and spears. From the tribe of Dan, 28,600 warriors, all battle-ready. From the tribe of Asher, 40,000 experienced warriors, all battle-ready. From the east side of the Jordan River, from the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 120,000 warriors carrying all kinds of weapons.

All these men came to Hebron dressed for battle, completely committed to making David king. All of Israel agreed that David should become king. They stayed three days there, eating and drinking together, for their relatives had provided them with supplies. Their neighbors, even as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali, arrived bringing food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen. They had plenty of flour, fig cakes, bunches of raisins, wine, olive oil, cattle, and sheep, for Israel was so happy.

David had discussions with all his leaders, including the army commanders of thousands and hundreds. Then he addressed the whole assembly of Israel, saying, "If you agree, and if God approves, let us send an invitation to every Israelite in the land, including the priests and Levites in their towns and pastures, to come and join us. Let us bring the Ark of our God back to us, because we forgot about it during the time of Saul."

The whole assembly was pleased with the proposal, agreeing that this would be a good thing to do. So David summoned all of Israel, from the Shihor River of Egypt up to Lebo-hamath, to help bring the Ark from Kiriath-jearim. So David and all of Israel went to Baalah (otherwise called Kiriath-jearim) in Judah to bring back the Ark of God the Lord, whose throne is between the cherubim and who is called by the Name. They loaded the Ark of God onto a brand new cart and brought it from Adinadab's house, with Uzzah and Ahio directing it. David and all of Israel were celebrating before the Lord as loudly as possible, singing songs and playing music on lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

But when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah stretched out his hand to stop the Ark falling. The Lord was angry with Uzzah for daring to touch the Ark like this so he struck him down, and Uzzah died there before the Lord.

David became angry with the Lord for his violent outburst against Uzzah. He named the place Perez-uzzah, and it is still called that today.

David became afraid of God that day. "How can I ever bring back the Ark of God home to me?" he asked. So David did not move the Ark of God to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he had it taken to the home of Obed-edom the Gittite. The Ark of God remained in Obed-edom's home for three months, and the Lord blessed Obed-edom's household and all that he had.

Then Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David along with cedar timber, stonemasons, and carpenters to build him a palace. In this way David realized that the Lord had placed him on the throne as king of Israel and had blessed him by supporting his kingdom for the sake of the Lord's people Israel. David married more wives in Jerusalem, and had more sons and daughters. This is a list of the names of the children he had in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Beeliada, and Eliphelet.

When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all of Israel, they gathered their whole army to go after him. But David heard they were coming and went out to confront them. The Philistines arrived and raided the valley of Rephaim.

David consulted God, asking "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you make me victorious over them?"

"Go ahead," the Lord told him, "I will make you victorious over them."

So David attacked and defeated them there at Baal-perazim. "God used me to defeat my enemies like a torrent of water that bursts out," he declared. That's why the place was named Baal-perazim. The Philistines had left their gods behind, so David gave orders that they should be burned.

However, the Philistines returned and made another raid on the valley. David consulted God again. "Don't make a frontal attack," God told him. "Instead go around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, go and attack for the Lord has gone before you to strike down the Philistine army." So David did what God told him, striking down the Philistine army all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

As a result David's reputation was spread everywhere, and the Lord made all the nations afraid of David.

Once David had finished building houses for himself in the City of David, he made a place for the Ark of God and set up a tent there. Then he gave orders: "Nobody is to carry the Ark of God except the Levites, for the Lord himself chose them to carry the Ark of the Lord and to serve him forever."

David summoned all of Israel to Jerusalem to bring the Ark of the Lord to the place he'd prepared for it. This is the list of the Levites, the sons of Aaron, that David called to attend: From the sons of Kohath, Uriel (chief), and 120 of his relatives; from the sons of Merari, Asaiah (chief), with 220 of his relatives; from the sons of Gershom, Joel (chief), with 130 of his relatives; from the sons of Elizaphan, Shemaiah (chief), with 200 of his relatives; from the sons of Hebron, Eliel (chief), with 80 of his relatives; from the sons of Uzziel, Amminadab (chief), with 112 of his relatives.

Then David summoned the priests Zadok and Abiathar, and the Levites Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab. He told them, "You are the heads of the Levite families. You must make yourselves and your relatives ceremonially clean and pure before you bring back the Ark of God, the Lord of Israel to the place I have made for it. Because you weren't there the first time to carry the Ark the Lord our God burst out in violence against us. We didn't treat it in accordance with his instructions." So the priests and the Levites purified themselves so that they could bring back the Ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. Then the Levites carried the Ark of God in the way that Moses had ordered, according to what God had said—on their shoulders using the special carrying poles.

David also instructed the leaders of the Levites to assign from their relatives singers who would sing loudly for joy, accompanied by musicians playing lyres, and harps, and cymbals. So the Levites assigned Heman the son of Joel; and from his relatives Asaph the son of Berechiah; and from the sons of Merari, their relatives, Ethan the son of Kushaiah. The second group of Levites consisted of Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel,

Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, and Mikneiah; and the gatekeepers Obed-edom and Jeiel.

The musicians Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were to strike the bronze cymbals; Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to play harps "according to alamoth," while Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah were to lead the music with lyres "according to sheminith." Kenaniah, the leader of the Levites in singing, was chosen to lead the music because of his ability. Berechiah and Elkanah were appointed to guard the Ark. Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer the priests were to blow the trumpets in front of the Ark of God. Obed-edom and Jehiah were also appointed to guard the Ark.

Then David, the elders of Israel, and the senior army commanders, went with great celebration to bring back the Ark of the Lord's Agreement from the home of Obed-Edom. Because God helped the Levites who carried the Ark of the Lord's Agreement, they sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams.

David wore a robe of fine linen like all the Levites who were carrying the Ark, and the singers and Kenaniah the leader of the music and singers. David also wore a linen ephod. So all of Israel brought back the Ark of the Lord's Agreement with a lot of shouting, accompanied by horns, trumpets, and cymbals, and music played on harps and lyres.

But as Ark of the Lord's Agreement entered the City of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked down from a window. Seeing David the king jumping and dancing for joy, she was full of contempt for him.

They brought the Ark of God and placed it in the tent that David had prepared for it. They presented burnt offerings and friendship offerings to God. Once David had finished presenting the burnt offerings and friendship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Then he shared out to every Israelite, to every man and woman, a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake.

David assigned some of the Levites to serve as ministers before the Ark of the Lord, to remember, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel. Asaph was the one in charge, Zechariah was second, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-edom, and Jeiel. They played harps and lyres, and Asaph struck the cymbals, and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel blew the trumpets continually in front of the Ark of God's Agreement. This was the day that David first instructed Asaph and his relatives to express thanks to the Lord in this way:

Give the Lord thanks, worship his wonderful nature, let people know what he's done!

Sing to him, sing his praises; tell everyone the great things he's done!

Be proud of his holy character; be happy, all who come to the Lord!

Look for the Lord, and his strength; always look to be with him.

Remember all the wonderful things he's done, the miracles he's performed, and the judgments he's carried out,

descendants of Israel, children of Jacob, his chosen people.

He is the Lord, our God, his judgments cover the whole earth.

He remembers his agreement forever, the promise he made lasts for a thousand generations;

the agreement he made with Abraham, the vow he gave to Isaac.

The Lord legally confirmed it with Jacob, he made this everlasting agreement with Israel:

saying, "I will give the land of Canaan to you for you to possess."

He said this when there were only a few of you, just a small group of foreigners in the land.

They wandered from country to country, from one kingdom to the next.

He didn't let anyone treat them badly; warning kings to leave them alone:

"Don't touch my chosen people; don't harm my prophets!"

Sing to the Lord, all the earth, sing to the Lord! Each day let everyone know of his salvation!

Declare his glorious acts among the nations, the wonderful things he does among all peoples.

For the Lord is great, and deserves the best praise! He is to be respected with awe above all gods.

For all the gods of other nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens!

Splendor and majesty are his; power and glory are in his sanctuary.

Give the Lord credit, nations of the world, credit him with glory and strength.

Give the Lord the glory he deserves; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the Lord in his magnificent holiness.

Let everyone on earth tremble in his presence. The world is held together firmly—it cannot be broken apart.

Let the heavens sing for joy, let the earth be happy. Tell the nations, "The Lord is in charge!"

Let the sea and everything in it shout with praise! Let the fields and everything there celebrate;

Let all the trees in the forest sing for joy, for he is coming to judge the earth.

Say thank you to the Lord, for he is good! His trustworthy love continues forever!

Shout out, "Save us, Lord, our God! Bring us back together from among the nations, rescue us, so we can thank you and praise how magnificent and holy you are."

How wonderful is the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives forever and ever! Then all the people said, "Amen!" and "Praise the Lord!"

Then David made sure Asaph and his brothers would minister continually before the Ark of the Lord's Agreement, performing whatever services were needed every day, as well as Obed-edom and his sixty-eight relatives. Obed-edom, son of Jeduthun, and Hosah, were gatekeepers. David put Zadok the priest and his fellow priests in charge of the Ark of the Lord at the high place in Gibeon to present burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of burnt offerings, morning and evening, according to all that was written in the law of the Lord which he had ordered Israel to follow. They

were accompanied by Heman, Jeduthun, and the rest of those chosen and identified by name to give thanks to the Lord, for “His trustworthy love lasts forever.” Heman and Jeduthun used their trumpets and cymbals to make music to accompany the songs of God. The sons of Jeduthun guarded the gate. Then all the people went home, and David went to bless his family.

Once David had settled into his palace, he spoke to the prophet Nathan. “Look,” he said, “I'm living in a cedar palace while the Ark of the Lord's Agreement is kept in a tent!”

“Do what you think you should, for God is with you,” Nathan replied.

But that night God told Nathan, “Go and talk to my servant David. Tell him, this is what the Lord says: You are not to build a house for me to live in. I have not lived in a house from the time I led Israel out of Egypt until now. I have lived in tents, moving from place to place. But in all those travels with all of Israel did I ever ask any Israelite leader I'd ordered to take care of my people, ‘Why haven't you built a cedar house for me?’ So then, go and tell my servant David this is what the Lord Almighty says. It was me who took you from the fields, from looking after sheep, to become a leader of my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you've gone. I have struck down all your enemies right in front of you, and I will make your reputation as great as the most famous people on earth. I will choose a place for my people Israel. I will settle them there and they won't be disturbed anymore. Evil people won't persecute them as they used to, from the time I placed judges in charge of my people. I will defeat all of your enemies.

Also I want to make it clear that I the Lord will build a house for you. For when you come to the end of your life and join your ancestors in death, I will bring to power one of your descendants, one of your sons, and make sure his kingdom is successful. He will be the one to build me a house, and I will make sure his kingdom lasts forever. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to me. I will never take away my kindness and love from him, as I did in the case of the one who ruled before you. I will put him in charge of my house and my kingdom forever, and his dynasty will last forever.” This is what Nathan explained to David—everything he was told in this divine revelation.

Then King David went and sat down in the presence of the Lord. He prayed, “Who am I, Lord God, and what is significant about my family, that you have brought me to this place? God, you talk as if this was a small thing in your eyes, and you also have spoken about the future of my house, my family dynasty. You also see me as someone very important, Lord God.

What more can I, David, say to you for honoring me in this way? You know your servant all too well! Lord, you're doing all this for me, your servant, and because it's what you want—doing all these amazing things and letting people know about them.

Lord, there really is no one like you; there is no other God, only you. We have never heard about anyone else. Who else is as fortunate as your people Israel? Who else on earth did God go and redeem to make his own people? You gained a wonderful reputation for yourself by all the tremendous, amazing things you did in driving out other nations before your people as you redeemed them from Egypt. You made your people Israel your own forever, and you, Lord, have become their God.

So now, Lord, please ensure that what you have said about me and my house happens, and lasts forever. Please do as you have promised, and may your true nature be recognized and honored forever, with people declaring, ‘The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, is Israel's God!’ May the house of your servant David continue to be there in your presence.

You, my God, have explained to me, your servant, that you will build me a house. That's why your servant has had the courage to pray to you. For you, Lord, are God! You are the one who has promised all these good things to your servant. So now, please bless your servant's house that it may continue in your presence forever. For when you bless, Lord, it is blessed forever.”

Some time later, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he captured Gath and its nearby towns from the Philistines. David also defeated the Moabites, making them subject to him and requiring them to pay taxes.

David then defeated Hadadezer, king of Zobah, near Hamath, as he tried to enforce his control along the Euphrates River. David captured from him 1,000 chariots, 7,000 charioteers, and 20,000 foot soldiers. David hamstrung all the chariot horses—except he saved enough for 100 chariots.

When the Arameans from Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David killed 22,000 of them. David placed forces in the Aramean town of Damascus, and also made them subject to him and required them to pay taxes. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went.

David took the shields of gold that were carried by Hadadezer's officers and brought them to Jerusalem. David also took a large quantity of bronze from Tibhath and from Cun, towns that had belonged to Hadadezer. Solomon used that bronze to make the bronze sea, the columns, and the various bronze objects.

When Tou, king of Hamath, learned that David had destroyed the entire army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, he sent his son Hadoram to David to make friends with him and to congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer. Tou and Hadadezer had often been at war. Hadoram brought gifts of gold, silver, and bronze. King David dedicated these gifts to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had taken from all the following nations: Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalekites.

Abishai, son of Zeruiah, killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He set up army posts in Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The Lord gave David victories wherever he went. David ruled over all Israel. He did what was fair and right for all his people. Joab, son of Zeruiah, was the army commander, while Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept the official records. Zadok, son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, were the priests, while Shavsha was secretary. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were at the king's side, serving as his chief officials.

Some time later, Nahash, king of the Ammonites, died and his son succeeded him. David said, “I will be kind to Hanun, son of Nahash, for his father was kind to me.” So David sent messengers to comfort him over his father's death. David's ambassadors arrived in the land of the Ammonites and went to comfort Hanun. But the Ammonite princes said to Hanun, “Do you really think that David is honoring your father by sending comforters to you? Haven't these ‘comforters’ only come to spy out the land to find ways to conquer it?” So Hanun detained David's ambassadors and had them shaved, and their robes cut off at the buttocks. Then he sent them back.

A message was sent to David to explain what had happened to the men. David then sent messengers to the men to tell them, “Stay at Jericho until your beards grow, and then you can come back.”

Then the Ammonites realized that they had really been offensive to David. So Hanun and the Ammonites sent a thousand talents of silver to hire chariots and charioteers from Aram-naharaim, Aram-maacah, and Zobah. They also hired 32,000 chariots and the king of Maacah with his army. They came set up camp near Medeba. The Ammonites were also called up from their towns and prepared for battle.

When David learned of this, he sent Joab and the entire army to confront them. The Ammonites set up their battle lines near the town entrance, while the other kings who had joined them took up positions in the open fields.

Joab realized he would have to fight both in front of him and behind him, he chose some of Israel's best troops and he took charge of them to lead the attack the Arameans. He put the rest of the army under the command of Abishai, his brother. They were to attack the Ammonites. Joab told him, “If the Arameans are stronger than me, you come and help me. If the Ammonites are stronger than you, I'll come and help you. Be brave, and fight your best for our people and the towns of our God. May the Lord do what he sees as good!”

Joab attacked the Arameans with his forces and they ran away from him. When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans had run away, they also ran away from Abishai, Joab's brother, and retreated into the town. So Joab went back to Jerusalem.

As soon as the Arameans saw they had been defeated by the Israelites they sent for reinforcements from the other side of the Euphrates River, under the leadership of Shobach, commander of Hadadezer's army.

When this was reported to David, he assembled all Israel together. He crossed the Jordan and approached the Aramean army, drawing up his forces in battle line against them. When David engaged in battle with them they fought with him. But the Aramean army ran away from the Israelites, and David killed 7,000 charioteers and 40,000 infantry, as well as Shobach, their army commander. When Hadadezer's allies realized that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with David and became subject to him. As a result, the Arameans didn't want to help the Ammonites any more.

In spring, at the time of year when kings go out to make war, Joab led the Israelite army in attacks against the country of the Ammonites, also besieging Rabbah. However, David remained behind in Jerusalem. Joab attacked Rabbah and destroyed it.

David took the crown from the head of their idol Milcom. It was made of gold, and was set with gems. It weighed a talent and was placed on David's head. David also took a great deal of plunder from the city. David made the people there work with saws, iron picks, and axes. He also did the same to all the Ammonite towns. Then David and all his army returned to Jerusalem.

Some time after this war broke out with the Philistines at Gezer. But then Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Sippai, a descendant of the Rephaim, and the Philistines were forced to submit.

In another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan, son of Jair, killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath the Gittite. The shaft of his spear was as thick as a weaver's rod.

In yet another battle at Gath, there was a gigantic man, who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, making twenty-four all. He too was descended from the giants. But when he insulted Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimea, David's brother, killed him. These were the descendants of the giants in Gath, but they were all killed by David and his men.

Satan interfered to cause trouble for Israel. He provoked David to do a census of Israel. So David told Joab and the army commanders, “Go and count the Israelites from Beersheba to Dan. Then report back to me so I can have a total number.”

But Joab replied, “May the Lord multiply his people a hundred times over. Your Majesty, aren't they all your subjects? Why do you want to do this? Why should you make Israel guilty?”

But the king was adamant so Joab left and went all over Israel. Eventually he returned to Jerusalem, and he gave David the number of people censused. In Israel there were 1,100,000 fighting men who could handle a sword, and 470,000 in Judah. However, Joab did not include Levi and Benjamin in the census total, because he disagreed with what the king had ordered. The Lord considered the census a bad thing to do and he punished Israel for it.

Then David said to God, “I have committed a terrible sin by doing this. Please take away the guilt of your servant, for I have been very stupid.”

The Lord told Gad, David's seer, “Go and tell David that this is what the Lord says: ‘I'm giving you three options. Choose one of them, and that's what I'll do to you.’”

So Gad went and told David, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Make your choice: either three years of famine; or three months of devastation, running from the swords of your enemies; or three days of the Lord's sword—in other words three days of plague in the land, with an angel of the Lord causing destruction throughout the whole of Israel.’ Now you have to decide how I should reply to the one who sent me.”

David replied to Gad, “This is an awful situation for me! Please, let the Lord decide my punishment, for he is so merciful. Don't let me be punished by people.”

So the Lord sent a plague on Israel, and 70,000 Israelites died. God also sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But just as the angel was about to destroy it, the Lord saw it, and he relented from causing such a disaster. He told the destroying angel, “That's enough. You can stop now.” Right then the angel of the Lord was standing beside the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.

When David looked up and saw the angel of the Lord standing between earth and heaven, holding his drawn sword extended over Jerusalem, David and the elders, wearing sackcloth, fell on their faces. David said to God, “Wasn't it me who ordered the census of the people? I'm the one who has sinned and acted wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Lord my God, please punish me and my family, but don't punish your people with this plague.”

Then the angel of the Lord told Gad to tell David to go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. So David went and did what Gad had told him in the name of the Lord.

Ornan was busy threshing wheat. He turned around and saw the angel; and his four sons who were with him went and hid. When David arrived, Ornan looked out and saw David. He left the threshing floor and bowed down before David with his face to the ground.

David said to Ornan, “Please let me have the threshing floor. I'll buy it at its full price. Then I can build an altar to the Lord here so that the plague on the people may be stopped.”

“Take it, and Your Majesty can do whatever you want with it,” Ornan told David. “You can have the oxen for burnt offerings, the threshing boards for firewood, and the wheat for a grain offering. I'll give it all to you.”

“No, I insist, I will pay the full price,” replied King David “I won't take for the Lord what is yours or present burnt offerings that didn't cost me anything.”

So David paid Ornan six hundred shekels of gold for the place.

David built an altar to the Lord there and presented burnt offerings and friendship offerings. He called on the Lord in prayer, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering. Then the Lord told the angel to put his sword back into its sheath.

When David saw that the Lord had answered him at the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, he offered sacrifices there. At that time the tent of the Lord that Moses had made in the wilderness, and the altar of burnt offering, were at the high place in Gibeon. But David did not want to go there to ask God's will, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the Lord.

Then David said, “This is where the house of the Lord God will be, and this is the place for the altar of burnt offering for Israel.” So David gave orders to summon the foreigners living in the land of Israel, and he assigned stonecutters to prepare dressed stones to build the house of God. David provided plenty of iron to make the nails for the entrance doors and for the supports, as well as more bronze than could be weighed. He provided more cedar logs than could be counted, because the people of Sidon and Tyre had brought a huge quantity of cedar logs to David.

David said to himself, “My son Solomon is still young and inexperienced, and the house that is to be built for the Lord must be truly magnificent, famous and glorious around the world. I need to start preparing for it.” So David made sure plenty of building materials were ready before he died.

Then he sent for his son Solomon and instructed him to build a house for the Lord, the God of Israel. David told Solomon, “My son, I had always wanted to build a house to honor the Lord my God. But the Lord told me, ‘You have shed a lot of blood and engaged in many wars. You are not to build a house to honor me because I have seen you shed so much blood on the earth. But you will have a son who will be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies in the nations around. Solomon will be his name, and I will grant peace and quiet to Israel during his reign. He is the one who will build a house to honor me. He will be my son, and I will be his father. And I will make sure the throne of his kingdom over Israel lasts forever.’

Now, my son, may the Lord be with you so you may succeed in building the house of the Lord your God, just as he said you would. Only may the Lord give you insight and understanding when he puts you in command of Israel, so that you may keep the law of the Lord your God. Then you will be successful, as long as you are careful to follow the laws and regulations that the Lord through Moses instructed Israel to do. Be strong and be brave! Don't be afraid or discouraged!

Look, I've taken a lot of trouble to provide for the house of the Lord— 100,000 talents of gold, 1,000,000 talents of silver, and bronze and iron, more than can be weighed. I have also provided timber and stone, but you will need to add more. You have many workers such as stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and all kinds of craftsmen of gold, silver, bronze, and iron—without limit. So get started, and may the Lord be with you!”

David also ordered all the leaders in Israel to help his son Solomon. “Isn't the Lord God with you? Hasn't he given you peace on all your borders?” he asked. “Why? Because he has placed the inhabitants of the land under my power, and they are now subject to the Lord and to his people. Now, with your whole mind and heart, make a definite decision to always worship the Lord your God. Get started on building the sanctuary of the Lord God, Then you can bring the Ark of the Lord's Agreement and the holy things of God into the house that is to be built to honor the Lord.”

When David was old, having lived a long life, he made his son Solomon king of Israel. He also summoned all the leaders of Israel, the priests, and the Levites. The Levites over thirty years old were counted, and there was 38,000 in total. “Of these 24,000 will be in charge of the work of the house of the Lord, while 6,000 will be officers and judges,” David instructed. “And 4,000 will be gatekeepers, while 4,000 will praise the Lord using the musical instruments I have provided for praise worship.”

David divided them into sections corresponding to the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

The sons of Gershon: Ladan and Shimei. The sons of Ladan: Jehiel (chief), and Zetham, and Joel, three in total. The sons of Shimei: Shelomoth, Haziel, and Haran,

three in total. These were the leaders of the families of Ladan. The sons of Shimei: Jahath, Zizah, Jeush, and Beriah—four in total. Jahath (chief), and Zizah (second); but because Jeush and Beriah did not have many sons they were counted as a single family.

The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel—a total of four. The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses. Aaron was dedicated to service with the most holy things, that he and his sons should always present offerings to the Lord, and minister before him, and give blessings in his name forever. As for Moses, the man of God, his sons were included with the tribe of Levi. The sons of Moses: Gershom and Eliezer. The sons of Gershom: Shebuel (chief). The sons of Eliezer: Rehabiah (chief). Eliezer had no other sons, but Rehabiah had many sons. The sons of Izhar: Shelomith (chief). The sons of Hebron: Jeriah (chief), Amariah (second), Jahaziel (third), and Jekameam (fourth). The sons of Uzziel: Micah (chief) and Isshiah (second).

The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli: Eleazar and Kish. Eleazar died without having sons, only daughters. Their cousins, the sons of Kish, married them. The sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, and Jeremoth—three in total.

These were the descendants of Levi by family, the heads of families chiefs listed individually by name—those twenty years of age or more who served in the house of the Lord. For David said, “The Lord, the God of Israel, has given peace to his people, and he will live in Jerusalem forever. So the Levites don't need to carry the Tent any longer, or anything needed for its service.” In accordance with David's final instructions, Levites twenty years of age or more were counted. Their assignment was to help the descendants of Aaron with the service of the house of the Lord They were responsible for the courtyards and rooms, for cleansing all the holy things, and the work of the service of the house of God. They were also responsible for the showbread that was placed on the table, the special flour for the grain offerings, the unleavened bread, the baking, the mixing, and dealing with all amounts and measurements. They also had to stand every morning to give thanks and praise to the Lord, and do the same in the evening, and whenever burnt offerings were presented to the Lord whether on Sabbaths, new moons, and feast days. They were to serve regularly before the Lord according to the number required for them. So the Levites were to carry out the responsibility of caring for the Tent of Meeting and the sanctuary, and with their brothers the descendants of Aaron, they served the house of the Lord.

The sons of Aaron were placed in divisions as follows. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father did, and they had no sons. Only Eleazar and Ithamar carried on as priests.

With the help of Zadok, a descendant of Eleazar, and Ithamar, a descendant Ahimelech, David placed them in divisions according to their appointed duties. Because Eleazar's descendants had more leaders than those of Ithamar, they were divided like this: sixteen family leaders from the descendants of Eleazar, and eight from the descendants of Ithamar.

They were divided by casting lots, without preference, for there were officers of the sanctuary and officers of God from both the sons of Eleazar and the sons of Ithamar. Shemaiah son of Nethanel, a Levite, was the secretary. He wrote down the names and assignments in the presence of the king, the officials, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech son of Abiathar, and the family leaders of the priests and Levites. One family from Eleazar and one from Ithamar were chosen in turn.

The first lot fell to Jehoiarib. The second to Jedaiah. The third to Harim. The fourth to Seorim. The fifth to Malkijah. The sixth to Mijamin. The seventh to Hakkoz. The eighth to Abijah. The ninth to Jeshua. The tenth to Shecaniah. The eleventh to Eliashib. The twelfth to Jakim. The thirteenth to Huppah. The fourteenth to Jeshebeab. The fifteenth to Bilgah. The sixteenth to Immer. The seventeenth to Hezir. The eighteenth to Happizzez. The nineteenth to Pethahiah. The twentieth to Jehezkel. The twenty-first to Jakin. The twenty-second to Gamul. The twenty-third to Delaiah. The twenty-fourth to Maaziah.

This was the order in which each group were to serve when they came into the house of the Lord, following the procedure defined for them by their forefather Aaron, as instructed by the Lord, the God of Israel. These were the rest of the sons of Levi: from the sons of Amram: Shubael; from the sons of Shubael: Jehdeiah. For Rehabiah, from his sons: Isshiah (first). From the Izharites: Shelomoth;

from the sons of Shelomoth: Jahath. The sons of Hebron: Jeriah (first), Amariah (second), Jahaziel (third), and Jekameam (fourth). The son of Uzziel: Micah; from the sons of Micah: Shamir. The brother of Micah: Isshiah; from the sons of Isshiah: Zechariah. The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. The son of Jaaziah: Beno. The sons of Merari: from Jaaziah: Beno, Shoham, Zaccur and Ibri. From Mahli: Eleazar, who did not have any sons. From Kish: the son of Kish, Jerahmeel. The sons of Mushi: Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.

These were the sons of the Levites, according to their families. They also cast lots in the same way their relatives the descendants of Aaron did. They did this in the presence of King David, and of Zadok, Ahimelech, and the family leaders of the priests and of the Levites, the family leaders and their youngest brothers alike.

David and the leaders of the Levites chose men from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to serve by prophesying accompanied by lyres, harps, and cymbals. Here is the list of those who performed this service: From the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. These sons of Asaph were under the supervision of Asaph, who prophesied under the supervision of the king. From the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six in total, under the supervision of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied accompanied by the harp, giving thanks and praise to the Lord. From the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamtiezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. All these sons of Heman, the king's seer, were given to him through the promises of God to honor him, for God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All of

them were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives, all of them trained and skilled in singing to the Lord, they totaled 288.

They cast lots for whatever responsibility they had, the least important equal to the most important, the teacher to the student. The first lot, which was for Asaph, fell to Joseph, his sons, and his brother, 12 in total. The second fell to Gedaliah, his sons, and his brothers, 12 in total. The third fell to Zaccur, his sons, and his brothers, 12 in total. The fourth fell to Izri, his sons, and his brothers, 12 in total. The fifth to Nethaniah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The sixth fell to Bukkiah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The seventh fell to Jesarelah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The eighth fell to Jeshaiah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The ninth fell to Mattaniah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The tenth fell to Shimei, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The eleventh fell to Azarel, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twelfth fell to Hashabiah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The thirteenth fell to Shubael, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The fourteenth fell to Mattithiah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The fifteenth fell to Jerimoth, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The sixteenth fell to Hananiah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The seventeenth fell to Joshbekashah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The eighteenth fell to Hanani, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The nineteenth fell to Mallothi, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twentieth fell to Eliathah, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twenty-first fell to Hothir, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twenty-second fell to Giddalti, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twenty-third fell to Mahazioth, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total. The twenty-fourth fell to Romamti-Ezer, his sons and his brothers, 12 in total.

This is a list of the divisions of the gatekeepers. From the Korahites: Meshelemiah son of Kore, one of the sons of Asaph. The sons of Meshelemiah: Zechariah (first), Jediael (second), Zebadiah (third), Jathniel (fourth), Elam (fifth), Jehohanan (sixth), and Eliehoenai (seventh).

The sons of Obed-edom: Shemaiah (first), Jehozabad (second), Joah (third), Sacar (fourth), Nethanel (fifth), Ammiel (sixth), Issachar (seventh), and Peullethai (eighth), for God had blessed Obed-edom.

Shemaiah, Obed-edom's son, had sons who were capable leaders and had great authority in their father's family The sons of Shemaiah: Othni, Rephael, Obed, and Elzabad. His relatives, Elihu and Semakiah, were also capable men. All these descendants of Obed-edom, plus their sons and grandsons, a total of sixty-two, were capable men, well qualified for their service.

Meshelemiah's eighteen sons and brothers were also capable men.

Hosah, one of the sons of Merari, made Shimri as leader among his sons, though he was not the firstborn. His other sons included Hilkiah (second), Tebaliah (third), and Zechariah (fourth). The total of Hosah's sons and relatives was thirteen.

These divisions of the gatekeepers, through their family leaders, served in the house of the Lord, just like their brothers. Every gate was assigned by lot to different families, the least important equal to the most important.

The lot for the east gate fell to Meshelemiah. Then they cast lots for his son Zechariah, a wise counselor with insight, and the lot for the north gate fell to him. The lot for the south gate fell to Obed-edom, and the lot for the storehouse fell to his sons. Shuppim and Hosah received the west gate and the gate of Shallecheth on the road that leads up. They were always guarded. There were six Levites on duty every day at the east gate, four at the north gate, four at the south gate, and two at a time at the storehouse. Six were on duty every day at the west gate, four at the main road, and two at the courtyard.

These were the divisions of the gatekeepers from the sons of Korah and the sons of Merari.

Other Levites under Ahijah were in charge of the treasuries of the house of God and the treasuries of what had been dedicated to God. From the sons of Ladan, who were the descendants of the Gershonites through Ladan, and were the family leaders of Ladan the Gershonite: Jehieli. The sons of Jehieli, Zetham and his brother Joel, were in charge of the treasuries of the house of the Lord.

From the Amramites, the Izharites, the Hebronites, and the Uzzielites: Shebuel, a descendant of Gershom, son of Moses, who was the chief officer in charge of the treasuries. His relatives by Eliezer were Rehabiah, Jeshaiah, Joram, Zicri, and Shelomoth.

Shelomoth and his relatives were in charge of all the treasuries for all that had been dedicated by King David, by the family leaders who were the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and by the army commanders. They dedicated a part of the plunder they had won in battle to help maintain the house of the Lord. Shelomoth and his relatives also looked after the gifts dedicated to the Lord by Samuel the seer, Saul son of Kish, Abner son of Ner, and Joab son of Zeruiah. All the dedicated gifts were the responsibility of Shelomoth and his relatives.

From the Izharites: Kenaniah and his sons were given outside duties as officials and judges over Israel.

From the Hebronites: Hashabiah and his relatives, 1,700 capable men, were put in charge of Israel west of the Jordan, responsible for everything involving the Lord's work and the king's service.

Also from the Hebronites came Jerijah, the leader of the Hebronites according to the family genealogies. In the fortieth year of David's reign the records were examined, and men of great ability were discovered at Jazer in Gilead. Among the relatives of Jerijah were 2,700 capable men who were family leaders. King David put them in charge of the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They were responsible for everything involving the Lord's work and the king's service.

This is a list of the Israelites, the family leaders, the commanders of thousands, and the commanders of hundreds, and their officers who served the king in everything related to the divisions that were on duty

each month during the year. There were 24,000 men in each division.

In command of the first division for the first month, was Jashobeam, son of Zabdiel. He had 24,000 men in his division. He was a descendant of Perez, and was in charge of all the army officers for the first month.

In command of the division for the second month was Dodai the Ahohite. Mikloth was his division leader. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The third army commander for the third month was Benaiah, son of Jehoiada the priest. He was chief and there were 24,000 men in his division. This was the same Benaiah who was a great warrior among the Thirty, and was in charge of the Thirty. His son Ammizabad was his division leader.

The fourth, for the fourth month, was Asahel, Joab's brother. His son Zebadiah was his successor. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The fifth, for the fifth month, was the army commander Shamhuth the Izrahite. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The sixth, for the sixth month, was Ira, son of Ikkesh the Tekoite. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The seventh, for the seventh month, was Helez the Pelonite of the tribe of Ephraim. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The eighth, for the eighth month, was Sibbecai the Hushathite, a Zerahite. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The ninth, for the ninth month, was Abiezer the Anathothite of the tribe of Benjamin. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The tenth, for the tenth month, was Maharai the Netophathite, a Zerahite. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The eleventh, for the eleventh month, was Benaiah the Pirathonite of the tribe of Ephraim. He had 24,000 men in his division.

The twelfth, for the twelfth month, was Heldai the Netophathite, from the family of Othniel. He had 24,000 men in his division.

This is a list of the leaders for the tribes of Israel: for the Reubenites: Eliezer, son of Zicri; for the Simeonites: Shephatiah, son of Maacah; for Levi: Hashabiah, son of Kemuel; for Aaron: Zadok; for Judah: Elihu, a brother of David; for Issachar: Omri, son of Michael; for Zebulun: Ishmaiah, son of Obadiah; for Naphtali: Jerimoth, son of Azriel; for the Ephraimites: Hoshea, son of Azaziah; for the half the tribe of Manasseh: Joel, son of Pedaiah; for the half-tribe of Manasseh in Gilead: Iddo, son of Zechariah; for Benjamin: Jaasiel, son of Abner; for Dan: Azarel, son of Jeroham. These were the officers for the tribes of Israel.

David did not census the men under twenty because the Lord had said he would make Israel as numerous as the stars of heaven. Joab, son of Zeruiah, had begun the census but did not finish it. Israel was punished because of this census, and the results were not recorded in the official account of King David.

Azmaveth, son of Adiel, was in charge of the king's storehouses, while Jonathan, son of Uzziah, was in charge of those in the country, towns, villages, and watchtowers. Ezri, son of Kelub, was in charge of the farm workers who worked the land. Shimei the Ramathite was in charge of the vineyards. Zabdi the Shiphmite was in charge of the produce of the vineyards for the wine cellars. Baal-Hanan the Gederite was in charge of the olive and sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Joash was in charge of the stores of olive oil. Shitrai the Sharonite was in charge of the cattle in the Sharon pastures. Shaphat, son of Adlai, was in charge of the cattle in the valleys. Obil the Ishmaelite was in charge of the camels. Jehdeiah the Meronothite was in charge of the donkeys. Jaziz the Hagrite was in charge of the sheep and goats. These were all officials in charge of what belonged to King David.

Jonathan, David's uncle, was an advisor, a man of insight, and a scribe. Jehiel, son of Hacmoni, looked after the king's sons. Ahithophel was the king's counselor and Hushai the Archite was the king's friend. After Ahithophel came Jehoiada, son of Benaiah and Abiathar. Joab was the commander of the royal army.

David summoned to Jerusalem all the leaders of Israel—the leaders of the tribes, the army division commanders in service to the king, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of all the property and livestock of the king and his sons, along with the court officials, the warriors and all the best fighting men. King David got to his feet and said, “Listen to me, my brothers and my people! I really wanted to build a house as a resting place for the Ark of the Lord's Agreement, as a footstool for our God. So I made plans to build it. But God told me, ‘You are not to build a house to honor me because you are a man of war who has spilled blood.’

However, the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me out of all my father's family to be king of Israel forever. For he chose Judah as the leading tribe, and from among the families of Judah he chose my father's family. From among my father's sons he was pleased to chose me as king over the whole of Israel. From all my sons (for the Lord gave me many) the Lord has chosen Solomon my child to sit on the throne and to rule over the Lord's kingdom Israel. He told me, ‘Your son Solomon is the one who will build my house and my courts, because I have chosen him as my son, and I will be his father. I will make sure his kingdom lasts forever if he single-mindedly keeps my commandments and regulations like he does today.

So now, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the Lord, and as God listens, be sure to obey all the commandments of the Lord your God so that you may go on possessing this good land and be able to pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants forever.

Solomon my son, get to know the God of your father. Serve him with complete dedication and with a willing mind, for the Lord examines every motivation and understands the intention of every thought. If you look for him, you will find him; but if you abandon him, he will reject you forever. Pay attention now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong, and take action!’”

Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the Temple porch, its buildings, storehouses, upper rooms, inner rooms, and the room for the “place of atonement.” He also gave him everything he had planned for the courts of the house of the Lord, for all the sur-

rounding rooms, for the treasuries of the house of God and of those things that had been dedicated. In addition he passed on instructions regarding the divisions of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of service of the house of the Lord, and for all that was used for worship in the house of the Lord.

He also laid down how much gold and silver was to be used in making the different objects used in every kind of service, the weight of the gold and silver lampstands and their lamps, depending on the use of each lampstand; the weight of gold for each table of showbread, and the weight of silver for the silver tables, the weight of pure gold for the forks, basins, and cups; the weight of each gold dish; the weight of each silver bowl; the weight of the refined gold for the altar of incense; and lastly plans for a golden chariot of cherubim that spread their wings, covering the Ark of the Lord's Agreement. “All this is in writing from the hand of the Lord, given to me as instructions—every detail of this plan,” said David.

Then David also told Solomon, “Be strong, be brave, and take action! Don't be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you! He will not let you down or leave you. He will make sure all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished. The divisions of the priests and the Levites are prepared for all the service of the house of God. People will be willing to use their different skills to help you in all the work—the officials and all the people will do what you tell them.”

Then King David said to everyone gathered there, “My son Solomon, chosen by God alone, is young and inexperienced, and the work to be done is great because this Temple will not be for man, but for the Lord God. Using all my means I have provided for the house of my God—gold for the articles made of gold, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron, and wood for the wood; onyx stones and stones for settings: turquoise, different colored stones, every kind of precious stone; and plenty of marble.

More than this, because of my devotion to the house of my God, I'm now giving my personal fortune of gold and silver, in addition to everything that I have provided for this holy house. 3,000 talents of gold—the gold of Ophir—and 7,000 talents of refined silver will go to cover the walls of the buildings, gold for the gold work, and silver for the silver work, and for all the work done by the craftsmen. Now who willingly wants to commit themselves to giving to the Lord today?”

They gave willingly—the family leaders, those in charge of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work. They gave to the service of the house of God 5,000 talents and 10,000 darics of gold, 10,000 talents of silver, 18,000 talents of bronze, and 100,000 talents of iron. Those who had precious stones gave them to the treasury of the house of the Lord, under the supervision of Jehiel the Gershonite. The people celebrated because their leaders had been so willing to give to the Lord, freely and wholeheartedly. King David was also really delighted.

Then David praised the Lord before the whole assembly:

“Praise to you, Lord, the God of Israel our father, for ever and ever! Lord, yours is the greatness, the power, the glory, the splendor, and the majesty, for everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Lord, yours is the kingdom, and you are admired as ruler of all. Riches and honor come from you and you reign supreme. You possess power and might, and have the ability to make people great and to give strength to all.

Now our God we thank you, and we praise you and your glorious character. But who am I, and who are my people, that we are able to give as willingly as this? For everything we have comes from you—we are only giving back what you have given us. In your eyes we are strangers and foreigners, just like our forefathers. Our time here on earth passes like a shadow, we have no hope of staying here long.

Lord our God, even all this wealth that we have provided to build you a house for your holy name comes from what you give, and it all belongs to you. I know, my God, that you look on the inside and are happy when we live right. Everything I have given willingly and with an honest heart, and now I have seen your people here giving happily and willingly to you. Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and our forefathers, please keep these thoughts and commitments in the minds of your people forever, and make sure they stay loyal to you. Please also give my son Solomon a desire to whole-heartedly keep your commandments, decrees, and statutes, and to do all he can to build your Temple that I have provided for.”

Then David said to everyone there, “Praise the Lord your God!” So everyone praised the Lord, the God of their fathers. They bowed down in reverence to the Lord and to the king.

The following day they presented sacrifices and burnt offerings to the Lord: one thousand bulls, one thousand rams, and one thousand lambs, with their drink offerings and plenty of sacrifices for all of Israel. Then they ate and drank in the presence of the Lord with great happiness that day. They made Solomon, the son of David, king for a second time, and they anointed him as ruler for the Lord, and anointed Zadok as priest.

So Solomon took the throne of the Lord as king in place of David, his father. He was successful, and all the Israelites obeyed him. All the officials and warriors, as well as all of King David's sons, gave a solemn promise of loyalty to King Solomon. The Lord made Solomon highly respected throughout Israel, and gave him greater royal majesty than had been given to any king of Israel before him.

So David, son of Jesse, ruled over all of Israel. He ruled over Israel forty years—seven in Hebron, and thirty-three in Jerusalem. David died at a good old age, having lived a long life, blessed with wealth and honor. Then his son Solomon took over and ruled in his place. Everything that King David did, from beginning to end, is written down in the Records of Samuel the Seer, the Records of Nathan the Prophet, and the Records of Gad the Seer. These include all the details of his reign, his power, and what happened to him, and to Israel, and all to the kingdoms of the neighboring countries.

2 Chronicles

Second Book of Chronicles

Solomon, son of David, strengthened his hold over the kingdom, and the Lord God was with him and made him extremely powerful. Solomon sent for all the Israelite leaders, to the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, to the judges, and to every family leader. Solomon went with the whole assembly to the high place at Gibeon, for this was the site of God's Tent of Meeting that Moses, the Lord's servant, had made in the wilderness.

David had brought up the Ark of God from Kiriath-jearim to the place in Jerusalem where he had set up a tent for it. However, the bronze altar made by Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, was there in front of the Tent of the Lord, so that is where Solomon and the assembly went to worship. Solomon went up to the bronze altar before the Lord, in front of the Tent of Meeting. There he presented one thousand burnt offerings.

That night God appeared to Solomon and told him, “Ask what you want me to give you.”

Solomon responded to God, “You showed trustworthy love without limit to my father David, and you have made me king in his place. Lord God, please keep the promise you made to my father David. You have made me king over a nation that has as many people as the dust of the earth. Please give me wisdom and knowledge to lead this people—for who can rule with justice this great people of yours?”

God told Solomon: “Because this is what you really wanted, and you didn't ask for wealth, possessions, or honor, or the death of those who hate you, or for a long life, but instead you asked for wisdom and knowledge so you can rule with justice my people that I have made you king over; wisdom and knowledge is given to you. I will give you wealth, possessions, and honor as well, much more than any king who came before you has had, or who comes after you will ever have.” Then Solomon returned to Jerusalem from the Tent of Meeting in Gibeon, and he ruled over Israel.

Solomon built up an army of chariots and horses. He had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses, which he placed in the chariot cities, and also with him in Jerusalem. The king made silver and gold as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar wood as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. Solomon imported horses for himself from Egypt and Kue; the king's traders bought them in Kue. A chariot could be imported from Egypt for six hundred silver shekels, and a horse for a hundred and fifty. In the same way they exported them to all the Hittite kings and the Aramean kings.

Solomon ordered the building of a Temple to honor the Lord and a royal palace for himself. He allocated 70,000 men as laborers, 80,000 as stone cutters in the mountains, and 3,600 as foremen.

Solomon sent a message to Hiram, king of Tyre, telling him, “Please do as you did with my father David when you sent him cedar timber for him to build a palace to live in. I'm about to start building a Temple to honor the Lord my God, dedicated to him, where he will be offered sweet-smelling incense, where the show-bread will be always set out in rows, and where burnt offerings will be made every morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, at new moon festivals, and at the feasts of the Lord our God—this to be done forever in Israel. This Temple I am about to build must be impressive, because our God is greater than all gods. But who can build a Temple for him to live in, for the heavens, even highest heaven, cannot contain him, and who am I that I should dare to build him a house, except to burn incense to him?

So please send me a master craftsman who is skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, and iron; and in purple, scarlet, and blue fabrics. He must also know how to engrave, working together with my expert craftsmen from Judea and Jerusalem provided by my father David. Also send me cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon, for I know that your workers are skillful in cutting down the trees of Lebanon. I will send men to help your workers to produce a large quantity of timber because the Temple I'm building will be really large and very impressive. I will pay your workers, the wood-cutters, 20,000 cors of crushed wheat, 20,000 cors of barley, 20,000 baths of wine, and 20,000 baths of olive oil.”

King Hiram of Tyre responded to Solomon by letter: “It's because the Lord loves his people that he has made you their king.” Hiram went on, “Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth! He has given King David a wise son with insight and understanding who is going to build a Temple for the Lord and a royal palace for himself.

I'm sending you Hiram-Abi, a master craftsman who knows and understands what he's doing. His mother is from the tribe of Dan and his father is from Tyre. He's an expert in working with gold and silver, bronze and iron, stone and wood, purple, blue, and crimson fabric, and fine linen. He can do all kinds of engraving and can make any design he's given. He'll work with your craftsmen and with the craftsmen of my lord, your father David.

Now my lord, please send to us his servants the wheat, barley, olive oil, and wine he spoke about. We will cut all timber you need from Lebanon and take it to you by sea in rafts to Joppa. From there you can transport it to Jerusalem.”

Solomon had a census taken of all the foreigners in the land of Israel, like the census his father David had conducted, and found there were 153,600. He allocated 70,000 as laborers, 80,000 as stonecutters in the mountains, and 3,600 as foremen.

Then Solomon began building the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared to his father David. This was the place that David had provided—the former threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite. Solomon began construction on the second day of the second month in his fourth year as king.

The size of the foundation Solomon laid for the Temple of God was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide (according to the old cubit measurement). The front porch that ran across the width of the Temple was twenty cubits long and twenty cubits high. He covered the inside of the porch with pure gold. He paneled the main room with cypress overlaid with fine gold, with images of palm trees and chains. He decorated the Temple with beautiful gems, and with gold he imported from Parvaim. He covered the beams, thresholds, walls, and doors of the Temple with gold, and he carved cherubim on the walls.

He made the room of the Most Holy Place to correspond with the width of the Temple—twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. He covered the interior with six hundred talents of fine gold. The weight of the nails was one shekel for every fifty shekels of gold.

He made for the Most Holy Place two wooden cherubim covered with gold. The wingspan of the cherubim together was twenty cubits. One wing of the first cherub was five cubits long and touched one Temple wall, while its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the second cherub. In similar fashion, one wing of the second cherub was five cubits long and touched one Temple wall, while its other wing, also five cubits long, touched the first cherub. So the wingspan of these cherubim together was twenty cubits. They stood on their feet, facing the main room.

He made the veil of blue, purple, and crimson embroidery on fine linen, with images of cherubim on it. He made two columns for the front of the Temple, thirty-five cubits high, each having a capital five cubits high. He made chains like in the Most Holy Place and he placed them on top of the columns. He also made one hundred ornamental pomegranates and attached them to each chain. He set up the columns in front of the Temple, one on the south, and one on the north. The column on the south he named Jachin, and the column on the north he named Boaz.

Solomon made a bronze altar twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. He made a “Sea” from cast metal, ten cubits in diameter, five cubits in height, and thirty cubits in circumference. Below it were ornamental bulls all around it, ten per cubit. They were in two rows when it was all cast. The Sea was supported by twelve statues of bulls three facing north, three facing west, three facing south, and three facing east. The Sea was placed on them, with their rears toward the center. It was as thick as the width of a hand, and its edge was like the flared edge of a cup or a lily flower. It held three thousand baths. He also made ten basins on carts for washing. He placed five on the south side, and five on the north. They were used for cleaning what was used in burnt offerings, but the Sea was used by the priests for washing.

He made ten gold lampstands as had been specified, and placed them in the Temple, five on the south side and five on the north. In addition he made ten tables and placed them in the Temple, five on the south side and five on the north. He also made a hundred gold basins.

Solomon also built a courtyard of the priests, and the large courtyard and doors for the courtyard, and he covered the doors with bronze. He placed the Sea on the south side, by the southeast corner.

Hiram also made the pots, shovels, and basins. Hiram completed the work that he had been doing for King Solomon on the Temple of God: the two columns; the two bowl-shaped capitals on top of the columns; the two sets of network that covered both bowls of the capitals on top of the columns; the four hundred ornamental pomegranates for the two sets of network—two rows of pomegranates for each network covering both the bowl-shaped capitals on top of the columns; the water carts and the basins on the water carts; the Sea and the twelve bull statues that supported it; the pots, shovels, forks, and everything else.

All the metalwork Hiram made for King Solomon for the house of the Lord was of polished bronze. The king cast them in clay molds in the plain of the Jordan between Succoth and Zeredah. Solomon made so many of these things that the weight of the bronze used could not be measured.

Solomon also made everything used in the Temple of God: the golden altar; the tables where the Bread of the Presence was displayed; the lampstands of pure gold and their lamps that were to burn in front of the Most Holy Place as specified; the decorative flowers, lamps, and tongs—all made of solid gold; the wick trimmers, basins, dishes and censers—all made of gold; and the doors of the Temple: the inner doors to the Most Holy Place, and the doors of the main hall—all covered with gold.

Once Solomon had finished all the work on the house of the Lord, he brought the holy items his father David had dedicated—the silver, the gold, and all the various worship items—and he placed them in the treasuries of God's Temple.

Then Solomon summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel—all the heads of the tribes and family leaders of the Israelites—to bring the Ark of the Lord's Agreement from Zion, the City of David. So all the Israelites gathered to be with the king at the feast which is in the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the Levites lifted up the Ark. The priests and Levites brought up the Ark, the Tent of Meeting, and all the holy objects it contained. They sacrificed so many sheep and cattle that they couldn't be counted! Then the priests brought the Ark of the Lord's Agreement and placed it in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the Most Holy Place, beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim were spreading their wings over the place where the Ark was, so that the cherubim made a covering above the Ark and its poles. The poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place in front of the Most Holy Place, but not from outside. They are there to this day. Inside the Ark there was nothing except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Mount Sinai, where the Lord had made an agreement with the people of Israel when they came out of Egypt.

Then the priests came out of the Holy Place. All the priests who were there had purified themselves, whatever their division. All the Levites who were singers—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and relatives—stood on the east side of the altar. They were dressed in fine linen, striking cymbals, playing harps and

lyres, and accompanied by one hundred and twenty priests sounding trumpets. The trumpeters and singers joined together with one voice to praise and thank the Lord. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, and musical instruments, the singers raised their voices, praising the Lord: "For he is good; his trustworthy love lasts forever."

Then the Temple, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud. The priests could not stand up to continue with the service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the Temple of God.

Then Solomon spoke, "The Lord said that he lives in deep darkness. However, I have built you a magnificent Temple, a place for you to live forever."

Then the king turned and blessed the whole assembly of Israel, as they all stood. He said, "Praise the Lord God of Israel, who has kept the promise he made to my father David when he said, 'Ever since the day I brought my people out of the land of Egypt, I have not chosen a town from any tribe of Israel where a Temple could be built to honor me, and I have not chosen anyone to be ruler over my people Israel. But now I have chosen Jerusalem so that I will be honored there, and I have chosen David to rule over my people Israel.'

My father David really wanted to build this Temple to honor the Lord, the God of Israel. But the Lord told my father David, 'You really wanted to build me a Temple to honor me—and it was good for you to want to do this. But you are not going to build the Temple. Your son, one of your children, will build the Temple to honor me.'

Now the Lord has kept the promise he made. For I have taken the place of my father, and I sit on the throne of Israel as the Lord said, and I have built the Temple to honor the Lord God of Israel. I have placed the Ark there, which has inside it the agreement the Lord made with the sons of Israel."

Then Solomon stood in front of the altar of the Lord before the whole assembly of Israel and spread out his hands in prayer. Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. He had set it in the middle of the courtyard, and he was standing on it. Then he knelt down before the whole assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven. He said, "Lord God of Israel, there is no god like you in heaven or on earth, keeping your agreement of trustworthy love with your servants who follow you with complete devotion. You have kept the promise you made to your servant, my father David. With your own mouth you made that promise, and with your own hands you have fulfilled it today.

So now, Lord God of Israel, please keep the promise you made to your servant David, my father, when you told him, 'If your descendants pay close attention to follow my way, and to keep my law as you have done, you will never fail to have one of them to sit on the throne of Israel.' Now, Lord God of Israel, please fulfill this promise you made to your servant David.

But will God really live here on earth among people? The heavens, even highest heaven, cannot contain you, much less this Temple I have built! Please listen to the prayer of your servant and his request, Lord my God. Please hear the appeals and the prayers that your servant is presenting before you. May you watch over this Temple day and night, caring for the place where you said you would be honored. May you hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place, and hear the request of your servant and your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Please hear from heaven where you live. May you hear and forgive.

When someone sins against another and is required to take an oath declaring the truth before your altar in this Temple, listen from heaven, act and judge your servants. Pay back the guilty; vindicate and reward those who do right.

When your people Israel are defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they come back in repentance to you, praying for forgiveness in this Temple, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them back to the land you gave them and their forefathers.

If the skies are closed shut and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, if they pray toward this place and if they come back in repentance to you, turning away from their sin because you have punished them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way so that they can follow it, and please send rain on the land that you have given to your people to own.

If there is famine in the land, or disease, or blight or mildew on the crops, or if there are locusts or caterpillars, or if an enemy comes to lay siege to the towns in the land—it can be whatever kind of plague or whatever kind of disease— then whatever kind of prayer or whatever kind of appeal is made by anyone or all your people Israel, in fact anyone who, knowing their problems and pains, prays toward this Temple, then hear from heaven, the place where you live, and forgive. Give according to the way they live their lives, for you know what people are really like inside, and you alone know the true character of people. Then they will respect you and follow your ways all the time they live in the land you gave to our forefathers.

As for the foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel but who come from a distant land, having heard of your great nature and power and ability to help, when they come and pray toward this Temple, then hear from heaven, the place where you live, and give them what they're asking. That way, everyone on earth will come to know and respect you, just as your own people Israel do. They will also know that this Temple I have built honors you.

When your people go to fight against their enemies, wherever you send them, and when they pray to you towards the city you have chosen and the house I have built to honor you, then hear from heaven what they are praying and asking for, and support their cause.

If they sin against you—and there is nobody who does not sin—you may become angry with them and hand them over to an enemy who takes them away as prisoners to a foreign land, near or far. But if they think again in their land of captivity and repent and plead for mercy from you, saying, 'We have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly,' and they come back to you with complete sincerity in their thoughts and attitudes there in their land of captivity; and they pray

towards the land you gave their forefathers and the city you chose and the Temple I have built to honor you, then hear from heaven, the place where you live, and respond and support their cause. Forgive your people who have sinned against you.

Now my God, please open your eyes, and may your ears pay attention to the prayers offered in this place.

'Come, Lord, and enter your home, together with your Ark of power. May your priests wear salvation like clothing; may your faithful people shout for joy in your goodness.

Lord God, don't reject the king you have chosen. Remember your trustworthy love for your servant David.'"

When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and burned up the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple. The priests couldn't enter the Temple of the Lord because the Lord's glory filled the Lord's Temple. When all the Israelites saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord in the Temple, they knelt down and bowed their faces to the ground. They worshiped and praised the Lord, saying, "He is good! His trustworthy love lasts forever!"

Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices to the Lord. King Solomon offered a sacrifice of 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep. In this way the king and all the people dedicated the Temple of God. The priests stood at their posts, and the Levites too, with the musical instruments that King David had made for giving praise, and which David had used for praise. They sang, "For his trustworthy love lasts forever!" Opposite them the priests blew trumpets, and all the Israelites stood up.

After that Solomon dedicated the middle of the courtyard in front of the Temple of the Lord. There he presented burnt offerings and the fat of the friendship offerings, since the bronze altar he had made couldn't hold all the burnt offerings, the grain offerings, and the fat of the offerings.

Then over the next seven days Solomon observed the feast with all of Israel, a huge gathering that came from Lebo-hamath to the Wadi of Egypt. On the eighth day they held a final assembly, for the dedication of the altar had lasted seven days, and the feast another seven days. On the twenty-third day of the seventh month, Solomon sent the people home. They were still celebrating and really happy for the goodness that the Lord had shown to David, to Solomon, and to his people Israel.

After Solomon had finished the Temple of the Lord and the royal palace, having successfully accomplished everything he'd wanted to do for the Temple of the Lord and for his own palace, the Lord appeared to him at night and told him: "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a Temple of sacrifice. If I were to close the sky shut so there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send a plague among my people, and if my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray and return to me, and turn away from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sins, and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open, and my ears will pay attention to the prayers offered in this place, for I have chosen and consecrated this Temple so that I may be honored there forever. I will always watch over it and take care of it for it really matters to me.

As for you, if you follow my ways as your father David did, doing everything I've told you to do, and if you keep my laws and regulations, then I will make sure your reign is secure. I made this agreement with your father David, telling him, 'You will always have a descendant to rule over Israel.' But if you turn away and ignore the laws and the commandments I have given you, and if you go and serve and worship other gods, then I will pull you up from the land I gave you. I will banish from my presence this Temple I have dedicated to my honor, and I will make it an object lesson of ridicule among the nations. This Temple that now is so respected will become so spoiled that passers-by will say, 'Why has the Lord acted in such a way to this land and this Temple?' The answer will come, 'Because they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of Egypt, and have clung to other gods, worshiping them and serving them. That's why the Lord has brought all this trouble upon them.'"

It had taken twenty years for Solomon to build the Temple of the Lord and his own palace. Solomon rebuilt the towns Hiram had given him, and sent Israelites to live there. Then Solomon attacked Hamath-zobah and captured it. He built Tadmor in the wilderness and also built all the storehouse towns in Hamath. He rebuilt Upper and Lower Beth-horon, fortified cities with walls and barred gates, and also Baalath. He built all the storehouse towns that belonged to him, and all the towns where he kept his chariots and horses. He built everything he wanted to in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and throughout his entire kingdom.

There were some people who remained in the land: the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites—people who were not Israelites. They were the remaining descendants of the peoples that the Israelites had not destroyed. Solomon made them work as forced laborers, as they are to this day. But Solomon did not make any of the Israelites work as slaves. Instead, they were his military men, his officers, and commanders of his chariots and horsemen. They were also King Solomon's chief officers, 250 men who supervised the people.

Solomon moved Pharaoh's daughter from the City of David to the palace he had built for her. For he said, "My wife cannot live in the palace of David king of Israel, because wherever the Ark of the Lord has gone are holy places."

Then Solomon presented burnt offerings to the Lord on the altar of the Lord he had built in front of the Temple's porch. He followed the requirement for daily offerings as Moses had ordered for Sabbaths, new moons, and the three annual festivals—the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Shelters.

Following the instructions of his father David, he assigned the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites in their responsibilities to offer praise, and to help the priests in their daily duties. He also assigned gatekeepers by their divisions at each gate as David, the man of God, had instructed. They followed

David's instructions exactly regarding the priests, the Levites, and anything to do with the treasuries.

This is how all Solomon's work was carried out, from the day the foundation was laid for the Lord's Temple until it was finished. So the Lord's Temple was completed.

After this Solomon went to Ezion-geber and to Eloth on the coast of the land of Edom. Hiram sent him ships under the command of his own officers, along with experienced sailors. They went with Solomon's men to Ophir where they loaded 450 talents of gold, which they then brought back to King Solomon.

The queen of Sheba heard how famous Solomon was, so she came to Jerusalem to test him with tough questions. She brought with her a very large entourage, with camels loaded with spices, large amounts of gold, and precious gemstones. She came to Solomon and asked him about everything she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions. There was nothing he couldn't explain to her. When the queen of Sheba saw Solomon's wisdom, and the palace he had built, the food on the table, how his officials lived, how his servants operated and how they were dressed, the clothes of the waiters, and the burnt offerings he presented at the Lord's Temple, she was so astonished she could hardly breathe.

She told the king, “It's true what I heard in my own country about your proverbs and your wisdom! But I didn't believe what they told me until I came and saw with my own eyes. In fact, I wasn't told the half of it—the extent of your wisdom far exceeds what I heard! How happy your people must be! How happy those who work for you, who stand here every day listening to your wisdom! Praise the Lord your God who is so pleased with you, who placed you on his throne as king to rule on his behalf. Because of the love of your God for Israel he has made them secure forever, and he has made you king over them to do what is fair and right.”

She presented the king with one hundred and twenty talents of gold, huge amounts of spices and precious stones. Never before had there been spices like those the queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon.

(Hiram and Solomon's men, who brought gold from Ophir, also brought algum wood and precious stones. The king used the algum wood to make steps for the Temple and for the royal palace, and into lyres and harps for the musicians. Nothing like them had ever been seen before in the land of Judah.)

King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all she wanted, whatever she asked for. This was far more than she had brought the king. Then she and her attendants returned home to her own country.

The weight of gold that Solomon received each year was 666 talents, not including that received from traders and merchants. All the kings of Arabia and governors of the land also brought gold and silver to Solomon.

King Solomon made two hundred shields of hammered gold. Each shield required six hundred shekels of hammered gold. He also made three hundred small shields of hammered gold. Each of these shields required three hundred gold coins. The king placed them in the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.

The king also made a great throne of ivory, and covered it with pure gold. The throne had six steps, with a golden footstool attached. There were armrests on both sides of the seat, with lions standing beside the armrests. Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one on opposite ends of each step. Nothing like this had ever been made for any kingdom.

All of King Solomon's drinking cups were gold, and all the utensils of the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon were pure gold. No silver was used, because it was not valued in the days of Solomon.

The king had a fleet of ships from Tarshish crewed by Hiram's sailors. Once every three years the ships of Tarshish would arrive with a cargo of gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

King Solomon was greater than any other king on earth in wealth and wisdom. All the kings of the earth wanted to meet Solomon to hear the wisdom that God had placed in his mind. Year after year, every visitor would bring gifts—articles of silver and gold, clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules.

Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. He kept them in the chariot towns, and also with him in Jerusalem. He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, and to the border with Egypt. The king made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar wood as plentiful as sycamore-figs in the foothills. Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from many other lands. The rest of the acts of Solomon, from start to finish, are written in the Records of Nathan the Prophet, in the Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the Visions of Iddo the Seer about Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all of Israel for forty years. Then Solomon died and was buried in the city of his father David. His son Rehoboam took over as king.

Rehoboam went to Shechem, because all the Israelites had gone to Shechem to make him king. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was still in Egypt when he heard about this. (He had run away to Egypt to escape from King Solomon and was living there.) The Israelite leaders sent for him. Jereboam and all the Israelites went to talk with Rehoboam. “Your father placed a heavy burden on us,” they told him. “But now if you lighten the load your father imposed and the heavy demands he laid on us, we will serve you.”

Rehoboam answered, “Come back in three days time.” So the people left.

King Rehoboam asked for advice from the elders who had served his father Solomon when he was alive. “How do you advise me to reply to these people about this?” he asked.

They replied, “If you treat these people well, and please them by speaking kindly to them, they will always serve you.”

But Rehoboam dismissed the advice of the elders. He instead asked advice from the young men he had grown up with, those close to him. He asked them, “What response do you advise that we send back to these people who have told me, ‘Lighten the burden your father put on us’?”

The young men who he had grown up with told him, “This is what you have to tell these people who said to you, ‘Your father made our burden heavy, but you should make it lighter.’ This is what you should answer them: ‘My little finger is thicker than my father's waist! My father placed a heavy burden on you, and I will make it even heavier. My father punished you with whips; I will punish you with scorpions.’”

Three days later, Jeroboam and all the people returned to Rehoboam, because the king had told them, “Come back in three days time.”

The king answered them sharply. Dismissing the advice of the elders, he replied using the advice of the young men. He said, “My father placed a heavy burden on you, and I will make it even heavier. My father punished you with whips; I will punish you with scorpions.”

The king did not listen to what the people said, for this change in circumstances was from God, to fulfill what the Lord had told Jeroboam son of Nebat through Ahijah the Shilonite.

When all the Israelites saw that the king wasn't listening to them, they told the king: “What share do we have in David, and what part do we have in the son of Jesse? Go home, Israel! You're on your own, house of David!”

So all the Israelites went home. However, Rehoboam still ruled over the Israelites who lived in Judah.

Then King Rehoboam sent out Hadoram, who was in charge of forced labor, but the Israelites stoned him to death. King Rehoboam quickly jumped into his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem.

As a result, Israel has been in rebellion against the house of David to this day.

When Rehoboam arrived in Jerusalem, he gathered the men from the households of Judah and Benjamin— 180,000 chosen warriors—to go and fight against Israel to bring the kingdom back to Rehoboam. But a message from the Lord came to Shemaiah the man of God that said, “Tell Rehoboam, son of Solomon, king of Judah, and all the Israelites living in Judah and Benjamin: ‘This is what the Lord says: Don't fight against your relatives. Every one of you, go home! For what has happened is down to me.’” So they obeyed what the Lord told them and did not fight against Jeroboam.

Rehoboam stayed in Jerusalem, and he strengthened the defenses of the towns in Judah. He built up Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron. These are the fortified towns in Judah and in Benjamin. He strengthened their fortresses and put commanders in charge of them, together with supplies of food, olive oil, and wine. He stored shields and spears in all the towns and made them very strong. So he held Judah and Benjamin under his rule.

The priests and Levites throughout Israel chose to side with Rehoboam. The Levites even left their pasturelands and properties behind, and came to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons refused to allow them to serve as priests of the Lord. Jeroboam chose his own priests for the high places and for the goat and calf idols he had made. Those from every tribe of Israel who were committed to worshiping their God followed the Levites to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord, the God of their forefathers. So they supported the kingdom of Judah and for three years they were loyal to Rehoboam, son of Solomon, because they followed the way of David and Solomon.

Rehoboam married Mahalath, who was the daughter of David's son Jerimoth and of Abihail, the daughter of Eliab, son of Jesse. She was the mother of his sons Jeush, and Shamariah, and Zaham. After her he married Maacah Absalom's daughter, and she was the mother of his sons Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. Rehoboam loved Maacah Absalom's daughter more than all his other wives and concubines. He had a total of eighteen wives and sixty concubines, twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.

Rehoboam made Abijah son of Maacah crown prince among his brothers, planning to make him king. Rehoboam was also wise to place some of his sons throughout the land of Judah and Benjamin, and to all the fortified towns. He gave them plenty of supplies and sought many wives for them. He worked to arrange many wives for them.

Once Rehoboam was secure on the throne and was sure of his power, he together with all the Israelites abandoned the law of the Lord. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, king of Egypt, came and attacked Jerusalem because they had been unfaithful to God. He came with 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and an army from Egypt that couldn't be counted—Libyans, Sukkites, and Cushites. He conquered the fortified towns of Judah and then approached Jerusalem.

Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah who had run for safety to Jerusalem because of Shishak. He told them, “This is what the Lord says: ‘You have abandoned me, so I have abandoned you to Shishak.’”

The leaders of Israel and the king admitted they were wrong and said, “The Lord is right.”

When the Lord saw that they had repented, he sent a message to Shemaiah, saying, “They have repented. I won't destroy them, and I will soon save them. My anger won't be poured out on Jerusalem through Shishak. Even so they will become his subjects, so that they can learn the difference between serving me and serving the kings of earth.”

King Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and took the treasures of the Lord's Temple and the treasures of the royal palace. He took away everything, including the gold shields that Solomon had made. Later Rehoboam replaced them with bronze shields and gave them to be looked after by the commanders of the guard stationed at the entrance to the royal palace. Whenever the king would enter the Temple of the Lord the guards would go with him, carrying the shields, and then take them back to the guardroom. Because Rehoboam repented, the anger of the Lord did not fall on him, and the Lord did not destroy him completely. Things went well in Judah.

King Rehoboam became powerful in Jerusalem. He was forty-one when he became king, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city the Lord had chosen from all the tribes of Israel where he would

be honored. The name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonite. But Rehoboam did what was evil because he did not commit himself to following the Lord.

What Rehoboam did, from beginning to end, is written down in the records of Shemaiah the Prophet and of Iddo the Seer dealing with genealogies. However, Rehoboam and Jeroboam were always at war with each other.

Rehoboam died and was buried in the City of David. His son Abijah took over as king.

Abijah became king of Judah in the eighteenth year of the reign of Jeroboam. He reigned in Jerusalem for three years. His mother's name was Micaiah, daughter of Uriel—she was from Gibeah. Abijah and Jeroboam were at war. Abijah went out to fight with an army of 400,000 brave warriors, while Jeroboam opposed him with his army of 800,000 chosen warriors of great strength.

Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim, in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, “Listen to me, Jeroboam and all of Israel! Don't you understand that the Lord, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom of Israel to David and his descendants forever by a binding agreement? Yet Jeroboam, son of Nebat, just a servant of Solomon, son of David, had the audacity to rebel against his master. Then some good-for-nothing evil men gathered round him and defied Rehoboam, son of Solomon, when he was young and inexperienced, and couldn't confront them.

Now do you really think you can oppose the kingdom of the Lord, held by David's descendants? You may be a large horde, and have with you the golden calves that Jeroboam made for you as gods. But didn't you drive out the priests of the Lord, Aaron's descendants, and the Levites, and make priests for yourselves just like people in other nations do? Now anyone who wants to can come and dedicate himself, sacrificing a young bull and seven rams, and he can become a priest of things that really are not gods.

But for us, the Lord is our God! We have not abandoned him. We have priests serving the Lord who are descendants of Aaron, and we have Levites who help them in their ministry. Morning and evening they present burnt offerings and burn fragrant incense to the Lord. They place the rows of showbread on the purified table, and light the lamps of the gold lampstand every evening. We are doing what the Lord our God told us to do, while you have abandoned him. God is leading us! His priests blow their trumpets to go into battle against you. People of Israel, don't fight against the Lord, the God of your fathers, for you won't win!”

But Jeroboam had sent troops around to attack from the rear, so that while he and the main force was in front of Judah, the ambush was behind them. Judah turned around and realized that they were having to fight front and rear. They cried out to the Lord for help. Then the priests blew their trumpets, and the men of Judah gave a loud shout. When they shouted, God struck Jeroboam and all Israel in front of Abijah and Judah.

The Israelites ran away from Judah, and God handed them over to Judah, defeated. Abijah and his men hit them hard, and 500,000 of Israel's best warriors were killed. So the Israelites were subdued at that time, and the people of Judah were victorious because they relied on the Lord, the God of their forefathers. Abijah chased Jeroboam and captured some towns from him: Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron, along with their villages. Jereboam never regained his power during Abijah's reign. Eventually the Lord struck him down and he died. But Abijah grew stronger and stronger. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. The rest of what Abijah did—what he said and what he accomplished—is recorded in the history written by Iddo the Prophet.

Abijah died and was buried in the City of David. His son Asa took over as king. For ten years of his reign the country was at peace. Asa did what was good and right in the Lord's sight. He took down the foreign altars and high places, smashed their sacred pillars, and cut down the Asherah poles. He ordered Judah to worship the Lord, the God of their forefathers, and to observe the law and the commandments. He also took down the high places and the incense altars from all the towns of Judah. Under his rule the kingdom was at peace. Because the country was at peace he was able to rebuild the fortified towns of Judah. There were no wars during these years because the Lord had granted him peace.

Asa told the people of Judah, “Let us build up these towns and surround them with walls and towers and barred gates. The land is still ours, because we continue to worship the Lord our God. We worship him, and he has given us peace from all our enemies.” So they began the building projects, and completed them successfully.

Asa had an army made up of three hundred thousand men from Judah who carried large shields and spears, and two hundred eighty thousand men from Benjamin who carried regular shields and bows. All of them were brave warriors. Zerah the Ethiopian attacked them with an army of a thousand times a thousand men and three hundred chariots, advancing as far as Mareshah. Asa went out to confront him, lining up for battle in the Valley of Zephathah at Mareshah. Asa called out for help to the Lord his God: “Lord, there is no one apart from you who can help the powerless against the powerful. Please help us, Lord our God, for we trust in you. We have come against this horde because we stand for you, Lord. You are our God. Do not let a mere human being beat you.”

The Lord struck the Ethiopians in front of Asa and Judah, and the Ethiopians ran away. Asa and his army chased them as far as Gerar. The Ethiopians were killed—there were none who survived, for they were caught between the Lord and his army. The men of Judah carried off a large amount of plunder. They also attacked all the towns around Gerar, because the inhabitants were terrified of the Lord. The men of Judah took a large amount of plunder from all the towns. Then they attacked the camps of the herdsmen and took many sheep and camels. Then they went back to Jerusalem.

The Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded. He went out to meet Asa and said to him, “Listen to me, Asa and all of Judah and Benjamin. The Lord is with you while you are with him. If you look for him, you will find him; but if you abandon him, he will abandon you.

For many years Israel was without the true God, without a priest to teach them, and without the law. But when they were in trouble they returned to the Lord, the God of Israel—they looked for him, and they found him.

During those times travel was dangerous, for all the inhabitants of the lands were in great turmoil. People everywhere had terrible problems. Nation fought nation, and town fought town, for God threw them into a panic with all kinds of trouble. But you need to be strong, not weak, for you will be rewarded for the work you do."

When Asa heard these words of prophecy from Azariah the prophet, son of Oded, he was encouraged. He removed the vile idols from the whole territory of Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. Then he repaired the altar of the Lord that stood in front of the porch of the Lord's Temple.

Then Asa summoned all of Judah and Benjamin, along with those Israelites from the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon who were living among them, for many people had deserted Israel and come over to Asa when they saw that the Lord his God was with him. They gathered in Jerusalem in the third month of the fifteenth year of Asa's reign.

That day they sacrificed to the Lord seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep from the plunder they had brought back. Then they made an agreement to conscientiously and completely follow the Lord, the God of their forefathers. They also agreed that anyone who refused to follow the Lord, the God of Israel, would be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. They declared their oath with a loud shout, accompanied by trumpets and blasts from rams' horns. The whole of Judah was happy at the oath they had conscientiously sworn. They looked for him sincerely, and they found him. The Lord gave them peace from all their enemies.

King Asa also removed Maacah from her position as queen mother for making an offensive Asherah pole. Asa cut down her vile idol, crushed it up, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. While the high places were not removed from Israel, Asa was completely devoted to the Lord all his life. He brought into God's Temple the silver and gold articles he and his father had dedicated. There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of Asa's reign.

In the thirty-sixth year of Asa's reign, Baasha, king of Israel, invaded Judah. He fortified Ramah to stop anyone coming from or going to Asa, king of Judah.

Asa took the silver and gold from the treasuries of the Lord's Temple and the king's palace and sent them to Ben-hadad, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus, with a message that said:

"Make an alliance between me and you like the one between my father and your father. Look at the silver and gold I've sent you. Go ahead and break your agreement with Baasha, king of Israel, so that he will leave me and go home."

King Ben-hadad did as Asa had asked, and he sent his armies and their commanders to attack the towns of Israel. They conquered Ijon, Dan, Abel-maim, and all the storehouse towns of Naphtali. When Baasha heard about it, he stopped fortifying Ramah and gave up his project. So King Asa went with all the men of Judah, and they carried away from Ramah the stones and the timbers Baasha had used for building, and with them he built up Geba and Mizpah.

But right then Hanani the seer came to Asa, king of Judah, and told him, "Because you have put your trust in the king of Aram and have not put your trust in the Lord your God, your opportunity to destroy the army of the king of Aram has gone. Didn't the Ethiopians and Libyans have a huge army with many chariots and horsemen? Yet because you trusted in the Lord, he made you victorious over them. For the Lord looks all over the earth for the opportunity to show his power on behalf of those who are completely and sincerely devoted to him. You have acted stupidly in doing this. So from now on you will always be at war."

Asa was angry with the seer. He was so angry with him over this that he put him in prison. At this same time Asa started to mistreat some of the people.

The rest of what Asa did, from beginning to end, is written down in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa had trouble with disease in his feet, which only became worse and worse. Yet even in his sickness he did not turn to the Lord, but only the physicians. Asa died in the forty-first year of his reign. He was buried in the tomb that he had prepared for himself in the City of David. They placed him on a bed full of spices, perfumed oils, and fragrances. Then they made a great fire to honor him.

Asa's son Jehoshaphat took over as king. He strengthened his country's defenses against Israel. He assigned troops to every fortified city of Judah and placed garrisons throughout Judah and in the towns of Ephraim that his father Asa had captured.

The Lord supported Jehoshaphat because he followed the ways of his father David. He did not believe in the Baals, but worshiped the God of his father and obeyed his commandments, unlike what the kingdom of Israel was doing. So the Lord made Jehoshaphat's hold on the kingdom secure, and all the people of Judah paid their dues to him. As a result he became very wealthy and highly honored. He was sincerely committed to what the Lord wanted. He also removed the high places and Asherah poles from Judah.

In the third year of his reign, Jehoshaphat sent his officials Ben-hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah to teach in the towns of Judah. He sent along with the them Levites named Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, and with them the priests Elishama and Jehoram. Taking with them the Book of the Law of the Lord they taught as they went around Judah. They visited all the towns of Judah, teaching the people.

All the surrounding kingdoms were in awe of the Lord, so that they did not attack Jehoshaphat. Some of the Philistines even brought him gifts and silver, while the Arabians brought him 7,700 rams and 7,700 goats.

Jehoshaphat grew increasingly powerful, and he built fortresses and storehouse towns in Judah. He

maintained a great deal of supplies in the towns of Judah. He also had troops, experienced warriors, in Jerusalem.

This is a count of them, according to their family lines: from Judah, the commanders of thousands: Adnah the commander, and 300,000 mighty warriors with him; then Jehohanan the commander, and 280,000 with him; then Amasiah, son of Zichri, who volunteered to serve the Lord, and 200,000 mighty warriors with him; from Benjamin, Eliada, a mighty warrior, and 200,000 with him armed with bows and shields; then Jehozabad, and 180,000 with him ready for battle; These were the men who served the king, in addition to those he assigned to the fortified towns throughout Judah.

Now Jehoshaphat was very wealthy and highly honored, and he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. Some years later he went to pay Ahab a visit in Samaria. Ahab sacrificed many sheep and cattle for him and the people who accompanied him, and encouraged him to attack Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab, king of Israel, asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, "Would you go with me against Ramoth-gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied, "You and I are as one, and my men and your men are as one. We will join forces with you in this war." Then Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "But first though, please find out what the Lord says."

So the king of Israel brought out the prophets—four hundred of them—and he asked them, "Should we go up and attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I not?"

"Yes, go ahead," they replied, "for God will hand it over to the king."

But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there another prophet of the Lord here that we can ask?"

"Yes, there's another man who could consult the Lord," the king of Israel replied, "but I don't like him because he never prophesies anything good for me—it's always bad! His name is Micaiah, son of Imlah."

"You shouldn't talk like that," said Jehoshaphat.

The king of Israel called over one of his officials and told him, "Bring me Micaiah, son of Imlah, right away."

Dressed in their royal robes, the king of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor beside the gate of Samaria, with all of the prophets prophesying in front of them. One of them, Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, had made himself iron horns. He announced, "This is what the Lord says: 'With these horns you will gore the Arameans until they're dead!'"

All the prophets were prophesying the same thing, saying, "Go ahead, attack Ramoth-gilead; you will be successful, for the Lord will hand it over to the king."

The messenger who went to call Micaiah told him, "Look, all the prophets are unanimous in prophesying positively to the king. So please make sure to speak positively like them."

But Micaiah replied, "As the Lord lives, I can only say what my God tells me."

When he came before the king, the king asked him, "Should we go up and attack Ramoth-gilead, or should I not?"

"Yes, go ahead and be victorious," Micaiah replied, "for they will be handed over to the king."

But the king said to him, "How many times must I make you swear to tell me only the truth in the name of the Lord?"

So Micaiah answered, "I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains like sheep without a shepherd. The Lord said, 'These people have no master; let each of them go home in peace.'"

The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Didn't I tell you he never prophesies anything good for me, only bad?"

Micaiah went on to say, "So listen to what the Lord says. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, surrounded by the whole army of heaven standing to his right and to his left. The Lord asked, 'Who will trick Ahab, king of Israel, into attacking Ramoth-gilead so he will be killed there?'

One said this, another said that, and another said something else. Finally a spirit came and approached the Lord and said, 'I will trick him.'

'How are you going to do that?' the Lord asked.

'I will go and be a lying spirit and make all his prophets tell lies,' the spirit replied.

'That will work,' the Lord responded. 'Go and do it.'

As you see, the Lord has put a lying spirit into these prophets of yours, and the Lord has pronounced your death sentence."

Then Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, went and slapped Micaiah in the face, and demanded, "Which way did the Spirit of the Lord go when he left me to speak to you?"

"You'll soon find out when you try and find some secret place to hide!" Micaiah replied.

The king of Israel ordered, "Place Micaiah under arrest and take him back to Amon the governor of the city and to my son Joash. Tell them these are the king's instructions: 'Put this man in jail. Give him only bread and water until my safe return.'"

"If you do in fact return safely then the Lord has not spoken through me," Micaiah declared. "Pay attention everyone to all I've said!"

The king of Israel and Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went to attack Ramoth-gilead. The king of Israel told Jehoshaphat, "When I go into battle I will be in disguise, but you should wear your royal robes." So the king of Israel disguised himself and went into battle.

The king of Aram had already given these orders to his chariot commanders: "Head straight for the king of Israel alone. Don't fight with anyone else, whoever they are."

So when the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, they shouted, "There's the king of Israel!" So they turned to attack him, but Jehoshaphat called out for help, and the Lord did help him. God redirected them away from him, for when the chariot commanders realized that he wasn't the king of Israel, they stopped chasing him. However, an enemy archer shot an arrow at random, hitting the king of Israel between the joints of his armor by his breastplate. The king told his charioteer, "Turn around and get me out of the fight, because I've been wounded!" The battle lasted all day. The king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot to face the Arameans until the evening. But he died at sunset.

Once Jehoshaphat had arrived safely home in Jerusalem, Jehu, son of Hanani, the seer went out to face him. He said to King Jehoshaphat, “Why are you helping the wicked? Why do you love those who hate the Lord? The Lord is angry with you because of this. Even so you've done some good things such as destroying the Asherah poles throughout the country, and you have made a sincere commitment to follow God.”

Jehoshaphat continued living in Jerusalem, and once again he traveled among the people, from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, to encourage them to serve the Lord, the God of their fathers. He appointed judges throughout the country, in all of the fortified towns of Judah.

He told the judges, “Be careful about what you're doing as judges, because you're not looking for the approval of people, but the approval of the Lord. He is the One with you when you give your verdict. So then, be sure to have reverence for God, obeying him and doing what he wants, for God does not permit any kind of injustice, favoritism, or bribery.”

Jehoshaphat also appointed in Jerusalem some of the Levites, priests, and family heads to act as judges regarding the law of Lord and to settle disputes. They were to have their courts in Jerusalem. He gave them these orders, “You must honor God, and act with faithfulness and complete commitment. In every case that comes before you from your people living in other towns, whether it involves murder or violations of the law, commandments, statutes, or judgments, you are to warn them not to offend the Lord so that punishment does not come upon you and your people. If you do this you will not be held guilty.

Amariah, the chief priest, will make the final decision for you in everything that relates to the Lord, and Zebadiah, son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, in all that relates to the king. The Levites will serve as officers to assist you. Be firm, and may the Lord be with those who do what is right.”

Then, after this, the Moabites and Ammonites, as well as some of the Meunites, came to attack Jehoshaphat. Some people came and told Jehoshaphat, “A large army is coming to fight you from Edom, from the other side of the Dead Sea. They have already reached Hazazon-tamar,” (otherwise called En-gedi).

Jehoshaphat was afraid, and went to ask the Lord what to do. He also ordered everyone throughout Judah to fast. So the people of Judah gathered in Jerusalem to pray to the Lord—in fact, they came from all the towns of Judah to commit themselves to him. Jehoshaphat stood before the assembled people of Judah and Jerusalem at the Temple, in front of the new courtyard, and said, “Lord, God of our forefathers, aren't you the God of heaven? Don't you rule over all earthly kingdoms? You possess strength and power, and no one can stand against you! Our God, didn't you drive out before your people Israel those who were living in this land? Didn't you give this land to the descendants of your friend Abraham forever? They are living in the land and have built a Temple for you here to honor you, saying, ‘If disaster strikes us, whether it's invasion or judgment, disease or famine, we will stand in front of this Temple and before you, for this Temple is yours. We will cry out to you to help us in our suffering, and you will hear us and save us.’

Look, here come the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, those very countries you did not let Israel invade when they came out of Egypt. Israel left them alone and did not destroy them. See how they're rewarding us, coming to steal the land you gave us to possess forever! Our God, won't you punish them, because we don't have the power to confront such a great army that is marching against us? We don't know what to do. We're looking to you for help.”

All the men of Judah stood before the Lord, together with their wives and children and babies. Then the Spirit of the Lord came over Jahaziel while he was standing there in the assembly. He was the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite from the descendants of Asaph. He said, “Listen, everyone from Judah, people of Jerusalem, and King Jehoshaphat. This is what the Lord has to say to you: Don't be afraid or discouraged because of this large army. This isn't your battle—it's God's! Tomorrow march down to face them. You will see them coming up the pass at Ziz—you'll find them at the end of the valley in front of the desert of Jeruel. But you do not need to fight this battle. Just stand still and watch the Lord's victory. He is with you, Judah and Jerusalem! Don't be afraid or discouraged! March down to face them, for the Lord is with you!”

Jehoshaphat bowed down with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell to the ground before the Lord, worshiping him. Then the Levites from the Kohathites and Korahites stood to praise the Lord, the God of Israel, shouting loudly.

They got up early the next morning and went to the desert of Tekoa. As they left, Jehoshaphat stood up and said, “Listen to me, people of Judah and Jerusalem. Trust in the Lord your God, and you will be vindicated; trust in his prophets, and you will be successful.”

After discussion with the people, he appointed singers to praise the Lord for his glorious, holy goodness. They led the way at the front of the army, singing, “Praise the Lord, for his trustworthy love lasts forever!”

As soon as they started singing and praising, the Lord ambushed the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir who were coming to attack Judah, and they were defeated. The men of Ammon and Moab turned on the men from Mount Seir, killing all of them. Once they'd finished wiping out the army from Seir, they turned on each other, destroying themselves. So when the men of Judah came to the watchtower in the desert, they looked out to see the enemy army and all they saw were corpses lying on the ground! No one had escaped.

When Jehoshaphat and his people came to collect the plunder, they found a great deal of cattle, equipment, clothing, and other valuable articles, more than they could carry. It took three days to collect the plunder because there was so much of it. On the fourth day they gathered in the Valley of Blessing. They gave it this name because this was where they blessed the Lord. It is still called the Valley of Blessing to this day.

Then all the men of Judah and Jerusalem celebrated as they returned to Jerusalem, with Jehoshaphat leading them, full of joy for the Lord's victory over their

enemies. They entered Jerusalem and went straight to the Temple of the Lord, accompanied by music from harps, lyres, and trumpets.

All the kingdoms around were in awe of God when they heard that the Lord had fought against the enemies of Israel. Jehoshaphat and his kingdom were at peace, for God gave him rest—there were no attacks from any direction.

So Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah, having become king when he was thirty-five years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-five years. His mother's name was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. Jehoshaphat followed the way of his father Asa and did not turn away from it. He did what was right in the Lord's sight. However, the high places were not removed, and the people were not committed to the God of their forefathers. The rest of what Jehoshaphat did, from beginning to end, is written down in the chronicles of Jehu, son of Hanani, recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel.

Later in his life, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, allied himself with Ahaziah, king of Israel, who did wicked things. They agreed to work together and send ships to Tarshish. The ships were built in Ezion-geber. But Eliezer, son of Dodavahu of Mareshah, prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, “Because you have made an alliance with Ahaziah, the Lord will destroy what you're doing.” The ships were wrecked and couldn't sail to Tarshish.

Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his forefathers in the City of David, and his son Jehoram took over as king. His brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat, were Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah, Michael, and Shephatiah. All were sons of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. Their father had given them many gifts of silver and gold and valuable items, as well as the fortified towns in Judah; but he gave the kingdom to Jehoram because he was the firstborn. But once Jehoram had secured the kingdom, he made sure of his position by killing all his brothers, along with some of the princes of Judah.

Jehoram was thirty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eight years. He followed the evil ways of the kings of Israel, and was as bad as Ahab, for he had married one of Ahab's daughters. He did evil in the Lord's sight. However, the Lord did not want to destroy David's line because of the agreement he had made with David, and he had promised that David's descendants would rule forever like an ever-burning lamp.

During Jehoram's reign, Edom rebelled against Judah's rule and chose their own king. So Jehoram crossed into Edom with his officers and all his chariot army. The Edomites surrounded him and his chariot commanders, but he broke through during the night. From this time on Edom was in rebellion against Judah's rule, and remains so to this day. At the same time Libnah also rebelled against his rule, because he had abandoned the Lord, the God of his forefathers. He also built high places on the mountains of Judah; he made the people of Jerusalem unfaithful to God and led Judah away from him.

Jehoram received a letter from Elijah the prophet that said, “This is what the Lord, the God of David your forefather says, ‘You have not followed the ways of your father Jehoshaphat, or Asa, king of Judah, but instead you have followed the ways of the kings of Israel, and have made the people of Jerusalem unfaithful, and the people of Jerusalem as unfaithful as the family of Ahab. You have even killed your brothers, your father's family, who were better than you. Watch out, for the Lord is going to hit your people hard—your sons, your wives, and all that you own. You yourself will be struck with a terrible illness—a disease of the bowels which will get worse day by day until they come out.’”

The Lord stirred up the hostility of the Philistines and of the Arabians (who live near the Ethiopians) against Jehoram. They came and invaded Judah, and took away everything they found in the king's palace, along with his sons and his wives, so that only the youngest son Jehoahaz was left.

After all this, the Lord struck Jehoram with a disease of the bowels for which there was no cure. Day after day it grew worse, until after two full years passed his bowels came out because of his disease, and he died in agony. His people did not make a fire to honor him as they had done for his forefathers. Jehoram was thirty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eight years. When he died, no one mourned him. He was buried in the City of David, but not in the royal tombs.

The people of Jerusalem made Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, king in succession to his father, since the invaders who had entered the camp with the Arabians had killed all the older sons. So Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, became king of Judah. Ahaziah was twenty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. Ahaziah also followed the evil ways of the family of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him to do wicked things. He did what was evil in the Lord's sight, just as the family of Ahab had done. For after his father's death they were his counselors, to his ruin.

He also followed their advice in joining with Joram, son of Ahab, king of Israel, in attacking Hazael, king of Aram, in Ramoth-gilead. The Arameans wounded Joram, and he returned to Jezreel to recover from the wounds he'd received in Ramah fighting against Hazael king of Aram. Ahaziah, son of Jehoram, king of Judah, went to Jezreel to visit Joram, son of Ahab, because Joram was wounded. Ahaziah's downfall came from God when he went to see Joram. When Ahaziah got there, he went with Joram to meet Jehu, son of Nimri. The Lord had anointed Jehu to destroy Ahab and his family.

While Jehu was carrying out judgment on the family of Ahab, he came across the leaders of Judah and Ahaziah's relatives who were assisting Ahaziah, and he killed them. Then Jehu went looking for Ahaziah. His men found him in Samaria and captured him, and took him to Jehu where they killed him. They buried him, for they said, “He is the grandson of Jehoshaphat, who was completely committed to following the Lord.” There was no one left from Ahaziah's family to rule the kingdom.

When Athaliah Ahaziah's mother found out that her son was dead, she proceeded to kill all who remained of the royal family of Judah. But Jehoshabeath, daughter of King Jehoram, grabbed Joash, son of

Ahaziah, and took him from the sons of the king who were about to be killed, and she placed him and his nurse in a bedroom. Because Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and the wife of Jehoiada the priest, was Ahaziah's sister, she hid Joash from Athaliah so she couldn't kill him. And they kept Joash hidden with them in God's Temple for six years while Athaliah ruled the country.

But in the seventh year, Jehoiada had the courage to act. He made a pledge with the commanders of hundreds: Azariah, son of Jeroham, Ishmael, son of Jehohanan, Azariah, son of Obed, Maaseiah, son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat, son of Zichri. They traveled all over Judah and brought together the Levites from all the cities of Judah and the family leaders of Israel. When they came to Jerusalem, they all assembled at God's Temple and made a solemn agreement with the king.

Jehoiada announced to them, “Look, here is the king's son and he must reign, just as the Lord promised the descendants of David would. Here's what you have to do. One third of you priests and Levites who enter on the Sabbath shall guard the entrances. Another third shall go over to the king's palace, while the last third shall be at the Foundation Gate. Everyone else stay in the courtyards of the Lord's Temple. No one should enter the Lord's Temple except the priests and those Levites who are serving. They can enter because they have been made holy, but everyone else must follow the Lord's commands. The Levites shall surround the king, weapons in hand. Kill anyone who enters the Temple. Stay close to the king wherever he goes.”

The Levites and all the people of Judah did everything that Jehoiada the priest told them. The commanders each brought his men, both those coming on duty on the Sabbath and those going off duty, for Jehoiada the priest had not dismissed any of the divisions. Jehoiada the priest provided the commanders with the spears and the large and small shields of King David that were in God's Temple. He placed them all, with their weapons in hand, to surround the king from the south side of the Temple to the north side, and near the altar and the Temple.

Jehoiada and his sons then brought out the king's son, placed the crown on him, presented him with a copy of God's law, and proclaimed him king. They anointed him, and shouted out, “Long live the king!”

When Athaliah heard the noise of people running and shouting praise to the king, she rushed to the crowds at the Lord's Temple. She saw the king standing by his pillar at the entrance. The commanders and trumpeters were with the king, and everyone was celebrating and blowing trumpets as the singers with musical instruments led the praise. Athaliah ripped her clothes and screamed out, “Treason! Treason!”

Jehoiada ordered the army commanders, “Bring her to the men standing in front of the Temple, and kill anyone who follows her.” Earlier the priest had made it clear, “She must not be killed in the Lord's Temple.” They grabbed hold of her and took her to the entrance of the Horse Gate of the king's palace, and killed her there.

Then Jehoiada made a solemn agreement between himself and all the people and the king that they would be the Lord's people. Everyone went to the Temple of Baal and tore down its altars and smashed the idols. They killed Mattan, the priest of Baal, right in front of the altar.

Jehoiada placed the responsibility for the Lord's Temple in the hands of the Levitical priests. They were the ones whom David had appointed over the Lord's Temple to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, as is required by the Law of Moses, with celebration and singing, as David instructed. He placed gatekeepers at the entrances to the Lord's Temple, so that no one unclean for any reason could enter.

Along with the commanders, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people, he led the king in a procession down from the Lord's Temple through the upper gate to the royal palace. There they set the king on the royal throne.

All throughout the land people celebrated, and Jerusalem was at peace, because Athaliah had been killed by the sword.

Joash was seven when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for forty years. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. Joash did what was right in the Lord's sight during the lifetime of Jehoiada the priest. Jehoiada arranged for him to marry two wives, and he had sons and daughters.

Some time later, Joash decided to repair the Lord's Temple. He summoned the priests and Levites and told them, “Go to the towns of Judah and collect the yearly dues from everyone in Israel to repair the Temple of your God. Do it right away.” But the Levites did not go right away.

So the king called for Jehoiada the high priest and asked him, “Why haven't you ordered the Levites to collect from Judah and Jerusalem the tax that Moses, the Lord's servant, and the assembly of Israel imposed to maintain the Tent of the Law?”

(The supporters of that wicked woman Athaliah had broken into God's Temple and had stolen the holy objects of the Lord's Temple and used them to worship the Baals.)

The king ordered a collection chest to be made and placed outside the entrance to the Lord's Temple. A decree was proclaimed throughout Judea and Jerusalem to bring to the Lord the tax that Moses, the Lord's servant, imposed on Israel in the wilderness. All the leaders and all the people were glad to do so and brought their taxes. They dropped them in the chest until it was full.

Every so often the Levites took the chest to the king's officials. When they saw that it contained a large amount of money, the king's secretary and the chief officer of the high priest would come and empty the chest. Then they would carry it back to its place. They did this every day and collected a great deal of money. Then the king and Jehoiada would allocate the money of those supervising the work on the Lord's Temple to hire stonecutters and carpenters to restore the Lord's Temple and craftsmen in iron and bronze to repair the Lord's Temple.

The men doing the repairs worked hard and made good progress. They restored God's Temple to its original condition and strengthened it. When they finished, they returned the money that was left to the king and Jehoiada, and with it utensils were made for the Lord's Temple, both for the worship services and for the burnt offerings, also bowls for incense and vessels of gold and silver. Burnt offerings were regularly offered in the Lord's Temple throughout Jehoiada's lifetime. Jehoiada grew old and died at the age of 130, having lived a full life. He was buried with the kings in the City of David, for all the good he had done in Israel for God and his Temple.

But after the death of Jehoiada, the leaders of Judah came to swear their loyalty to the king, and he listened to their advice. They abandoned the Temple of the Lord, the God of their forefathers, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols. Judah and Jerusalem were punished because of their sin.

The Lord sent prophets to bring the people back to him and to warn them; but they refused to listen.

Then the Spirit of God came to Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest. He stood before the people and told them, "This is what God says: 'Why do you break the Lord's commandments so that you cannot be successful? Since you have abandoned the Lord, he has abandoned you.'"

Then the leaders hatched a plot to kill Zechariah, and on the orders of the king they stoned him to death in the courtyard of the Lord's Temple. King Joash showed he had forgotten all about the loyalty and love shown to him by Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, by killing his son. As he died, Zechariah cried out, "May the Lord see what you've done and pay you back!"

At the end of the year, the Aramean army came to attack Joash. They invaded Judah and Jerusalem and killed all the people's leaders, and sent all their plunder back to the king of Damascus. Even though the Aramean army had come with only a few men, the Lord gave them the victory over a very large army, because Judah had abandoned the Lord, the God of their forefathers. In this way they punished Joash.

When the Arameans departed, they left Joash badly wounded. But then his own officers plotted against him for murdering the son of Jehoiada the priest, and they killed him in his bed. He was buried in the City of David, but not in the cemetery of the kings. Those who plotted against him were Zabad, son of Shimeath, (an Ammonite woman), and Jehozabad, son of Shimrith, (a Moabite woman).

The story of the sons of Joash, as well as the many prophecies about him and about the restoration of God's Temple, are recorded in the Commentary on the Book of the Kings. His son Amaziah took over as king.

Amaziah was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Jehoaddan and she came from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the Lord's sight but not with complete commitment. After he had made sure his rule was secure, he executed the officers who had murdered his father the king. However, he did not kill their sons, as is written in the Law, in the book of Moses, where the Lord commanded: "Fathers must not be executed for their children, and children must not be executed for their fathers. Everyone is to die for their own sin."

Then Amaziah called up the people of Judah for military service, and assigned them by families to commanders of thousands and of hundreds. He also took a census of those twenty years of age and older throughout Judah and Benjamin, and found there were 300,000 first-rate fighting men who could use spear and shield. He also hired 100,000 battle-ready fighting men from Israel for a hundred talents of silver.

But a man of God came to him and said, "Your Majesty, don't let this army of Israel join you, for the Lord is not with Israel, with these sons of Ephraim! Even if you fight bravely, God will let you stumble and fall before the enemy, for God has the power to help you or let you fall."

Amaziah asked the man of God, "But what about the hundred talents of silver I paid the army of Israel?"

"The Lord can give you much more than that!" replied the man of God.

So Amaziah dismissed the army he'd hired from Ephraim and sent them home. They became very angry with Judah, and returned home furious.

Amaziah then bravely led his army to the Valley of Salt, where they attacked the Edomite army from Seir, and killed ten thousand of them. The army of Judah also captured another ten thousand, took them to the top of a cliff and threw them off, killing them all.

But the men of the army Amaziah sent home, refusing to let them go with him to battle, raided the towns of Judah, from Samaria to Beth-horon They killed 3,000 of their inhabitants and took a great deal of plunder.

When Amaziah returned from killing the Edomites, he brought back the gods of the people of Seir and set them up as his own gods, worshiped them, and offered sacrifices to them. The Lord became angry with Amaziah and he sent a prophet to him, who said to him, "Why would you worship the gods of a people who couldn't even save their own people from you?"

But while he was still speaking, the king said to him, "Have we made you a counselor to the king? Stop right now! Do you want to be struck down?"

So the prophet stopped, but said, "I know that God has decided to destroy you, because you have acted like this and have refused to listen to my advice."

Then Amaziah, king of Judah, took advice from his counselors and sent a message to the king of Israel, Joash, son of Jehoahaz, son of Jehu. "Come and face me in battle," he challenged.

Joash, king of Israel, replied to Amaziah, king of Judah, "A thistle on Lebanon sent a message to a cedar on Lebanon, saying, 'Give your daughter to my son for a wife,' but a wild animal of Lebanon passed by and trampled down the thistle. You're telling yourself how great you are for defeating Edom, boasting about it. But just stay at home. Why should you stir up trouble that will bring you down, and Judah with you?"

But Amaziah didn't listen, for God was going to hand him over to his enemies because he had chosen to worship the gods of Edom.

So Joash king of Israel prepared for battle. He and Amaziah, king of Judah, faced one another at Beth-

shemesh in Judah. Judah was defeated by Israel—they all ran away home.

Joash, king of Israel, captured Amaziah, king of Judah, son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, at Beth-shemesh. He took him to Jerusalem, and demolished the wall of Jerusalem for 400 cubits, from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. He carried away all the gold and silver, and all the articles found in God's Temple that had been looked after by Obed-edom and in the treasuries of the king's palace, as well as some hostages, and then returned to Samaria.

Amaziah, son of Joash, king of Judah, lived for fifteen years after the death of Joash, son of Jehoahaz, king of Israel. The rest of what Amaziah did, from beginning to end, is written down in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel.

After Amaziah gave up following the Lord, a plot was hatched against him in Jerusalem, and he fled to Lachish. But the plotters sent men to Lachish to hunt him down, and they killed him there. They brought him back by horse and buried him with his fathers in the city of Judah.

All the people of Judah took Uzziah, sixteen years old, and made him king in succession to his father Amaziah. He rebuilt Eloth and brought it back into the kingdom of Judah after Amaziah died. Uzziah was sixteen when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-two years. His mother's name was Jecoliah and she came from Jerusalem. He did what was right in the Lord's sight as his father Amaziah had done. He worshiped God during the lifetime of Zechariah, who taught him to respect God. As long as he followed the Lord, God made him successful.

Uzziah went to war against the Philistines, and he demolished the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. Then he built cities around Ashdod and in other Philistine areas. God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabians living in Gurbaal, and against the Meunites. The Meunites brought gifts as tribute to Uzziah. His reputation spread as far as the border of Egypt, for he became very powerful.

Uzziah built defensive towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and the Valley Gate, and at the corner, and strengthened them. He also built towers in the desert and cut many water cisterns out of the rock, because he had a great deal of livestock in the foothills and on the plains. He had farmers and vineyard workers in the hills and in the fertile lowlands, for he loved the soil. Uzziah had an army of battle-ready soldiers, in divisions according to the numbers in the listing made by Jeiel the secretary and Maaseiah the official, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. The total number of family leaders was 2,600 fighting men. Under their command was an army of 307,500 trained for battle, who had the power to help the king fight against the enemy.

Uzziah supplied shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and slingstones for the whole army. He also made skillfully designed war machines to fire arrows and large stones from the towers and corners of the wall. His reputation spread far and wide, for he received extraordinary help until he became really powerful. But because he was powerful he became arrogant, and this led to his ruin. For he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and he himself entered the Lord's Temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty brave priests of the Lord. They stood up to him, and told him, “It's not your place to burn incense to the Lord. Only the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been set apart as holy may burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have sinned, and the Lord God will not bless you.”

Uzziah, who was holding a censer in his hand to offer incense, became furious. But as he raged at the priests in the Lord's Temple in front of the altar of incense, leprosy appeared on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him and saw the leprosy on his forehead, they rushed him out. In fact he too was in a hurry to leave, because the Lord had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day he died. He lived by himself as a leper, barred from entering the Lord's Temple, while his son Jotham was placed in charge of the king's affairs and governed the country.

The rest of what Uzziah did, from beginning to end, was written down by the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. Uzziah died and was buried near them in a cemetery belonging to the kings, for people said, “He was a leper.” His son Jotham took over as king.

Jotham was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. His mother's name was Jerushah, daughter of Zadok. He did what was right in the Lord's sight as his father Uzziah had done, and he did not enter the Lord's Temple as his father had. But the people still acted corruptly.

Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of the Lord's Temple, and did extensive building work on the wall at Ophel. He built towns in the hill country of Judah, and fortresses and towers in the mountains and forests.

Jotham fought with the king of the Ammonites and defeated them. The Ammonites gave him every year for three years one hundred talents of silver, and ten thousand cors of wheat and ten thousand of barley.

Jotham grew powerful because he made sure what he did followed the ways of the Lord his God. The rest of what Jotham did, his wars and other events, are written in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. He was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. Jotham died and was buried in the City of David. His son Ahaz took over as king.

Ahaz was twenty when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for sixteen years. He did not do what was right in the Lord's sight as his forefather David had. He followed the example of the kings of Israel, and also cast metal idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, and sacrificed his children in the fire, following the disgusting practices of the peoples the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He presented sacrifices and burned incense offerings on the high places, on the mountain tops, and under every living tree.

As a result, the Lord his God let the king of Aram conquer Ahaz. The Arameans attacked him and captured many of his people, taking them to Damascus. Ahaz was also defeated by the king of Israel in a mas-

sive attack. In just one day, Pekah, son of Remaliah, killed 120,000 fighting men in Judah, because they had abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers. Zichri, a warrior from Ephraim, killed Maaseiah, the son of the king; Azrikam, the palace governor; and Elkanah, the king's second-in-command. The Israelites captured 200,000 of their "brothers"—women, sons, and daughters. They also took a great deal of plunder and brought it to Samaria.

But a prophet of the Lord named Oded was there in Samaria, and he went out to meet the returning army. He told them, "It was because the Lord, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah that he allowed you to defeat them. But you have killed them with such fury that it has upset heaven. Now you're planning to turn these people from Judah and Jerusalem into slaves. But aren't you also guilty of sinning against the Lord your God? Listen to me! Return the prisoners you've taken from your brothers, the fierce anger of the Lord is falling upon you!"

Some of the leaders of the people of Ephraim—Azariah, son of Jehohanan, Berechiah, son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah, son of Shallum, and Amasa, son of Hadlai—stood up in opposition against those returning from the war. "Don't you bring those prisoners here!" they told them. "If you do you will only add to our sins and wrongdoing against the Lord. Our guilt is already great, and his fierce anger is falling upon Israel."

So the armed men left the prisoners and the plunder before the leaders and all the people gathered there. The men named above got up and took clothes from the plunder to those that had none, gave them sandals to wear, and food and drink, and put olive oil on their wounds. Those who couldn't walk any more they put on donkeys, and took them all to Jericho, the town of palms, to be close to the people of Judah.

It was then that King Ahaz asked the king of Assyria for help. The armies of Edom had once again invaded Judah and taken people prisoner, while the Philistines had attacked the towns in the foothills and the Negev of Judah. They had captured and occupied Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, along with Soco, Timnah, and Gimzo and their villages. The Lord had brought Judah down because Ahaz, king of Israel, was out of control in Judah, sinning terribly against the Lord.

So Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, came to Ahaz but attacked rather than helped him. Ahaz took what was valuable from the Lord's Temple, the king's palace, and from his officials and gave them to the king of Assyria as tribute. But it didn't help him.

Even at this time when he was having so much trouble, King Ahaz sinned more and more against the Lord. He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus, whose army had defeated him, for he said to himself, "Since the gods of the kings of Aram helped them, I'll sacrifice to them so they can help me." But this led to the ruin of Ahaz and of all Israel.

Ahaz took the sacred items from the Lord's Temple and smashed them to pieces. He barred the doors of the Lord's Temple and set up pagan altars on every corner in Jerusalem. In every town throughout Judah he set up high places to make offerings to pagan gods, angering the Lord, the God of his forefathers.

The rest of what Ahaz did, from beginning to end, is written down in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Ahaz died, and they buried him in the city, in Jerusalem. They did not bury him in the tombs of the kings of Israel. Hezekiah his son took over as king.

Hezekiah was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for twenty-nine years. His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. He did what was right in the Lord's sight, just as his forefather David had done. In the first month of the first year of his reign, Hezekiah opened the doors of the Lord's Temple and repaired them. He summoned the priests and the Levites, and had them gather on the square to the east.

He told them, "Listen to me, Levites. Purify yourselves now and purify the Temple of the Lord, the God of your forefathers. Take away from the Holy Place everything that is filthy. For our fathers were sinful, and did what was evil in the Lord's sight. They abandoned him and paid no attention to the Lord's Temple, turning their backs on him. They shut the doors at the entrance to the Temple and put out the lamps. They didn't burn incense or present burnt offerings at the sanctuary of the God of Israel.

So the Lord's anger fell on Judah and Jerusalem, and he made them into something appalling, terrifying, and ridiculous, as you can see for yourselves. As a result, our fathers have died in battle, and our sons and our daughters and our wives have been captured. But now I'm going to make an agreement with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will no longer fall on us. My sons, don't neglect your responsibilities, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to serve him, and to be his ministers presenting burnt offerings."

Then the Levites went to work. They were Mahath, son of Amasai, and Joel, son of Azariah, from the Kohathites; Kish, son of Abdi, and Azariah, son of Jehallelel, from the Merarites; Joah, son of Zimmah, and Eden, son of Joah, from the Gershonites; from the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeiel; and from the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah; from the sons of Heman, Jehiel and Shimei; and from the sons of Jeduthun, Shemaiah and Uzziel.

They called together the other Levites and all of them purified themselves. Then they went in to clean the Lord's Temple, as the king had commanded, following the instructions as required by the Lord. The priests went into the inner sanctuary of the Lord's Temple to clean it. They removed all the unclean things that they found in the Lord's Temple and placed them in the Temple courtyard. Then the Levites took them out and carried them to the Kidron Valley.

They started the work of purification on the first day of the first month, and by the eighth day of the month they had reached the Temple porch. For eight more days they worked on purifying the Temple itself, and finished on the sixteenth day of the first month.

Then they went in to tell King Hezekiah, "We have cleaned the entire Temple of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the table of the showbread with all its utensils. We have recovered and purified all the items that King Ahaz threw away during

his reign when he was unfaithful. They are now before the Lord's altar."

King Hezekiah got up early, summoned the city officials, and went to the Lord's Temple. They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs, and seven male goats as a sin offering for the kingdom, for the sanctuary, and for Judah. The king ordered the priests, the descendants of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord. So they killed the bulls, and the priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar. They killed the rams and sprinkled the blood on the altar. They killed the lambs and sprinkled the blood on the altar. Then they brought the goats for the sin offering before the king and the assembly, who placed their hands on them. Then the priests killed the goats and placed their blood on the altar for a sin offering, to make atonement for the whole of Israel, because the king had ordered that the burnt offering and sin offering were for the whole of Israel.

Hezekiah had the Levites stand in the Lord's Temple with cymbals, harps, and lyres, following the instructions of David, Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet. The instructions had come from the Lord through His prophets. The Levites stood with the musical instruments provided by David, with the priests holding their trumpets.

Then Hezekiah gave the order for the burnt offering to be offered on the altar. As the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began at the same time, the trumpets sounded, and music was played on the instruments of David, once king of Israel. All the people in the assembly were worshiping, the singers were singing, and the trumpeters were playing. This continued until the burnt offering was finished. Once the offerings were completed, the king and everyone there with him bowed down and worshiped. Then King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the Lord using the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then Hezekiah told them, "Now that you have dedicated yourselves to the Lord, come and bring your sacrifices and thank offerings to the Lord's Temple." So the people in the assembly brought their sacrifices and thank offerings, and everyone who wanted to brought burnt offerings. The total number of burnt offerings they brought was seventy bulls, a hundred rams, and two hundred lambs; all these were to be a burnt offering to the Lord. In addition there were dedicated offerings of six hundred bulls and three thousand sheep.

Since there weren't enough priests to skin all the burnt offerings, their Levite relatives helped them until the work was finished and the priests had been purified. (The Levites had been more conscientious in purifying themselves than the priests had.) Apart from the large number of burnt offerings, there was the fat of the friendship offerings, as well as the drink offerings that went with the burnt offerings.

In this way the service of the Lord's Temple was restored. Hezekiah and everyone there were so happy at what God done for the people, because everything had been achieved so quickly.

Then Hezekiah sent an announcement to everyone in Israel and Judah, and also sent letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to come to the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the Lord, the God of Israel. The king and his officials and the whole assembly in Jerusalem had decided to observe the Passover in the second month, because they hadn't been able to observe it at the usual time since not enough priests had purified themselves and the people hadn't had time to get to Jerusalem.

The plan seemed right to both the king and the whole assembly. So they decided to send an announcement to everyone in Israel, from Beersheba to Dan, inviting people to come and keep the Passover to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Jerusalem, for many had not done as the Law required.

So messengers went to all of Israel and Judah carrying letters from the king and his officials and with the king's authorization. They said, "Children of Israel, return to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, so that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped the oppression of the kings of Assyria. Don't be like your fathers and those of you who sinned against the Lord, the God of your forefathers He made them into something horrifying, as you can see. So don't be proud and obstinate like your fathers, but give yourselves to the Lord and come to his sanctuary, which he has made holy forever, and serve the Lord your God, that his fierce anger may no longer fall on you.

If you come back to the Lord, your relatives and children will receive mercy from their captors and will return to this land. For the Lord your God is gracious and merciful. He will not reject you if you come back to him."

The messengers went from town to town all over the land of Ephraim and Manasseh as far as Zebulun; but the people laughed at them and mocked them. Only some men from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun weren't too proud to go to Jerusalem.

At this time the power of God was helping the people in Judah to all have the same desire to follow the orders of the king and his officials, as indicated by the word of the Lord.

Many people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the second month—a really large crowd. They went and removed the pagan altars in Jerusalem as well as the incense altars and threw them into the Kidron Valley. On the fourteenth day of the second month they killed the Passover lamb. The priests and Levites were ashamed, and they purified themselves and brought burnt offerings to the Lord's Temple. They stood at their assigned positions, according to the law of Moses, the man of God. The priests sprinkled the blood of the sacrifices, which the Levites gave to them.

Since many people in the assembly had not purified themselves, the Levites had to kill the Passover lambs on behalf of every unclean person to dedicate the lambs to the Lord. Most of the people, many of those from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not purified themselves. Yet they ate the Passover meal even though this was not what the Law required, for Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, "May the

good Lord forgive everyone who sincerely wants to follow the Lord God, the God of their forefathers, even though they're not clean according to the sanctuary requirements." The Lord accepted Hezekiah's prayer and permitted them this violation.

The people of Israel who were there in Jerusalem celebrated the Feast of Unleavened Bread for seven days with great enthusiasm, and every day the Levites and priests praised the Lord, accompanied by loud instruments. Hezekiah spoke positively to all the Levites who showed a good understanding of the Lord. For seven days they ate the food that was assigned to them, presented friendship offerings, and gave thanks to the Lord, the God of their forefathers. Everyone then agreed to continue to celebrate the festival for seven more days. So for another seven days they celebrated, full of joy.

Hezekiah, king of Judah, gave a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep as offerings on behalf of the assembly. The officials in turn gave a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep as offerings on behalf of the assembly. A large number of priests purified themselves.

The whole assembly of Judah celebrated, together with the priests and Levites, and also with the whole assembly that had come from Israel, including the foreigners from Israel and those living in Judah. There was such tremendous happiness in Jerusalem, for since the time of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, nothing like this had happened in the city. The priests and the Levites stood up to bless the people, and God heard them—their prayer ascended to where he lived in heaven.

When all this had finished, the Israelites who were there went to the towns of Judah and smashed the pagan pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and destroyed the high places and altars throughout Judah and Benjamin, as well as in Ephraim and Manasseh, until they had completely demolished all of them. After that they all went home to their respective towns.

Then Hezekiah reallocated the divisions of the priests and Levites, each according to their service: presenting burnt offerings and friendship offerings, serving, giving thanks, and singing praises at the entrances of the Lord's Temple. The king contributed personally towards the morning and evening burnt offerings, and for the burnt offerings on the Sabbaths, new moons, and special feasts, as required by the Law of the Lord. He also ordered the people living in Jerusalem to provide for the priests and Levites so that they could dedicate themselves to studying and teaching the Law of the Lord.

As soon as the message went out, the Israelites generously gave the firstfruits of the grain, new wine, olive oil, and honey, and of all the crops. They brought plenty, a tithe of everything. The people of Israel now living in Judah, and the people of Judah brought a tithe of their herds and flocks. They also brought a tithe of what had been dedicated to the Lord their God, and piled them up. They started doing this in the third month, and they finished in the seventh month.

When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw what had been collected, they thanked the Lord and his people Israel. Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites about what had been collected.

Azariah, the chief priest of the family of Zadok, answered, "Ever since the people began to bring their contributions into the Lord's Temple, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare. Because the Lord has blessed his people there is so much left over."

Hezekiah ordered the construction of storehouses in the Lord's Temple. Once they were ready, the people faithfully brought in their offerings, tithes, and dedicated gifts. Conaniah the Levite was the one who was responsible for them, and his brother Shimei was second in command. They were in charge of the following officers: Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, and Benaiah were overseers who assisted Conaniah and Shimei his brother. They were appointed by King Hezekiah and Azariah, the chief officer of God's Temple.

Kore, son of Imnah, the Levite, the gatekeeper of the East Gate, was responsible for receiving the freewill offerings given to God. He also distributed the offerings given to the Lord, together with the consecrated gifts. Under him were his assistants Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah. They faithfully made the allocations to their fellow Levites in their towns, according to the priestly divisions, sharing equally with the old and young. They also gave allowances to the males listed in the genealogy who were three years of age or older, to all who would enter the Lord's Temple to perform their daily duties of serving according to the responsibilities of their divisions. They also gave allowances to the priests listed by family in the genealogy, and to the Levites twenty years of age or older, according to the responsibilities of their divisions. The genealogy included all the babies, wives, sons, and daughters of the whole community, for they were faithful in making sure they dedicated themselves as holy.

In the case of the priests, the descendants of Aaron, those who lived on the farmlands around their towns, men were appointed by name in all the towns to distribute an allocation to every male among the priests and to every Levite as listed in the genealogies. This is what Hezekiah did throughout the whole of Judah. He did what was good, right, and true before the Lord his God. In everything he did in working for God's Temple and in following God's laws and commandments, Hezekiah was sincere in his commitment to God. So he was successful in all he did.

After Hezekiah's faithful work, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah and attacked its fortified towns, planning to conquer them for himself. When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come to attack Jerusalem, he talked with his army commanders about blocking up the water sources that lay outside the city. This is what they did. They directed a large group of workers to block all the springs as well as the stream flowing nearby. "Why should the kings of Assyria come here and find plenty of water?" they asked.

Hezekiah set to work and rebuilt all the parts of the wall that had fallen down and constructed towers on it. He also built another wall outside the first wall. He reinforced the Millo in the city of David. He also made

a large quantity of weapons and shields. Hezekiah put army commanders in charge of the people.

Then he summoned the people to gather in the square at the city gate. He spoke to them confidently, telling them, “Be strong and be brave! Don't be afraid or discouraged because of the king of Assyria with his large army, for there are more with us than with him. He has human help, but we have the Lord God on our side to help us and fight our battles.” The people were encouraged by this speech of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Some time later, when Sennacherib was attacking the town of Lachish with his armies, he sent his officers to Jerusalem with this message for Hezekiah, king of Judah, and for everyone from Judah living there.

“This is what Sennacherib, king of Assyria, says. What are you going to trust in to help you survive when I come to attack Jerusalem? Can't you see that in reality Hezekiah is telling you to die from starvation and thirst when he tells you, ‘The Lord our God will save us from the king of Assyria’? Wasn't it Hezekiah who destroyed the high places and altars of this god and told Judah and Jerusalem, ‘You must worship at this one altar, and offer sacrifices on it alone’?

Don't you know what I and my fathers have done to all the nations of the earth? None of their gods could save them or their lands from me! Which one of all these gods of these nations that my fathers destroyed has been able to save them from me? So why would you think your god can save you from me? So don't let Hezekiah fool you, and don't let him mislead you like this. Don't trust him, for no god of any nation or kingdom has been able to save their people from me or from my fathers. So it's even less possible for your god to save you from me!”

Sennacherib's officers continued criticizing the Lord God and his servant Hezekiah. Sennacherib also wrote letters insulting the Lord, the God of Israel, taunting him by saying, “In the same way the gods of the nations did not save their people from me, so the god of Hezekiah will not save his people from me either.”

The Assyrians also shouted this out in Hebrew to the people of Jerusalem standing on the wall to frighten and to terrify them so that the city would be surrendered. They talked about the God of Jerusalem like they did about the gods of the other nations, gods made by human beings.

King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, appealed about this in prayer to the God of heaven. The Lord sent an angel who wiped out every warrior, leader, and commander in the camp of the Assyrian king. So he returned home in disgrace. When he went into the temple of his god, some of his own sons killed him with their swords.

The Lord saved Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem from King Sennacherib of Assyria and all other enemies, giving them peace in every direction. From then on he was very well respected by all the nations, and many brought offerings to Jerusalem for the Lord and valuable gifts for Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Around that time Hezekiah fell sick and was about to die. So he prayed to the Lord, who replied by healing him and giving him a miraculous sign. But because he had become proud, Hezekiah did not acknowledge the gift he'd been given. So the Lord's anger fell on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah apologized for his arrogance, as did the people of Jerusalem, and the Lord's anger no longer fell on them during Hezekiah's lifetime.

Hezekiah was very rich and highly honored, and he built treasury storerooms to hold silver, gold, precious stones, spices, shields, and all kinds of valuable things. He constructed buildings to store supplies of grain, new wine, and olive oil, and stalls for all kinds of animals, including cattle and sheep. He built many towns, and he owned large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, for God had made him very wealthy. Hezekiah blocked off the outlet of the upper Gihon spring and made the water flow down to the west side of the City of David. Hezekiah was successful in everything he did.

But when ambassadors of the rulers of Babylon came to him to ask about the miraculous sign that had happened in the country, God left him to test him, so he could know Hezekiah's true thinking.

The rest of what Hezekiah did, including his acts of loyalty, are recorded in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, in the Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Hezekiah died and was buried in the upper cemetery of David's descendants. All Judah and the people of Jerusalem honored him at his death. His son Manasseh took over as king.

Manasseh was twelve when he became king, and he reigned in for Jerusalem fifty-five years. He did evil in the Lord's sight by following the disgusting religious practices of the nations that the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had destroyed, and he made altars for the Baals and set up Asherah poles. He worshiped the sun, moon, and stars and served them.

He built altars in the Lord's Temple, about which the Lord had said, “I shall be honored in Jerusalem forever.” He built these altars to worship the sun, moon, and stars in both courtyards of the Lord's Temple. He sacrificed his children by burning them to death in the Valley of Ben-hinnom. He practiced sorcery, divination, and witchcraft, and visited mediums and spiritists. He did a great deal of evil in the Lord's sight, making him angry.

He took a pagan idol he had made and set it up in God's Temple, about which God had told David and his son Solomon, “I will be honored forever in this Temple and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel. If the Israelites are careful to follow everything I have instructed them to do—all the laws, commandments, and regulations, given through Moses—then I will not make them leave the land I granted your forefathers.” But Manasseh seduced Judah and the people of Jerusalem, leading them to commit even worse sins than the nations the Lord had destroyed before the Israelites occupied the land.

The Lord warned Manasseh and his people, but they ignored him. So the Lord sent the armies of Assyria with their commanders to attack them. The Assyrians captured Manasseh, put a hook through his nose, put bronze shackles on him, and took him away to Babylon. In his misery, he asked the Lord God for help, repenting for his arrogance before the God of his forefathers. He

prayed and prayed, and the Lord listened to his pleadings; so the Lord brought Manasseh back to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh was convinced that the Lord is God.

After this, Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David from west of Gihon in the valley to the Fish Gate, and around the hill of Ophel, and made it much higher. He also assigned army commanders to all the fortified towns of Judah. He disposed of the foreign gods and the idol from the Lord's Temple, together with all the altars he had built on the Temple hill and in Jerusalem, throwing all of them outside the city. Then he restored the altar of the Lord, and sacrificed friendship offerings and thank offerings on it, and he instructed Judah to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. But the people still sacrificed on the high places, but only to the Lord their God.

The rest of what Manasseh did, along with his prayer to his God and what he was told by the seers who spoke on the Lord's behalf are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel. His prayer and how God answered him, as well as all his sins and unfaithfulness, and where he built high places and set up Asherah poles and idols before he admitted he was wrong, are recorded in the Records of the Seers. Manasseh died and was buried at his palace. His son Amon took over as king.

Amon was twenty-two when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for two years. He did evil in the Lord's sight just as his father Manasseh had. Amon worshiped and sacrificed to all the idols his father Manasseh had made. However, he did not admit his pride before the Lord as his father Manasseh had done—in fact Amon made his guilt even worse. Then Amon's officials plotted against him and killed him in his palace. But the people of the land killed everyone who had plotted against King Amon, and they made his son Josiah king.

Josiah was eight when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for thirty-one years. He did what was right in the Lord's sight and followed the ways of his forefather David—he did not deviate to the right or to the left.

In the eighth year of his reign, while he was still young, Josiah began to publicly worship the God of David his forefather, and in the twelfth year of his reign he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem by removing the high places, the Asherah poles, the carved idols, and the metal images. He had the altars of Baal torn down in front of him, and the incense altars above them cut down. In addition, the Asherah poles, the carved idols, and the metal images were smashed to pieces and scattered over the graves of those who had been sacrificing to them. He burned the bones of the idolatrous priests on their altars. In this way he cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.

Josiah repeated this in the towns of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Simeon, all the way to Naphtali, and in their surrounding areas. He tore down the altars and crushed the Asherah poles and the images to dust, and cut down all the incense altars across the whole land of Israel. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

In the eighteenth year of his reign, once he had finished cleansing the land and the Temple, Josiah sent Shaphan, son of Azaliah, Maaseiah the city governor, and Joah, son of Joahaz, the record-keeper, to repair the Temple of the Lord his God. They went to Hilkiah the high priest and gave him the money that had been brought to God's Temple. The Levites at the entrances had collected this money from the people of Manasseh and Ephraim, from what was left of the people of Israel, as well as contributions from Judah, Benjamin, and the people of Jerusalem.

They handed it over to those who were supervising the repair work on the Lord's Temple, who in turn paid the workmen doing the restoring and repairing. They also paid carpenters and builders to buy cut stone, as well as timber for joists and beams for the buildings that the kings of Judah had let deteriorate. The men did good, honest work. In charge of them were Jahath and Obadiah, Levites from the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, Levites from the sons of the Kohathites. The Levites, all skilled musicians, were in charge of the workmen and directed everyone involved, depending on what was required. Some of the Levites were scribes, some officers, and some gatekeepers.

In the process of taking out the money donated to the Lord's Temple, Hilkiah the priest discovered the Book of the Lord's Law written down by Moses. Hilkiah told Shaphan the scribe, “I've found the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple.” He gave it to Shaphan. Shaphan took the book to the king and told him, “We your servants are doing everything we were instructed to do. The money collected at the Lord's Temple has been handed over to those who are supervising the workers, paying them to do the repairs.” Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, “Hilkiah the priest gave me this book.” Shaphan read it to the king.

When the king heard what the Law said, he tore his clothes. Then he issued the following orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Abdon, son of Micah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah, the king's assistant: “Go and talk to the Lord for me, and also for those who still live in Israel and Judah, about what is said in the book that's been found. For the Lord must be really angry with us because our forefathers have not obeyed the Lord's instructions by following all that's written in this book.”

Hilkiah and those the king had selected went and talked with Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum, son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, custodian of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the city's second quarter.

Huldah told them, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, this is what the Lord says: I am about to bring disaster down on this place and on its people, in accordance with all the curses written in the book that has been read to the king of Judah. They have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to other gods, making me angry by everything they've done. My anger will be poured out upon this place and will not be stopped.

But tell the king of Judah who sent you to ask the Lord, tell him this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: As for what you heard read to you— because you were receptive and repentant before God when you heard his warnings against this place and against its

people, and because you have repented, tearing your clothes and weeping before me, I have also heard you, declares the Lord. All this will not happen until after you have died, and you will die in peace. You will not see all the disaster that I'm going to bring down on this place and on its inhabitants." They went back to the king and gave him her response.

Then the king summoned all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went to the Lord's Temple with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, together with the priests and the Levites, all the people from the least to the greatest, and he read to them the whole Book of the Agreement that had been discovered in the Lord's Temple. The king stood by the pillar and made a solemn agreement before the Lord to follow him and to keep his commandments, laws, and regulations with total dedication, and to observe the requirements of the agreement as written in the book. Then he had everyone present from Jerusalem and Benjamin stand up to show they agreed to it. So all the people of Jerusalem accepted and followed the agreement with God, the God of their forefathers.

Josiah demolished all the vile idols from the whole territory belonging to the Israelites, and he made everyone in Israel serve the Lord their God. During his reign they did not give up worshiping the Lord, the God of their fathers.

Josiah held a Passover for the Lord in Jerusalem, and the Passover lamb was killed on the fourteenth day of the first month. He assigned the priests to their respective duties and encouraged them in their ministry at the Lord's Temple. Josiah told the Levites who taught all Israel and were holy to the Lord, "Place the holy Ark in the Temple built by Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. It's not necessary for you to carry it around on your shoulders any more. Your responsibility now is to serve the Lord your God and his people Israel. Get yourselves ready for service in your divisions, by families, according to the instructions given by David, king of Israel, and his son Solomon.

Then you are to stand in the sanctuary to assist the lay people according to family divisions, following the assignments according to your Levite family divisions. Sacrifice the Passover lambs, purify yourselves, and be ready to help the people who come to fulfill the requirements given by the Lord through Moses."

Josiah contributed as Passover offerings for all the people who were present 30,000 lambs and goats, and 3,000 bulls, all from his own flocks and herds. His officials contributed freely to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, who were in charge of God's Temple, gave the priests as Passover offerings 2,600 Passover lambs and 300 bulls. The leaders of the Levites, Conaniah, and Shemaiah and Nethanel his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, gave the Levites as Passover offerings 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls.

Once the preparations had been completed, the priests stood where they had been assigned and the Levites took their places in their divisions as the king had ordered. They killed the Passover lambs, the priests sprinkled the blood they were given on the altar, while the Levites skinned the sacrifices. They put to one side the burnt offerings to be given to the families of the lay people, by division, to offer to the Lord, as required in the Book of Moses. They did the same thing with the bulls. They roasted the Passover sacrifices on the fire as required, and they boiled the holy offerings in pots, caldrons, and pans, and took them quickly to the lay people. After that they prepared food from the offerings for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the descendants of Aaron, were busy presenting burnt offerings and fat until night came. So the Levites did this work for themselves and for the priests, the descendants of Aaron. The singers, the descendants of Asaph, were in their places following the instructions given by David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, the king's seer. The gatekeepers in charge at each gate did not need to leave, because their fellow Levites provided for them.

So on that day the whole Passover service of the Lord took place, including the presenting of burnt offerings on the altar of the Lord, as King Josiah had ordered. The Israelites who were there also celebrated Passover at that time, and also the Feast of Unleavened Bread for the following seven days. No Passover like this had been held in Israel since the time of Samuel the prophet. None of the kings of Israel had ever held a Passover like the one that Josiah observed with the priests, the Levites, all of Judah, the Israelites who were there, and the people of Jerusalem. This Passover was observed in the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah.

After all this work that Josiah had carried out in restoring the Temple, King Neco of Egypt was leading his army to fight at Carchemish near the Euphrates, and Josiah went to confront him. Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What argument is there between you and me, king of Judah? I have not come to attack you today, because I'm fighting with another kingdom. God told me I should hurry, so stop obstructing God, who is with me, or he'll destroy you!"

But Josiah did not turn away and leave. Instead, he disguised himself so he could fight Neco in battle. He ignored Neco's message that came from God, and went to fight him on the Plain of Megiddo. There archers shot King Josiah. He called out those beside him, "Get me out of the battle, because I'm badly wounded!"

So they carried him out of his chariot, and took him back in his second chariot to Jerusalem, where he died. Josiah was buried in the tomb of his forefathers. All Judah and Jerusalem wept for him.

Then Jeremiah wrote a lament over Josiah, and to this day male and female choirs sing sad songs about Josiah. They have become a part of what is regularly sung in Israel, and they are recorded in the Book of Laments.

The rest of what Josiah did, along with his acts of loyalty following what is written in the Law of the Lord, all his actions, from beginning to end, are recorded in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

The people of the land took Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, and made him king in Jerusalem in succession to his father. Jehoahaz was twenty-three when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months. Then the king of Egypt removed him from the throne in Jerusalem and imposed a tax on Judah of a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Neco, king of

Egypt, made Eliakim, Jehoahaz's brother, king over Judah and Jerusalem, and he changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. Neco took Eliakim's brother Jehoahaz back with him to Egypt.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God. Then Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jehoiakim. He captured him and put bronze shackles on him, and brought him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also took some items from the Lord's Temple, and he put them in his temple in Babylon.

The rest of what Jehoiakim, the disgusting sins he committed, and all the evidence against him, are written down in the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. His son Jehoiachin took over as king.

Jehoiachin was eighteen when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for three months and ten days. He did evil in the Lord's sight. In the spring of the year, King Nebuchadnezzar summoned him and brought him to Babylon, along with valuable items from the Lord's Temple, and he made Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah king over Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was twenty-one when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and he refused to admit his pride when the prophet Jeremiah warned him directly from the Lord. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear an oath of loyalty by God. Zedekiah was arrogant and hard-hearted, and refused to come back to the Lord, the God of Israel.

All the leaders of the priests and the people were also totally faithless and sinful, following all the disgusting practices of the heathen nations. They defiled the Lord's Temple that he had set apart as holy in Jerusalem. Again and again the Lord, the God of their fathers, warned his people through his prophets, because he wanted to show mercy to them and to his Temple. But they ridiculed God's messengers, they despised his warnings and mocked his prophets, until the Lord's anger against his people was provoked to such an extent it couldn't be stopped.

So the Lord brought the king of Babylon to attack them. His army killed by the sword their best young men even in the sanctuary. The Babylonians did not spare young men or young women, the sick or the elderly. God handed them all over to Nebuchadnezzar. He took back to Babylon all the articles, large and small, from God's Temple, and from the Temple treasury, and from the king and from his officials. Then the Babylonians burned down God's Temple and demolished Jerusalem's walls. They set fire to all the palaces and destroyed everything that had any value. Nebuchadnezzar took into exile in Babylon those who had not been killed. They were slaves for himself and his sons, until the kingdom of Persia took over.

So to fulfill the Lord's prophecy given through Jeremiah, the land enjoyed its Sabbaths as rest all the time it was left desolate, keeping the Sabbath until seventy years were completed. In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, to fulfill the Lord's prophecy given through Jeremiah, the Lord encouraged Cyrus, king of Persia, to issue a proclamation throughout his kingdom and also to put it in writing, saying, “This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: ‘The Lord, the God of heaven, who has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, has given me the responsibility to build a Temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone among you who belongs to his people can go there. May the Lord your God be with you.’”

Ezra

Book of Ezra

In order to fulfill the Lord's prophecy given through Jeremiah, the Lord encouraged Cyrus, king of Persia, to issue a proclamation throughout his kingdom and also to put it in writing, saying, "This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The Lord, the God of heaven, who has given to me all the kingdoms of the earth, has given me the responsibility to build a Temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Anyone among you who belongs to his people can go to Jerusalem in Judah to rebuild this Temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem. May your God be with you. Wherever survivors are currently living, let them be helped by the people of that region with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, together with a voluntary donation for God's Temple in Jerusalem.'"

Then God encouraged the family leaders of Judah and Benjamin, as well as the priests and Levites to go and rebuild the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem. All their neighbors supported them with gifts of silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with other valuable items, in addition to all their voluntary donations.

King Cyrus also retrieved the items belonging to the Lord's Temple that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from Jerusalem and placed in the temple of his god. Cyrus had Mithredath the treasurer retrieve them, who counted them and gave them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of Judah.

This was the list: 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 silver silverware, 30 gold bowls, 410 matching silver bowls, and 1,000 other items. In total there were 5,400 gold and silver items. When the exiles left Babylon to go to Jerusalem Sheshbazzar took all these along with them.

This is a list of the Jewish exiles from the province who returned from captivity after King Nebuchadnezzar had taken them away to Babylon. They went back to Jerusalem and to their own towns in Judah. Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

This is the number of the men of the people of Israel: the sons of Parosh, 2,172; the sons of Shephatiah, 372; the sons of Arah, 775; the sons of Pahath-moab (sons of Jeshua and Joab), 2,812; the sons of Elam, 1,254; the sons of Zattu, 945; the sons of Zaccai, 760; the sons of Bani, 642; the sons of Bebai, 623; the sons of Azgad, 1,222; the sons of Adonikam, 666; the sons of Bigvai, 2,056; the sons of Adin, 454; the sons of Ater (sons of Hezekiah), 98; the sons of Bezai, 323; the sons of Jorah, 112; the sons of Hashum, 223; the sons of Gibbar, 95; the people from Bethlehem, 123; the people from Netophah, 56; the people from Anathoth, 128; the people from Beth-azmaveth, 42; the people from Kiriath-jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth, 743; the people from Ramah and Geba, 621; the people from Micmash, 122; the people from Bethel and Ai, 223; the sons of Nebo, 52; the sons of Magbish, 156; the sons of Elam, 1,254; the sons of Harim, 320; the sons of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, 725; the sons of Jericho, 345; the sons of Senaah, 3,630.

This is the number of the priests: the sons of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua), 973; the sons of Immer, 1,052; the sons of Pashhur, 1,247; the sons of Harim, 1,017.

This is the number of the Levites: the sons of Jeshua and Kadmiel (sons of Hodaviah), 74; the singers of the sons of Asaph, 128; the gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai, 139.

The descendants of these Temple servants: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Siaha, Padon, Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, Hagab, Shalmai, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Neziah, and Hatipha.

The descendants of King Solomon's servants: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-hazzebaim, and Ami. The total of the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants was 392.

Those who came from the towns of Tel-melah, Telharsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer could not prove their family genealogy, or even that they were descendants of Israel. They included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, 652 in total.

In addition there were three priestly families, sons of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (Barzillai had married a woman descended from Barzillai of Gilead, and he was called by that name.) They searched for a record of them in the genealogies, but their names weren't found, so they were barred from serving as priests. The governor instructed them not to eat anything from the sanctuary sacrifices until a priest could ask the Lord about the issue by using the Urim and Thummim.

The total of number of people returning was 42,360. In addition there were 7,337 servants and 200 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

When they arrived at the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders made voluntary contributions toward the rebuilding of God's Temple where it had once stood. They gave depending on how much they had, putting their gift into the treasury. The total came to 61,000 gold daric coins, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers, the Temple servants, as well as some of the people went back to live in their specific towns. The others returned to their own towns throughout Israel.

By the time of the seventh month, the Israelites had settled in their towns, and the people gathered together as one in Jerusalem. Then Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and the priests with him, together with Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and his relatives, started to build the altar of the God of Israel in order to sacrifice burnt offerings on it, as instructed by the Law of Moses, the man of God. Even though they were afraid of the local people, they set up the altar on its original foundation and sacrificed burnt offerings on it to the Lord, both morning and evening burnt offerings.

They observed the Festival of Shelters as the Law required, sacrificing the specified number of burnt offerings each day. After that they also presented the daily burnt offerings and the new moon offerings, as well as those for all the yearly festivals of the Lord and for those who brought voluntary offerings to the Lord. So from the first day of the seventh month, the Israelites began to present burnt offerings to the Lord, even though the foundation of the Lord's Temple had not been laid.

They paid masons and carpenters, and provided food and drink and olive oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre for them to bring cedar logs from Lebanon to Joppa by sea, as King Cyrus of Persia had authorized.

In the second month of the second year after arriving at God's Temple in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and those with them —the priests, the Levites, and everyone who had come back to Jerusalem from captivity—began the work. They put Levites twenty years and older in charge of building the Lord's Temple. Jeshua and his sons and relatives, Kadmiel and his sons, the descendants of Yehudah, the sons of Henadad and their sons and relatives, all of them Levites, supervised those working on God's Temple.

When the builders laid the foundation of the Lord's Temple, the priests dressed in their special clothes and carrying trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) carrying cymbals, all took their places to praise the Lord, following the instructions given by King David of Israel. They sang with praise and thanks to the Lord: "God is good; for his trustworthy love for Israel lasts forever." Then everyone there gave a tremendous shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the Lord's Temple had been laid.

But many of the older priests, Levites, and family leaders who remembered the first Temple wept loudly when they saw the foundation of this Temple, though many others shouted for joy. However, nobody could tell the shouts of joy from the cries of weeping, because everyone was making so much noise—so much so it could be heard a long way away.

The enemies of Judah and Benjamin heard that the exiles were building a Temple to the Lord, the God of Israel. They came to Zerubbabel and the family leaders and said, "Please let us help you with the building work, for we worship your God like you do. In fact we have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."

But Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the family leaders of Israel replied, "You can't share with us in building a Temple for our God. Only we can build it for the Lord, the God of Israel. This is what Cyrus the king of Persia has ordered us to do."

Then the local people set out to intimidate the people of Judah and make them too scared to go on building. They bribed officials to oppose them and to obstruct their plans. This continued during the whole reign of Cyrus king of Persia up until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

When Ahasuerus became king the local people sent him a written accusation against the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

During the time of Artaxerxes, king of Persia, Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and their fellow officers wrote a letter to Artaxerxes. The letter was written in Aramaic and translated from Aramaic.

Rehum the officer in command and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter to King Artaxerxes condemning Jerusalem stating,

This comes from Rehum the officer in command, Shimshai the scribe, and fellow officers: the judges and officials and those in charge of Persia, Erech and Babylon, the Elamites of Susa, and the rest of the people whom the great and noble Ashurbanipal deported and resettled in the towns of Samaria and other places west of the Euphrates. The following is a copy of the letter they sent to him.

To King Artaxerxes, from your servants, men beyond the River Euphrates:

Your Majesty should be informed that the Jews who came from you to us have returned to Jerusalem. They are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city, completing repairs to the walls, and mending its foundations. Your Majesty should realize that if this city is rebuilt and its walls repaired, they will not pay tax, tribute, or fees, and the king's revenue will suffer. Now because we are in the king's service and it is not right for us to see Your Majesty disrespected, we are sending this letter so that you can be informed, and order a search of the royal archives. You will discover in these records that this is a rebellious city, damaging to kings and countries, having often risen up in revolt in the past. That is what led to this city being destroyed. We wish to inform Your Majesty that if this city is rebuilt and the walls completed, you will lose this province west of the Euphrates.

The king replied as follows: "To Rehum the commander, Shimshai the scribe, and fellow officers living in Samaria and in other areas west of the Euphrates: Greetings. The letter you sent to us has been translated and read to me. I ordered a search to be conducted. It was discovered that this city has often risen up in revolt against kings in the past, frequently promoting insurrection and rebellion. Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and throughout the whole area west of the Euphrates, and they received tax, tribute, and fees. Issue an immediate order for these men to stop work. This city is not to be rebuilt until I authorize it. See that you do not neglect this matter. Why should this problem be allowed to grow and damage royal interests?"

As soon as this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai the scribe, and their fellow officers, they rushed to the Jews in Jerusalem and used their power to forcibly make them stop work.

Consequently work on God's Temple in Jerusalem came to a halt. The stoppage continued until the second year of the reign of King Darius of Persia.

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, son of Iddo, gave messages to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem from the God of Israel, their ruler. Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, son of Jozadak, decided to start work on rebuilding God's Temple in Jerusalem. The prophets of God encouraged them and helped them.

Almost immediately Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and

their fellow officials arrived and asked, “Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and finish it?” Then they asked, “What are the names of the men who are working on this building?”

But their God was watching over the Jewish leaders, so that they were not prevented from working until a report could be sent to Darius and a written reply with instructions was received.

The following is a copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their fellow officials, officials of the province, sent to King Darius.

The report they sent to him read like this: “To King Darius: Greetings. We wish to inform Your Majesty that we went to the province of Judah, to the Temple of the great God. It is being built with large stones, with timber beams being placed on the walls. This work is being done properly and is progressing well.

We questioned the leaders, asking them, ‘Who gave you permission to rebuild this Temple and finish it?’ We also asked for their names, so that we could write them down and let you know the names of their leaders.

This is the answer they gave us. ‘We are servants of the God of heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the Temple built and completed many years ago by a great king of Israel. But our forefathers made the God of heaven angry, so he handed them over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this Temple and deported the people to Babylon. However, Cyrus, king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, issued a decree to rebuild this Temple of God. He even gave back the gold and silver items belonging to God's Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem and placed in his temple in Babylon. King Cyrus gave them to a man named Sheshbazzar, whom he had appointed governor, telling him, Take these items and place them in the Temple in Jerusalem. Rebuild God's Temple on its original site. So Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundation of God's Temple in Jerusalem. It has been under construction since then, but hasn't yet been completed.’

So, if Your Majesty wishes, authorize a search to be made of the royal archives in Babylon to discover if there is a record that King Cyrus issued a decree to rebuild God's Temple in Jerusalem. Then please let us know Your Majesty's decision in this matter.”

Thus King Darius ordered that a search be made of the archives that were housed in the treasury of Babylon. But it was actually in the fortress of Ecbatana, in the province of Media, that a scroll was found, recording the following: In the first year of King Cyrus, he issued a decree regarding God's Temple in Jerusalem: Let the Temple be rebuilt as a place where sacrifices are offered, and ensure it has strong foundations. Make it sixty cubits high and sixty cubits wide, with three layers of stone blocks and one of timber. Expenses are to be paid from the royal treasury. In addition, the gold and silver items of God's Temple, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the Temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, must also be returned to the Temple in Jerusalem and placed there.

These are my instructions to you, Tattenai, governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and your fellow officials, and officials of the province: Stay far away from there! This work on God's Temple—leave it alone! Let the governor and leaders of the Jews continue with rebuilding this Temple of God on its original site. Furthermore, this is my decree as to what you are to do for these Jewish leaders regarding the rebuilding of this Temple of God. The full expense involved is to be paid from royal income, the tribute of the province west of the Euphrates, so that the work will not be delayed. Provide whatever is needed by the priests in Jerusalem: young bulls, rams, and lambs for burnt offerings to the God of heaven, and wheat, salt, wine, and olive oil. Make sure to give them this each day without fail. In this way they can offer sacrifices that are acceptable to the God of heaven, and pray for the lives of the king and his sons. Further I declare that if any man interferes with this decree, a beam is to be ripped from his house and set in the ground, and he is to be impaled on top of it. His own house shall be turned into a pile of rubble for disobeying this decree. May God who chose the city of Jerusalem as the place where he would be honored, destroy any king or people who try to alter what I have said or who destroy this Temple. I, Darius, issue this decree. Let it be faithfully carried out.

Tattenai, the governor of the province west of the Euphrates, Shethar-bozenai, and their fellow officials faithfully carried out what King Darius had decreed. As a result the Jewish leaders continued building, and they were encouraged by the messages from Haggai the prophet and Zechariah, son of Iddo. They completed building the Temple following the command of the God of Israel, and the decrees of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes, kings of Persia. The Temple was completed on the third day of the month of Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius.

Then the people of Israel, the priests, the Levites, and the rest of those who had returned from exile, all joyfully celebrated the dedication of God's Temple. To dedicate God's Temple they sacrificed one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs, and a sin offering for the whole of Israel comprising twelve male goats, one for each Israelite tribe. They organized the priests and Levites by their divisions to serve God in the Temple at Jerusalem, in accordance with the Book of Moses.

The exiles who had returned observed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. The priests and Levites had all purified themselves so that they were clean according to the ceremonial law. So they killed the Passover lamb for all the exiles who had returned, for their fellow priests, and for themselves. The Passover was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, and by those who had joined them and had rejected the pagan practices of the peoples of the land in order to worship the Lord, the God of Israel. Then they observed the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days. Everyone throughout the land was so happy because the Lord had made the king of Assyria favorable to them, helping them to rebuild the Temple of God, the God of Israel.

After all this, during the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra arrived from Babylon. He was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum,

son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest. This Ezra arrived from Babylon, and was a scribe who was an expert in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given to Israel. The king had granted Ezra everything he'd asked for, because the Lord his God was with him. In the seventh year of King Artaxerxes Ezra left for Jerusalem, accompanied by some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, singers and gatekeepers, and Temple servants.

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of King Artaxerxes' reign. He had started the journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, his gracious God going with him. For Ezra had committed himself to gaining insights from the Law of the Lord, wanting to practice it and to teach in Israel its rules and how to live.

This is a copy of the letter King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest and scribe, who had studied the Lord's commandments and regulations given to Israel:

"Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven: Greetings. I hereby issue this decree: Any of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom who voluntarily decide to go to Jerusalem with you may do so. You are being sent by the king and his seven counselors to investigate the situation in Judah and Jerusalem as it relates to the Law of your God, which you carry with you. We also instruct you to take with you the silver and gold that the king and his counselors have voluntarily donated to the God of Israel, who lives in Jerusalem, together with all the silver and gold you may receive from the province of Babylon, as well as the voluntary donations of the people and priests to the Temple of their God in Jerusalem. You are to use this money first to buy as many bulls, rams, and lambs as necessary, along with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and present them on the altar at the Temple of your God in Jerusalem. Then you and those with you may decide to use the rest of the silver and gold in whatever way you think best, in accordance with the will of your God.

But the items you have been given for the service of the Temple of your God must be all delivered to the God of Jerusalem. If there is anything else required for the Temple of your God that you have to provide, you may charge it to the royal treasury.

I, King Artaxerxes, decree that all the treasurers west of the Euphrates should provide whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven, may require from you, and it must be provided in full, up to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred cors of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of olive oil, and unrestricted amounts of salt. Make sure you provide in full whatever the God of heaven requires for his Temple, for why should his anger be brought down on the king and his sons? Also be aware that all of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Temple servants, or other workers of this Temple are exempt from paying any tax, tribute, or fees, and you are not authorized to charge them.

You, Ezra, are to follow the wisdom of your God which you possess, shall appoint magistrates and judges to provide justice to all the people west of the Euphrates—all those who follow the laws of your God. You are to teach these laws to those who do not. Anyone who does not keep the law of your God and the law of the king, will be severely punished, either by death, banishment, seizure of property, or imprisonment."

Praise the Lord, the God of our forefathers, who put into the king's mind to honor the Lord's Temple in Jerusalem in this way, and who has shown me such kindness by honoring me before the king, his counselors, and all his high officials. Because the Lord my God was with me, I was encouraged and called together the leaders of Israel to return to Jerusalem with me.

This is a list of the family leaders and genealogical records of those who came back with me from Babylon during the reign of King Artaxerxes:

From the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. From the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. From the sons of David, Hattush, son of Shecaniah. From the sons of Parosh, Zechariah, and with him 150 men were registered. From the sons of Pahath-moab, Eliehoenai, son of Zerahiah, and with him 200 men. From the sons of Zattu, Shecaniah, son of Jahaziel, and with him 300 men. From the sons of Adin, Ebed, son of Jonathan, and with him 50 men. From the sons of Elam, Jeshaiah, son of Athaliah, and with him 70 men. From the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah, son of Michael, and with him 80 men. From the sons of Joab, Obadiah, son of Jehiel, and with him 218 men. From the sons of Bani, Shelomith, son of Josiphiah, and with him 160 men. From the sons of Bebai, Zechariah, son of Bebai, and with him 28 men. From the sons of Azgad, Johanan, son of Hakkatan, and with him 110 men. From the sons of Adonikam, those who were last, their names being Eliphelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah, and with them 60 men. From the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zaccur, and with them 70 men.

I gathered the returning exiles together at the Ahava Canal. We camped there for three days while I reviewed who had come—the ordinary people, the priests, and the Levites. I discovered there wasn't a single Levite so I sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were leaders, and for Joiarib and Elnathan, who were men with good insight. I told them to go to Iddo, the leader of the Temple servants at Casiphia, asking him and his relatives to send us ministers for the Temple of our God.

Since our gracious God was with us, they brought us Sherebiah, a man with good insight from the sons of Mahli, son of Levi, son of Israel, together with his sons and brothers, a total of eighteen men; and Hashabiah, along with Jeshaiah, from the sons of Merari, and his brothers and their sons, a total of twenty men. In addition they brought 220 of the Temple servants, a group appointed by David and his officials to help the Levites. These were all registered by name.

At the Ahava Canal I called for a fast so we could confess our sins before God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, along with all our possessions. I had been reluctant to ask the king to give us a military escort to protect us from enemies on the way.

We had told the king, “Our gracious God takes care of everyone who follows him, but shows his anger against anyone who abandons him.” So we fasted and asked God to protect us, and he answered our prayers.

Then I designated twelve of the leading priests, and Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers, and I weighed out and handed them the donations of silver and gold, and the items that the king, his counselors, his leaders, and all the people of Israel there had given for the Temple of our God. I weighed out and placed in their hands 650 talents of silver, silver Temple items weighing 100 talents, 100 talents of gold, 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 darics, and two articles of highly-polished bronze, as valuable as gold.

I told them, “You are set apart for the Lord, and these Temple items are too. The silver and gold are a voluntary offering to the Lord, the God of your forefathers. You are to guard them and keep them safe until you hand them over, weighing them before the high priests, the Levites and the family leaders in Israel at Jerusalem, in the treasury rooms within the Lord's Temple.” The priests and Levites took responsibility for the silver and gold and the Temple items that had been weighed out to be brought to the Temple of our God in Jerusalem.

On the twelfth day of the first month, we left the Ahava Canal to go to Jerusalem, and our God was with us to protect us from enemy ambushes along the way. Eventually we arrived in Jerusalem and rested there for three days.

On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the Temple items were weighed out in the Temple of our God and handed over to Meremoth, son of Uriah the priest, accompanied by Eleazar, son of Phinehas. Also present were the Levites, Jozabad, son of Jeshua, and Noadiah, son of Binnui. Everything was checked, both by number and weight, and the total weight was written down at the time.

Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel—twelve bulls for all of Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs, and a sin offering of twelve goats. All were sacrificed as a burnt offering to the Lord. They also delivered the king's decrees to the chief officers of the king and the governors of the province west of the Euphrates, who then provided assistance to the people and to God's Temple.

Some time later after all this had happened, the leaders came and told me, “The people of Israel, including the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the people around us whose disgusting religious practices are similar to those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. Some Israelites have even married women from these people, both themselves and their sons, mixing the holy race with these people of the land. Our leaders and officials are at the forefront of this sinful behavior.”

When I heard about this, I tore my clothes, pulled out some hair from my head and beard, and sat down, absolutely appalled. Everyone who respected the instructions of the God of Israel gathered around me because of this sin on the part of the exiles. I sat there shocked and appalled until the evening sacrifice.

At the evening sacrifice, I stood up from where I had been sitting in grief, with my clothes torn, and I kneeled down and held out my hands to the Lord my God. I prayed, “My God, I am so ashamed and embarrassed to come and pray to you, my God, because we are in over our heads in sin, and our guilt has risen to the heavens. From the time of our forefathers to now, we have been deeply guilty. Because of our sins, we, our kings, and our priests have been handed over to the kings of the earth, killed and taken prisoner, robbed and humiliated, just like we are today.

Now for a short time the Lord our God has given us grace, preserving a few of us as a remnant, and giving us safety in his holy place. Our God has brightened our lives by giving us some relief from our slavery. Though we are slaves, our God did not abandon us in our slavery, but he showed us his trustworthy love by making the kings of Persia kind to us, by reviving us so we could rebuild the Temple of our God and repair its ruined state, and by giving us a wall of protection around Judah and Jerusalem.

But now, our God, what do we have to say for ourselves after all this? For we have given up following your commands that you gave through your servants the prophets, telling us, ‘The land you are entering to become its owners is contaminated by the sins of its peoples, the disgusting religious practices that they have filled it with, from one side to the other. So do not let your daughters marry their sons, or allow their daughters marry your sons. Never make a peace or friendship treaty with them, so that you may live well and eat the good food the land produces, and give the land as an inheritance to your children forever.’

Now that we are receiving all this punishment because of our sinful actions and our terrible guilt—though you, our God, have not punished us as much as our sins deserve, and have still given us this remnant — shall we break your commandments once again and intermarry with the peoples who commit these disgusting religious practices? Wouldn't you become so angry with us that you would destroy us? No remnant would be left, not a single survivor. Lord, God of Israel, you do what is right. Today we're all that is left, a remnant. We are before you in our guilt, but no one can stand before you because of it.”

As Ezra was praying and confessing sins, weeping and falling down on his face before God's Temple, a very large crowd of Israelites, men, women, and children, gathered around him. The people were weeping bitterly as well. Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, an Elamite, said to Ezra: “Yes, we have been unfaithful to our God because we have married foreign women from the people of the land. But even so there is still hope for Israel over this. Let us make a solemn agreement right now before our God that we will send away all the foreign wives and their children. We will follow the directions given by you and those who respect the instructions of our God, carried out according to the Law. Take action! It's your responsibility. We are with you. Be brave and do it!”

So Ezra stood up and made the leading priests, Levites, and all the Israelites present take an oath to act on what had just been said. They all took the oath. Then Ezra left them in front of God's Temple, and went to the room of Jehohanan, son of Eliashib. During the time he stayed there, he didn't eat or drink anything, because he was still mourning the unfaithfulness of the exiles.

Then a proclamation was issued throughout Judah and Jerusalem that all the exiles should assemble in Jerusalem. Anyone who did not come within three days would have all their property confiscated, and would be banned from the assembly of the exiles. This was the decision of the leaders and elders.

Within three days, everyone from Judah and Benjamin assembled in Jerusalem. On the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people sat in the square beside God's Temple, shivering because of this issue and also because of the heavy rain. Ezra the priest stood up and told them, "You have committed sin by marrying foreign women, making Israel's guilt even worse. Now you must confess your sin to the Lord, the God of your forefathers, and do what he requires. Sever your connections with the people of the land and your foreign wives."

The whole assembly answered in a loud voice: "We agree, and we promise to do as you say! But there are a lot of people here, and it's pouring with rain. We can't stay outside. More to the point, this isn't something that can be fixed in one or two days, for we have sinned extremely seriously in this. Let our leaders act on behalf of the whole assembly. Then let every man in each of our towns who has married a foreign woman be given an appointment to come and meet, together with the elders and judges of that town, until our God is no longer angry with us over this."

The only ones to oppose this were Jonathan, son of Asahel, and Jahzeiah, son of Tikvah, supported by Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite.

So this what the exiles did, selecting Ezra the priest and family leaders, according to their family divisions, all of them specifically named. On the first day of the tenth month they sat down to begin the inquiry, and by the first day of the first month they had finished handling all the cases of men who had married foreign women.

Among the descendants of the priests, the following had married foreign women: from the sons of Jeshua son of Jozadak, and his brothers Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. They vowed to send their wives away, and they presented a ram from the flock as a guilt offering for their guilt.

From the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.

From the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uzziah.

From the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

Among the Levites: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (or Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

Among the singers: Eliashib. Among the gatekeepers: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

Among the Israelites: From the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Hashabiah, and Benaiah.

From the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah.

From the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza.

From the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai.

From the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adaiah, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth.

From the sons of Pahath-moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh.

From the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah.

From the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

From the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

From the sons of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Adaiah, Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph.

From the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

All of these men listed had married foreign women. They divorced them and sent them away with their children.

Nehemiah

Book of Nehemiah

This is the account of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah. In the month of Kislev, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, I was in the fortress at Susa. Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men. I asked them about the remnant of the Jewish exiles who had returned from captivity, and also about Jerusalem.

They told me, “The remnant who are left from the exile are there in the province, but they are having a great deal of trouble and feel humiliated. Jerusalem's walls have been knocked over, and its gates burned down.”

When I heard the news, I sat down, weeping and mourning for days, fasting and praying to the God of heaven.

Then I prayed, “Please, Lord God of heaven—the great and awesome God who keeps his agreement of trustworthy love with those who love him and keep his commandments— please listen and focus your attention on the prayer of your servant that I am praying to you now, day and night, on behalf of your servants, the Israelites. I confess the sins that we Israelites have committed against you, including my own sins and those of my family. We have done terrible things to offend you and we have not kept the commandments, laws, and regulations that you gave to your servant Moses.

Please remember what you told Moses when you said, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you come back to me and follow my commandments and obey them, then even if you are exiled to the ends of the earth, I will gather them together and bring them to the place I have chosen where I will be honored. They are your servants and our people. You saved them by your great power and incredible ability. Lord, please respond to my prayer and to the prayers of those who love to worship you. Please let me be successful today and make the king sympathetic to me.’” I was the king's cupbearer.

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes' reign, when the wine was brought in for him, I picked it up and gave it to the king. I had never before appeared before him looking sad, so the king asked me, “Why are you looking so sad, even though you don't seem to be sick? You must be really upset.” I was absolutely terrified, but I replied to the king, “Long live the king! How can I help being sad? The city where my forefathers are buried is in ruins, and its gates have been burned down.”

“So what do you want?” the king asked me.

I prayed to the God of heaven, and answered the king, “If it pleases Your Majesty, and if you are happy with me, I request you send me to Judah, to the city where my forefathers are buried, so I can rebuild it.”

The king, with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you come back?” The king agreed to send me, and I told him how long I would be gone.

I also asked him, “If it pleases Your Majesty, let letters be provided to give to the governors west of the Euphrates, so that they will allow me to pass safely until I reach Judah. May I also have a letter for Asaph, warden of the king's forest, so he can give me timber to make beams for the gates of Temple fortress, for the city walls, and for the house I will live in.” Because my gracious God was upon me, the king gave me what I asked.

Then I went to the governors of the province west of the Euphrates and gave them the king's letters. The king also sent a military escort of cavalry with me. But when Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were upset. For them this was a total disaster—that someone had arrived to help out the Israelites.

I arrived in Jerusalem and rested for three days. Then I got up during the night and went out with just a few men. I didn't explain to anyone what my God had put in my head to do for Jerusalem. I only took one horse to ride. So I rode in the dark through the Valley Gate toward the Spring of the Serpent and the Refuse Gate, and I inspected Jerusalem's walls that had been knocked over and the gates that had been burned down. Then I continued on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but we couldn't get through as there wasn't enough room to pass. So I went up along the valley in the dark and inspected the wall. Then I returned, going back through the Valley Gate.

Those in charge of the city had no idea where I had gone or what I was doing, because I hadn't yet told the Jews, priests, nobles, or officials or any others about the construction plans.

Then I said to them, “Look at the trouble we're in! Jerusalem is a heap of rubble, and its gates have been burned down. Come on, let's rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, so that we won't be so ashamed any more.” Then I explained to them how good God had been to me, and what the king had told me.

“Let's get on with the rebuilding,” they replied, and they set to work enthusiastically.

But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official, and Geshem the Arab got to hear about it, they mocked and taunted us, asking, “What are you up to? Are you rebelling against the king?”

But I replied, telling them, “The God of heaven, he will make sure we're successful. We, his servants, will begin rebuilding, but Jerusalem doesn't belong to you, and you have no authority over it or claim to it.”

Eliashib the high priest and other priests with him began rebuilding at the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set up its doors. Then they continued building as far as the Tower of the Hundred and the Tower of Hananel and dedicated it. The men of Jericho built the section next to Eliashib, and Zaccur, son of Imri, built the one after.

The Fish Gate was rebuilt by the sons of Hassenaah. They laid its beams and set up its doors, together with its bolts and bars. The next section was repaired by Meremoth, son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz; next to him, was Meshullam, son of Berechiah, son of Meshezabel; and next to him, Zadok, son of Baana. Next were the

Tekoites, but their nobles refused to do manual work under a supervisor.

The Old Gate was repaired by Joiada, son of Paseah and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and set up its doors, together with its bolts and bars. Next were Melatiah the Gibeonite, Jadon the Meronothite, and the men of Gibeon and Mizpah, who were under the jurisdiction of the governor of the province west of the Euphrates.

Next was Uzziel, son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths; and next to him was Hananiah, son of the perfumer. They strengthened Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. Next was Rephaiah, son of Hur, ruler of a Jerusalem half-district. Next was Jedaiah, son of Harumaph, who made repairs opposite his house. Next was Hattush, son of Hashabneiah. Malchijah, son of Harim, and Hasshub, son of Pahath-moab, worked on another section, as well as the Tower of the Ovens. Next was Shallum, son of Hallohesh, ruler of a Jerusalem half-district, helped by his daughters.

The Valley Gate was repaired by Hanun and the people who lived in Zanoah. They rebuilt it, set up its doors, together with its bolts and bars, and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall up to the Refuse Gate. The Refuse Gate was repaired by Malchijah, son of Rechab, ruler of the district of Beth-haccherem, He rebuilt it and set up its doors, together with its bolts and bars.

The Fountain Gate was repaired by Shallun, son of Col-hozeh, ruler of the Mizpah district. He rebuilt it, put a roof on it, set up its doors, together with its bolts and bars. He rebuilt the wall of the Pool of Shelah by the king's garden, as far as the steps that go down from the City of David. Past him, Nehemiah, son of Azbuk, ruler of a Beth-zur half-district, repaired up to a point opposite David's cemetery, as far as the man-made pool and the House of the Mighty Warriors.

Next were the Levites under Rehum son of Bani, and next was Hashabiah, ruler of Keilah half-district, who made repairs on behalf of his district. Next to them were their neighbors under Binnui, son of Henadad, ruler of the other Keilah half-district. Next was Ezer, son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, who repaired another section opposite Armory Hill, where the wall turns. Next was Baruch, son of Zabbai, who worked hard repairing another section, from where the wall turns to the entrance of Eliashib the high priest's house. Next was Meremoth, son of Uriah, son of Hakkoz, who repaired another section, from the entrance of Eliashib the high priest's house to its end.

Next were repairs made by the priests from the surrounding area. Past them were Benjamin and Hasshub who made repairs in front of their house, and next to them, Azariah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house. Next was Binnui, son of Henadad, who repaired another section, from Azariah's house to where the wall turns and the corner. Palal, son of Uzai, worked opposite where the wall turns and the tower that extends from the upper palace, near the court of the guard. Next were Pedaiah, son of Parosh and the Temple servants that lived on the hill of Ophel who made repairs opposite the Water Gate toward the east and the tower that extends. Next were the Tekoites who repaired to another section opposite the great tower that extends to the wall of Ophel.

Above the Horse Gate, each of the priests made repairs opposite his own house. Next was Zadok, son of Immer, who worked opposite his house, and next was Shemaiah, son of Shecaniah, the guard at the East Gate. Next were Hananiah, son of Shelemiah, as well as Hanun, the sixth son of Zalaph, who repaired. Next was Meshullam, son of Berechiah, who made repairs opposite where he lived. Next was Malchijah, one of the goldsmiths, made repairs as far as the house of the Temple servants and the merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and as far as the room above the corner. The goldsmiths and merchants made repairs between the room above the corner and the Sheep Gate.

When Sanballat found out that we were rebuilding the wall, he was furious—really mad! He made fun of the Jews in front of his colleagues and the army of Samaria, saying, “What are these useless Jews trying to achieve? Do they think they can rebuild the wall? Are they going to offer sacrifices? Are they going to finish it in a day? Do they think they can re-use stones from piles of rubble and dirt, especially since they've all been burned?”

Tobiah the Ammonite, standing beside him, commented, “Even a fox walking on what they're building would knock down their wall of stones!”

I prayed, “Lord, please listen to us, because we are being treated with contempt. Rain down their insults on their own heads! Let them be taken away like plunder, prisoners in a foreign land! Don't forgive their guilt or blot out their sins, for they have made you angry in front of the builders.”

So we rebuilt the wall until it was all connected, reaching half its height, because the people were keen to work.

When Sanballat and Tobiah, and the Arabs, Ammonites, and Ashdodites, heard that the repair to the walls of Jerusalem was progressing and that the gaps were being filled in, they were furious. They all plotted together to come and attack Jerusalem and to throw everything into confusion. So we prayed to our God, and we had guards ready to defend against them day and night.

Then people of Judah started grumbling, saying, “The workmen are exhausted. There's just too much rubble to clear. We'll never be able to finish the wall.”

Our enemies were saying to themselves, “Before they know it, before they're aware of anything, we'll appear right in among them, kill them, and put a stop to what they're doing.”

The Jews who lived close by came and told us over and over again, “They're going to attack us from all directions!” So I positioned defenders behind the lowest, most vulnerable sections, of the wall. I had them take their positions by families, armed with their swords, spears, and bows.

After inspecting our defenses, I stood up and addressed the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people, saying, “Don't be afraid of them! Remember the Lord, who is powerful and formidable! Fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes!”

When our enemies discovered that we knew about their plan, and that God had foiled it, we all went back to our work on the wall. From then on, half of my men were doing the work while the other half were ready to fight, holding their spears, shields, bows, and armor. The leaders stood behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those carrying materials worked with one hand, holding a weapon in the other. All the builders carried a sword strapped to their side, and the trumpeter stood beside me.

Then I told the nobles, the officials, and the rest of the people: “We have a lot to do everywhere, so we're very spread out along the wall. Wherever you are and you hear the sound of the trumpet, run to join us there. Our God will fight for us!”

We went on working, with half of the men holding spears from dawn until the stars came out. I also told the people, “Everyone including servants must spend the night inside Jerusalem, so they can be on guard duty at night and work during the day.” During that time none of us changed our clothes—not me or my brothers or my men or the guards with me. Everyone carried their weapons at all times, even to go for water.

Around this time some people and their wives started a tremendous argument with the other Jews. They were complaining, “Our families are so large we need more food so we can eat and live.” Others added, “We've had to mortgage our fields, our vineyards, and our homes to buy food during the famine.” Still more said, “We've had to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. Even though we are the same people as our creditors and though our children are the same as their children, yet we are going to have to turn our sons and daughters into slaves. In fact some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we can't do anything about it, because our fields and our vineyards are now owned by others.”

I became very angry when I heard them protesting their grievances. I thought it over and then I went to argue with the nobles and officials, telling them, “You are charging your own brothers interest!” So I called a large meeting to deal with them.

There I told them, “We have done as much as we can to buy back our Jewish brothers who were sold to foreigners, but now you are selling your own brothers as slaves! Are you expecting to sell them back to us?” They kept quiet because they couldn't think of anything to say.

“What you're doing isn't right,” I told them. “Don't you think you should respect our God so that enemy nations don't criticize us? I, as well as my brothers and my men have been lending the people money and food. Please, let's stop this business of charging interest! Give them back right now their fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses, along with the one percent interest on the money, grain, new wine, and olive oil that you have been charging them.”

“We will give it back,” they replied, “and we won't demand anything more from them. We'll do as you say.” So I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials swear an oath that they'd do what they had promised.

I shook out the folds of my robe and said, “This is how my God will shake you out of your homes and out of your possessions if you don't keep your promise! If you don't, you'll be shaken out and end up with nothing!” Everyone there said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. The people did what they'd promised.

In addition to this, from the day King Artaxerxes appointed me as governor in the land of Judah, which was from his twentieth year until his thirty-second year, a total of twelve years, neither I nor my brothers ate the food which was allocated to the governor. But the governors before me had placed a heavy burden on the people, taking forty shekels of silver from them as well as food and wine. Their assistants also extorted the people. But because of my respect for God I didn't act like that.

I also made rebuilding the wall my top priority, and I assigned all my workers to help with that. We didn't acquire any land for ourselves. I had 150 Jews and officials eating at my table, as well as visitors from nearby countries. Every day I paid for one ox, six good sheep, and poultry. Every ten days I paid for a large supply of all kinds of wine. But I never demanded the governor's food allowance, because the people were already carrying a heavy burden. Please remember me positively, my God, for all that I've done for this people.

When Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and our other enemies heard that I had rebuilt the wall and there were no gaps left—though at that time I still had not put the doors into the gates— they sent a message to me, saying, “Come on, let's meet in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” But they intended to kill me.

So I sent messengers to tell them, “I'm busy with important work and I can't come down. Why should I stop what I'm doing and leave it to come and see you?”

They sent me the same message four times, and every time my reply was the same.

Sanballat sent me the same message the fifth time by his servant, who brought in his hand an open letter. The letter read: “People around are saying, and Geshem confirms it, that you and the Jews are planning a rebellion, and that's why you're building the wall. You also plan to become their king, so they say, and you have even arranged for prophets in Jerusalem to announce for you, ‘There is a king in Judah.’ The king will soon get to hear about this. So come, and let's talk this over.”

I replied, telling him, “Nothing's happening like you're saying! In fact you're just making it all up!”

They were all just trying to scare us, telling themselves, “They won't have the strength to work so it won't ever get finished.” But I prayed, now make me strong!

Later on, I went to Shemaiah's house (he was the son of Delaiah, son of Mehetabel) who had shut himself in his house. He said: “Come and meet me at the house of God inside the Temple. Then we can bolt the Temple doors shut because they are coming to kill you! They're coming to kill you tonight!”

I replied, “Should someone like me run away? Should someone like me go and hide in the Temple so I can survive? I'm not going!”

I thought about it and saw that God hadn't sent him, but that he had spoken this prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. They'd

hired him thinking I'd be scared into doing something wrong. Then they'd be able to point the finger and ruin my reputation. My God, remember Tobiah and Sanballat for doing this, and Noadiah the prophetess and the other prophets too who tried to frighten me.

The wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul. It took fifty-two days. When all our enemies found out they were frightened; all the nations around were very discouraged, for they recognized that this had been done by our God.

At that time the nobles of Judah were exchanging many letters with Tobiah, because many people in Judah had sworn an oath of loyalty to him as he was a son-in-law of Shecaniah, son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berechiah. They kept on telling me all the good things Tobiah was doing, and they reported to him what I said. Tobiah also sent letters to try and scare me.

Once the wall had been rebuilt and I had put up the doors, I appointed the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites. I put my brother Hanani in charge of Jerusalem, together with Hananiah the commander of the fortress, because he was an honest man who respected God more than many others.

I told them, “Don't allow the gates of Jerusalem to be opened until the sun is hot, and make sure the guards shut and bolt the doors while they're still on duty. Appoint some of the residents of Jerusalem as guards, to be at their posts, standing in front of their own houses.”

In those times the city was large with plenty of space, but there weren't many people in it, and the houses hadn't been rebuilt. My God encouraged me to have everyone—the nobles, the officials, and the people—all come to be registered according to their family genealogy. I found the genealogical register of those who had returned first. This is what I discovered written there.

This is a list of the people of the province who returned from the captivity. These were the exiles who had been taken away to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, to their home towns. They were led by Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah.

This is the number of men of the people of Israel: The sons of Parosh, 2,172; the sons of Shephatiah, 372; the sons of Arah, 652; the sons of Pahath-moab (the sons of Jeshua and Joab), 2,818; the sons of Elam, 1,254; The sons of Zattu, 845; the sons of Zaccai, 760; the sons of Binnui, 648; the sons of Bebai, 628; the sons of Azgad, 2,322; the sons of Adonikam, 667; the sons of Bigvai, 2,067. The sons of Adin, 655. The sons of Ater (sons of Hezekiah), 98; the sons of Hashum, 328; the sons of Bezai, 324; the sons of Hariph, 112; the sons of Gibeon, 95; the people from Bethlehem and Netophah, 188; the people from Anathoth, 128; the people from Beth-azmaveth 42; the people from Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, 743; the people from Ramah and Geba, 621; the people from Michmas, 122; the people from Bethel and Ai, 123; the people from the other Nebo, 52; the sons of the other Elam, 1,254; the sons of Harim, 320; the sons of Jericho, 345; the sons of Lod, Hadid and Ono, 721; the sons of Senaah, 3,930.

This is the number of the priests: the sons of Jedaiah (through the family of Jeshua), 973; the sons of Immer, 1,052; the sons of Pashhur, 1,247; the sons of Harim, 1,017.

This is the number of the Levites: the sons of Jeshua through Kadmiel (sons of Hodaviah), 74; the singers of the sons of Asaph, 148; the gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai, 138.

The descendants of these Temple servants: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Sia, Padon, Lebanah, Hagabah, Shalmai, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Meunim, Nephusim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Neziah, and Hatipha.

The descendants of King Solomon's servants: Sotai, Sophereth, Perida, Jaala, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim and Amon. The total of the Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants was 392.

Those who came from the towns of Tel-melah, Telharsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer could not prove their family genealogy, or even that they were descendants of Israel. They included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda, 642 in total.

In addition there were three priestly families, sons of Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai. (Barzillai had married a woman descended from Barzillai of Gilead, and he was called by that name.) They searched for a record of them in the genealogies, but their names weren't found, so they were barred from serving as priests. The governor instructed them not to eat anything from the sanctuary sacrifices until a priest could ask the Lord about the issue by using the Urim and Thummim.

The total number of people returning was 42,360. In addition there were 7,337 servants and 245 male and female singers. They had 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

Some of the family leaders made voluntary contributions toward the work. The governor presented to the treasury 1,000 gold darics, 50 bowls and 530 sets of clothes for the priests. Some of the family leaders donated to the treasury for the work 20,000 darics of gold and 2,200 minas of silver. The rest of the people donated 20,000 gold darics, 2,000 minas of silver, and 67 sets of clothes for the priests.

The priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, and Temple servants, as well as some of the people and the rest of the Israelites, went back to live in their specific towns. By the seventh month the Israelites were living in their towns,

and the people gathered together as one in the square beside the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had ordered Israel to follow.

On the first day of the seventh month, Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly—men and women, and all those children who could listen and understand. He read from it in front of the square before the Water Gate from early morning till noon to everyone there, the men and the women and those who

could understand. All the people listened carefully to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden stage built for this event. On his right side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, and on his left Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book while they were all watching because the whole crowd could see him. When he opened it they all stood up.

Ezra praised the Lord, the great God, and everyone answered, “Amen! Amen!” as they lifted up their hands. Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were the Levites present, explained the Law to the people as they remained standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making clear the meaning so that the people could understand what it said.

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were teaching the people told them all, “This is a holy day to the Lord your God. Don't mourn or cry,” for everyone was crying as they heard the Law being read.

Nehemiah went on, “Go and enjoy some good food and sweet drinks, and share some with those who don't have anything ready, because today is a special, holy day to our Lord. Don't be sad, for your strength comes from the Lord who makes you happy.”

The Levites too were quieting everyone down, telling them, “Don't cry! This is a holy day and you shouldn't be sad.”

Then everyone went away to eat and drink, and to share their food. They celebrated happily because now they understood the Law as it had been explained to them.

The next day family leaders of all the people, as well as the priests and Levites, joined with Ezra the scribe to study the Law in more depth. They discovered written in the Law the Lord had ordered to be observed through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in shelters during the festival of the seventh month. They were to make an announcement in all their towns and in Jerusalem, saying, “Go into the hills and bring back branches of olive, wild olive, myrtle, palm, and other leafy trees, to make shelters to live in, as the Law requires.”

So they went out and brought back branches and made shelters for themselves on the roofs of their houses, in their courtyards, in the courtyards of God's Temple, and in the squares near the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. Everyone who came back from exile made shelters and stayed in them. They had not celebrated like this since the time of Joshua, son of Nun. Everyone was very happy.

Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God every day, from the first day to the last. The Israelites observed the festival for seven days, and on the eighth day they met together in assembly, as the Law required.

On the twenty-fourth day of this same month, the Israelites met together, fasting and wearing sackcloth, with dust on their heads. Those of Israelite ancestry separated themselves from the foreigners, and stood to confess their sins and those of their forefathers. They spent three hours standing there reading the Book of the Law of the Lord their God, and another three hours confessing their sins and worshiping the Lord their God. The Levites stood on the stage and called out loudly to the Lord their God. (Their names were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani.)

Then the Levites announced: “Stand up and praise the Lord your God who lives eternally: ‘May who you are and your glory be blessed, and may you be lifted up above all blessing and praise.’” (The names of the Levites were Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah.)

They prayed, “Only you are the Lord. It was you who made the sky, the heavens with all their stars, the land and everything on it, the seas and everything in them. You give life to all of them, and all the heavenly beings worship you.

You are the Lord, the God who chose Abram, who led him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You knew he would be faithful to you, and made an agreement with him to give him and his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites. You kept your promise, because you do what is right.

You saw how much our forefathers were suffering in Egypt. You heard their cries for help at the Red Sea. You performed miraculous signs and wonders against Pharaoh, all his officials, and all his people of his land, for you recognized how arrogantly they treated our forefathers. You created a wonderful reputation for yourself that people still recognize to this day. You split the sea apart in front of them so that they could walk through it on dry ground. But you threw their pursuers into the depths of the sea, like stones thrown into raging waters.

You led them with a column of cloud during the day, and a column of fire at night, showing them the way which they should go. You descended on Mount Sinai. You spoke to them from heaven. You gave them right ways to live, true laws, and good regulations and commandments. You explained your holy Sabbath to them. You gave them commandments and regulations and laws through your servant Moses. When they were hungry you gave them bread from heaven, and when they were thirsty you brought water out of the rock for them. You told them to go and take ownership of the land which you had sworn to give them.

But they and our forefathers acted arrogantly and became stubborn, and didn't pay attention to your commands. They refused to listen to you, and forgot about all the miracles you did for them. They became obstinate and decided to choose themselves a leader to take them back to slavery in Egypt.

But you are a forgiving God, gracious and merciful, slow to get angry, and full of trustworthy love. You did not give up on them, even when they made themselves a metal calf and said, ‘This is your god who led you out of Egypt,’ and committed terrible blasphemies.

But you because you are so merciful didn't abandon them in the desert. The column of cloud didn't stop guiding them during the day, and the column of fire continued to light their way at night. You gave your good Spirit to teach them. You did not stop feeding them with your manna, and you gave them water when they were thirsty. You took care of them for forty years in the desert. Their clothes didn't wear out, they didn't want for anything. Their feet didn't even swell up!

You gave them kingdoms and nations; you assigned their borders. They took control of the land of Sihon, king of Heshbon, and of Og, king of Bashan. You made their descendants as countless as the stars of heaven, and led them to the land you had promised their fathers they would enter and possess. Their descendants went in and took over the land. Right in front of them you conquered the Canaanites who lived there, handing over their kings and people so they could do with them whatever they wanted. They captured fortified cities and fertile land. They took over houses full of valuable things, water cisterns, vineyards, olive groves, and many fruit trees. They ate until they were full, and grew fat. They were so happy at how good you were to them.

But they completely rebelled against you. They tossed your Law over their shoulders. They killed your prophets who warned them to try and bring them back to you, and they committed terrible blasphemies. So you handed them over to their enemies who treated them badly. In their suffering they cried out to you for help.

But you heard their cries from heaven, and because you're so merciful you sent them leaders to save them from their enemies.

However, as soon as they had peace, they went back to doing evil in your sight. So once more you handed them over to their enemies, who dominated them. They came back to you, and they cried out to you again.

But you heard from heaven once more, and you saved them time and again because you are so merciful. You warned them to come back to your Law, but they were arrogant. They ignored your commands, and sinned against your rules, which, as you previously said, 'If people obey they will live by them.' They obstinately turned their backs on you and refused to listen. You were patient with them for many years. You warned them by your Spirit through your prophets, but they didn't listen, so you handed them over to the other nations. But because of your wonderful mercy you did not finish with them, and you did not abandon them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

So now, our God, the great and powerful and awesome God who keeps his agreement of trustworthy love, please don't see as unimportant all the hardships that have happened to us, and to our kings and leaders, our priests and prophets, our forefathers and all your people, from the time of the Assyrian kings of Assyria up till now.

But you have done what is right regarding everything that has happened to us. You have always acted faithfully, while we have done so much evil. Our kings, our leaders, our priests, and our forefathers did not follow your Law, and they ignored your commands and regulations you ordered them to keep.

But they, even during the time they had their own kingdom, with so many blessings you had given them in the wide and fertile land you had provided for them, even then they refused to serve you and would not turn from their evil ways.

Look at us now, slaves in the land you gave our forefathers to enjoy its fruit and all its good things. Look at us slaves here! The rich harvests of this land go to the kings you have placed over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and our cattle, doing whatever they want. We are suffering so much!"

In response the people declared, "Considering all this, we are making a solemn agreement, putting it in writing. It is sealed by our leaders, Levites, and priests."

The document was sealed by: Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah.

Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malchijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah. These were the priests.

The Levites: Jeshua, son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel, and these other Levites: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

The leaders of the people: Parosh, Pahath-moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea, Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

The rest of the people, including the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, and Temple servants, and everyone who had separated themselves from the people of the land to keep the Law of God, as well as their wives and all their sons and daughters who were old enough to understand, joined the leaders in swearing an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God, to pay attention to and carry out all the commands of the Lord our God, his rules and regulations.

"We promise not to allow our daughters to marry the people of the land, and not to allow our sons to marry their daughters. When the people of the land bring goods and all kinds of food to sell on the holy Sabbath, we will not buy anything from them on the Sabbath or on other holy days. Every seventh year we will leave the land to rest, and we will cancel all debts.

We accept the obligation to pay one third of a shekel for the operation of the Temple of God, for the showbread, for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings, for the Sabbath offerings, for the new moon and yearly festivals, for the holy offerings, for the sin offerings to make atonement for Israel, in short all that takes place in the Temple of our God.

We have allocated by lot among the priests, Levites, and the people, to determine who will bring wood to the Temple of our God to burn on the altar of the Lord

our God at specific times during the year, as required by the Law.

We also promise to bring the first part of the produce from our fields and from every fruit tree to the Lord's Temple every year. We will bring the firstborn of our sons and of our livestock and of our herds and flocks to the Temple of our God, to the priests who minister there, as required by the Law. We will bring to the storerooms of the Temple of our God, to the priests, the first part of our coarse-ground flour, of our grain offerings, of the fruit of all our trees, and of our new wine and olive oil. We will also bring a tithe of our produce to the Levites, for the Levites are the ones who collect the tithes in all the farming towns.

A priest descended from Aaron will accompany the Levites when they collect the tithe, and the Levites are to bring a tithe of these tithes to the rooms of the storehouse in the Temple of our God.

The people of Israel and the Levites are to bring the offerings of grain, new wine, and olive oil to the storerooms where the sanctuary objects are kept, where the ministering priests, the gatekeepers, and the singers are. We will not forget the Temple of our God."

The leaders of the people were already living in Jerusalem. The rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of ten to come and live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the other nine would stay in their own cities. Everyone praised those who were willing to move to Jerusalem.

This is a list of the leaders of the province who came to live in Jerusalem. (Most of the Israelites lived on their own property in the towns of Judah. This included the priests, the Levites, the Temple servants, and the descendants of Solomon's servants who lived in their home towns. However, some of the people of Judah and Benjamin moved to Jerusalem.)

From the tribe of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of the sons of Perez; and Maaseiah, son of Baruch, son of Col-hozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. The total of the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem was 468 men of ability.

From the tribe of Benjamin: Sallu, son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiah, and after him Gabbai and Sallai, a total of 928. Joel son of Zichri was the officer in charge of them, and Judah son of Hassenuah was in second-in-command of the city.

From the priests: Jedaiah, son of Joiarib, Jachin; Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, chief administrator of the Temple of God, and their fellow priests who served at the Temple, a total of 822; Adaiah son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malchijah, and those who worked with him, family leaders, a total of 242; and Amashsai, son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer, and those who worked with him, a total of 128 strong warriors. Zabdiel, son of Haggedolim, was in charge of them.

From the Levites: Shemaiah, son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni; and Shabbethai and Jozabad, Levite leaders who were in charge of the outside work of God's Temple; Mattaniah, son of Mica, son of Zabdi, son of Asaph, who led out in giving thanks and praise; and Bakbukiah, who was second; and Abda, son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun. The total number of priests in the holy city was 284.

The gatekeepers: Akkub, Talmon, and their fellow workers, who guarded the gates: a total of 172.

The other Israelites, with rest of the priests and Levites, lived in their home towns in Judah, each on their own property.

The Temple servants lived on the hill of Ophel. Ziha and Gishpa were in charge of them.

The one in charge of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi, son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica, one of Asaph's descendants, the singers who led the service in God's Temple. They had specific orders from the king who had instructed them to perform a daily service.

Pethahiah, son of Meshezabel, a descendant of Zerah, son of Judah, was the king's advisor on all things relating to the Israelites.

Regarding the villages with their nearby fields: some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-arba, Dibon, and Jekabzeel, and their smaller settlements; in Jeshua, Moladah, and Beth-pelet; in Hazar-shual, in Beersheba with its settlements, in Ziklag, in Mekonah and its settlements, in En-rimmon, in Zorah, in Jarmuth, Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, and Azekah and its settlements. They lived all the way from Beersheba to the Valley of Hinnom.

The people of Benjamin from Geba lived in Michmash, Aija, and Bethel and its settlements, in Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, Ono, and in the Valley of Craftsmen. Some divisions of the Levites of Judah also settled in Benjamin.

This is a list of the priests and Levites who came back with Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the high priest: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethon, Abijah, Miniamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, and Jedaiah. These were the leaders of the priests and their relatives in Jeshua's time.

The Levites were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his fellow Levites was in charge of the songs of praise. Two other Levites, Bakbukiah and Unni, stood opposite them in the service.

Jeshua the high priest was the father of Joiakim, who was the father of Eliashib, who was the father of Joiada, who was the father of Jonathan, who was the father of Jaddua.

In Joiakim's time, these were the family leaders of the priests: of the family of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah; of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan; of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; of Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin and of Moadiah, Piltai; of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; of Joiarib, Mattenai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi;

of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel.

The family leaders of the Levites in the time of Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua, in addition to those of the priests, were recorded during the reign of Darius the Persian. As for the genealogy of the sons of Levi, the family leaders up to the time of Johanan, son of Eliashib, were listed in the Book of the Records. The Levite leaders were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua, son of Kadmiel, together with their fellow Levites, who stood opposite them, each section giving praise and thanks and responding to one another, as arranged by David, the man of God. They were joined by Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, and Obadiah.

Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers who guarded the storehouses at the gates. They served in the time of Joiakim, son of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and in the time of Nehemiah the governor and Ezra the priest and scribe.

In order to dedicate the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were called from everywhere they were living to come to Jerusalem and celebrate with joy the dedication with songs of praise and thanks, accompanied by cymbals, harps, and lyres. The singers were also brought in from the area around Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites, as well as from Beth-gilgal and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves all around Jerusalem. Once the priests and the Levites had purified themselves, they purified the people, the gates, and the wall.

I had the leaders of Judah go up on the wall, and arranged for two large choirs to give thanks. One group went to right along the wall to the Refuse Gate. Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, as well as some of the priests with trumpets, and Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, and his fellow priests, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, along with the musical instruments as required by David, the man of God. Ezra the scribe led them. At the Fountain Gate they headed straight up by the stairs of the city of David, where the wall goes uphill, above the house of David, and on to the Water Gate on the east.

The other choir group went in the opposite direction. I followed them, along with half the people, on the wall passing the Tower of the Ovens, on to the Broad Wall, over the Ephraim Gate, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel, and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate, stopping at the Guard Gate.

Both thanksgiving choirs then took their places in God's Temple. I followed with the group of leaders that was with me, along with the priests blowing their trumpets: Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah. Then came the singers Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer, and the choirs sang, directed by Jezrahiah.

Many sacrifices were offered that day, celebrating that God had brought them so much happiness, tremendous happiness. The women and children also celebrated, and the sounds of joy in Jerusalem could be heard far away.

On the same day men were put in charge over the storerooms that contained the offerings, the first part of the crops, and tithes. What was allocated by the Law for the priests and Levites was brought into these storerooms from the fields around the towns, because all the people of Judah were happy for the service of the priests and Levites. They were responsible for the worship of their God and for the service of purification, along with the singers and gatekeepers, following the instructions of David and his son Solomon. For long ago, back in the time of David and Asaph, directors had been appointed for the singers and for the songs of praise and thanks to God. So in the time of Zerubbabel and of Nehemiah, everyone in Israel provided the daily food allowances for the singers and the gatekeepers. They also made sure to provide for the other Levites, and the Levites gave a share of this to the descendants of Aaron.

One day when the Book of Moses was being read to the people, the section was found where it was written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be allowed into the assembly of God, because they hadn't brought food and water when they met the Israelites, but instead they had hired Balaam to put a curse on them —though our God turned that curse into a blessing!

When the people heard about this law, they separated out from Israel everyone who had foreign ancestry.

Before all this, Eliashib the priest, who was related to Tobiah, had been put in charge of the storerooms of the Temple of our God. He had provided Tobiah with a large room which had previously been used to store the grain offerings, incense, and Temple items, as well as the tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil allocated to the Levites, singers, and gatekeepers, in addition to the offerings for the priests.

When all this happened I was not in Jerusalem because I had returned to King Artaxerxes of Babylon in the thirty-second year of his reign. Some time later I requested permission from the king to go back. When I arrived back in Jerusalem I discovered the dreadful thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courtyard of God's Temple. I was extremely upset, and I went and threw out everything that was in Tobiah's room. I ordered the rooms purified, and put back the Temple items, the grain offerings, and the incense.

I also found out that the food allowances for the Levites were not being provided, so the Levites had gone back to take care of their fields, along with the singers who led the worship services. I went and confronted the leaders, asking, “Why is God's Temple being neglected?” I called the Levites back and made sure they were carrying out their responsibilities. Everyone in Judah then brought the tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil into the storerooms.

I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and Pedaiah, one of the Levites, in charge of the storerooms with Hanan, son of Zakkur, son of Mattaniah, to assist them, because they were considered honest people.

Their responsibility was to distribute the allowances to their fellow Levites.

My God, please remember me over this. Please don't forget my good deeds I have done for the Temple of my God and its services.

Around that time I noticed people treading the winepress on Sabbath. I saw others collecting grain and loading it up on donkeys, along with wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of burdens, and bringing it all into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. I told them off for selling their produce on that day. Some people from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of things and they were selling them on the Sabbath to the people of Judah in Jerusalem.

I confronted the Jewish leaders, asking them, “Why are you doing such an evil thing? You are violating the Sabbath day! Wasn't this what your forefathers did, bringing our God down on us, causing us and this city such disasters? Now you're bringing even more trouble on us by violating the Sabbath!”

So I ordered Jerusalem's gates to be shut at sunset on the day before the Sabbath, and not to be opened until after the Sabbath had ended. I assigned some of my men to guard the gates to make sure no goods would be brought in on the Sabbath day.

A couple of times merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside of Jerusalem. I warned them, saying, “Why are you spending the night by the wall? If you do that again I'll have you arrested!” After that they didn't come on the Sabbath.

Then I told the Levites to purify themselves and to come and guard the gates to keep the Sabbath day holy. My God, please also remember me for doing this, and be merciful to me because of your trustworthy love.

Around the same time I realized some Jews had married women from Ashdod, Moab, and Ammon. Half their children could only speak the language of Ashdod or that of another people, and didn't know how to speak the language of Judah. So I confronted them and told them they were cursed. I beat some of them and pulled out their hair. Then I made them take an oath before God, saying, “You must not allow your daughters to marry their sons, or allow your sons—or yourselves—to marry their daughters. Wasn't it marriages like these that made King Solomon of Israel sin? There wasn't a king in any nation like him. God loved him, and God made him king over all Israel, but even he was made to sin by foreign women. So do we have to hear about you committing this dreadful sin, how you are being unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women?” Even one of the sons of Jehoiada, son of Eliashib the high priest, had become a son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite. So I expelled him.

My God, remember them and what they did, violating the priesthood and the solemn agreement of the priests and Levites. I purified them from everything foreign, and I made sure the priests and Levites were carrying out their assigned responsibilities. I also arranged for wood to be supplied for the altar at the specified times, and for the first part of the produce to be donated.

My God, remember me favorably.

Esther

Book of Esther

This is an account of what happened during the time of King Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. At the time King Xerxes was ruling from his royal throne at the fortress in Susa. In the third year of his reign he organized a feast for his officials and administrators. The army commanders of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the provincial officials were all there with him. He put on display his wealth and the glory of his kingdom, showing how majestic, splendid, and glorious he was, for 180 days.

After that the king gave a feast lasting for seven days for all the people, great and small, who were there in the fortress of Susa in the garden courtyard of the king's pavilion. It was decorated with white and blue cotton curtains tied with cords of fine linen and purple thread on silver rings, held up by marble pillars. Gold and silver couches were placed on a pavement made of purple porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and expensive stones. Drinks were served in golden goblets of different kinds, and the royal wine flowed freely because of the king's generosity. The king had ruled that there was to be no limit on how much a guest could drink; he had told his servants to give each guest whatever they wanted. Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women in the palace that belonged to King Xerxes.

On the seventh day of the feast, the king, feeling happy from drinking wine, ordered the seven eunuchs who were his attendants, Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Karkas, to bring Queen Vashti to him wearing her royal headdress, so he could show her beauty to the people and officials, for she was very good-looking. But when the eunuchs delivered the order from the king, Queen Vashti refused to come. The king became extremely angry—he was absolutely furious.

Then the king spoke with the wise men who would know what to do, for it was the custom for him to ask the opinion of experts in procedures and legal matters. Those closest to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. They were the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had frequent meetings with the king and had the highest positions in the kingdom.

"What does the law say should be done with Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She refused to obey the direct order of King Xerxes as delivered by the eunuchs!"

Memucan gave his answer before the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti hasn't just insulted the king but all the nobles and all the people of all the provinces of King Xerxes. Once it gets out what the queen has done, all wives will despise their husbands, looking down on them and telling them, 'King Xerxes ordered Queen Vashti brought to him but she didn't come!' By the end of the day, the wives of all the nobles throughout Persia and Media who have heard what the queen did will treat their noble husbands with angry contempt!

If it please Your Majesty, issue a royal decree, in accordance with the laws of Persia and Media which cannot be changed, that Vashti is banished from the presence of King Xerxes, and that Your Majesty will give her royal position to another, one who is better than her. When Your Majesty's decree is proclaimed throughout your vast empire, all wives will respect their husbands, highborn or lowborn."

This advice looked good to the king and the nobles, so the king did what Memucan had said. He sent letters to all provinces in the empire, in each province's script and language, that every man should rule his own home, and use his own mother tongue.

Later on, after all this had happened, King Xerxes' anger subsided and he thought about Vashti and what she'd done, and the decree issued against her. His advisors suggested to him, "Why not order a search to find beautiful young virgins for Your Majesty? Your Majesty should appoint officers in each province of his empire to gather all the beautiful young women and bring them to the king's harem at the fortress of Susa. They should be placed under the supervision of Hegai, the king's eunuch in charge of the women, and they should be given beauty treatments. The young woman the king finds most attractive can become queen in place of Vashti." The king thought this was a good idea, so he acted upon it.

There was a Jewish man living in the fortress of Susa named Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjamite who was among those taken prisoner with King Jehoiachin of Judah and carried into exile from Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He had brought up Hadassah (or Esther), his uncle's daughter, because she had no father or mother. The young woman had a beautiful figure and was very attractive. After her father and mother died, Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.

When the king's order and decree had been announced, many young women were brought to the fortress of Susa under the supervision of Hegai. Esther was also taken to the king's palace and placed under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women.

Esther caught his eye and he treated her favorably. He quickly arranged beauty treatments and special food for her. He also provided her with seven specially-chosen maids from the king's palace, and moved her and her maids to the best location in the harem.

Esther had not let anyone know her nationality or who her family was, because Mordecai had ordered her not to. Each day Mordecai spent time walking around in front of the courtyard of the harem so he could find out how Esther was doing and what was happening to her.

Before it was the turn of a young woman to go to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments for women that were required: six months with oil of myrrh, and six with perfumed oils and ointments. When it was time for the young woman to go to the king, she was given whatever she asked for to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go, and in the morning she would return to a different harem under the supervi-

sion of Shaashgaz, who was the king's eunuch in charge of the concubines. She would not go back to be with the king again unless he was particularly attracted to her and called for her by name.

(Esther was the daughter of Abihail, Mordecai's uncle. Mordecai had adopted her as his own daughter.) When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she didn't ask for anything to take with her except what Hegai advised. (He was the king's eunuch in charge of the women.) Esther was looked on with admiration by everybody.

Esther was taken to King Xerxes into his royal palace, in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. The king loved Esther more than all the other women. He treated her more favorably and with greater kindness than all of the other virgins. So he placed the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. The king gave a great feast for all his officials and administrators—Esther's feast. He also declared it a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed generous gifts.

Even though there had been a second gathering of virgins, and Mordecai had been given a position by the king, Esther still did not let anyone know about her family or her nationality, as Mordecai had ordered her. She followed Mordecai's instructions just as she did when he brought her up.

At that time, as Mordecai was doing his work at the palace gate, Bigthan and Teresh, two eunuchs who guarded the entrance to the king's rooms, became furious with King Xerxes and looked for a way to assassinate him. Mordecai found out about the plot and reported it to Queen Esther. Esther in turn told the king on Mordecai's behalf. When the plot was investigated and found to be true, both men were impaled on poles. This was recorded in the official Book of Records by order of the king.

Some time after this, King Xerxes honored Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, giving him a position higher than all his fellow officials. All the officials in royal employment bowed down and showed respect to Haman, for this is what the king had commanded. But Mordecai would not bow down and show respect to him. The king's officials asked Mordecai, “Why are you disobeying the king's command?” They talked to him about it day after day, but he refused to listen. So they told Haman about it to see if he would put up with what Mordecai was doing, for Mordecai had told them he was a Jew.

Haman was furious when he saw that Mordecai did not bow down and show respect to him. Having found out who Mordecai's people were, he dismissed the idea of just killing Mordecai. He decided to kill every Jew in the whole Persian Empire—all of Mordecai's people!

In the twelfth year of King Xerxes, in the first month, the month of Nisan, “pur” (meaning a “lot”) was cast in Haman's presence to choose a day and month, taking each day and each month one at a time. The lot fell on the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

Haman went to King Xerxes and said, “There's a particular people living among others in many different places throughout the provinces of your empire who cut themselves off from everybody else. They have their own laws which are different from those of any other people, and what's more, they don't obey the king's laws. So it's not a good idea for Your Majesty to ignore them.

If it please Your Majesty, issue a decree to destroy them, and I will personally contribute 10,000 silver talents to those who carry out the king's business to be placed in the royal treasury.”

The king took off his signet ring and handed it to Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. The king told Haman, “You can have the money, and do to the people whatever you want.”

On the thirteenth day of the first month the king's secretaries were summoned. A decree was issued in accordance with everything Haman demanded and sent to the king's chief officers, the governors of the different provinces and the nobles of the various peoples in the provinces. It was sent in the script of each province and in the language of every people, with the authorization of King Xerxes and sealed with his signet ring.

Letters were sent by messenger to all the provinces in the king's empire with orders to destroy, kill, and annihilate all Jews, young and old, women and children, and confiscate their possessions, all in one day—the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar.

A copy of the decree was to be issued as law in every province and publicized to the people so that they would be ready for the day. By order of the king the messengers hurried on their way. The decree was also issued in the fortress of Susa. The king and Haman sat down for a drink while the people in the city of Susa were very disturbed.

When Mordecai found out all that had happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and walked through the city, crying and wailing in grief. He went as far as the palace gate, because no one was allowed to enter the palace gate wearing sackcloth.

When the king's decree and orders reached all the different provinces the Jews began to mourn in terrible distress. They fasted, they wept, and they wailed; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her, and the queen was very upset. She sent clothes to Mordecai so he could take off his sackcloth, but he refused to accept them. She called Hathatch, one of the king's eunuchs assigned to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what he was doing and why.

Hathatch went to Mordecai in the city square in front of the palace gate. Mordecai explained to him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money that Haman had promised to pay the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the decree that had been issued in Susa for their destruction to show Esther and explain it to her, and asked him to instruct her to go to the king and appeal for mercy and plead before him for her people. Hathatch went back and told Esther what Mordecai had said.

Then Esther spoke with Hathatch and ordered him to deliver this message to Mordecai. “All the king's officials, and even the people in the provinces of the king's empire, know that any man or any woman who goes to the king, entering his inner court without being sum-

moned, is sentenced to death—that is the king's one law—unless the king holds out his golden scepter to them so they can live. In my case, I have not been called to go to the king for thirty days."

When Mordecai was told what Esther said, Mordecai sent a message back to Esther, saying, "Don't think that just because you live in the king's palace that your life is the only one that will be saved of all the Jews! If you stay silent right now, help and rescue will come to the Jews from some other place, and you and your relatives will die. Who knows—it could be you came to be queen for such a time as this!"

Esther replied to Mordecai, saying, "Have all the Jews in Susa meet together and fast for me. Don't eat or drink anything for three days and nights. I and my girls will also fast. After that, I will go to the king, even though it's against the law, and if I die, I die."

Mordecai went and did everything Esther had told him to do.

Three days later Esther put on her royal robes and went and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, opposite the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the king's hall, facing the entrance. When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the inner court she won his approval so he acted favorably by holding out his scepter to her. So Esther went over and touched the end of the scepter.

The king asked her, "What is it, Queen Esther? What do you want? I'll give it to you, as much as half my empire!"

Esther replied, "If it please Your Majesty, may the king and Haman come today to a dinner I have prepared for him."

"Bring Haman here at once so we can do what Esther has requested," the king ordered. The king and Haman went to the dinner that Esther had prepared.

As they drank their wine, the king asked Esther, "What are you really asking for? It will be given to you. What do you want? You shall have it, as much as half my empire!"

Esther answered, "This is what I'm asking for, and this is what I want. If the king looks on me favorably, and if it please Your Majesty to grant my request and do as I ask, may the king and Haman come to a dinner I will prepare for them. Tomorrow I will answer Your Majesty's question."

When Haman left that day he was very happy and pleased with himself. But when he saw Mordecai at the palace gate and that he didn't stand up or tremble with fear before him, Haman was furious with Mordecai. However, Haman controlled himself and he went home.

There he invited his friends over. Once they and his wife Zeresh had gathered, Haman went into great detail about how much money and possessions he had, and how many children, and how the king had made him so important by promoting him above all the other nobles and officials.

"Added to all that," Haman went on, "I was the only other person Queen Esther invited to come to a dinner she had prepared for the king. I'm also invited by her to eat together with the king tomorrow."

Then he said, "But all of this is worthless to me while I keep on seeing Mordecai the Jew sitting at the palace gate."

His wife Zeresh and his friends told him, "Arrange for a pole to be set up, fifty cubits high. Then, in the morning, go and ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on it. Afterwards, you'll be happy as you go with the king to the dinner." Haman thought this was good advice, so he had the pole set up.

That night the king wasn't able to sleep, so he ordered the Book of Records of the King's Reign brought in so it could be read to him. There he discovered the account of what Mordecai had reported about Bigthana and Teresh, the two king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers who had plotted to assassinate King Xerxes.

"What honor or position did Mordecai receive as a reward for doing this?" asked the king.

"Nothing has been done for him," replied the king's attendants.

"Who's here in the court?" the king asked. Haman had just happened to arrive in the outer court of the royal palace to ask the king to have Mordecai impaled on the pole he had set up for him.

The king's attendants told him, "Haman is waiting in the court." "Tell him to come in," the king ordered.

When Haman came in, the king asked him, "What should be done for a man the king wants to honor?" Haman said to himself, "Who would the king want to honor except me?"

So Haman said to the king, "A man whom the king wants to honor should be brought royal robes the king has worn, a horse the king has ridden and which has a royal headdress on its head. Have the robes and the horse handed over to one of the king's highest officials and nobles. Let him make sure the man the king wishes to honor is dressed in the royal robes and that he rides on the horse through the city streets, and have the official announce before him, 'This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor!'"

Then the king told Haman, "Right! Off you go! Quickly get the royal robes and the horse, and do just what you've said for Mordecai the Jew sitting at the palace gate. Don't leave out anything that you mentioned."

Haman went and got the robes and the horse. He dressed Mordecai and placed him on the horse, and led him through the streets of the city, shouting before him, "This is what is done for the man the king wishes to honor!" Mordecai went back to the palace gate, but Haman rushed home, crying and covering his head in shame.

Haman explained to his wife Zeresh and all his friends what had happened to him. These wise friends and his wife Zeresh told him, "If Mordecai is one of the Jewish people, and you have already begun to lose status before him—you won't be able to beat him! You're going to lose to him, you're going to fall!" While they were still talking to him, the king's eunuchs arrived and quickly took Haman to the dinner which Esther had prepared.

The king and Haman went to Queen Esther's dinner. At this second dinner, as they were drinking wine, the king asked Esther again, "What are you really

asking for, Queen Esther? It will be given to you. What do you want? You shall have it, as much as half my empire!"

Queen Esther answered, "If the king looks on me favorably, and if it please Your Majesty to grant me my life, that is my request; and the lives of my people, that is what I ask. For my people and I have been sold to be destroyed, killed, and annihilated. If we had only been sold as slaves, I would have kept quiet, because our suffering would not have justified disturbing the king."

The king asked Queen Esther, demanding to know, "Who is this? Where is the man who has dared to do this?"

"The man, the opponent, the enemy, is this evil Haman!" Esther replied. Haman shook with terror in front of the king and the queen.

The king was furious. He got up, leaving his wine, and went out into the palace garden. Haman stayed behind to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he realized the king planned an evil end for him. When the king came back in from the palace garden to the dining room, Haman had thrown himself on the couch where Queen Esther was.

The king shouted out, "Is he even going to rape the queen here in the palace, right in front of me?" As soon as the king said this, the servants covered Haman's face.

Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said: "Haman set up a pole beside his house for Mordecai, the one whose report saved the king's life. The pole is fifty cubits high."

"Impale him on it!" the king ordered.

So they impaled Haman on the pole that he had set up for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king died down.

That very day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the property that had belonged to Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Also, Mordecai came before the king, because Esther had explained who he was to her. The king removed his signet ring which he had taken back from Haman, and gave it to Mordecai. Esther put Mordecai in charge of Haman's property.

Esther went to speak to the king again, falling down at his feet and weeping, pleading with him to do away with the evil scheme of Haman the Agagite that he had thought up to destroy the Jews.

Once again the king held out the golden scepter to Esther. She got up and stood before him.

Esther said, "If it please Your Majesty, and if he looks on me favorably, and if the king believes it is the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be issued that revokes the letters sent out by Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, with his devious scheme to destroy the Jews in all the provinces of the king. For how can I bear to see the disaster about to fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?"

King Xerxes said to Esther the Queen and Mordecai the Jew, "Notice that I have given Haman's estate to Esther, and he was impaled on a pole because he wanted to kill the Jews. Now you may write an order regarding the Jews in whatever way you want, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's signet ring. For no decree written in the king's name and sealed with his signet ring can be revoked."

The king's secretaries were summoned, and on the twenty-third day of the third month, the month of Sivan, they wrote a decree of all of Mordecai's orders to the Jews and to the king's chief officers, the governors, and the nobles of the 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. They wrote to every province in its own script, to every people in their own language, and to the Jews in their own script and language. He wrote in the name of King Xerxes and sealed it with the king's signet ring. He sent the letters by messenger on horseback, who rode fast thoroughbred horses of the king.

The letters from the king authorized the Jews in every city to gather together in self-defense, and to destroy, kill, and annihilate any armed group of a people or province that might attack them, including women and children, and to confiscate their possessions. This was to happen on one day throughout all the provinces of King Xerxes, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar. A copy of the decree was to be issued as law in every province and publicized to the people so that the Jews would be ready on that day to pay back their enemies. By order of the king, the messengers riding the king's relay horses rushed out, hurrying on their way. The decree was also issued in the fortress of Susa.

Then Mordecai left the king, wearing royal clothes of blue and white, with a large golden crown and a purple robe made of fine linen. The city of Susa shouted with joy. For the Jews it was a bright time of happiness, joy, and respect. In every province and in every city, wherever the king's order and decree had reached, the Jews were joyful and happy—they feasted and celebrated. Many people became Jews, because they had become afraid of them.

On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the king's order and decree were to be carried out. That day the enemies of the Jews had thought they would crush them, but the exact opposite happened—the Jews crushed their enemies. The Jews gathered in their cities throughout the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those who wanted to destroy them. Nobody could oppose them, because all the other people were afraid of them. All the officials of the provinces, the chief officers, the governors, and the king's officials helped the Jews, because they were afraid of Mordecai. Mordecai had a great deal of power in the royal palace, and his reputation spread throughout the provinces as his power increased.

The Jews attacked their enemies with swords, killing and destroying them, and they did whatever they wanted to their enemies. In the fortress of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. This included Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha, the ten sons of Haman, son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews, but they did not take their possessions.

The same day, when the number of those killed in the fortress of Susa was reported to the king, he said to Queen Esther, "The Jews have killed and destroyed five hundred men in the fortress of Susa, including Haman's ten sons. Imagine what they've done in the rest of the royal provinces! Now what is it you'd like to ask? It

will be given to you. What more do you want? It will be granted."

"If it please Your Majesty," Esther replied, "allow the Jews in Susa to do the same tomorrow as they did today, following the decree. Also, let the ten sons of Haman be impaled on poles."

The king ordered this to be done. A decree was issued in Susa, and they impaled the bodies of Haman's ten sons. On the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, the Jews in Susa gathered together again and killed three hundred men there, but again they did not take their possessions.

The other Jews in the king's provinces also gathered to defend themselves and get rid of their enemies. They killed 75,000 who hated them, but did not touch their possessions.

This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made it a day of feasting and celebration. However, the Jews in Susa had gathered to fight on the thirteenth and the fourteenth days of the month. So they rested on the fifteenth day, and made that a day of feasting and celebration. To this day rural Jews, living in the villages, observe the fourteenth day of the month of Adar as a day of celebration and feasting, a holiday when they send gifts to one another.

Mordecai recorded these events and sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces ruled by King Xerxes, near and far, requiring them to celebrate every year the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar as the time when the Jews rested from their victory over their enemies, and as the month when their sadness was turned into joy and their mourning into a time of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

The Jews agreed to continue what they had already started doing, following what Mordecai had written to them. For Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted to destroy the Jews, and had cast "pur" (meaning a "lot") to crush and destroy them. But when it came to the king's attention, he sent out letters ordering that the evil scheme which Haman had planned against the Jews should rebound on him, and that he and his sons should be impaled on poles. (That's why these days are called Purim, from the word Pur.)

As a result of all the instructions in Mordecai's letter, and what they'd seen, and what had happened to them, the Jews committed themselves to adopt the practice that they and their descendants and all who join them should not forget to celebrate these two days as set down, and at the right time every year. These days were to be remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim would always be observed among the Jews, and they would not be forgotten by their descendants.

Then Queen Esther, the daughter of Abihail, wrote a letter, along with Mordecai the Jew, giving in her letter full authority to Mordecai's letter about Purim. Letters expressing peace and reassurance were also sent to all the Jews in the 127 provinces of the empire of King Xerxes. They established these days of Purim at their given time as Mordecai the Jew and Queen Esther had ordered, committing themselves and their descendants to the times of fasting and mourning. In this way Esther's decree confirmed these practices regarding Purim, which were entered in the official record.

King Xerxes imposed taxes throughout the empire, even to its most distant shores. All he accomplished through his power and strength, as well as the complete account of the high position to which the king promoted Mordecai, are written down in the Book of the Records of the kings of Media and Persia. For Mordecai the Jew was second-in-command to King Xerxes, leader of the Jews and highly-respected in the Jewish community, he worked to help his people and improve the security of all Jews.

Job

Book of Job

Once there was a man called Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was a man of integrity who did what was right. He respected God and avoided evil. He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred teams of oxen, and five hundred female donkeys, as well as many servants. He was more wealthy than anyone else in the East.

Job's sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes on their specific day, also inviting their sisters to come and eat and drink with them. When the days of feasting were over, Job would send for them and purify them by getting up early in the morning to offer a burnt offering for each of them. He was concerned, thinking to himself, "Maybe my children have sinned in some way and have unintentionally offended God." This is what Job always did.

One day the angels came to present themselves to the Lord, and Satan came with them. The Lord asked Satan, "What have you been doing?"

"Traveling around on earth, going here and there," Satan replied.

"Have you paid attention to Job, my servant?" asked the Lord. "There's no one like him on earth, a man of integrity who does what is right, who respects God and avoids evil."

"Is it for nothing that Job respects God?" Satan answered. "You've placed a protective fence around him and his family—in fact around everything he has. You have blessed everything he does. His flocks and herds have increased so much they fill the whole land! But if you reach out and take everything he has, he will definitely curse you to your face."

The Lord told Satan, "Very well, you have the power to do whatever you want to everything he has, but don't hurt him physically." Then Satan left the Lord's presence.

The day came when while Job's sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and told him, "As the oxen were plowing and female donkeys were grazing nearby, the Sabeans attacked and took them, killing the herdsmen. Only I escaped to bring you this news."

While he was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and set the sheep and shepherds on fire and burned them up. Only I escaped to bring you this news."

While he was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, "Three armed companies of Chaldeans attacked the camels and took them, killing the herdsmen. Only I escaped to bring you this news."

While he was still speaking another messenger arrived and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of their eldest brother when all of a sudden a tremendous wind came in from the desert. It hit the house on all four sides so that it collapsed on them and they died. Only I escaped to bring you this news."

Then Job stood up and tore his robe. Then cut off his hair and fell to the ground in worship. "I was naked when I came out of my mother's womb, and I shall be naked when I leave," he said. "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. May the Lord's name be honored."

In all of this Job did not sin, nor blame God.

One day the heavenly beings came to present themselves to the Lord, and Satan came with them to present himself to the Lord. The Lord asked Satan, "What have you been doing?"

"Traveling around on earth, going here and there," Satan replied.

"Have you noticed my servant Job?" asked the Lord. "There's no one like him on earth, a man of integrity who does what is right, who respects God and avoids evil. And he has kept his integrity, even though you wanted me to harm him for no reason."

"Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give up everything to save his life. But reach out and hurt his bones and his flesh, and he will definitely curse you to your face."

So the Lord said to Satan, "Very well, you have the power to do whatever you want to him, but don't kill him." Then Satan left the Lord's presence and inflicted Job with horrible skin sores from the bottom of his feet to the top of his head. Job picked up a piece of broken pottery to scratch himself as he sat in ashes. His wife said to him, "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"

But he told her, "You're talking just like any foolish woman would! Should we receive only good from God, and not evil?" Despite all this, Job said nothing sinful.

When three of Job's friends heard of all the trouble that had happened to him, they each left their homes: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite. They met together and went to comfort and console him. When they saw Job from a distance they hardly recognized him. They broke out into loud wailing, tore their robes, and threw dust into the air over their heads. They sat down on the ground with him for seven days and seven nights. None of them said anything to him because they saw how badly he was suffering.

After this Job began speaking, cursing the day of his birth. He said, "Wipe out the day I was born, and the night when it was announced that a boy had been conceived. Turn that day to darkness. God above should not remember it. Don't let light shine on it. Take it back, darkness and death-shadow. A black cloud should overshadow it. It should be as terrifying as the darkness of an eclipse during the day. Blot out that night as if it never existed. Don't count it on the calendar. Don't let it have a day in any month.

Let that night be childless, with no sounds of happiness heard. Those who place curses on certain days should curse it, those who have the power to raise Leviathan. Its early morning stars should stay dark. Looking for light, may none come, may it not see the glimmer of dawn for it did not shut my mother's womb to prevent me from seeing trouble.

Why wasn't I stillborn? Why didn't I die at birth? Why was there a lap for me to lie on, or breasts for me to suck? For now I would be lying down in peace. I would be sleeping and at rest, along with the kings of this world and their officials whose palaces now lie in ruins, or with noblemen who collected gold and filled their houses with silver. Why wasn't I a miscarriage, buried in secret, a baby who never saw the light? There in the grave the wicked give no more trouble, and those whose strength is gone have their rest. There prisoners take it easy—they don't hear the commands of their oppressors. Both small and great are there, and slaves are freed from their masters. Why does God give life to those who are suffering, living bitterly miserable lives, those who are waiting for death that does not come and who are looking for death more desperately than hunting for treasure? They're so incredibly happy when they reach the grave! Why is light given to someone who doesn't know where they're going, someone God has fenced in?

My groans are the bread I eat; my raging tears are the water I drink. For all that I feared has happened to me; everything that I dreaded has come upon me. I have no peace, no quiet, no rest. All that comes is rage."

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered Job. "Could I say a word? I don't want to upset you but who could keep quiet and not respond? You've certainly encouraged many people and supported those who are weak. Your advice has helped those who are stumbling not to fall, and you have strengthened those whose knees are weak. But now you're the one suffering and you're upset. Wasn't it your reverence for God that gave you confidence and your integrity that gave you hope? Think about it: since when did the innocent die? Since when were good people destroyed? From what I've seen it's those who plant evil and sow trouble who reap the same! A breath from God destroys them; a blast of his anger wipes them out. Lions may roar and growl, but their teeth still break. Even a lion dies from lack of food, and the lioness' cubs are scattered.

A word quietly crept up on me; a whisper reached my ear. Troubling thoughts came to me in nightmares when you fall into a deep sleep. I became terrified and trembled; all my bones were shaking. Then a breath brushed my face and gave me goose-pimples. Something stopped, but I couldn't see its face. My eyes could only make out a shape. It was totally quiet, and then I heard a voice: 'Can anyone be right before God? Can anyone be pure before their Maker? If he doesn't even trust his servants, and he says his angels make mistakes, how much more does this apply to those who live in these houses made of clay, whose foundations are based on dust, who fall apart like clothing to a moth? Alive in the morning, they are dead by evening. They die, unnoticed. They are like tent ropes that are pulled up, and they collapse in death. They die without wisdom.'"

"Call if you want, but who is going to answer you? Which angel are you going to turn to? Surely anger slays the fool and jealousy kills the simple. I have seen a fool growing strong, but I immediately cursed his house. His sons are never safe; they are crushed in court with no one to defend them. The hungry eat everything he has harvested, taking even that protected by a thorn hedge, while others look to steal his wealth. For evil doesn't come from the dust; neither does trouble grow from the earth. But human beings are born for trouble just as certainly as sparks from a fire fly upwards.

If it were me, I would go to God and put my case before him. He is the one who does amazing, incredible things; miracles that can't be counted! He gives rain to the earth and sends water to the fields. He exalts the humble, and rescues those who mourn. He frustrates the plans of the cunning so that they are unsuccessful. He traps the wise in their own clever thinking, and the schemes of twisted people are cut short. In the daytime they're in the dark, and they stumble around at noon like it's night. But God is the one who saves from their cutting remarks, and the poor from the actions of the powerful. As a result those who are helpless have hope, and the wicked have to shut their mouths! See how happy is the person God corrects—so don't despise the Almighty's discipline. For he causes pain but he provides relief; he wounds but his hands heal. He will save you from many disasters; a multitude of evils will not affect you. In times of famine he will rescue you from death, and in times of war he will save you from the power of the sword. You will be protected from sharp-tongued slander; and when violence comes you will not be afraid. You will laugh at violence and famine; you won't be afraid of wild animals— for you will be at peace with the stones of the field and the wild animals will be at peace with you. You will be certain that your home is safe, for you will go to where you live and find nothing missing. You will also be sure that you will have many children; your descendants will be like the grass of the earth. You will live to a ripe old age like a sheaf of grain when it is harvested. Look, we've examined it, and it's true! Listen to what I'm saying and apply it to yourself!"

Then Job responded: "If my grief could be weighed and my troubles placed on the scales they would be heavier than the sand of the sea. That's why I spoke so rashly. For the arrows of the Almighty are in me; their poison saps my spirit. God's terrors are lined up against me. Don't wild donkeys bray when their grass is gone? Don't cattle groan when they don't have food! Can something that's tasteless be eaten without salt? Is there any taste in the white of an egg? I just can't touch any food—even the thought makes me feel sick! Oh, if only I could have what I really want, that God would give me what I most desire— that God would be willing to crush me to death, that he would just let me die! But it still comforts me to know, making me happy through the never-ending pain, that I have never rejected the words of God.

Why should I go on waiting when I don't have the strength? Why should I keep going when I don't know what is going to happen to me? Am I as strong as rock? Am I made out of bronze? How can I help myself now that any chance of success is ripped away from me? Anyone who isn't kind to a friend has given up respecting the Almighty. My brothers have acted as deceptively as a desert stream, rushing waters in the desert that vanish. The stream floods when it is full of dark ice and

melting snow, but in the heat it dries up and disappears, vanishing from where it once was. Camel caravans turn aside to look for water, but don't find any and they die. Caravans from Tema looked, travelers from Sheba were confident, but their hopes were dashed—they came and found nothing.

Now you are no help, just like that—you see my trouble and you're afraid. Have I asked you for anything? Have I told you to bribe anyone for me from your wealth? Have I asked you to rescue me from an enemy? Have I told you to save me from my oppressors? Explain this to me, and I'll be quiet. Show me where I'm wrong. Honest words are painful, but what do your arguments prove? Are you going to argue over what I said, when the words of someone in despair should be left to blow away in the wind? You would play dice to win an orphan; you would bargain away your friend! Look me in the eye and see if I'm lying to your face! Don't talk like this! Don't be unjust! What I'm saying is right. I'm not telling lies—don't you think I wouldn't know if I was wrong?"

"Isn't life for human beings like serving a sentence of hard labor? Don't their days pass like those of a hired laborer? Like some slave longing for a bit of shade, like a hired hand anxiously waiting for pay day, I've been given months of emptiness and nights of misery. When I go to bed I ask, 'When shall I get up?' But the night goes on and on, and I toss and turn until dawn. My body is covered with maggots and caked in dirt; my skin is cracked, with oozing sores. My days pass quicker than a weaver's shuttle and they come to an end without hope. Remember that my life is just a breath; I will not see happiness again. Those watching me won't see me anymore; your eyes will be looking for me, but I will be gone. When a cloud disappears, it's gone, just as anyone who goes down to Sheol does not come back up. They will never return home, and the people they knew will forget them.

So, no, I won't hold my tongue—I will speak in the agony of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea or a sea monster that you have to guard me? If I tell myself, 'I'll feel better if I lie down on my bed,' or 'it will help me to lie down on my couch,' then you scare me so much with dreams and terrify me with visions that I would rather be strangled—I would rather die than become just a bag of bones.

I hate my life! I know I won't live long. Leave me alone because my life is just a breath. Why are human beings so important to you; why are you so concerned about them that you inspect them every morning and test them every moment? Won't you ever stop staring at me? Won't you ever leave me alone long enough to catch my breath? What have I done wrong? What have I done to you, Watcher of Humanity? Why have you made me your target, so that I'm a burden even to myself? If so why don't you pardon my sins, and take away my guilt? Right now I'm going to lie down in the dust, and though you will look for me, I will be gone."

Then Bildad the Shuhite spoke up and said, "How much longer will you go on talking like this? The words coming out of your mouth are a lot of hot air! Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? Your children must have sinned against him, and so they deserved the punishment he inflicted on them. But if you pray to God and ask for his help, if you live a clean life and do what is right, then he would act to make things right for you in your home. Though you began with next to nothing, you will end up with so much!

Why don't you ask what previous generations discovered, examine what our ancestors found out? We were born yesterday and don't know anything! Our days on earth fade as quickly as a passing shadow. Won't they teach you and explain what they know? Can papyrus grow where there is no marsh? Can reeds grow without water? Even without being cut, while they are still flowering, they wither faster than grass. This is what happens to everyone who forgets God. The hopes of those who live without God come to nothing. Their confidence is like holding on to a flimsy spider's web. They look to their home to provide security, but it provides no support. They try to hang onto it, but it doesn't last. Those who live without God are like a luxuriant plant growing in the sun, spreading its shoots all over the garden. It twists its roots down through the stones, and holds on to rock. But when it's cut down, the place where it was disowns it, saying, 'I never even saw you.' Its life is over, and others spring up from the earth to take its place.

Look, God doesn't reject someone who is innocent, and he doesn't support those who are guilty. He can make you laugh with happiness again and shout for joy. Those who hate you will be put to shame, and the place where the wicked live will be destroyed."

Job replied, "Yes, I know all that! But how can anyone be right before God? If you wanted to argue with God, God could ask a thousand questions that no one could answer. God is so wise and so powerful that no one could challenge him and win.

God moves the mountains suddenly; he overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth, making its foundations quake. He is the one who can command the sun not to rise and the stars not to shine. He alone is the one who stretches out the heavens and walks on the waves of the sea. He made the constellations of the Bear, Orion, the Pleiades, and the stars of the southern sky. He is the one who does incredible things that are beyond our understanding, marvelous things that are uncountable.

But when he passes by me, I don't see him; when he moves on, he is invisible to me. If he takes away, who can prevent him? Who is going to ask him, 'What are you doing?' God does not restrain his anger; he crushes Rahab's helpers underfoot.

So how much less could I answer God, or choose my words to argue with him! Even though I'm right, I can't answer him. I must plead for mercy from my judge. Even if I called him to come and he responded, I don't believe he would listen to me.

He pounds me with the winds of a storm; he wounds me time and again, without giving a reason. He doesn't give me a chance even to catch my breath; instead he fills my life with bitter suffering. If it's a question of strength, then God is the strongest. If it's a question of justice, then who will set a time for my case? Even though I am right, my own mouth would condemn

me; even though I am innocent, he would prove me wrong. I am innocent! I don't care what happens to me. I hate my life! That's why I say, 'It makes no difference to God. He destroys both the innocent and the wicked.' When disaster strikes suddenly he mocks the despair of the innocent. The earth has been handed over to the wicked; he blinds the eyes of the judges—if it's not him who does this, then who is it? The days of my life race by like a runner, rushing past without me seeing any happiness. They pass by like fast sailing ships, like an eagle swooping down on its prey.

If I said to myself, 'I will forget my complaints; I will stop crying and be happy,' I would still be terrified at all my suffering because you, God, will not say I'm innocent. Since I'm condemned, what's the point in arguing? Even if I wash myself with pure mountain water and clean my hands with soap, you would toss me into a slime pit so that even my own clothes would hate me! For God is not a mortal being like me, I can't defend myself or take him to court. If only there was an arbitrator who could bring us both together! I wish God would stop beating me with his rod and terrifying me! Then I could speak up without being afraid—but since I am, I can't!"

I hate my life! Let me speak freely about my complaints—I can't keep my bitterness to myself. I will tell God, "Don't just condemn me—tell me what you have against me. Do you enjoy accusing me? Why do you reject me, someone you made with your own hands, and yet smile on the scheming of the wicked? Do you have human eyes? Do you see like human beings do? Is your life as short as mortal beings? Are your years as brief as those of humanity, that you have to examine my wrongs and investigate my sins? Even though you know I'm not guilty, no one can save me from you. You made me and shaped me with your own hands, and yet you destroy me. Remember that you shaped me like a piece of clay—are you now going to turn me back into dust? You poured me out like milk, you curdled me like cheese. You clothed me with skin and flesh; you wove my body together with bones and muscles. You granted me life and showed me your kindness; you have taken great care of me.

But you kept these things hidden in your heart. I know your purpose was to watch me, and if I sinned, then you would not forgive my wrongs. If I'm guilty I'm in trouble, if I'm innocent I can't hold my head high because I'm totally disgraced as I look at my sufferings. If I do hold my head high you hunt me down like a lion, showing how powerful you are in hurting me. You repeat your arguments against me, you pour out more and more of your anger against me, you send fresh armies against me.

So why did you allow me to be born? I wish that I had died, and nobody had ever seen me! It would have been better if I had never existed, taken straight from the womb to the grave. I only have a few days left, so why don't you leave me alone so I can have a little peace before I go to where I shall never return from, the land of darkness and the shadow of death— the land of total darkness where death's shadow lies, a place of chaos where light itself is darkness."

Then Zophar the Naamathite began speaking and said, "So many words should be answered, shouldn't they? Or is a person proved right by doing a lot of talking? Should all your babbling force people to keep quiet? When you mock, shouldn't someone make you feel ashamed? You said, 'What I teach is the pure truth,' and 'in God's eyes I am clean.' If only God would speak up and tell you directly, because then he would explain to you the secrets of wisdom. True wisdom has many sides to it. God's treatment of you is far better than your guilt deserves.

Can you find out the mysteries of God? Can you discover all the wisdom of the Almighty? It is greater than the heavens—what can you do? It is deeper than Sheol—what can you know? It extends farther than the earth, and wider than the sea. If God comes and imprisons someone, or assembles the court for judgment, who can stop him? For God knows who are deceivers—when he sees someone sin, he pays attention to it. Stupid people will become wise when wild donkeys are born tame!

But if you repent and spread out your hands to pray to him, if you get rid of your sins and don't let wickedness continue in your life, then you would be able to hold your head high in innocence, you will be firm and unafraid. You will forget your misery, remembering it only as water under the bridge. Your life will shine brighter than the noonday sun; even darkness will be like the morning. You will have confidence because there is hope; you will be protected and rest in safety. You will lie down to sleep with no one to frighten you, and many will come asking for your favor. But the eyes of the wicked will fail, they will not be able to escape, and their only hope is in death."

Job replied, "You really think you're special people, don't you? Obviously when you die, wisdom will die with you! But I too have insights, and you're no better than me. Doesn't everyone know the things you've said? But my friends laugh at me because I called on God and he answered me: the innocent man who does right has become an object of derision. People who are comfortable have contempt for those who are in trouble, ready to push over those who are already slipping. Robbers live in peace, and those who make God angry live in safety, trusting their own strength as their 'god.'

But if you ask the animals they will teach you, the birds in the sky will tell you; ask the earth and it will teach you, and the fishes in the sea will tell you. Which of all these doesn't know that the Lord has done this? He gives life to every living thing, life to all humankind. The ear distinguishes words just like the palate distinguishes foods. Wisdom to distinguish belongs to the old, and the ability to rightly discriminate belongs to those with long experience. God has wisdom and power, counsel and understanding belong to him. If he tears something down, nobody can rebuild it. If he imprisons someone, nobody can free them. If God holds back the waters, everything dries up; if he releases the waters, the earth floods. He is mighty and victorious; both deceivers and those deceived are subject to him. He leads counselors away stripped of their wisdom, he makes judges into fools. He removes the chains of office from kings and makes them wear loincloths. He leads priests away stripped of their religious garments,

he overthrows the powerful. He takes away the advice of trusted advisors, he removes the discernment of the elders. He pours scorn upon princes and takes away power from the strong. He reveals what is hidden in darkness, and brings into the light the shadow of death. He makes nations great and he destroys them; he expands nations and ruins them. He removes the understanding of rulers and makes them wander in the wilderness. They grope around in the dark without a light. He makes them stagger like drunk people."

Look, I've seen all this with my own eyes, and heard it with my own ears, and I understand it. I know what you know. You're no better than me. But I would still like to speak to the Almighty: I want to prove myself to God! As for you, you cover things up by telling lies! You are all like doctors who can't heal anyone! I wish you would all be quiet! That would be the wisest thing for you to do. Listen to my argument and pay attention to what I have to say.

Do you think you can tell lies to defend God? Are you talking deceitfully on his behalf? Or are you wanting to show God favoritism? Are you going to argue God's case for him? Will you be found to be doing good when God examines you? Can you fool him as if he's a human being? No, he will definitely rebuke you if you secretly show him favoritism! Isn't his majesty terrifying to you? Aren't you so afraid of him you're paralyzed? Your sayings are as helpful as ashes; your arguments as weak as clay.

Be quiet. Don't talk to me. Let me speak, come what may. I take responsibility for myself; I am ready to risk my life. Even though he kills me, I will hope in him. I am still going to defend my ways before him. By doing this I will be saved since no godless person could come before him. Listen carefully to what I say, pay attention to my explanation. Look, I've prepared my case—I know I will be proved right. Who wants to argue with me? If I'm proved wrong, I'm prepared to be quiet and die. God, I have two requests, then I can face you. Stop beating me, and stop terrifying me. Then call, and I will answer. Or let me speak, and then answer me. What are my sins and iniquities? Show me what have I done wrong; how have I rebelled against you? Why are you unfriendly towards me? Why do you treat me as your enemy? Would you frighten a leaf blown by the wind or hunt down a piece of straw? For you write down bitter things against me and pay me back for the sins of my youth. You put my feet in the stocks. You keep an eye on every step I take. You even inspect my footprints! I'm falling apart like something rotten, like moth-eaten clothes.

"Life is short and full of trouble, like a flower that blooms and withers, like a passing shadow that soon disappears. Do you even notice me, God, and why do you have to drag me to court? Who can bring something clean of what is unclean? No one. You have determined how long we shall live—the number of months, a time limit on our lives. So leave us alone and give us some peace—so like a laborer we could enjoy a few hours of rest at the end of the day.

Even a tree that's cut down has the hope of sprouting again, of sending up shoots and continuing to live. Even though its roots grow old in the earth, and its stump dies in the ground, just a trickle of water will make it bud and grow branches like a young plant.

But human beings die, their strength dwindles away; they perish, and where are they then? Like water evaporating from a lake and a river that dries up and disappears, so human beings lie down and don't get up again. Until the heavens cease to exist they will not awake from their sleep.

I wish you would hide me in Sheol; conceal me there until your anger is gone. Set a definite time for me there, and remember me! Will the dead live again? Then I would have hope through all my time of trouble until my release comes. You would call and I would answer you; you would long for me, the being that you made. Then you would look after me and wouldn't be watching me to see if I sinned. My sins would be sealed up in a bag and you would cover my guilt.

But just as the mountains crumble and fall, and the rocks tumble down; as water wears away the stones, as floods wash away the soil, so you destroy the hope people have. You continually overpower them and they pass away; you distort their faces in death and send them away. Their children may become important or fall from their positions, but they don't know or see any of this. As people die they only know their own pain and are sad for themselves."

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered and said, "Would a wise man answer with such empty 'knowledge' that is just a lot of hot air? He wouldn't argue with unprofitable speeches using words that do no good. But you are doing away with the fear of God, and destroying communion with him. It's your sins that are doing the talking, and you are choosing deceptive words. Your own mouth is condemning you, not me; your own lips are testifying against you.

Were you the very first person to be born? Were you born before the hills were created? Were you there listening in God's council? Does wisdom only belong to you? What do you know that we don't? What do you understand that we don't? We have among us old, gray-haired people much older than your father!

Are the comforts God provides too little for you? Are God's gentle words not enough for you? Why do you let yourself be carried away by your emotions? Why do your eyes flash in anger that you turn against God and let yourself speak this way? Who can say they are clean? Which human being can say that they do what is right? Look, God doesn't even trust his angels—even the heavenly beings are not pure in his sight! How much less pure are those who are unclean and corrupt, drinking in sin like water!

If you are ready to listen to me, I will show you. I will explain my insights. This is what wise men have said, confirmed by their ancestors, those to whom alone the land was given before foreigners ever were there.

The wicked writhe in pain all their lives, through all the years these oppressors survive. Terrifying sounds fill their ears; even when they think they're safe, the destroyer will attack them. They don't believe they will escape the darkness—they know a sword is waiting for them. They wander around looking for food, asking 'Where is it?' They know that their day of darkness is close at hand. Misery and torment overwhelm them

like a king preparing for battle. They shake their fists in God's face, defiantly challenging the Almighty, insolently attacking him with their shields.

They have become fat in their rebellion, their bellies bloated with fat. But their cities will become desolate; they will live in abandoned houses that are crumbling into ruins. They will lose their riches, their wealth will not endure, their possessions will not spread over the earth.

They will not escape from the darkness. Like a tree whose shoots are burned up in a forest fire, the breath of God will blow him away. They should not trust in things that are worthless, for their reward will be worthless. This will be paid in full before their time has come. They are like tree branches that wither, like vines that lose their unripe grapes, or olive trees that lose their flowers. For those who reject God are barren, and fire will burn up the homes of those who love bribes. They plan trouble and produce evil, giving birth to deception."

Job replied, "I've heard all this before. You are comforters who just cause trouble! Will your windy speeches never cease? What's bothering you that you have to answer me? I could talk like you do if you were in my place, stringing words together to criticize you, ridiculing you with a toss of my head. I could build you up by my mouth speaking words; the movement of my lips would ease your pain. For me, if I speak it doesn't ease my pain, and if I don't speak the pain is still there.

God, you have worn me out. You have destroyed my whole family. You have made me shrivel up, which is a witness against me; my thin body testifies against me. He has torn me apart in his anger; in his hostility he has gnashed his teeth at me; my enemy pierces me with his fierce look. People stare at me with their mouths wide open, they slap me on my cheeks to mock me, they crowd around me to attack me. God has handed me over to evil people; he has thrown me into their hands.

I was living in peace and he smashed me to pieces. He grabbed me by the neck and dashed me to pieces. He set me up as his target. His archers surround me. His arrows pierce my kidneys without mercy. He pours out my gall on the ground. Like a wall he breaks me down, breach upon breach, rushing at me like a warrior. I have sown sackcloth to cover my skin; my strength lies broken in the dust. My face is red from crying and dark shadows surround my eyes, although I have done nothing wrong and my prayer is pure.

Earth, do not cover up my blood. May my cry find no place to hide. Look, right now my witness is in heaven; the one who speaks for me is on high. My friends scorn me, but my eyes pour out tears to God. I want my witness to speak for me with God as someone does for their friend. For in a few short years I shall go down that road from which I shall not return."

"My spirit is crushed; my life is extinguished; the grave is ready for me. Mockers surround me. I see how bitterly they ridicule me. God, you need to put down a pledge for me with yourself, for who else will be my guarantor? You have closed their minds to understanding, so do not let them win! They betray friends to gain benefit for themselves and their children suffer for it. He has made me a proverb of ridicule among the people; they spit in my face. My eyes are worn out from crying and my body is a shadow of its former self. People who think they are good are shocked to see me. Those who are innocent are troubled by the godless. Those who are right keep going, and those whose hands are clean grow stronger and stronger.

Why don't you come back and repeat again what you've been saying?—yet I still won't find a wise man among you! My life is over. My plans are gone. My heart is broken. They turn night into day, and say that daylight is close to darkness. What am I looking for? To make my home in Sheol, to make my bed in darkness? Should I call the grave my father, and the maggot my mother or my sister? So then where is my hope? Can anyone see any hope for me? Will hope go down with me to the gates of Sheol? Will we go down together into the dust?"

Then Bildad the Shuhite spoke up and said, "How long will you go on talking, hunting for the right words to say? Talk sense if you want us to reply! Do you think we're dumb animals? Do we look stupid to you? You tear yourself apart with your anger. Do you think the earth has to be abandoned, or the mountains moved, just because of you?

It's certain that the life of the wicked will end like a lamp that is snuffed out—their flame will shine no more. The light in their home goes out, the lamp hanging above is extinguished. Instead of taking strong strides they stumble, and their own plans cause them to fall. Their own feet trip them up and they are caught in a net; as they walk along they fall into a pit. A trap grabs them by the heel; a snare tightens around them. A noose is hidden on the ground for them; a rope is stretched across the path to trip them. Terrors scare the wicked, coming at them from every side, chasing them, biting at their heels. Hunger robs them of strength; disaster waits for them when they fall. Disease devours their skin; deadly disease consumes their limbs. They are torn from the homes they trusted in and taken to the king of terrors. People they don't know will live in their homes; sulfur will be scattered where they used to live. They wither away, roots below and branches above; the memory of them fades from the earth; nobody remembers their names any more. They are thrown out of light into darkness, driven from the world. They have no children or descendants among their people, and no survivors where they used to live. People of the west are appalled at what happens to them. People of the east are shocked. This is what happens to the homes of the wicked, to the places of those who reject God."

Job replied, "How long will you go on tormenting me? How long will you go on crushing me with words? Ten times already you have humiliated me. Aren't you ashamed for treating me so badly? Even if I did sin, that's my problem, and has nothing to do with you. You think you're so much better than me, and you use my degradation against me. But you should realize that it's God who has wronged me, he has trapped me in his net. Even though I cry for help, I get no answer; even though I shout my objections, I get no justice. God has walled me in so I can't escape; he has plunged my path into darkness. He has stripped my honor from me; he has taken away my reputation. He tears me down from all

sides until I am finished; he has destroyed my hope like a tree that is uprooted. His anger burns against me; he treats me as one of his enemies. God's troops assemble to attack me. They build ramparts against me. They encircle and besiege my home.

He has driven my brothers far away from me; all my former friends are estranged from me. My relatives have abandoned me; my close friends have forgotten me. My house guests and my maidservants treat me as a stranger—to them I have become a foreigner. I call my servant, but he doesn't reply. I have to beg him! I am repulsive to my wife, and I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even young children despise me; when I stand up they ridicule me. All my closest friends despise me, and those I loved have turned on me. I've been reduced to skin and bones and I survive by the skin of my teeth.

Have pity on me, my friends, have pity on me, because God has struck me down! Why are you persecuting me like God does? Aren't you satisfied with getting your pound of flesh?

I wish my words could be written down, recorded in a book, or engraved with an iron pen and molten lead in the rock forever.

I know my Redeemer is alive, and that he shall finally take the stand for me on the earth. Even though my skin is destroyed, in my body I shall see God. I myself will see him—with my own eyes, and not those of someone else! The thought overcomes me! You say to yourselves, 'How can we make him suffer so he can see he is the source of his problems?' You yourselves should fear being punished by God, for you know anger brings God's punishment that accompanies judgment."

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered and said, "I'm forced to reply because I'm really upset! What I hear you say insults me, but I know how to reply to you!

Don't you know that since ancient times, since human beings were put on this earth, that the triumph of the wicked doesn't last long, that those who reject God are only happy for a short time? Even though they are so tall they reach the heavens, even though their heads reach the clouds, they will vanish forever like their own excrement. People who knew them will ask, 'Where have they gone?' They will vanish like a dream, never to be found, fleeing like a vision of the night. Those who once saw them will not see them anymore; their families will never set eyes on them again. Their children will have to pay back the poor; they will have to return their wealth. Though the wicked have bodies that are young and strong, they will die and be buried.

Though evil tastes sweet in their mouths and they hide it under their tongues, not letting it go but keeping it in their mouths, in their stomachs it turns bitter, becoming like snake venom inside them. They swallow wealth and vomit it up again; God forces it from their stomachs. They suck in snake venom; the bite of the viper will kill them. They will not live to enjoy the streams, the rivers of milk and honey. They will have to give back what they have gained and will not have any benefit; they will not enjoy any of their profits. For they have oppressed and abandoned the poor; they have seized houses they did not build. Because their greed was never satisfied, nothing they liked is left that they didn't consume. Nothing escapes their ravenous appetites, so their happiness doesn't last long.

Even when the wicked have all that they want they run into trouble; all kinds of misery will fall upon them. While they are busy filling their bellies, God's hostility will burn against them, raining down on them. As they flee to escape an iron weapon, a bronze arrow will strike them down. The arrow is pulled out of their gall bladder, glistening with blood. They are absolutely terrified! All they value will disappear into the darkness; divine fire will destroy them; all they have left will go up in smoke. The heavens reveal what they have done wrong; the earth will rise up against them. All their possessions will be carried from their homes; they will be dragged off on the day of God's judgment. This is the share the wicked receive from God, the inheritance God says they should have."

Job replied, "Please listen carefully to what I say—that would be one comfort you could give me. Bear with me; let me speak. After I've spoken you can resume mocking me. Am I complaining against people? Of course not. Why shouldn't I be impatient? Just take a look at me. Aren't you appalled? Cover your mouth with your hand in shock! Every time I think of what's happened to me I am horrified and I shake all over with fear.

Why do the wicked continue to live, to grow old and increasingly powerful? Their children are with them; they watch their grandchildren grow up. They live in their homes in safety—they are not afraid. God does not use his rod to beat them. Their bulls always breed successfully; their cows give birth to calves and do not miscarry. They send out their little ones like lambs to play; their children dance around. They sing accompanied by the tambourine and lyre; they celebrate with the music of the flute. They live out their lives contentedly, and go down to Sheol in peace. Yet they tell God, 'Get lost! We don't want anything to do with you. Who does the Almighty think he is for us to serve him as slaves? What benefit is there for us if we pray to him?' Such people believe they make their own fortune, but I don't accept their way of thinking.

How often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does disaster come upon them? How often does God punish the wicked in his anger? Are they blown along like straw in the wind? Does a tornado come in and carry them away? Some say, 'God saves up people's punishment for their children.' But I say, 'God should punish those people themselves so that they can learn from it.' Let them see their destruction themselves, and drink deeply from God's anger. For they don't care what happens to their families once they're dead.

Can anyone teach God anything he doesn't already know, since he is the one who judges even heavenly beings? One person dies in good health, totally comfortable and secure. Their body is fat from eating well; their bones still strong. Another dies after a miserable life without ever experiencing happiness. Yet they are both buried in the same dust; they are treated alike in death, eaten by maggots.

Look, I know what you're thinking, and your schemes to do me wrong. You may ask me, 'Where is

the home of the great man? Where is the place where the wicked live?' Haven't you asked people who travel? Don't you pay attention to what they tell you? Wicked people are spared in times of disaster; they are rescued from the day of judgment. Who confronts them with their actions? Who pays them back for what they have done? When they eventually die and are carried to the graveyard, their tomb is guarded. The earth of the grave softly covers them. Everyone attends their funeral service; a huge procession of people comes to pay their last respects. Why do you try to comfort me with worthless nonsense? Your answers are just a pack of lies!"

Then Eliphaz the Temanite responded and said, "How can anyone be of help to God? Even wise people are only helpful to themselves. Is it any benefit to the Almighty if you're a good person? What does he gain if you do what's right? Does he correct you and bring charges against you because of your reverence? No: it's because you're so wicked! Your sins are never-ending!

For no reason at all you took your brother's clothing as a security for a debt, and left them stripped naked. You refused water to the thirsty; you denied food to the hungry. Is it because the land belongs to the powerful, and only the privileged have a right to live there? You have sent widows away empty-handed; you have crushed the outstretched arms of orphans, begging for help. That's why you're surrounded by traps to catch you, and why you suddenly panic in terror. That's why it's so dark you cannot see, and why you feel like you're drowning.

Doesn't God live high in heaven and looks down on even the highest stars? But you ask, 'What does God know? How can he see and judge what happens down here in darkness? Thick clouds cover him so he can't see anything as he walks around in heaven.'

Why do you insist on following the traditional thinking of the wicked? They were taken before their time; all they had built was washed away. They had told God, 'Get lost! What can the Almighty do to us?' And yet he was the one who had filled their homes with good things—but I don't accept their way of thinking.

Those who do right rejoice when they see the destruction of the wicked, and the innocent mock them, saying, 'Our enemies are destroyed, and fire has burned up all that's left of them.'

Come back to God and be reconciled to him, and you'll be prosperous again. Listen to what he tells you and keep his words in mind. If you return to God you will be restored. If you renounce your sinful life and give up your love of money and desire for possessions, then the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver.

Then you will find delight in the Almighty, and be able to face him without feeling ashamed. You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will keep your promises to him. Whatever you decide to do will be successful, and wherever you go, light will shine on you. When others are humbled, and you say, 'please help them,' God will save them. God saves those who are innocent, and you will be saved if you do what is right."

Job replied, "Just the same, my complaints today remain bitter. In spite of my groaning he is still punishing me. If only I knew where I could find him so I could go to where he sits in judgment. There I would lay out my case before him and present all my arguments in full. I would discover how he would answer me and learn what he has to say to me. Would he fight against me using his mighty power? No, he would pay attention to what I have to say. There a good person could reason with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. If I go to the east, he's not there; if I go the west, I don't find him. If he's working in the north, I don't perceive him; if he's moving south, I don't see him.

Yet he always knows where I'm going. When he has proved me, I will come out shining like gold. I have kept in step with him; I have followed his way without turning aside. I have not neglected his commands, for I value what he has told me to do more than the food I eat every day.

But God is unchangeable—who can turn him from his purposes? He does whatever he wants to do. So he will finish whatever he has planned for me—and he has many plans for me. That's why I'm terrified at meeting him; when I think of him I tremble with fear. God has made me faint-hearted; the Almighty has scared me to death. Yet I'm still here despite the dark—even though I can't see through the utter darkness."

"Why doesn't the Almighty set a definite time to punish the wicked? Why do those who follow him never see him act in judgment? The wicked move boundary stones; they seize other people's flocks and move them to their own pastures. They steal the orphan's donkey; they take the widow's ox as security for a debt. They push the poor out of their way; the destitute are forced to hide from them. Like wild donkeys in the desert, the poor have to scavenge for their food, looking for anything to feed their children in the wasteland. They are forced to find what they can in other people's fields, to glean among the vineyards of the wicked. They spend the night naked because they have no clothes; they have nothing to cover themselves against the cold. They are soaked by the cold mountain storms, and huddle beside the rocks for shelter. Fatherless children are snatched from their mother's breasts, taking the babies of the poor as security for a debt. Because they have no clothes to wear they have to go naked, harvesting sheaves of grain while they themselves are hungry. In the olive groves they work to produce oil, but do not taste it; they tread the winepress, but are thirsty. In the city the dying groan, and the wounded cry for help, but God ignores their prayers.

These are people who rebel against the light. They do not want to know its ways, or to stay on its paths. The murderer gets up at dawn to kill the poor and needy, and when night falls he becomes a thief. The adulterer waits for dusk, saying to himself, 'No one will see me now,' and he covers his face. Thieves break into houses during the night and they sleep during the day. They don't even know what the light is like! Total darkness is like light to them, for they are familiar with the night.

Like bubbles on the surface of a river they are quickly carried away. The land they own is cursed by God. They don't enter their own vineyards. Just as heat and drought dry up snowmelt, so Sheol takes away those who have sinned. Even their mothers for-

get them, maggots feast on them, they are no longer remembered, and their wickedness becomes like a tree that is broken into pieces. They mistreat childless women and are mean to widows. God prolongs the life of the wicked by his power; but when they arise, they have no assurance of life. He supports them and gives them security, but he is always watching what they're doing. Though they may be illustrious for a while, soon they are gone. They are brought down like all others, cut off like the heads of grain. If this isn't so, who can prove I'm a liar and there's nothing to what I say?"

Then Bildad the Shuhite spoke up and said, "Dominion and awe belong to God. He brings peace to his heavens. Who can count his armies? Is there anywhere his light doesn't shine? How can a human being be right before God? Can anyone born of woman be pure? If in God's eyes even the moon does not shine brightly, and the stars are not pure, how much less a human being—who by comparison is like a maggot or a worm!"

Job replied, "How helpful you have been to this feeble man that I am. How supportive you have been to the weak. What good advice you have given to this ignorant man, demonstrating you have so much wisdom. Who helped you speak these words? Who inspired you to say such things?

The dead tremble, those beneath the waters. Sheol lies naked before God, Abaddon is uncovered. He stretches the northern sky over empty space; he hangs the world on nothing. He gathers the rain in his storm clouds which do not break under the weight. He veils his throne; covering it with his clouds. On the surface of the waters he set a boundary; he set a limit dividing light from darkness. The pillars of heaven tremble; they shake with fear at his rebuke. He calmed the sea with his power; because he knew what to do, he crushed Rahab. The breath of his voice made the heavens beautiful; with his hand he pierced the gliding serpent. This is just a little of all he does—what we hear of him is hardly a whisper, so who can understand his thunderous power?"

Job began to speak again. "I promise you—as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made my life bitter, for as long as I have life, while the breath of God remains in my nostrils— my lips will never speak lies, my tongue will never be dishonest. I will never agree that you are right; I will insist on my innocence until the day I die. I'm convinced I'm right and will never give up believing this; my conscience will not condemn me as long as I live.

May my enemy become like the wicked; may those who oppose me become like those who do evil. For what hope do those who reject God have when he cuts them down, when God brings their lives to an end? When times of trouble come to them, will God hear their cry for help? Do they have a good relationship with the Almighty? Can they call on God at any time? Let me explain God's power to you. I will not keep anything back that the Almighty has planned. If all of you have recognized this, why do you talk such vain nonsense?

This is what God provides as the destiny for the wicked, this is the inheritance that the ruthless will receive from the Almighty— even if they have many children, they will experience violent deaths or die of starvation. Those who survive will die from disease, and even their widows will not mourn for them. Even though they pile up silver like dust, and clothes like heaps of clay, those who do good will wear the clothes and the innocent will divide the silver among them. They build their houses like a moth; like some flimsy shelter made by a watchman. They go to bed rich, but never again! For when they wake up, it's all gone. Waves of panic flood over them; in the night a whirlwind snatches them away. The east wind picks them up and they're gone, carried away from where they were. The wind blows at them with full force; they try desperately to escape. People clap their hands at them and hiss at them wherever they are."

"There are silver mines and places where gold is refined. Iron is extracted from the earth and copper is smelted from its ore. Miners take lamps into the darkness underground and search for ore as far as they can go in the shadows and the gloom. They dig a mineshaft far from where people live or anyone ever goes. They swing from ropes that hang in the pits. Bread comes from the earth, but underneath it looks as if it has been turned upside-down by fire. Here the rocks contain lapis lazuli and the dust contains gold. No birds of prey can see these paths, no falcon's eye can perceive. No wild beasts have passed that way; the lion has not walked there. Miners attack the hard rock; they overturn the roots of mountains. They tunnel through the rock, looking carefully for every precious stone. They dam the sources of the rivers, and bring to light what is hidden.

But where can wisdom be found? Where is the place to gain understanding? Human beings do not know the way to wisdom; it is not found among the living. The deep waters say, 'It's not here,' and the sea says, 'It's not here either.' It cannot be bought with gold; nor can it be purchased with silver. Its value cannot be measured, even with the gold of Ophir; it is more precious than onyx or lapis lazuli. Gold or fine glass cannot compare with wisdom; it cannot be exchanged for gold jewelry. Coral and crystal are not worth mentioning; the price of wisdom is far above rubies. Topaz from Ethiopia can't compare with it; it cannot be bought with the purest gold.

So where does wisdom come from? Where is the place to gain understanding? Wisdom is hidden from the sight of all living things, even the birds of the air cannot see it. Abaddon and Death say, 'We've only heard a rumor of it.'

Only God understands the path to wisdom; he knows where it is found. For he looks to the very end of the earth; he sees everything under heaven. He decided how strong the wind should blow, and regulated the waters. He set a limit for the rain and made a path for the lightning. Then he considered wisdom. He examined it, gave it his approval, and declared it good. He said to humankind, 'To reverence the Lord is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.'"

Job went on speaking. "I wish I was back in the old days when God looked after me! His light shone above me and lit my way through the darkness. When I was young and strong, God was my friend and spoke to me in my home. The Almighty was still with me and I

was surrounded with my children. My herds produced much milk, and oil flowed freely from my olive presses. I went out to the city gate and took my seat in the public square. The young men saw me and moved out of the way; the elders would stand up for me. The leaders remained silent and covered their mouths with their hands. The voices of the officials were hushed; they held their tongues in my presence.

Everyone who listened to me praised me; whoever saw me commended me, because I gave to the poor who called out to me and the orphans who had no one to help them. Those who were about to die blessed me; I made the widow sing for joy. Being true and acting right were what I wore for clothing. I was like eyes for the blind and feet for the lame. I was like a father to the poor, and I defended the rights of strangers. I broke the jaw of the wicked and made them drop their prey from their teeth. I thought I would die at home, after many years. Like a tree my roots spread out to the water; the dew rests on my branches overnight. Fresh honors were always being given to me; my strength was renewed like an unfailing bow.

People listened carefully to what I had to say; they kept quiet as they listened to my advice. Once I had spoken they had nothing else to say; what I said was enough. They waited for me like people waiting for rain; their mouths wide open for the spring rain. When I smiled at them they could hardly believe it; my approval meant all the world to them. I decided the way forward as their leader, living like a king among his soldiers, and when they were sad I comforted them."

But now people much younger than me laugh at me; people whose fathers I would not put to work with my sheepdogs. They are too weak to be any use to me; they're all worn-out. Thin through hunger and want, they try to eat the dry ground in the dark, desolate wilderness. There they pick desert herbs and the leaves of bushes, and eat the roots of broom trees. They were driven out of the community. People shouted after them as if they were thieves. They have to live in dangerous ravines, in caves and among the rocks. They shout out like animals among the bushes; they huddle together in the weeds for shelter. They are foolish, nameless people that have been driven from the land.

Yet now they mock me in their songs; I have become a joke to them! They despise and shun me; they don't hesitate to spit in my face. God has made my bowstring loose and humbled me. The rabble rise up against me, they send me running; like a city under siege they devise ways to destroy me. They cut off my way of escape; they bring about my downfall and do this without anyone's help. They come in through a wide breach; they rush in as the wall comes tumbling down. Terrors overcome me; my honor is blown away by the wind; my salvation vanishes like a cloud.

And now my life is ebbing away; every day despair grips me. At night my bones are in agony; the pain gnaws at me and never stops. God grabs me roughly by my clothes; he pulls me by the collar of my shirt. He has thrown me in the mud; he has humbled me like dust and ashes. God, I cry to you but you don't answer; I stand before you, but you don't even notice me. You have turned cruel to me; you use your power to make me suffer. You pick me up and blow me along in the wind; tossing me about in the whirlwind. I know you're taking me to my death, to the place where all the living go. Who would want to kick a man when he is down, when they cry for help in their time of trouble? Didn't I weep for those having hard times? Didn't I grieve at what the poor suffered? But when I looked for good, only evil came, and when I waited for the light, all that came was darkness. Inside I am in turmoil, it never stops; I face days of despair. I am so depressed; seeing the sun doesn't help. I stand up in the assembly and cry for help. I am like a brother to the jackals, a companion to owls. My skin turns black on me; and my bones burn within me. My lyre only plays sad songs, and my pipe is the voice of those who weep.

"I vowed to myself never to look with desire at young women. What should people expect to receive from God? What reward should the Almighty on high give them? Isn't it disaster for the wicked and destruction for those who do wrong? Doesn't God see everything I do—even count every step I take? Have I lived a deceitful life? Have I been eager to tell lies? No! Let God weigh me on the scales of his justice and let him discover my integrity.

If I have wandered from God's way, if I have let what I see become my desires, if there's any stain of sin on my hands, then let someone else eat what I have sown, and all that I have grown be uprooted. If a woman has seduced me, or if I have looked for an opportunity to sleep with my neighbor's wife, then let my wife serve another, let other men sleep with her. For that would be wicked, a sin deserving punishment, for this sin is like a fire that leads to destruction, destroying everything I have.

If I had refused to listen to my menservants or maidservants when they brought their complaints to me, what would I do when God came to judge me? How would I reply if he investigated me? Didn't the same God make all of us? Have I refused to give the poor what they needed, or caused widows to despair? Have I even eaten just a piece of bread by myself? Haven't I always shared my food with orphans? From when I was young I was a father to orphans and took care of widows. If ever I saw someone needing clothes, the poor without anything to wear, they always thanked me for the wool clothing that kept them warm.

If I raised my hand to hit an orphan, confident that if it came to court the judges would be on my side, then let my shoulder be pulled from its joint, my arm wrenched out of its socket. Since I'm terrified of what punishment God may have in store for me, and because of his majesty, I could never do this.

Have I put my trust in gold, calling fine gold, 'My security'? Have I delighted in being rich, happy at all my wealth I had gained? Have I looked at the sun shining so brilliantly or the moon moving in majesty across the sky and been tempted to secretly worship them by kissing my hand to them in devotion? This too would be a sin deserving punishment for it would mean I had denied God above.

Have I ever been happy when disaster destroyed those who hated me, or celebrated when evil took them down? I have never allowed my mouth to sin by putting

a curse on someone's life. Haven't my family asked, ‘Is there anyone who has not eaten as much as they wanted of his food?’ I have never let strangers sleep in the street; I have opened my doors to travelers. Have I concealed my sins from others, hiding my wrongdoing deep inside me? Was I afraid of what everybody else would think, scared of the contempt families would show me, so that I kept quiet and didn't go outside?

Why won't anyone listen to what I'm saying! I'm signing my name to endorse everything I've said. Let the Almighty answer me. Let my accuser write down what he is charging me with. I would hold them up high; I would wear them on my head like a crown. I would explain to him everything I'd done; I would hold my head high before him.

If my land has cried out against me; if her furrows have wept over me; if I have taken its crops without payment or if I have caused harm to the farmers; then let thorns grow instead of wheat, and weeds instead of barley.” The words of Job are ended.

Job's three friends stopped responding to him because he kept on protesting his innocence. Then Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, grew angry. He was angry with Job for claiming he was right rather than God. Elihu was also angry at Job's three friends because they made it seem that God was wrong, because they had not been able to answer Job. Elihu had waited for the other three to speak with Job since they were older than he was. But when he saw that they could not answer Job, he grew very angry.

Elihu, the son of Barachel the Buzite, said, “I am young, and you are old, which is why I was reluctant to tell you what I know. I told myself, ‘Those who are older should speak—those who are elderly should teach wisdom.’ However, there is a spirit in human beings, the breath of the Almighty, that gives them understanding. It is not the old who are wise, or the elderly who know what is right. That's why I'm telling you to listen to me now—let me tell you what I know. Well, I waited to hear what you had to say, listening for your insights as you looked for the right words to speak. I paid close attention to all of you, and none of you have proved Job wrong or answered his arguments. Don't say to yourselves, ‘We are so wise,’ for God will prove him wrong, not a human being. Job didn't line up his arguments against me, and I won't answer him the way you did. You sit there speechless with nothing left to say. Should I continue to wait since you're no longer talking, just standing there saying nothing? No—now I'll give my answer too. I'll tell you what I know. I have so much to say I can't hold the words back! Inside I'm like fermenting wine all bottled up; like new wineskins ready to explode! I have to speak before I burst; I will open my lips to answer him. I will not take sides, and I'm not going to flatter anyone. I don't know how to flatter, and if I did my Creator would soon destroy me.”

“Now listen to me, Job. Pay attention to everything I have to say. Look, I'm about to speak; my mouth is ready to talk. My words come from my upright heart; my lips speak sincerely of what I know. The spirit of God made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me, if you can. Stand in front of me and prepare to defend yourself. Look, before God we are both the same. I was also made from a piece of clay. See here, you don't need to be frightened of me. I won't be too hard on you. You spoke in my hearing and I have listened to everything you had to say. You say, ‘I'm clean, I've done nothing wrong; I'm pure, I have not sinned. See how God finds fault with me and treats me as his enemy. He puts my feet in the stocks and watches everything I do.’ But look, you are wrong—let me explain. God is greater than any human being. Why are you fighting against him, complaining that God isn't answering your questions? God speaks over and over again, but people don't notice. Through dreams and visions in the night, when people fall into deep sleep, resting on their beds, God speaks to them with solemn warnings to turn them away from doing wrong and to stop them from becoming proud. He saves them from the grave and spares them from violent death. People are also disciplined on a bed of pain with constant aching in their bones. They have no desire to eat; they do not even want their favorite dishes. Their flesh wastes away to nothing; all that's left is skin and bones. They are close to death; their lives approaching the executioner.

But if an angel appears, a mediator, one of God's thousands of angels, to tell someone the right way for them, he will be gracious to them. He will say, ‘Save them from going down into the grave, for I have found a way to free them.’ Then their bodies will be renewed as if they were young again; they will be as strong as when they were in their prime. They will pray to God, and he will accept them; they come into God's presence with joy, and he will set things right for them. They sing, and tell others, ‘I sinned, I distorted what is right, but it did not do me any good. He saved me from going down into the grave and I will live in the light.’ Look, God does this time and again for people; he saves them from the grave so they might see the light of life.

Pay attention Job, and listen to me! Be quiet—let me speak! But if you have anything to say, then speak up. If not, listen to me. Keep quiet and I will teach you wisdom.”

Then Elihu continued, “Listen to my words, you men who say you are wise; pay attention to what I'm saying you who think you know. The ear distinguishes words just as the palate distinguishes foods. Let us discern for ourselves what is right: let us decide among ourselves what is good. Job said, ‘I am innocent, and God has denied me justice. Even though I'm right, I'm treated like a liar; I am dying from my wounds, even though I've done nothing wrong.’

Has there ever been a man like Job with such a thirst for ridiculing others? He keeps company with wicked people; he associates with those who do evil. He's even said, ‘What benefit is there in being God's friend?’

So listen to me, you men of understanding! It's impossible for God to do evil and the Almighty to do wrong. He pays people back for what they've done, and treats them as they deserve. It's absolutely sure that God doesn't act wickedly; the Almighty would never pervert justice. Who put him in charge of the earth? Who gave him the responsibility for all the world? If he were to withdraw his spirit, if he were to take back

his breath, all living things would immediately die and human beings would return to dust.

If you have understanding then hear this; pay attention to what I'm saying. Do you really think someone who hated justice could govern? Are you going to condemn Almighty God who always does what is right? He's the one who tells kings, 'You're useless!' or says to nobles, 'You're wicked!' He doesn't think more of the rich than the poor, for they are all people he himself made. They die in a moment; at midnight they shudder and pass away; the mighty are gone without effort.

For he watches what they're doing and sees everywhere they go. There is no darkness so deep where people who do evil can hide themselves from him. God doesn't need to examine anyone in any greater detail that they should come before him for judgment. He brings down the mighty without needing an investigation; he sets up others in their place. Knowing what they've done he overthrows them in a night and destroys them. He strikes them down for their wickedness in public where they can be seen because they turned away from following him, disregarding all his ways. They made the poor call out to him, and he heard the cries of the oppressed. Yet if God wants to remain silent, who can condemn him? If he chooses to hide his face, who can see him? Whether it concerns a nation or an individual, a person who rejects God should not rule so they don't mislead people.

If you were to say to God, 'I have sinned, but I won't do bad things any more. Show me what I cannot see. If I have done wrong, I won't do it again,' then should God reward you for following your own opinions since you have rejected his? You're the one who has to choose, not me! Tell us what you think. For people who understand —those who are wise who have heard what I said—will tell me, 'Job doesn't know what he's talking about. What he says doesn't make any sense.' If only Job were thoroughly condemned because he speaks like evil people do. Now he has added rebellion to his sins; he claps his hands at us, making long speeches full of accusations against God."

Then Elihu continued, saying, "Do you think it's honest to claim you are right before God? And you ask, 'What benefit do I get? What good has it done me by not sinning?'

I'll tell you, and your friends too! Just look up at the sky and see. Observe the clouds high above you. If you sin, how does that harm God? How do your many sins affect God? If you do what's right, what good are you doing for him? No—your sins only affect people like yourself, and whatever good you do only affects them too.

People cry out because of terrible persecution; they call for someone to save them from their oppressors. But no one asks, 'Where is the God my maker, the one who gives songs in the night, who teaches us more than the animals, and makes us wiser than the birds?' When they call out for help, God doesn't answer them because they are proud and evil people. God doesn't listen to their empty cries; the Almighty doesn't pay them any attention. How much less will God hear you when you say he can't see you? Your case is before him, so you have to wait for him.

You're saying that God doesn't punish people in his anger and pays little attention to sin. You, Job, are talking nonsense, making long speeches when you know nothing!"

Elihu continued speaking. "Be patient with me just a little while longer and let me explain. I still have something to say on God's behalf. I will share my extensive knowledge, and I will prove my Creator is in the right. I assure you that what I'm saying are not lies, for I am a man whose knowledge is of the highest order. God is mighty, but doesn't despise anyone; he is powerful in strength and understanding. He does not keep the wicked alive, but gives justice to the oppressed. He always pays attention to those who do right, and places them on thrones with kings, honoring them eternally. If they are bound in chains, tied down by ropes of suffering, then he explains to them what they've done —their arrogant sins. He makes them pay attention and orders them to stop sinning.

If they listen and do what God says they will live out their lives in happiness. But if they do not listen they will die a violent death, ignorant of God. Those who reject God hold on to their bitterness. Even when he disciplines them they do not cry out to him for help. They die in their youth; their lives end among the male temple prostitutes. Through suffering God saves those who suffer; he gets their attention through their troubles.

God is trying to rescue you from the jaws of trouble to a place of freedom and safety, filling your table full of the very best food. But you are preoccupied with the fate of the wicked; judgment and justice fill your mind. But be careful that your anger doesn't seduce you into mockery; and don't let the size of the 'bribe' lead you into sin. Will your cry for help sustain you when troubles come? Do not long for the night when people are suddenly taken away. Watch out that you don't turn to evil! For it's because of this that you are being tested through suffering.

Look how much power God has! What teacher is like him? Who has instructed him what to do? Who can say to him 'You have done wrong'? Instead you should praise him for what he has done, as people have done in song. Everyone has seen God's creation, though only from a distance.

See how great God is—more than we can understand! No one can count his years. He draws up the water and distils it into the dew and the rain. The clouds pour down rain, falling plentifully on humankind. Can anyone understand how the clouds spread out, or how thunder roars from where he lives? See how he scatters lightning around him, and covers the depths of the sea in darkness. By these actions he rules the people, he provides abundant food. He holds lightning in his hands and commands where it should strike. Thunder declares his presence—even cattle know when a storm is coming."

"At this my heart trembles, beating rapidly within me! Listen carefully to God's thunderous voice that rumbles as he speaks. He sends it across the heaven; his lightning flashes to the ends of the earth. Then comes the roar of thunder, his majestic voice holding nothing

back when he speaks. God's thunderous voice is wonderful! We can't comprehend the great things he does!

He tells the snow to fall and the rain to pour down on the earth. By this he stops people working so that everyone can understand what he does. Even the animals take shelter and remain in their dens. The south wind blows in storms, while the north wind blows in cold weather. God's breath produces ice, freezing the surface of water solid. He fills the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning from them. They swirl around under his control; they move over all the earth as he commands. He does this to accomplish his will, either to discipline or to show his goodness.

Listen to this, Job! Stop for a moment and consider the wonderful things God does. Do you know how God controls the clouds, or makes his lightning flash from them? Do you know how clouds float in the sky—the wonderful work of him who knows everything. You know how your clothes drip with sweat when the south wind brings air that is hot and heavy. Can you hammer out the sky so it becomes like a molten mirror, as he does?

So why don't you teach us what to tell God? We cannot make our case because we are in the dark! Should God be told that I want to speak? Anyone who wanted to would be destroyed! After all, we can't look at the sun when it blazes brightly in the sky, after the wind has cleared away the clouds. Out of the north God comes shining like gold, surrounded in awesome majesty. We cannot approach the Almighty for he is far beyond us in power and justice, and doing right. He does not act like a tyrant—no wonder people are in awe of him, though he does not value those who think they're wise."

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, "Who is this who questions my wisdom by talking so ignorantly? Prepare yourself, be strong, for I am going to question you, and you must answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have such knowledge! Who decided its dimensions? Don't you know? Who stretched out a measuring line? What do its foundations rest upon? Who laid its cornerstone, when the stars of the morning sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.

Who laid down the boundaries of the sea when it was born? Who clothed it with clouds, and wrapped it in a blanket of deep darkness? I set its limits, marking its borders. I said, 'You may come here, but no farther. Here is where your proud waves stop.'

During your lifetime, have you ever ordered the morning to begin? Have you ever told the dawn where to appear that it might take hold of the corners of the earth and shake the wicked out? The earth is changed like clay under a seal; its features stand out like a crumpled garment. The 'light' of the wicked is taken away from them; their acts of violence are stopped.

Have you entered the sources of the sea? Have you explored their hidden depths? Have you been shown where the gates of death are? Have you seen the gates of utter darkness? Do you know how far the earth extends? Tell me if you know all this! In which direction does light live? Where does darkness dwell? Can you take them home? Do you know the way to where they live? Of course you know, because you were already born then! You've lived so long!

Have you been to where the snow is kept? Have you seen where the hail is held? I have stored them up for the time of trouble, for the day of war and battle. Do you know the way to where light comes from, or to where the east wind blows over the earth? Who cuts a channel for the rain to flow? Who creates a path for the thunderbolt?

Who brings rain to an uninhabited land, to a desert where nobody lives, to water a parched wasteland to make the green grass grow? Does the rain have a father? Who was the father of the dewdrops? Who was the mother of ice? Does the frost of the air have a mother? Water turns into rock-hard ice; its surface freezes solid. Can you tie together the stars of the Pleiades? Can you loosen the belt of the Orion constellation? Can you guide the stars of Mazzaroth at the right time? Can you direct the Great Bear constellation and its other stars? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you apply them to the earth?

Can you shout to the clouds and command them to pour rain down on you? Can you send out bolts of lightning and direct them, so that they can answer you saying, 'Here we are'? Who has placed wisdom inside people? Who has given understanding to the mind? Who is clever enough to count the clouds? Who can turn heaven's water jars on their sides when the dust has baked into a solid mass?

Can you hunt prey for the lion? Can you feed the lion cubs as they crouch down in their dens and lie in wait in the bushes? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God, weak from starvation?"

"Do you know when the wild goats give birth? Have you watched the birth-pains of the deer? Do you know how many months they carry their young? Do you know the time when they give birth? They crouch down in labor to deliver their offspring. Their young grow strong in the open countryside; they leave and never return.

Who gave the wild donkey its freedom? Who set it free from its bonds? I have given it the wilderness as its home, the salt plains as a place to live. It despises the noise of the city; it doesn't need to listen to the shouts of a driver. It hunts in the mountains for pastureland, searching for all kinds of green plants to eat.

Is the wild ox willing to serve you? Will it spend the night at your manger? Can you tie a wild ox to a plow? Can you make it till your fields for you? Because it's so powerful can you trust it? Can you depend on it to do your heavy work for you? Are you sure it will gather your grain and bring it to your threshing floor?

The ostrich proudly flaps her wings, but they are nothing like the flight feathers of the stork. The ostrich abandons her eggs on the ground, leaving them to be warmed in the dust. She doesn't think that they can be crushed underfoot, trampled by a wild animal. She is tough towards her young, acting as if they didn't belong to her. She doesn't care that all her work was for nothing. For I, God, made her forget wisdom—she didn't get her share of intelligence. But when she needs to, she can jump up and run, mocking a horse and its rider with her speed.

Did you give the horse its strength? Did you place a mane upon its neck? Did you make it able to jump like a locust? Its loud snorting is terrifying! It paws at the ground, rearing up with power as it charges into battle. It laughs at fear; it is not frightened at all. The quiver full of arrows rattles against it; the spear and the javelin flash in the sunlight. Shaking with rage it gallops across the ground; it cannot remain still when the trumpet sounds. Whenever the trumpet calls, it is ready; he senses the sound of battle from far away, he hears the commanders shouting.

Is it through your wisdom that the hawk soars, spreading its wings towards the south? Do you command the eagle to fly high and make its nest in the summits of the mountains? It lives among the cliffs, and roosts on a remote rocky crag. From there it spies its prey from far away, fixing its gaze on its victim. Its chicks eagerly swallow blood. Where the carcasses are, that's where birds of prey are found."

God continued speaking to Job. "Are you still going to fight with the Almighty and try to set him straight? Anyone who argues with God must give some answers."

Job answered the Lord, "Me—I am nothing at all. I have no answers. I put my hand in front of my mouth. I have already said far too much and I won't say anything more."

Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, "Prepare yourself, be strong, for I am going to question you, and you must answer me.

Are you really going to say my decisions are wrong? Are you going to condemn me so you can be right? Are you as powerful as I am? Does your voice thunder like mine? Why don't you dress yourself with majesty and dignity, and clothe yourself with glory and splendor! Let loose your fierce anger. Humble the proud with a glance. Bring down the proud with your gaze; tread the wicked underfoot right where they are. Bury them in the dust; lock them away in the grave. Then I will also agree that your own strength can save you.

Consider Behemoth, a creature I made just like I made you. It eats grass like cattle. Look at its powerful loins, the muscles of its belly. It bends its tail like a cedar; its thigh sinews are strong. Its bones are like bronze tubes; its limbs like iron rods. It is the most important example of what God can do; only the one who made it can approach it with a sword. The hills produce food for it, and all the wild animals play there. It lies under the lotus; it hides in the reeds of the marsh. The lotus covers it with shade; the willow trees of the valley surround it. Even if the river is in flood, it is not concerned; it remains calm when the Jordan river surges against it. No one can catch it while it is watching, or pierce its nose with a noose."

"Can you pull out Leviathan with a hook? Can you tie its mouth shut? Can you thread a rope through its nose? Can you pass a hook through its jaw? Will it beg you to let it go? Or will it talk softly to you? Will it make a contract with you? Will it agree to be your slave forever? Will you play with it like a pet bird? Will you put it on a leash for your girls? Will your trading partners decide on a price for him, and divide him up among the merchants? Can you pierce his skin with many harpoons, its head with fishing spears? If you were to grab hold of it, imagine the battle you would have! You wouldn't do that again! Any hope to capture it is foolish. Anyone who tries is thrown to the ground. Since no one has the courage to provoke Leviathan, who would dare to stand up against me? Who has confronted me with any claim that I should repay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.

Let me tell you about Leviathan: its powerful legs and graceful proportions. Who can remove its hide? Who can penetrate its double coat of armor? Who can open its jaws? Its teeth are terrifying! Its pride is its rows of scales, closed tightly together. Its scales are so close together that no air can pass between them. Each scale attaches to the next; they lock together and nothing can penetrate them. When it sneezes light shines out. Its eyes are like the rising sun. Flames pour from its mouth, sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke comes from its nostrils, like steam from a kettle on a fire made of reeds. Its breath sets fire to charcoal as flames shoot from its mouth. Its neck is powerful, and all who face him shake with terror. Its body is dense and solid, as if it is made from cast metal. Its heart is rock-hard, like a millstone. When it rises, even the powerful are terrified; they retreat as it thrashes about. Swords just bounce off it, as do spears, darts, and javelins. It brushes aside iron like straw, and bronze like rotten wood. Arrows cannot make it run away; stones from slingshots are like pieces of stubble. Clubs are also treated like stubble; it laughs at the sound made by flying spears. Its underparts are covered with points as sharp as broken pots; when it drags itself through the mud it leaves marks like a threshing sledge. It churns up the sea like water in a boiling pot, like a steaming bowl when ointment is mixed. It leaves a glistening wake behind it as if the sea had white hair. There is nothing on earth like it: a creature that has no fear. It looks down on all other creatures. It is the proudest of all."

Then Job answered the Lord. "I know you can do anything. No one can prevent you doing what you want. You asked, 'Who is this who questions my wisdom by talking so ignorantly?' I was speaking about things I didn't understand—things too wonderful for me to know. You told me, 'Listen to me, I am going to speak. I am going to question you, and you must answer me.' Before, I had only heard about you, but now I've seen you for myself. That is why I'm sorry for what I said, and I repent in dust and ashes."

After the Lord had finished speaking to Job he said to Eliphaz the Temanite, "I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not told the truth about me, as my servant Job did. So take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job, and you shall offer a burnt offering for yourselves. My servant Job will pray on your behalf and I will accept his prayer and not deal with you according to your foolishness, because you have not told the truth about me, as my servant Job did." So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite did what the Lord commanded them, and the Lord accepted Job's prayer.

The Lord restored Job's prosperity when he prayed for his friends, and gave him twice as much as he had before. Then all his brothers and sisters and friends he'd previously known came and ate with him at his

home. They showed him sympathy and comforted him because of all the trouble the Lord had caused him. Each one of them gave him money and a gold ring. The Lord blessed the last part of Job's life more than the first part. Now he owned 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female donkeys. Job also had seven sons and three daughters. Job called the first daughter Jemimah, the second Keziah, and the third Keren-Happuch. Nowhere in all the land were there women as beautiful as Job's daughters, and Job gave them the same inheritance as their brothers. Job lived 140 years after this, seeing his children, and grandchildren, in fact four generations. Then Job died at an old age, having lived a very full life.

Psalms

Book of Psalms

Happy are those who don't follow the advice of the wicked. They refuse to adopt the ways of sinful people, and they don't make fun of others.

Instead they love to do what the law of the Lord says, and they think about it day and night.

They're like trees growing by flowing rivers, producing fruit every season. Their leaves never wither, and they are successful in all they do.

But it's not like that for the wicked! They are like chaff, blown away by the wind.

For this reason the wicked will not survive the judgment—sinners have no place among those who live right.

For the Lord watches over those who follow the right way, but the way of the wicked leads to death.

Why are the nations plotting rebellion? The peoples devise schemes, but they're pointless.

The kings of the world prepare to attack, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his anointed one, saying,

"Let's break the chains and throw away the cords that bind us."

But the one who sits enthroned in heaven laughs. The Lord mocks them.

He will thunder at them, and terrify them in his fury, saying,

"It is I who placed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."

"I will proclaim the Lord's decree," says the king. "He told me, 'You are my son. Today I have become your father.

Ask me, and I will give you the nations as your possessions—the whole earth will belong to you.

You will break them with a rod of iron, smashing them like pottery.'"

So then you kings, be wise! Be warned, you rulers of the world!

Serve the Lord in reverence, celebrate with trembling!

Submit to his son so that he will not become angry and you die suddenly. His anger flares up quickly, but how happy are all those who go to him for protection.

A psalm of David concerning the time he had to flee from his son Absalom.

Lord, my enemies have become so many; so many are rebelling against me.

So many are telling me, "God can't save you!" Selah.

But you, Lord, are a shield protecting me. You give me victory; you hold my head high.

I cry out to the Lord for help, and he answers me from his holy mountain. Selah.

I lie down to sleep, and in the morning I wake up because the Lord takes care of me.

I'm not afraid of tens of thousands who surround me, people who are against me.

Stand up for me, Lord! Save me, my God! Hit all my enemies on the cheek; break the teeth of the wicked!

Salvation belongs to you, Lord; may you be a blessing to your people. Selah.

For the music director. A psalm of David, to be accompanied by string instruments.

When I call, please answer me, God who vindicates me. When I was hemmed in by troubles, you gave me a way out. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer.

How long will you people ruin my reputation? How long will you love what is worthless and tell lies? Selah.

You should realize that the Lord shows special favor to the faithful. The Lord listens when I call to him.

Be in awe; do not sin. When you rest, reflect on this, and keep quiet! Selah.

Offer sacrifices with the right attitude. Trust in the Lord.

Many say, "Who is going to show us some good?" Lord, may your face shine upon us.

The happiness you give me is better than those who have a plentiful harvest of grain and new wine.

I will lie down in peace and sleep, for you, Lord, alone keep me safe.

For the music director. A psalm of David, to be accompanied by flutes.

Lord, please listen to me. Don't ignore my groans of distress.

Hear me pleading for help, my King and my God, because I'm praying to you.

Please listen to what I have to say in the morning, Lord. Every morning I put my requests to you and wait for your reply.

For you are not a God who has any pleasure in wickedness; evil has no place with you.

The proud cannot come into your presence; you hate everyone who does evil.

You destroy those who tell lies. The Lord loathes bloodthirsty and deceptive people.

But because of the greatness of your trustworthy love, I can come into your house; in awe of you, I bow down towards your holy Temple.

Lead me, Lord, you who always does what is right, save me from my enemies. Make your way clear to me.

Nothing they say can be trusted; their main desire is to destroy. Their throat is like an open grave; their tongues are full of flattery.

God, condemn them as guilty! Make them fall because of their evil plans. Throw them out because of all their sins, for they have rebelled against you.

But may all those who trust in you be happy—may they sing for joy forever. May you spread your protection over them so that everyone who loves your character may celebrate.

For you, Lord, bless those who live right; you protect them with your shield of love.

For the music director. To be accompanied by stringed instruments, according to the sheminith. A psalm of David.

Lord, please don't condemn me because you're angry with me; please don't punish me because you're angry with me!

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am weak; heal me, Lord, for I am sick to the bone.

I'm shaking all over in fear. How long will it be, Lord, before you do something?

Turn, Lord, and rescue me! Save me because of your trustworthy love!

For no one remembers you when they're dead. Who is able to praise you from the grave?

My groaning has exhausted me. Every night I soak my bed with my crying; I drench my couch with my tears.

With all my crying I can hardly see; my eyes grow weak because of the trouble my enemies cause me.

Leave me alone, all you people who do evil, for the Lord has heard me crying!

The Lord has heard me calling out for help; the Lord answers my prayer.

All who hate me will be shamefully defeated and terrified; they will run away in disgrace.

A psalm (shiggaion) of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Lord my God, you are my protection. Save me from those who persecute me; please rescue me!

Otherwise they will tear me apart like a lion, ripping me to pieces with no one to save me.

If I have done what I'm accused of, if my hands are guilty,

If I have paid back a friend with evil, if I have robbed my enemy for no reason,

Then let my enemies chase me down; let them trample me in the dust and drag my reputation through the dirt. Selah.

Stand up, Lord, in your anger, rise up against the fury of my enemies; wake up, Lord, and bring me justice!

Bring together the nations before you; rule them from your throne on high.

The Lord judges all people. Defend me, Lord, because I do what is right, because of my integrity.

Please bring an end to the evil done by the wicked; vindicate those who do good, for you are the God of right who examines hearts and minds.

The Most High God is my defense, the one who saves those who live right.

God is a fair judge who is always hostile to evil.

If people do not change their minds, he will sharpen his sword. He has bent and strung his bow.

He has prepared weapons of death, he has his flaming arrows ready.

See how the wicked conceive evil! They are pregnant with trouble. They give birth to dishonesty.

They dig a deep hole to catch people, but then fall into it themselves.

The trouble they cause rebounds to hit them on the head; their violence against others comes down on their own skulls.

I will thank the Lord because he does what is right; I will sing praises to the name of the Lord Most High.

For the music director. On the gittith. A psalm of David.

Lord, our Lord, your magnificent reputation fills the earth! Your majesty is greater than the heavens above,

and is sung by the voices of children and infants. Your strength counters your opponents, silencing the enemy and the avenger.

When I contemplate the heavens that your hands made, the moon and stars that you placed there,

What are human beings that you should concern yourself with them? What are people that you should care for them?

You created them a little lower than God, crowning them with glory and majesty.

You put them in charge of all that you made, giving them authority over everything:

the sheep, the cattle, and the wild animals,

the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea—everything that swims in the ocean.

Lord, our Lord, your magnificent reputation fills the earth!

For the music director. According to Muth-labben. A psalm of David.

I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all the amazing things you have done.

I will be glad and celebrate in you; I will sing praises to your wonderful nature, Most High God.

Those who hate me retreat; they fall back and die when you confront them.

For you have judged that I am right; you have decided fairly from your throne of judgment.

You have condemned the nations; you have destroyed the wicked; you have wiped out their names forever and ever.

The enemies are finished, ruined forever; their cities are destroyed—even the memory of them is gone.

But the Lord rules forever, his throne is set up for judgment.

The Lord judges the world rightly; he judges the nations fairly.

The Lord is a place of safety for those who are oppressed, a fortress in times of trouble.

Those who know your nature trust in you, for you don't abandon those who come to you.

Sing praises to the Lord who reigns in Zion! Tell the nations what he has done!

He does not forget to punish murderers; he does not ignore the cries of the suffering.

Be gracious to me, Lord! Look at how my enemies are persecuting me! Grab me back from the gates of death,

so I can praise you at Zion's gates, happy that you have saved me.

The nations have fallen into their own pit they dug; their feet are trapped by their own net they set.

The Lord is known for his fairness; the wicked are trapped by their own actions. Higgaion. Selah.

The wicked depart, going to the grave—all nations who turn their backs on God.

But the needy will not be ignored forever, the hope of those who suffer will not always be dashed.

Stand up, Lord! Don't let human beings win! Let the nations be brought before you for judgment!

Lord, terrify them! Let them know they are only human! Selah.

Lord, why are you so distant? Why do you hide from me in times of trouble?

The wicked chase down the poor with impunity. May they be trapped by the evil schemes they themselves invented.

For the wicked boast about what they want to do. They praise the greedy, but treat the Lord with contempt.

The wicked are too proud to come to God. In all their thinking they never consider God.

What they do always seems to go well. They're unaware of God's judgments. They ridicule all their enemies.

They tell themselves, “Nothing bad is going to happen to me. I'll never be in trouble!”

Their speech is full of cursing, lies, and threats; their tongues are always ready to spread trouble and cause evil.

They hide out in ambush in the villages, ready to kill innocent passers-by. They are always on the lookout for their next victim.

They lie in ambush like a lion ready to attack, ready to leap out from their hiding place to seize their victim. They capture the helpless, throwing a net over them.

Their victims are knocked down, laid low. They fall under the strength of the wicked.

They tell themselves, “God won't notice. He's looking the other way. He won't ever see anything.”

Take a stand, Lord! Raise your hand to strike! Don't forget those who can't defend themselves.

Why do the wicked think they can treat God with such contempt? Why do they think that God won't make them accountable?

But you do see the trouble and grief they cause. Take it into your own hands. The helpless trust in you; you defend the orphans.

Destroy the power of the wicked, those evil people! Call each of them to account until there are none left!

Lord, you are King forever and ever! The nations will vanish from their lands.

Lord, you have heard the longing cries of those who are suffering. You will encourage them, for you will listen to them.

You will defend the rights of orphans and the oppressed so that those who are mere human beings here on earth will never terrorize them again.

For the music director: A psalm of David.

Lord, you are my protection. So how can you tell me, “Fly away to the mountains like a bird”?

Look, the wicked are drawing their bows, loading them with arrows ready to shoot from the shadows at good people.

When the foundations of society are destroyed, what can those who live right do?

The Lord is in his Temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. He keeps a close eye on everyone, watching them carefully.

The Lord examines both those who do right and those who do evil, but he hates those who love violence.

He will make blazing coals and sulfur rain down on the wicked; a scorching wind is what's coming on them.

The Lord does what is right, and he loves those who live right. Those who do good will see him face to face.

For the music director. To the Sheminith. A psalm of David.

Help, Lord, for all the good people have gone! Those who trust in you have disappeared from among the people on earth.

Everyone lies to their neighbors. They flatter with nice talk, but they don't mean what they say.

Stop their flattery, Lord, and silence their boasts—

these people who say, “We will succeed through what we say; our mouths belong to us. We don't take orders from anyone!”

“Because of the violence the helpless have suffered, and because of the groans of the poor, I will rise up to defend them,” says the Lord. “I will give them the protection they have been longing for.”

What the Lord says is trustworthy, as pure as silver refined seven times in a furnace.

You, Lord will keep the oppressed safe; you will protect us from these kinds of people forever;

even though the wicked are all around us, and evil is being promoted everywhere.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

How long, Lord, are you going to forget me? Forever? How long will you turn away from me?

How long must I be in inner turmoil, feeling sad all day long? How long will my enemy be victorious over me?

Think about this, and answer me, Lord my God. Give me back my strength, otherwise I'm going to die,

and my enemy will say, “I defeated him!” and my opponents will celebrate my downfall.

But I trust in your never-failing love, I will be happy because you save me.

I will sing to the Lord because he has treated me with such generosity!

For the music director. A psalm of David.

Only fools tell themselves, “God doesn't exist.” They are completely immoral; they commit terrible sins; not a single one of them does anything good.

The Lord watches from heaven to see whether anyone understands—if there's anyone who wants to come to God.

They have all gone their own way, they are totally depraved; none of them does anything good, not even one.

Won't these people who do evil ever learn? They consume my people as if they were eating bread, and refuse to pray to the Lord.

Look, they will become terrified, because God is with those who live right.

The wicked dismiss the plans of the poor people, but the Lord looks after them.

If only the Lord's salvation would come from Zion! When the Lord restores his people, the people of Jacob will celebrate, and the people of Israel will be glad.

A psalm of David.

Who may enter your sanctuary, Lord? Who may come into your presence on your holy mountain?

Those who live without fault and do what is right, those who sincerely tell the truth.

They do not slander, do not treat their neighbors badly, do not gossip about people they know.

They reject people the Lord has rejected, but honor those who follow the Lord. They keep their promises even when it's hard to do. They don't change their minds.

They lend money without charging interest. They don't take bribes to testify against the innocent. Those who act like this will never ever fall.

A psalm (miktam) of David.

Take care of me, Lord, for I come to you for protection.

I tell the Lord, “Apart from you Lord, I don't have anything that's good.”

As for the holy people in the land, they are the ones who are truly great. I appreciate them.

Those who run after other gods will face a lot of trouble. I will not participate in their offerings of blood, I will not even speak the names of their gods.

Lord, you alone are all I have; you give me what I need; you safeguard my future.

The land divisions have worked out in my favor—my property is wonderful!

I will bless the Lord who gives me good advice; even at night my conscience tells me what is right.

I have always kept the Lord in front of me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. That's why I'm so happy! That's why I am full of joy! That's why my body lives in hope!

For you will not abandon me in the grave, nor will you allow your Holy One to experience decay.

You have shown me the path of life, filling me with joy with your presence and the delight of living with you forever.

A prayer of David.

Lord, please hear my cry for justice! Please pay attention to my call for help! Listen to the prayer of an honest man!

Vindicate me before you—for you see what is right.

You have observed my thoughts, you have visited me at night, you have examined me—and you have found nothing wrong. I promised myself I wouldn't say anything I shouldn't.

With regard to the actions of others: I have done what you told me and I have avoided what violent people do.

I have not strayed from your path; my feet have not slipped from it.

God, I call out to you because I know you will answer; please listen carefully to what I have to say.

Show me how wonderful your trustworthy love really is, Savior of those who come to you for protection against their enemies!

Keep me safe as someone you love; hide me underneath your wings.

Protect me from the attacks of the wicked who want to destroy me, from my enemies who surround me, intent on killing me.

They have no compassion, and all they have to say is pure arrogance.

They hunt me down and surround me, looking for the chance to knock me down in the dust.

They are like lions, longing to tear their prey apart; like fierce lions crouching in ambush.

Lord, stand up and confront them! Force them to back down! By your sword rescue me from the wicked!

Lord, by your power, save me from people whose only thought is for this world. May they be filled with what you have in store for them, their children too, with left-overs for their grandchildren!

As for me, I shall see your face in all its goodness. When I awake, I will be so pleased to see you face to face.

To the music director. A psalm of David the servant of the Lord, who sang the words of this song to the Lord on the day when the Lord saved him from all his enemies, and from Saul. He sang:

I love you, Lord. You are my strength.

The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my Savior. He is my God, my rock who protects me. He shields me from harm, his power protects me, he keeps me safe.

I call for help from the Lord who should be praised, and he saves me from those who hate me.

Ropes of death encircled me, surging waters of destruction flooded over me;

The grave wound its ropes around me; death set snares for me.

In my despair I called on the Lord—I cried out to my God for help. He heard my voice from his Temple—my cry for help reached his ears.

The earth shook to and fro; the foundations of the mountains trembled, shaking because of his anger.

Smoke came out of his nostrils, and fire came from his mouth; burning coals blazed before him.

He parted the heavens and came down, with dark clouds beneath his feet.

Riding on an angel he flew, swooping on the wings of the wind.

He hid himself in darkness, covering himself with black thunderclouds.

Hailstones and burning coals flew out from his brightness, passing through his thick clouds.

The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High sounded among the hailstones and burning coals.

He fired his arrows, scattering his enemies; he routed them with his lightning bolts.

You roared, Lord, and by the wind from the breath of your nostrils the valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth were uncovered.

He reached down his hand from above and grabbed hold of me. He pulled me out of the deep water.

He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who hated me and who were much stronger than me.

They came at me at my worst possible moment, but the Lord supported me.

He set me free, he rescued me because he's my friend.

The Lord rewarded me because I do what's right; he repaid me because I am innocent.

For I have followed the Lord's ways; I have not sinned by turning away from my God.

I have kept all his laws in mind; I have not ignored his commandments.

I am blameless in his sight; I keep myself from sinning.

The Lord rewarded me for doing what's right. I am innocent in his sight.

You show trust to those who trust; you show integrity to those with integrity,

You show yourself pure to those who are pure, but you show yourself smart to those who are crafty.

You save the humble, but you bring down the proud.

You light my lamp! Lord, my God, you light up my darkness!

With you, I can charge down a troop of soldiers; with you, my God, I can climb a fortress wall.

God's way is absolutely right. What the Lord says is trustworthy. He is a shield to all who come to him for protection.

For who is God except the Lord? Who is the rock, except our God?

God makes me strong and keeps me safe.

He makes me surefooted like the deer, able to walk the heights in safety.

He teaches me how to fight in battle; he gives me the strength to draw a bronze bow.

You protect me with the shield of your salvation; you support me with your powerful right hand; your help has made me great.

You gave me space in which to walk, and prevented my feet from slipping.

I chased my enemies, and caught up with them. I did not turn around until I had destroyed them.

I struck them down—they couldn't get up. They fell at my feet.

You made me strong for battle; you made those who rose up against me kneel down before me.

You made my enemies run away; I destroyed all my enemies.

They cried out for help, but no one came to rescue them. They even called out to the Lord, but he did not answer them.

I ground them into dust, like dust in the wind. I threw them out like mud in the street.

You rescued me from rebellious people; you made me ruler over nations—people I didn't know now serve me.

As soon as they hear of me, they obey; foreigners cringe before me.

They lose heart, and come trembling in surrender from their strongholds.

The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock! May the God who saves me be praised!

God avenges me, he subdues peoples under me,

he rescues me from those who hate me. You keep me safe from those who rebel against me, you save me from violent men.

That's why I will praise you among the nations, Lord; I will sing praises about who you are.

You have saved the king so often, showing your trustworthy love to David, your anointed, and to his descendants forever.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

The heavens declare God's glory; the skies above announce what he has made.

Each day speaks constantly about God's glory to the next day; each night shares knowledge of God with the next night.

They speak without speech or words; their voice is not audible;

Yet what they say is heard all over the earth; their message goes to the whole world. God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

It's like a bridegroom coming out of his room, like a fit athlete happy to run a race.

It rises on one side of the heavens and travels across to the other. Nothing is hidden from its heat.

The Lord's law is beneficial, renewing spiritual life. The Lord's teaching is trustworthy, making inexperienced people wise.

The Lord's instructions are right, making people glad. The Lord's commandments are sincere, helping people see what is good.

Reverence for the Lord is right, and lasts forever. The Lord's judgments are both true and fair.

They are more to be valued than gold, even the finest gold; they are sweeter than honey, even the purest honey coming straight from the honeycomb.

They also warn your servant. By keeping them I'm richly rewarded.

Who's aware of their own mistakes? Don't punish me for these faults I'm unaware of.

Don't let your servant commit deliberate sins. Don't let them rule over me. Then I will be without fault, innocent of such rebellion.

May you be pleased with the words I speak, and the thoughts I think, Lord my rock and my redeemer.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

May the Lord answer you when you are in trouble; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.

May the Lord send you help from the sanctuary, and may he support you from Zion.

May the Lord remember all your offerings, and accept all your burnt sacrifices. Selah.

May the Lord give you whatever you really want; may he make all your plans successful.

May we shout for joy over your victory, and set up banners in the name of our God. May the Lord answer all your requests.

Now I know that the Lord saves the one he has anointed. He will answer him from his holy heaven, and save his anointed by his powerful right hand.

Some trust in chariots and some in war horses, but we trust in who the Lord our God is.

They collapse and fall down, but we rise and stand up.

May the Lord save the king! Please answer us when we call for help!

For the music director. A psalm of David.

The king celebrates your strength, Lord; he is so happy you made him victorious!

You gave him everything he wanted; you didn't hold back anything he asked for.

You welcomed him on his return with special blessings; you placed a crown of pure gold on his head.

He asked you to give him a good life, and you gave him a long life, forever and ever.

Your victories brought him great glory; you granted him splendor and majesty.

You give him blessings forever. He is full of joy because you are with him.

For the king trusts in the Lord; he stands firm because of the trustworthy love of the Most High.

You, the king, will find and capture all your enemies; you will seize everyone who hates you.

When you appear on the scene you will burn them up like in a furnace; the Lord in his anger will destroy them, burning them up with fire.

You will wipe out their children from the earth, their descendants from humankind.

Though they plot evil against you, their malicious schemes will not succeed.

They will turn and run away when they see your arrows fired at them.

Rise up, Lord, for you are strong! We will sing and praise your power!

For the music director. To the tune "Doe of the Dawn." A psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far away when I groan, asking for help?

My God, every day I cry out to you, but you don't answer; at night too, but I get no rest.

Yet you are holy, and the praises of Israel are your throne.

Our forefathers trusted in you; they trusted and you rescued them.

They cried out to you for help, and they were saved. They trusted in you and were not defeated.

But I'm a worm, not a man, scorned and despised by everyone.

People who see me mock me. They laugh at me and shake their heads, saying,

"He trusts in the Lord—well then, let the Lord save him! If the Lord is such a friend, then let the Lord rescue him!"

However, you brought me safely through birth, and led me to trust in you at my mother's breasts.

I was entrusted to you from birth; from the time I was born you have been my God.

Do not be distant from me, because trouble is close by and no one else can help.

Enemies surround me like a herd of bulls; strong bulls from Bashan have encircled me.

Like roaring lions tearing at their prey they open their mouths wide against me.

I feel like I'm being poured out like water. I'm falling apart as if all my bones have become loose. My mind feels like it's wax melting inside me.

My strength has dried up like a piece of broken pottery. My tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth. You're burying me as if I'm already dead.

Evil men surround me like a pack of dogs. They have pierced my hands and feet.

I'm so thin I can count all my bones. People stare at me and gloat.

They divide my clothing among them; they roll dice for my clothes.

But you, Lord, don't be far away from me! You are my strength—hurry, come and help me!

Save me from death by the sword! Save my life—the only one I have—from the dogs!

Rescue me from the mouth of the lion and from the wild bulls!

I will tell my people all the wonderful things you have done; I will praise you in the congregation.

Praise the Lord, all who worship him! Honor him, every descendant of Jacob! Be in awe of him, every descendant of Israel!

For he has not ridiculed or scorned the suffering of the poor; he has not turned away from them, he has listened to their cries for help.

You are the subject of my praise in the great assembly. I will fulfill my promises before those who worship you.

The poor shall eat, and they shall be satisfied. All who come to the Lord will praise him—may you all live forever!

Everyone in the whole world will repent and return to the Lord; all the nations will worship before you.

For kingly power belongs to the Lord; he is the one who rules over the nations.

All who prosper come to feast and worship. Bow down before him, all those destined for the grave—for none can keep themselves alive.

Our descendants will serve him; they will tell the next generation about the Lord.

They will come and tell those yet to be born how good the Lord is, and all that he has done!

A psalm of David.

Since the Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.

He gives me rest in green fields. He leads me towards quietly flowing streams.

He revives me. He guides me along the right paths because that's the kind of person he is.

Even when I walk through the valley dark as death, I'm not afraid of any evil, because you are right there with me; your rod and your staff protect me.

You prepare a banquet for me before my enemies. You honor me by anointing my head with olive oil. My cup is so full it overflows!

I'm absolutely certain that your goodness and trustworthy love will be with me all through my life, and I will live in the house of the Lord forever.

A psalm of David.

The earth is the Lord's, and everything that is in it belongs to him. The world is his, and everyone who lives there.

For he is the one who laid its foundations on the seas, setting it in place on the waters.

Who is allowed to go up the Lord's mountain? Who is permitted to stand in his holy place?

Those who have clean hands and pure minds, who don't worship idols, and who don't lie under oath.

They will take with them the blessing of the Lord, vindicated by the God who saves them.

These are the kind of people who may go to the Lord and worship before you, God of Jacob. Selah.

Open up, you gates! Swing wide, you ancient doors! Let the King of glory come in!

Who is this King of glory? The Lord, strong and powerful, mighty in battle.

Open up, you gates! Swing wide, you ancient doors! Let the King of glory come in!

Who is this King of glory? The Lord Almighty, he is the King of glory! Selah.

A psalm of David.

Lord, I come to worship you.

I trust in you, my God. Don't let me be humiliated, and don't let my enemies triumph over me.

No one who trusts in you will be humiliated, but humiliation comes to those who are deliberately dishonest.

Show me your ways, Lord; teach me to follow your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation. All day long I put my trust in you.

Remember, Lord, your compassion and trustworthy love—they are eternal!

Please don't remember the sins of my youth when I rebelled against you. Instead, remember me according to your trustworthy love, remember me because of your goodness, Lord.

The Lord is good and he is right; that is why he shows the way to those who are lost.

He leads those who are humble in doing what's right, teaching them his way.

The Lord's paths are those of trustworthy love and truth for those who keep his agreement and do as he says.

Lord, because of your nature, forgive my many sins.

Who are those who respect the Lord? He will show them the path to choose.

They will continue to be prosperous, and their descendants will inherit the land.

The Lord is friends with those who respect him, explaining to them his agreement.

I always look to the Lord, for he rescues me when I'm trapped.

Watch over me and be good to me, because I am all alone and suffering.

My problems get bigger and bigger. Please save me from all I'm going through.

See all my troubles and trials. Please forgive my sins.

Look at how many enemies I have, and how they really hate me!

Please look after me and save me! Don't let me be humiliated, for you are the one who protects me.

May integrity and honesty defend me because I place my confidence in you.

God, please deliver the people of Israel from all their troubles!

A psalm of David.

Confirm that I'm innocent, Lord, for I have acted with integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without fail.

Examine me, Lord, test me; investigate my thoughts and intentions.

For I always remember your trustworthy love, and I follow your truth.

I don't join in with liars and I don't associate with hypocrites.

I refuse to get together with those who do evil, and I won't involve myself with the wicked.

I wash my hands to show my innocence. I come to worship at your altar, Lord,

singing my thanks, telling of all the wonderful things you have done.

Lord, I love your house, the place where you live in your glory.

Please don't sweep me away along with sinners. Don't include me with those who commit murder,

whose hands carry out their evil schemes and grab hold of bribes.

For I don't do that—I act with integrity. Save me and be gracious to me!

I stand for what's right, and I will praise the Lord when we meet together to worship him.

A psalm of David.

The Lord is my light and my salvation! How could anyone scare me? The Lord is my life's fortress! How could anyone terrify me?

When evil people come at me to tear me apart, it's my enemies, those who are against me, they're the ones who trip and fall.

Even if an army surrounds me, I won't be frightened. Even if I am attacked, I will still trust in God.

I only ask the Lord for one thing: I just want to live in the house of the Lord throughout my life, contemplating the Lord's goodness and thinking about his Temple.

When troubles come he will protect me and keep me safe, hiding me in his house, as secure as if he'd placed me on a high rock.

He will hold my head high over my enemies who are all around me. I shall offer sacrifices in his house with shouts of joy, and I will sing praises to the Lord.

Listen to me, Lord, when I call for help. Be gracious and answer me.

You told me, “Come to me.” I am coming to you, Lord.

Don't refuse to talk to me. Don't be angry with your servant and turn away. You are the one who helps me, so please don't reject me and abandon me, God of my salvation.

Even if my father and my mother abandon me, the Lord will take care of me.

Lord, teach me your way and lead me along the right path, because my enemies are against me—

don't hand me over to them and their evil intentions, for they are making false accusations against me and threatening me with violence.

However, I'm absolutely sure that I will see the Lord's goodness even in this life.

Trust in the Lord! Be confident—he will give you courage! Trust in the Lord!

A psalm of David.

Lord, my rock, I'm calling out to you. Please listen to me! For if you don't respond, I'll be like those who go down into the grave.

Listen as I appeal for mercy, as I call for help, as I hold up my hands in prayer towards your holy Temple.

Don't drag me off with the wicked, with those who do evil, who speak nicely to their neighbors while in their minds they're plotting evil.

Give them what they deserve for their evil actions. Pay them back for what they've done. Give them the reward they've earned!

For they don't pay any attention to what the Lord does, or to what he created. So he will destroy them—they will never be restored.

Praise the Lord! For he has heard my appeal for mercy!

The Lord is my strength and my shield. I trust in him and he helps me. I'm so happy, and I sing my thanks to him.

The Lord gives strength to his people; he is a safe refuge for the one he has anointed.

Save your people! Bless your “special possession”! Be their shepherd and carry them in your arms forever!

A psalm of David.

Honor the Lord, children of God, honor his glory and strength.

Honor the Lord for his glorious character, bow in reverence to the Lord in his brilliant holiness.

The Lord's voice sounds over the sea. The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the vast ocean.

The Lord's voice is powerful; the Lord's voice is majestic;

the Lord's voice shatters the cedars, even breaking the cedars of Lebanon.

He makes the mountains of Lebanon skip like a calf, and Mount Hermon like a young wild ox.

The Lord's voice blazes out like lightning flashes.

The Lord's voice causes an earthquake in the desert; the desert of Kadesh shakes.

The Lord's voice makes the pregnant deer go into labor; it strips bare the forests. In his Temple all the worshipers shout, “Glory!”

The Lord sits on his throne above the floodwaters; the Lord is the eternal King.

The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses them with peace.

A psalm of David. A psalm for the dedication of the Temple.

I want to tell everyone how good you are, Lord, for you saved me, and you didn't let my enemies triumph over me.

Lord, my God, I called out to you for help, and you have healed me.

Lord, you rescued me from the grave, you brought me back to life, saving me from going down into the pit of death.

You who trust the Lord, sing praises to him, and be thankful for his holy character!

For his anger only lasts a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. You may spend the night in tears, but happiness comes with the morning.

When things were going well, I said, “Nothing will ever shake me!”

Lord, when you showed me your favor I stood as strong as a mountain; when you turned away from me I was terrified.

I called out to you for help, Lord. I asked the Lord for grace, saying,

What would you gain if I die, if I go down into the pit of death? Would my dust praise you? Would it tell of your trustworthiness?

Please listen to me, Lord, and be gracious to me! Lord, you are the one who helps me.

You have turned my weeping into dancing. You have taken off my clothes of sackcloth and dressed me in happiness,

so I can sing praises to you and not keep quiet. Lord my God, I will thank you forever!

A psalm of David. For the music director.

Lord, you are the one who keeps me safe; please don't let me ever be humiliated. Save me, because you always do what is right.

Please listen to me, and be quick to rescue me. Be my rock of protection, my strong fortress of safety.

You are my rock and my fortress. For the sake of your reputation, please lead me and guide me.

Help me escape from the hidden net that they set to trap me, for you are the one who protects me.

I put myself in your hands. Save me, Lord, for you are a trustworthy God.

I hate those who devote themselves to pointless idols; I trust in the Lord.

I will celebrate, happy in your love that never fails, for you have seen the problems I face and have paid attention to my troubles.

You haven't handed me over to my enemies; you have set me free.

Be kind to me Lord, for I am upset. I can hardly see from so much crying. I am completely wasting away.

Grief is killing me; my life is cut short by sadness; I am falling apart because of my troubles; I am worn to the bone.

I am ridiculed by my enemies, particularly by my neighbors. My friends dread meeting me; people who see me in the street run the other way.

I have been forgotten as if I were dead; I'm ignored like a broken pot.

I hear many people whispering about me; terror surrounds me. They plot together against me, planning to kill me.

But I put my trust in you, Lord, saying, “You are my God!”

My whole life is in your hands! Save me from those who hate me and persecute me!

May you look kindly on me, your servant. Save me because of your trustworthy love.

Lord, don't let me be disgraced, for I'm calling out to you. Instead let the wicked be disgraced, let them be silent in the grave.

Shut the mouths of those who tell lies against good people—those who speak contemptuously in their pride and arrogance!

How wonderful is the goodness you have reserved for those who honor you! In front of everyone you give this goodness to those who come to you for help.

You shelter and protect them with your presence, far from their enemies who scheme against them. You keep them safe from attacks and accusations.

Bless the Lord, for he has shown me his wonderful trustworthy love when my city was being attacked

Terrified I cried out, “I am being destroyed right in front of you!” But you heard my cry when I called out for you to help me.

Love the Lord, all you who trust in him! The Lord takes care of those who trust him, but he pays back in full those who are arrogant.

Be strong and be confident, all you who put your hope in the Lord.

A psalm of David.

How happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

How happy are those whose sins the Lord does not count against them, those who do not act deceptively.

When I kept quiet, my body fell apart as I groaned in distress all day long.

You beat me day and night, my strength dried up as in the heat of summer. Selah.

Then I confessed my sins to you. I did not hide the wrongs I had done. I said to myself, “I will confess my disobedience to the Lord,” and you forgave the guilt of my sins. Selah.

Therefore let all who are faithful pray to you while there's time, so when trouble comes in like a flood it will not overwhelm them.

For you are my refuge, you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of salvation. Selah.

“I will instruct you, teaching you the way to follow. I will advise you, watching out for you.

You mustn't be like a horse or a mule that doesn't know which way to go without a bit or a bridle. Otherwise they can't be controlled.”

The wicked have many problems, but those who trust in the Lord will be surrounded by his never-failing love.

So be happy in the Lord and celebrate, you who do good. Shout for joy, all you who live right!

Let those who do good shout for joy—those who live right should praise him!

Praise the Lord with the lyre, play music to him on the ten-stringed harp.

Sing a new song to him; play your instruments well and shout for joy.

For the word of the Lord is true, and he is trustworthy in everything he does.

He loves all that is good and right; the earth is full of the Lord's trustworthy love.

The Lord spoke the word and the heavens were made; his mouth breathed all the stars into existence.

He gathers the waters of the sea together, he keeps the ocean depths in store.

Let all the earth show reverence to the Lord; let all the world's inhabitants be in awe of him.

For he spoke and the world came into existence; he gave the command and it was created.

The Lord foils the decisions of the nations, he frustrates the plans of the peoples,

But the Lord's plan stands forever—what he decides lasts for all generations.

Happy is the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen as specially belonging to him.

The Lord looks from heaven and sees the whole of humanity,

from his throne he watches all those who live on earth.

He created their minds, so he knows everything they do.

Even the greatest army cannot save a king; the greatest strength cannot save a warrior.

Don't deceive yourself: a warhorse can't give you victory—even its incredible strength won't save you.

The Lord watches over those who reverently follow him, those who place their hope in his trustworthy love

to save them from death and to keep them alive when famine strikes.

We place our confidence in the Lord; he is our help and our defender.

We are so happy about him, for we trust in his holy character.

Lord, let your trustworthy love rest upon us as we hope in you.

A psalm of David concerning the time he pretended to be mad in front of Abimelech who then sent him away.

I will always bless the Lord; my mouth will continually praise him.

From the bottom of my heart I am proud of the Lord; those who are humble will hear and be happy.

Glorify God with me; together let's honor his reputation.

I asked the Lord for help, and he answered me. He set me free from all my fears.

The faces of those who look to him will shine with joy; they will never be downcast with shame.

This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard me, and saved me from all my troubles.

The angel of the Lord stands guard over all those who honor him, keeping them safe.

Taste, and you will see that the Lord is good! How happy are those who trust in his protection!

Show your reverence for the Lord, you who are his holy people, for those who respect him have everything they need.

Lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who trust in the Lord have all that is good.

Children, listen to me! I will teach you how to respect the Lord.

Who of you wants to live a long and happy life?

Then don't let your tongue speak evil, or your lips tell lies.

Reject what is evil, do what is good. Look for peace, and work to make it a reality.

The Lord watches over those who do right, and he hears when they cry for help.

The Lord sets himself against those who do evil. He will wipe out even the memory of them from the earth.

But when his people call out for help, he hears them and rescues them from all their troubles.

The Lord is close beside those who are broken-hearted; he saves those whose spirits are crushed.

Those who do right have many problems, but the Lord solves all of them.

He keeps them safe—not a single one of their bones will be broken.

Evil kills the wicked. Those who hate good people will suffer for their wrongdoing.

The Lord saves the lives of his servants. Those who trust in his protection will not suffer for their wrongdoings.

A psalm of David.

Oppose my opponents, Lord; fight those who are fighting against me.

Put your armor on, and pick up your shield. Get ready, come and help me.

Draw your spear and your javelin, confront those who are chasing me. Tell me, “I am your salvation!”

Shame them! Humiliate those who are trying to kill me! Turn them back! Disgrace those who are planning to hurt me!

Let them be like chaff blown by the wind; let the angel of the Lord drive them away.

May their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the Lord chasing them down.

For no reason they set a net to catch me; for no reason they dug a pit to trap me.

Let disaster come on them suddenly; let the net they set catch them instead; let the pit they dug trap them instead.

Then I will be glad in the Lord; I will be happy in his salvation.

Every part of me will say, Who can compare to you, Lord? You rescue the weak from the strong; the poor and needy from robbers.

Hostile witnesses stand up to testify against me, accusing me of crimes I don't know anything about.

They pay me back with evil instead of good. I feel like giving up.

But when they were sick, I put on clothes of sackcloth in sympathy. I denied myself through fasting. May my prayer for them return to bless me too.

I was upset for them, as if they were my own friends or family; I bowed down in grief as if I was mourning my own mother.

But when I was in trouble, they gathered around and laughed at me. Even strangers I don't know attacked me, constantly tearing me apart.

Like irreligious people mocking a cripple they mock me and call me names, gnashing their teeth at me.

How long, Lord, will you sit by and just watch? Save me from their vicious attacks; defend the only life I have from these lions.

Then I will thank you in front of the whole congregation and praise you in front of all the people.

Don't let my enemies take pleasure in my troubles, those people who hate me and tell lies about me, gloating over me for no reason.

They are not looking for peace; they invent malicious and deceptive schemes against innocent peace-loving people.

They open their mouths wide to make accusations against me, saying, “Look! Look! We saw it with our own eyes!”

But Lord, you've seen all this! Say something! Don't give up on me, Lord!

Wake up! Get up and defend me, my Lord and my God! Take up my case and make sure justice is done!

Vindicate me, my Lord and my God, because you are just and right. Don't let them gloat over me.

Don't let them say to themselves, “Look! We got what we wanted!” Don't let them say, “We completely destroyed him!”

Make them totally ashamed, all those who are happy for the trouble I'm in. Let those who are celebrating over me be covered with shame and dishonor.

Instead let those who are pleased I've been vindicated celebrate and shout for joy. Let them always say, “How great is the Lord! He is happy when his servants live in peace and have what they need.”

I will tell others about your character of truth and right, praising you all day long!

For the music director. A psalm of David, servant of the Lord.

Evil speaks to the wicked, deep down in their minds, for in their eyes they have no need to respect God.

In their own eyes they're so wonderful that they can't even see their sin and do something about it.

Whatever they say is deceptive and deceitful. They no longer do anything wisely or for good.

Even when they're lying in bed they think up evil schemes. They commit themselves to a way of life that is no good. They choose evil, and don't reject it.

Lord, your faithful love reaches to the heavens, your trustworthiness to the clouds.

Your goodness is like the highest mountains, your fairness is like the deepest oceans. Lord, you save both the people and the animals.

God, how priceless is your trustworthy love! Everyone can find protection under the shelter of your wings.

They gain strength from the wonderful food you provide in your house; you give them drink from your refreshing river.

You are the source of life; you are the light by which we see.

Extend your trustworthy love to those who know you, and your goodness to those who truly live right.

Don't let the arrogant trample me down; don't let the wicked drive me out.

Now look! See how those who do evil have fallen—thrown down, unable to get up.

A psalm of David.

Don't be upset over wicked people, or be jealous of those who do wrong.

For like grass, they will quickly dry up; like plants, they will soon wither away.

Trust in the Lord, and do good. Live in the land and feed on faithfulness.

Find your happiness in the Lord, and he will give you what you want the most.

Entrust all that you do to the Lord. Place your confidence in him and he will help you.

He will make your vindication shine like a light, the rightness of your cause like the noonday sun.

Be still in God's presence; wait patiently for him. Don't be upset over people who prosper when they carry out their evil schemes.

Give up your anger! Let go of your rage! Don't get mad—it only results in evil!

For the wicked will be destroyed, and those who trust in the Lord will take possession of the land.

In a little while the wicked will be no more—though you look for them you won't find them.

The humble will own the land; they will live there happily, in peace and prosperity.

The wicked plot evil against those who do good, gnashing their teeth at them.

But the Lord laughs at them, for he sees their coming day of judgment.

The wicked draw their swords, and bend their bows to destroy the poor and needy, to kill those who live right.

But the swords of the wicked will slice through their own hearts, and their bows will be broken.

It's better to do right and only have a little, than to be wicked and rich.

For the power of the wicked will be broken, but the Lord supports those who do right.

The Lord knows what is happening to the innocent and grants them an eternal inheritance.

They will not be humiliated in bad times; even in days of famine they will have plenty to eat.

But the wicked will die. The enemies of the Lord are like the flowers of the field—they will vanish like smoke.

The wicked borrow, but don't repay; while those who do right give generously.

Those who are blessed by God will own the land, but those he curses will die.

The Lord shows the right path to those who follow him, and is happy with the way they live.

Though they may trip up, they will not fall to the ground, for the Lord holds their hand.

Once I was young, and now I've grown old, yet I've never seen those who do right abandoned, nor their children having to beg for bread.

They are always kind, and generous with their loans; their children are a blessing.

Reject evil, do what is good, and you will live forever in the land.

For the Lord loves fairness and he will never abandon those who are trustworthy. He will protect them forever. But the children of the wicked will die.

Those who do right will own the land and will live there forever.

People who do right give good advice, explaining what is fair.

God's law lives in their minds, so they will not slip from his way.

The wicked lie in wait for those who do good, intending to kill them.

But the Lord will not let them fall into the hands of the wicked, and he will not let those who do good be condemned when they are put on trial.

Trust in the Lord, and stay on his path. He will lift you up and give you the land to own. You will see when the wicked are destroyed.

I have watched the wicked acting brutally, spreading like a large tree in its native land.

But when I passed that way the next time, they were gone. I searched for them but couldn't find them.

Observe the innocent, look at those who do right! Those who love peace have a future!

But those who are rebellious will be altogether destroyed; the wicked have no future.

The Lord saves those who live right; he is their protection in times of trouble.

The Lord helps them and rescues them from the wicked. He saves them because they go to him for protection.

A psalm of David, for a memorial.

Lord, please don't condemn me because you're angry with me; don't punish me because you're furious with me!

Your arrows have pierced me deeply, your hand has come down hard on me.

Because you're so upset with me, not a single part of my body is healthy; I am completely sick because of my sins.

I'm drowning in guilt—the burden is too heavy to bear.

My wounds are infected—they're smelling—all because of my stupidity.

I am bent over, doubled up in pain. The whole day I walk around crying my eyes out.

Inside I'm burning up with fever; no part of my body is healthy.

I'm worn out, totally down. I groan because of the anguish I feel in my heart.

Lord, you know what I desperately want, you hear every sigh I make.

My heart is racing, leaving me with no strength; my eyesight is failing.

My loved ones and my friends don't come near me because they're afraid of what I've got. Even my family keeps me at a distance.

Those who are trying to kill me set traps for me; those who want to hurt me make threats against me, working on their deceitful schemes all day long.

I act as if I'm deaf to what they're saying, and pretend to be dumb so I don't have to speak.

Like a man who can't hear, and who doesn't reply—that's me!

For I'm waiting on you, Lord! You will answer for me, my Lord and my God.

I'm asking you, Lord, please don't let my enemies gloat over me, don't let them be glad when I trip up.

For I'm about ready to collapse—the pain never stops.

I do confess my sins; I am terribly sorry for what I've done.

I have many powerful enemies—they are very active, hating me for no reason.

They pay me back evil for good; they accuse me for the good I try to do.

Don't give up on me, my Lord and my God, don't stay away from me.

Hurry, come and help me, Lord my salvation.

For Jeduthun, the music director. A psalm of David.

I told myself, "I will be careful in what I do, and not sin in what I say. I will keep my mouth shut when the wicked are around."

So I was completely silent—I didn't even say anything good. But the pain inside only got worse.

My mind burned as if on fire; I had to say what I was thinking:

Lord, remind me. How short is my life? How long do I have? Remind me how quickly my life will pass.

Just look at the tiny amount of days you have given me! In your eyes my whole lifetime is like nothing. Our lives here are just a breath… Selah.

Human beings are just shadows walking around. They pointlessly rush through life, trying to pile up possessions without knowing who will get them.

So Lord, what am I looking for? I put my hope in you.

Save me from my rebellion. Don't let me be mocked by fools.

I will stay quiet, I won't say a word, for it's you who has done this to me.

Please stop hitting me! Your beating has worn me out!

When you discipline us, reprimanding us for our sins, it's like a moth eating up what is precious to us. All of us are just a breath… Selah.

Please hear my prayer, Lord! Listen to my cry for help! Don't be deaf to my weeping. Please treat me as your guest, passing through, just like my forefathers.

Please leave me alone so I can be cheerful again, before I am dead and gone.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

I waited for the Lord patiently, and he turned to me—he heard my cry for help.

He pulled me out of the pit of destruction, out from the mud and the slime. He set me on a rock, and gave me a safe place to stand.

He gave me a new song to sing, a song of praise to our God. Many people will see and be in awe, and they will put their trust in him.

Happy are those who trust in the Lord, who do not look for help from the arrogant or from those who worship idols.

Lord my God, you have done so many wonderful things for us, and you have so many plans for us. No one compares to you. I want to tell all that you've done—blessings too many to count.

You don't want sacrifices and offerings. Now you have helped me understand—you're not asking for burnt offerings or sin offerings.

Then I said, “Look! Here I am! I've come to do what is written about me in the scroll of the Book.

I am pleased to do your will, my God—your Law guides my mind.”

I have announced the good news of salvation to the whole congregation. I don't keep quiet, Lord, as you know.

I have not kept the truth of your goodness hidden inside me—I have spoken of your trustworthiness and your salvation. I have not concealed your unfailing love and your faithfulness from the whole congregation.

Lord, please don't keep back your mercy from me. May your trustworthy love and faithfulness always be my protection.

For I'm experiencing so many problems—I can't even count them! My sins have piled up so high I can't see over them. They're more than the number of hairs on my head! I feel like giving up!

Lord, please save me! Hurry, Lord, help me!

Please defeat and humiliate the people who are trying to kill me; turn back in disgrace those who want to hurt me.

May they be shocked at their defeat, those who taunted me.

But may everyone who comes to you be happy and glad; may those who love your salvation always say, “The Lord is great!”

As for me, I am poor and needy. May the Lord think about me. Help me! Save me! My God, please don't wait!

For the music director. A psalm of David.

How happy are those who take care of the poor! When they are in trouble the Lord will save them.

The Lord protects them and keeps them alive. They will live happily in the land, and they will not be handed over to their enemies.

The Lord looks after them when they're sick; he makes them well from their illness.

“Lord, please be gracious to me,” I asked. “Please heal me, for I have sinned against you.”

Those who hate me only say evil things about me. “When is he going to die, and people forget all about him?” they ask.

They come to visit me, but their sympathy is not sincere. They're only interested in the bad news, which they spread around as soon as they leave.

All who hate me talk in whispers about my condition, hoping for the worst.

“He's been cursed with some terrible disease,” they say. “Now he's bed-ridden he'll never recover!”

Even my best friend, the one I trusted, who shared meals with me—even he has turned against me.

But you Lord, please be gracious to me, make me well so I can repay them!

I know you are pleased with me because you have not let my enemies win and shout in triumph over me.

You have supported me because of my integrity, you have brought me into your presence forever.

Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, from eternity to eternity! Amen and amen!

For the music director. A psalm (maskil) of the sons of Korah.

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God.

I am thirsty for God, the living God. When can I go and see God's face?

My tears have been my only food, day and night, while people ask me all day long, “Where is your God?”

I am crushed as I remember how I walked with the crowds, leading them in a procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and songs of thanks among the worshipers at the festival.

Why am I so discouraged? Why do I feel so sad? I will hope in God; I will praise him because he is the one who saves me—

my God! Even though I am very discouraged, I still remember you: from the land of Jordan and Hermon, and from Mount Mizar.

You thunder through the raging waters, through the noise of the waterfalls. Your crashing waves surge over me—I feel like I'm drowning.

But every day the Lord shows me his trustworthy love; every night he gives me songs to sing—a prayer to the God of my life.

I cry out, “My God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go around weeping because of the attacks of my enemies?”

The mocking of my attackers crushes my bones. They're always asking me, “Where is your God?”

Why am I so discouraged? Why do I feel so sad? I will hope in God; I will praise him because he is the one who saves me—my God!

(Psalm 42 and 43 were originally one psalm.)

God, please vindicate me! Plead my case against an unfaithful nation; save me from these wicked and dishonest people.

For you, God, are my protection—so why have you turned your back on me? Why must I go around weeping because of the attacks of my enemies?

Send your light and your truth so they can guide me; let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live.

I will go to God's altar, to God who makes me truly happy. I will praise you on the harp, God, my God.

Why am I so discouraged? Why do I feel so sad? I will hope in God; I will praise him because he is the one who saves me—my God!

For the music director. A psalm (maskil) of the sons of Korah.

God, we have heard with our own ears—our forefathers have told us—all you did in their times, long ago.

Through your power you drove out the other nations so you could settle our ancestors there; you defeated the nations and you sent our ancestors to occupy the land.

They did not conquer the land using their swords; it was not through their own strength that the victory was won—it was by your strength, your power, and your presence with them, because you loved them.

God, you are my King; command victories for Jacob!

Only through you can we repel our enemies; only in your name can we defeat our opponents.

I do not trust my bow; I do not have confidence in my sword to save me.

You are the one who saves us from our enemies; you defeat those who hate us.

God, we proudly thank you all day long, and praise your name forever. Selah.

But now you have rejected and disgraced us; you no longer accompany our armies.

You made us run from our enemies, and those who hate us have taken whatever they wanted.

You have handed us over like sheep to be slaughtered; you have scattered us among the other nations.

You have sold your own people for next to nothing, making no profit on the sale.

You have made a mockery of us before our neighbors, we are ridiculed and laughed at by those around us.

You have made us a joke to the other nations; they scornfully shake their heads at us.

We are humiliated all day long; we hold our heads in shame,

because of all the insults from the people mocking us, because our vengeful enemies are right in front of us.

All this has happened to us even though we didn't forget you; we haven't been unfaithful to the promises we made to you.

We have not turned away from you, not in thought, nor in action.

Even so, you crushed us, and made us into a jackal's den. You have covered us with the darkness of death.

If we had forgotten the name of our God, or worshiped other gods,

wouldn't God have been aware of this, because he knows everyone's thoughts?

But because of you we are killed all day long; we're considered just sheep to be slaughtered.

Lord, wake up! Why are you sleeping? Get up! Don't turn your back on us forever!

Why do you look away from us and take no notice of our suffering and misery?

We lie ruined in the dust, our bodies facedown in the dirt.

Stand up! Come and help us! Save us because of your trustworthy love!

For the music director. To the tune "Lilies." A psalm (maskil) of the sons of Korah. A love song.

I am moved to write about this wonderful subject. Let me share what I have written for the king. What I say comes from the pen of a skilled author.

You are more handsome than anyone else. You always speak graciously, for God has blessed you forever.

Strap on your sword, mighty warrior, stride out in glory and majesty!

In your majesty ride out to victory, in the defense of truth, humility, and right, because you are strong and act powerfully.

Your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of your enemies; the nations fall under you.

Your throne comes from God, and lasts forever and ever. The scepter with which you rule is a scepter of fairness.

You love what is right and hate what is wrong. That is why God, your God, has placed you above everyone else by anointing you with the oil of joy.

Your robes are perfumed with aloes, myrrh, and cassia; music played on stringed instruments in palaces decorated with ivory makes you happy.

The daughters of kings are among the noblewomen; the queen stands beside you on your right, wearing jewelry made of gold from Ophir.

Listen to what I have to say, daughter; please pay attention. Don't pine for your people and your family.

May the king desire you in your beauty; respect him, for he is your lord.

The people of Tyre will come with gifts; rich people will look for your favor.

Inside her preparation room the princess bride looks wonderful in her golden gown.

Wearing her beautiful clothes she is brought to the king, followed by her bridesmaids.

What a happy, joyful procession enters the king's palace!

Your sons will take the place of your fathers; as princes you will make them rulers throughout the land.

Through my words you will be famous through all generations, and nations will praise you forever and ever.

For the music director by the sons of Korah. According to alamoth, a song.

God is our protection and our strength; always ready to help when troubles come.

So we will not be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains fall into the depths of the sea,

though the waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble as the waters surge violently! Selah.

A river flows to bring happiness to those in God's city, the holy place where the Most High lives.

God is in the midst of the city; it will never fall. God protects it as soon as it is light.

Nations are in turmoil, kingdoms collapse. God raises his voice and the earth melts.

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob protects us. Selah.

Come and see what the Lord has achieved! See the amazing things he has done on the earth!

He stops wars all over the world. He smashes the bow; he breaks the spear; he sets shields on fire.

Stop fighting! Recognize I am God! I am the ruler of the nations; I am the ruler of the earth.

The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob protects us. Selah.

For the music director. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Everyone, clap your hands! Shout with joy to the Lord!

For the Lord Most High is awe-inspiring; he is the great King of all the earth.

He subdues other peoples under us; he puts nations under our feet.

He chose the land for us to own; the proud possession of Jacob's descendants whom he loves. Selah.

God ascends his throne with a great shout, the Lord is accompanied by the sound of the trumpet.

Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises!

For God is King of all the earth; sing praises with a psalm!

God rules over the nations; he sits on his holy throne.

The rulers of the nations gather together with the people of the God of Abraham, for the defenders of the earth belong to God. He is highly honored everywhere.

For the music director. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

The Lord is supreme! He deserves praise in the city of our God on his holy mountain.

Mount Zion is high and beautiful, bringing happiness to all the earth; on the northern side is the city of the great King.

God himself is in the city's fortresses; he is recognized as its defender.

Look at what happened when foreign kings joined forces and came to attack the city.

As soon as they saw it they were astonished and ran away terrified.

They shook all over, and were in agonizing pain like a woman giving birth,

just as the strong east wind wrecks the ships from Tarshish.

Just as we had heard, but now we have seen the city of the Lord Almighty. This is the city of our God; he makes it secure forever. Selah.

God, we recall your trustworthy love as we worship in the Temple.

As is fitting for your reputation, God, praises to you stretch all around the world. What you do is always right!

Let the people of Mount Zion be glad; let the people of Judah celebrate because your judgments are always fair!

Go and take a look at Zion. Count the towers as you walk around.

Inspect the fortifications. Examine the citadels, so you can describe everything to the next generation, telling them:

"This is who our God is. He is our God forever and ever. He himself will lead us until the very end."

For the music director. A psalm of the sons of Korah.

Listen to this, everyone! Pay attention, people of the world—

whether you are highborn or lowborn, rich or poor!

For what I say is wise, and my thinking is perceptive.

I pay attention to wise sayings; I answer hard questions to a tune on the harp.

Why should I be afraid when trouble comes, when evil enemies surround me?

They trust in their wealth; they boast about their riches,

but no one can pay to rescue another from death; no one can pay a ransom to God.

Redemption is beyond price; no one could ever pay enough

that they could live forever and not face the grave.

Everyone knows that the wise die, those who are foolish and stupid too, leaving what they have to the next generation.

They think their homes will last forever, that where they live will continue for all generations.

But human beings, for all their fame, don't understand. They die, just like the animals.

This is the way of foolish people, yet those who come after them think they were clever! Selah.

Like sheep they are destined for the grave. Death will be their shepherd. Those who live right will rule over them in the morning. Their bodies will decay in the grave, far from their homes.

But surely God will rescue me from the power of the grave; he will grab me back. Selah.

Don't be disturbed when people become rich, filling their houses with possessions.

For they won't take anything with them when they die; their wealth will not go down into the grave with them.

They congratulate themselves for all they possess —people always praise you when you do well—

but their destiny is the same as their forefathers: they will never again see the light of day.

Human beings, for all their fame, don't understand, and they die, just like the animals.

A psalm of Asaph.

The Lord, the Almighty God, speaks! He summons everyone on earth, from the east to the west.

God shines out of Mount Zion, perfect in beauty.

Our God arrives, and does not stay quiet. Fire flames before him, burning everything up; a violent storm rages around him.

He summons the heavens above and the earth to witness the judgment of his people.

"Bring me those who trust in me—those who confirmed the agreement with me through sacrifice."

The heavens declare his decisions are right, for God himself is the judge. Selah.

"My people, listen to what I have to say. I am bringing charges against you, Israel. I am God, your God!

I'm not complaining about your sacrifices or burnt offerings that you offer all the time.

I do not require bulls from your barns or goats from your pens,

for I own all the animals of the forest, and the cattle on a thousand hills belong to me.

I know every bird of the mountains; all living things in the fields are mine.

If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you, for the earth and everything in it are mine.

Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

Give an offering of thanks to God; keep the promises you made to the Most High,

and call on me when you're in trouble. I will rescue you, and you will thank me."

But to the wicked God says, "What's the point of mechanically repeating my laws or making empty promises about obeying the agreement?

You hate my discipline, and you toss my words away, leaving them behind you.

When you see people stealing, you admire them; you associate with adulterers.

With your mouth you say evil things; you use your tongue to spread lies.

You sit there and speak against your brother, slandering your own mother's son.

I kept quiet when you did these things. You thought I was someone just like you. But now I confront you, and bring my charges against you.

Think again, you people who dismiss God, or I will tear you apart, and no one will be able to save you.

But those who give an offering of thanks honor me, and to those who follow the right I will show them the salvation of God."

For the music director. A psalm of David. When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

God, please be gracious to me, because of your trustworthy love, because of your infinite kindness please wipe away my sins.

Wash away all my guilt; cleanse me from my sin.

I admit my rebellion; my sin always stares me in my face.

I have sinned against you, you alone. I have done evil in your sight. So you are right in what you say, and fair when you judge.

It's true that I was born guilty—sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

But you want truth on the inside; you teach me wisdom deep within.

Purify me with hyssop so I can be clean; wash me so I can be whiter than snow.

Please let me hear joy and happiness again; let the bones you have crushed be glad once more.

Turn your face away from looking at my sins; please wipe away my guilt.

Create a pure mind in me, God, and make me trustworthy again.

Don't expel me from your presence; don't take away your Holy Spirit from me.

Give me back the happiness of your salvation; help me to have a willing nature.

Then I will teach your ways to rebellious people, and these sinners will come back to you.

God, please forgive me for the blood I have shed, God of my salvation, and I will sing for joy of your goodness.

Lord, open my lips so I can speak your praise!

For sacrifices don't make you happy, or I would bring one; burnt offerings aren't what pleases you.

The "sacrifices" that God wants are on the inside—the brokenness of repentance. God won't reject a broken and sorrowful heart.

Be kind to Zion, help the city; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Then you will be pleased with sacrifices given in the right spirit, for all kinds of burnt offerings, and bulls sacrificed on your altar once more.

For the music director. A psalm (maskil) of David, concerning the time when Doeg the Edomite went to Saul and told him, "David has gone to the home of Ahimelech."

You great man, why do you boast about the evil things you've done? God's trustworthy love lasts all day long.

You plot to make people suffer; your words cut like a sharp razor, you liar!

You love evil more than good, and telling lies more than speaking the truth. Selah.

You love slanderous words that destroy others, you liar!

But God will strike you down so hard you'll never get up. He will grab hold of you and drag you from your tent. He will tear you out of the land of the living. Selah.

Those who do right will see all this. They will be astonished and laugh, saying,

"See what happens to those who don't go to God for help but instead rely on their great wealth and strength—which only brings their destruction!"

But I'm like an olive tree growing strongly in God's house. I trust in God's unfailing love forever and ever.

I will praise you forever, God, for all you have done. In the presence of your trustworthy people, I will place my hope in the kind of person you are, for you are good.

For the music director. According to Mahalath. A psalm (maskil) of David.

Only fools tell themselves, "God doesn't exist." They are completely immoral, they commit terrible sins, not a single one of them does anything good.

God watches from heaven to see if anyone understands, if anyone wants to come to God.

They have all fallen away, they are totally depraved; none of them does anything good, not even one.

"Won't these people who do evil ever learn? They consume my people as if they were eating bread, and refuse to pray to me."

They will become completely terrified, more frightened than they have ever been. God will scatter the bones of those who fight against you; you will defeat them because God has rejected them.

If only God's salvation would come from Zion! When God restores his people, the people of Jacob will celebrate, and the people of Israel will be glad.

For the music director. With stringed instruments. A psalm (maskil) of David, concerning the time when the Ziphites came to Saul and told him, "David is hiding among us."

God, because of your very nature, please save me! Vindicate me by your power!

God, please hear my prayer; listen to what I'm saying.

For strangers are coming to attack me—violent men who don't care about God are trying to kill me. Selah.

But God helps me; the Lord saves my life!

The evil my enemies have done will come back upon them. I depend on you to destroy them.

I will happily offer a sacrifice to you; I will praise the kind of person you are, Lord, for you are good.

For he has saved me from all my troubles; and I have seen those who hated me defeated.

For the music director. With stringed instruments. A psalm (maskil) of David.

God, please hear my prayer; don't ignore my cry for help!

Please listen, and give me an answer. I'm terribly troubled by my problems! I'm frantic!

For my enemies are screaming at me; the wicked are intimidating me. They rain down suffering on me, angrily assaulting me in their hatred.

My heart thumps in agony! Terrified, I feel I'm about to die!

I'm in a panic, trembling with fear; feelings of horror wash over me.

I tell myself, If only God would give me wings like a dove so I could fly away and be at peace!

I would fly far away to escape, and stay in the wilderness. Selah.

I would hurry to a place to hide, out of the wind, safe from the raging storm.

Confuse them, Lord! Muddle what they're saying, for I see violence and conflict in the city.

They patrol the city walls day and night, and wickedness and trouble are within the city.

The ones causing destruction are inside the city; frauds and cheats are always on the streets.

The problem is that it's not an enemy who mocks me—I could stand that. It's not someone who hates me who insults me—I could avoid them.

No, it's you, a man just like me, my best friend who I know so well!

Our friendship was so close. We used to have great talks together as we walked with everyone to the house of God.

May death come quickly to them; may they go down into the grave alive, because evil finds its home in them.

As for me, I cry out to God, and the Lord will save me.

I weep and groan morning, noon, and night, and he listens to me.

He rescues me, keeping me safe and sound from my attackers, because there are so many against me.

God who has ruled from the beginning will hear me and answer them. Selah. For they refuse to change and don't respect God.

As for my best friend, he attacked his friends who had no quarrel with him; he broke the promises he had made to them.

What he says is as smooth as butter, but inside he plans war; his words are as soothing as oil, but they cut like sharp swords.

Throw your burdens onto the Lord and he will take care of you. He will never allow those who live right to fall.

But you, God, will bring down murderers and liars, throwing them into the pit of destruction before they have even lived half their lives. As for me, I will trust in you.

For the music director. According to "Dove on Distant Oaks." A psalm (miktam) of David concerning the time the Philistines captured him in Gath.

God, please be gracious to me, for people are persecuting me; my attackers fight against me all day long.

My enemies chase me down all the time—there are many of them, attacking me in their arrogance.

But when I'm afraid, I trust in you.

I thank God for his promises. I trust in God, so why should I be fearful? What can mere human beings do to me?

They constantly twist my words against me; they spend all their time thinking of evil things to do to me.

They gather together in their hiding places to keep watch on me, hoping to kill me.

Will they escape when they do so much evil? God, in anger bring these people down!

You've kept track of all my wanderings. You've collected all my tears in your bottle. You've kept a record of each one.

Then those who hate me will run away when I call for your help. For I know this: God is for me!

I thank God for his promises. I thank the Lord for his promises.

I trust in God, so why should I be fearful? What can mere human beings do to me?

God, I will keep my promises to you. I will give thank offerings to you,

for you have saved me from death and kept me from falling. Now I walk in the presence of God, in the light that gives life.

For the music director. According to "Do Not Destroy." A psalm (miktam) of David concerning the time he fled from Saul and hid in the cave.

Please be kind to me, God! Be kind to me because I come to you for protection. I will shelter under the shadow of your wings until the danger is past.

I cry out for help to God Most High, to God who vindicates me.

From heaven he sends his help, and he saves me. He defeats those who persecute me. Selah. God sends me his unfailing love, showing he is completely trustworthy.

I am surrounded by man-eating lions—I am forced to live with them! Their teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongues are swords.

God, your greatness is above the highest heavens; and your glory covers the whole earth!

They set a trap to catch me. I was so depressed. They dug a pit on my path but they were the ones who fell into it. Selah.

I have confidence in you, God, I have confidence in you. I will sing songs of praise to you.

I say to myself, "Wake up!" Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake up the dawn!

I will thank you among the peoples, Lord; I will sing your praises among the nations.

Your faithful love reaches to the heavens; your trustworthiness to the clouds.

God, your greatness is above the highest heavens; and your glory covers the whole earth!

For the music director. According to "Do Not Destroy." A psalm (miktam) of David.

You leaders, do you really say what is right? Do you judge people fairly?

No, for in your minds you plan evil. You cause violence everywhere!

The wicked are sinners from birth; from the moment they're born they tell lies.

They have venom like that of a poisonous snake, and just like a cobra they stop listening,

refusing to hear the voice of the snake charmers or the spellbinders.

God, break their teeth, and smash the jaws of these lions, Lord.

May they vanish like water that flows away; when they shoot their arrows may they miss their mark.

May they be like the slime of snails that dissolves away, like a stillborn child that never saw the light of day.

Before the cooking pot is hot from burning thorns, whether fresh or dry, God will blow them away.

Those who live right will be happy when they see there is punishment; they will wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.

They will say, "There is definitely a reward for those who live right; there is certainly a God who judges fairly on earth."

For the music director. According to "Do Not Destroy." A psalm (miktam) of David, concerning the time Saul sent out soldiers to watch David's house in order to kill him.

Rescue me from my enemies, God! Protect me from those who are attacking me!

Rescue me from these evil people! Save me from these murderers!

See how they're lying in wait to kill me! Powerful men are gathered against me, Lord, even though I have not sinned or done anything wrong.

Even though I'm not guilty they hurry to prepare an attack on me. Please stand up, come and help me, and see what's going on.

You are God, the Lord Almighty, God of Israel. Stand up, and punish all the nations. Don't have any mercy on these evil traitors. Selah.

In the evening they return, snarling like dogs as they roam around the city.

See what evil talk comes pouring out of their mouths! Words sharp as swords, for they say to themselves, "Who can hear us?"

But you, Lord, you laugh at them; you pour scorn on all the nations.

You are my strength! I will look to you, God, for you are the one who protects me.

In his trustworthy love, God will come and save me. He will show me how my enemies are defeated.

Don't kill them right away, otherwise my people will quickly forget what you have done. By your power make them stagger around and then fall down, Lord our protection.

Let them be caught out by the evil things they say, the words they proudly speak—brought down by their curses and the lies they tell!

Destroy them in your anger! Destroy them completely! Then everyone will know that God rules in Israel!

In the evening they return, snarling like dogs as they roam around the city.

They wander around, looking for things to eat, and howl when they're not satisfied.

But I will sing of your strength; in the morning I will sing for joy about your trustworthy love. For you have been my protection; my place of safety in my time of trouble.

You are my strength, I sing praises to you, for you are the one who protects me—the God who shows me his trustworthy love!

For the music director. According to "Lily of the Testimony." A psalm (miktam) of David, useful for teaching, about the time he fought against Aram-naharaim and Aram-zobah, and then Joab returned and killed 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

You, God, have rejected us! You have broken us; you have been angry with us; but now you have to welcome us back!

You have sent earthquakes on our land and split it apart. Now heal the cracks, for the land is still having tremors.

You have been very hard on your people; you gave us wine that made us stagger around.

But you have given those who respect you the banner of truth to unfurl and rally around. Selah.

Rescue those you love! Answer us, and save us by your power!

God has spoken from his Temple: "Triumphantly I divide up Shechem, and portion out the Valley of Succoth.

Both Gilead and Manasseh belong to me. Ephraim is my helmet, and Judah is my scepter.

I will treat Moab as my washbasin; I will place my sandal on Edom; I will shout in triumph over Philistia."

Who will bring me into the fortified city? Who will lead me into Edom?

Have you rejected us, God? Won't you lead our armies?

Please give us help against our enemies, for human help is worthless.

Our strength is in God, and he will crush our enemies.

For the music director. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David.

God, please hear my cry for help; please listen to my prayer.

From this distant place, far from home, I cry out to you as my courage fails. Take me to a rock high above me where I will be safe,

for you are my protection, a strong tower where my enemies cannot attack me.

Let me live with you forever; protect me under the shelter of your wings. Selah.

For you, God, have heard the promises I've made. You have given all those who love your character your special blessing.

Please give the king many extra years; may his reign last through generations.

May he always live in your presence; may your trustworthy love and faithfulness protect him.

Then I will always sing praises to you, and every day I will keep my promises to you.

For Jeduthun, the music director. A psalm of David.

Only in God do I find peace; my salvation comes from him.

He is the one who protects me and saves me; he keeps me safe so I will never be in danger.

How long are you going to attack me? All of you against one man! To you I'm just a broken wall, a collapsed fence.

They plan to throw me down from my high position; they love to tell lies. They say nice things to me, but inside they're cursing me. Selah.

Only in God do I find peace; my hope comes from him.

He is the one who protects me and saves me; he keeps me safe so I will not be in danger.

My salvation and my success come from God alone; God is my security and my protection.

My people, always trust in him. Pour out all your thoughts to him, for he is the one who looks after us. Selah.

Ordinary people are mere breaths, while leaders are just fakes. Put them all together and weigh them on scales and they wouldn't weigh more than air!

Don't trust in money made by extortion or robbery. Don't be proud of your wealth even if you are successful—don't make money what you live for.

God has already made it clear—I have heard it many times—power belongs to you, God.

You show us trustworthy love. You give back to people in return for what they've done.

A psalm of David, when he was in the Judean desert.

God, you are my God, I eagerly look for you. I am thirsty for you; all that I am longs for you in this dry, weary, waterless land.

I see you in the Temple; I watch your power and glory.

Your trustworthy love is better than life itself; I will praise you.

I will thank you as long as I live; I lift up my hands as I celebrate your wonderful character.

You satisfy me more than the richest food; I will praise you with joyful songs.

I think of you all night long as I lie on my bed meditating about you.

For you are the one who helps me; I sing happily from under your wings.

I hold on to you; your strong arms lift me up.

Those who are trying to destroy me will go down into the grave.

They will be killed by the sword; they will become food for jackals.

But the king will be happy for what God has done. All who follow God will praise him, but those who tell lies will be silenced.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

God, please listen to my complaint. Protect me because my enemies scare me.

Shelter me from the plots of the wicked, from this evil mob.

What they say cuts like swords; they fire off poisonous words like arrows.

They shoot from their hiding places at innocent people—doing this without warning, not afraid of being caught.

They encourage one another to do evil, planning how to secretly trap people, telling themselves, "Nobody will notice."

They plot wicked things. "What a great plan we've created!" they say. There are no limits to the depths to which human minds and thoughts can sink.

But God will shoot them with arrows; all of a sudden they will be wounded.

What they themselves say will trip them up; people who see them will mock them, shaking their heads at them.

Then everyone will be frightened. They will say that this is the work of God, and they will think about what he has done.

Those who are right with the Lord will be happy in him, they will go to him for protection. Those who live right will praise him.

For the music director. A psalm of David. A song.

God, you deserve to be praised, and in Zion we will keep our promises to you.

You hear our prayers; everyone comes to you.

Even though we're drowning in our sins and our disobedience, you forgive us.

Happy are those you choose to keep close to you, those who live in your courts! We are delighted with the blessings we receive in your house, your holy Temple!

In your goodness you answer us through the wonderful things you do, God of our salvation. You can be trusted by everyone on earth, including those sailing distant oceans.

You made the mountains by your power, for you have great strength.

You calm the raging seas and crashing waves, you silence the noisy shouts of the nations.

Everyone, even those in distant lands, are amazed by the wonderful things you do, from the east to the west they sing for joy.

You care for the earth and water it; you make it very productive. God, your river is full of water to grow the grain—this is what you have planned.

You fill the plowed furrows with water, you soften the ridges; you bless the growing crops.

You make the high point of the year a wonderful harvest, filling the wagons with good things.

The pastures in the wilderness grow lush; the hillsides are clothed in bright flowers.

The meadows are covered with flocks of sheep, and the valleys with fields of grain. Everything triumphantly sings for joy.

For the music director. A song. A psalm.

Everyone on earth, shout for joy to God!

Sing about his marvelous reputation; praise him for his goodness!

Tell God, "What you do is awesome! Your enemies are forced to bow before you because of your power.

Everyone on earth worships you, singing your praises—singing praises because of who you are." Selah.

Come and see what God has done! What he does for people is truly awesome!

He turned the Red Sea into dry land, and his people walked across through the waters. We celebrated there because of what he did.

He rules forever through his power. He keeps an eye on the nations, watching to make sure no rebels rise up in opposition. Selah.

Let all people everywhere bless our God, and loudly sing praises to him.

He has kept us alive, and he has not let us fall.

God, you have tested us, refining us like silver.

You caught us in your net; you placed heavy burdens on our backs.

You let people ride roughshod over us; we suffered through fire and flooding, but you brought us to a safe place.

I will come to your Temple with burnt offerings; I will fulfill my promises to you,

the promises I made when I was in trouble.

I will sacrifice burnt offerings to you of fattened livestock—the smoke of the sacrifice of rams, offerings of bulls and goats. Selah.

Come and listen, everyone who honors God, and I will tell you all he has done for me.

I called out to him, and praised him with my voice.

If I had focused my mind on evil, the Lord would not have listened to me.

But God did hear me! He listened to what I had to say in my prayer!

Praise God, who did not disregard my prayer or take his trustworthy love from me.

For the music director. To be accompanied by stringed instruments. A psalm. A song.

May God be gracious to us and bless us. May he look favorably on us. Selah.

May everyone on earth come to know your ways, your salvation among all people.

May the people praise you, God; may all the people praise you.

May they be happy and sing for joy because you judge people fairly, and you guide everyone on earth. Selah.

May the people praise you, God; may all the people praise you.

The earth has produced its crops; and God, our God, has blessed us.

God will bless us, and all people everywhere will respect him.

For the music director. A psalm of David. A song.

Stand up, God, and scatter your enemies. Let those who hate him run away from him!

Blow them away as if they were smoke; melt them like beeswax in a fire. Let the wicked die in God's presence.

But those who are right with God are happy, and they celebrate in God's presence, full of joy.

Sing praises to God! Sing praises to his wonderful reputation! Praise the rider of the clouds—his name is the Lord! Be happy in his presence!

He is a father to the orphans, a protector of widows. This is who God is, who lives in his holy place.

God gives those who are abandoned a family to live with. He sets prisoners free with celebration. But those who rebel live in a desert wasteland.

God, when you led your people out, when you marched through the desert, Selah,

the earth quaked, and the heavens shook before God, the one of Sinai; before God, the God of Israel.

You sent plenty of rain to water the promised land; refreshing it when it was dry.

Your people settled there, and because of your kindness, God, you looked after the poor. Selah.

The Lord gives the command, and a great army of women spread the good news.

The kings of the foreign armies are quick to run away, and the women who stayed at home divide the plunder!

Why are you staying at home? There are ornaments in the shape of a dove with wings of silver and feathers of fine gold to be taken.

The Almighty scattered the foreign kings like a snowstorm on Mount Zalmon.

"Mountain of God," Mount Bashan, with your many high peaks, Mount Bashan,

why do you look enviously, mountain with many peaks, at the mountain God chose as his home, where the Lord will live forever?

God's chariots can't be counted; there are thousands and thousands of them. He comes among them from Sinai into his Temple.

As you ascended to your high throne you led a procession of prisoners. You received gifts from the people, even from those who had rebelled against the home of the Lord God.

May the Lord be blessed, for every day he carries our burdens. God is our salvation. Selah.

For us, God is a God who saves. The Lord God provides our escape from death.

But God will crush the heads of his enemies, the hairy heads of those who continue to sin.

The Lord says, "I will drag them down from Bashan; I will drag them up from the depths of the sea,

so that you may walk in their blood. Even your dogs will have their share of your enemies."

People watch your processions, God—the processions of my God and King as they go into the Temple.

The singers are at the front, the musicians at the back, and in the middle girls playing tambourines.

Praise God, everyone who has come to worship; praise the Lord, everyone who belongs to Israel.

There is the little tribe of Benjamin, followed by the many leaders from Judah; then come the leaders of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Display your power, God! Reveal your strength, Lord, as you have done for us in the past.

Because of your Temple in Jerusalem, kings bring tribute to you.

Condemn the beasts of the reeds, the bulls and calves! May they be humbled and bring bars of silver in tribute! Scatter the war-loving nations!

Let Egypt come with bronze gifts; let Ethiopia come quickly and hand over their tributes to God!

Sing to God, kingdoms of the earth, sing praises to the Lord. Selah.

Sing to the rider of the ancient heavens, his strong voice sounding like thunder!

Let everyone know of God's power: how his majesty extends over Israel, how his strength is revealed in the heavens.

How awesome is God in his Temple! The God of Israel gives strength and power to his people! Praise God!

For the music director. To the tune "Lilies." A psalm of David.

God, please save me, because the water is up to my neck!

I'm sinking deeper into the mud—there's no solid ground for me to stand. I find myself in deep water; floods wash over me.

I'm so tired of screaming out for help my throat is totally raw. My eyes are worn out looking for my God to help me.

Those who hate me for no reason are more than the number of hairs on my head. Many enemies try to destroy me by telling lies. How can I give back what I didn't steal?

God, you know how foolish I am! My sins are not hidden from you.

Don't let those who trust you be ashamed because of me, Lord God Almighty. Don't let those who follow you be disgraced because of me, God of Israel.

For your sake I put up with the insults; my face shows my embarrassment.

I have become a foreigner to my brother Israelites; a stranger to my very own brothers.

My devotion for your house is burning me up inside; the insults of those who insulted you have fallen on me.

I wept and I fasted, but they mocked me;

I mourned in sackcloth, but they laughed at me.

People sitting by the town gate gossip about me. I'm the subject of rude songs sung by drunks.

But my prayer is to you, Lord, believing this is a good time to respond to me. God, in your wonderful trustworthy love, answer me with your sure salvation.

Please rescue me from the mud—don't let me sink! Save me from those who hate me and from drowning in the deep waters!

Don't let the flood waters wash over me. Don't let the deep waters pull me down. Don't let the grave close over me.

Please answer my prayers, Lord, for you are good and love me with your trustworthy love; because of your kindness, please help me.

Don't turn away from me, your servant. Please answer me quickly because I'm in trouble.

Come here and rescue me; set me free from my enemies.

You—you know my shame, my disgrace, my humiliation. You see everything my enemies are doing.

Insults have broken my heart—I am so sick there is no cure. I looked for some sympathy, but there was no one! Nobody showed me any compassion.

Instead they gave me bitter herbs to eat and vinegar to drink.

May the table set before them become a trap for them, a net that catches them, bringing punishment.

May their eyes become blind so they cannot see, and may their backs always be bent low in dejection.

Pour out your judgment on them; chase them down in your fierce anger.

Let the places where they live be deserted. Let their homes be abandoned.

For they persecute those you have punished, and make it even more painful for those you have disciplined.

Punish them for the evil they have done. Don't acquit them.

Blot out their names from the Book of Life. Don't let them be listed with those who do right.

But I am suffering and in physical pain. God, please save me and keep me safe.

I will praise God's character in song; I will say how incredible he is and how thankful I am.

The Lord is happier with this than with offering animals as sacrifices: cattle, or bulls with horns and hooves.

The humble will see this and be happy. May God encourage everyone who comes to him.

God hears the poor, and he does not ignore his people who are in prison.

Praise him heaven and earth, the seas and everything that lives in them!

For God will save Zion, and rebuild the cities of Judah. They will live there and own the land.

The descendants of those who follow him will inherit the land, and those who love him will live there.

For the music director. A psalm of David. For a memorial.

God, save me! Hurry, Lord, help me!

Please defeat and humiliate the people who are trying to kill me; turn back in disgrace those who want to hurt me.

May they be shocked at their defeat, those who taunted me.

But may everyone who comes to you be happy and glad; may those who love your salvation always say, “God is great!”

As for me, I am poor and needy. Hurry, God, help me! Save me! Lord, don't wait!

Lord, you are the one who keeps me safe; please don't disappoint me.

Save me, rescue me, because you always do what is right.

Please listen to me, and save me. Be my rock of protection where I can always go and hide. You gave the command to save me; for you are my rock and fortress.

My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked, from the clutches of those who are evil and brutal.

For you, Lord God, are my hope. You are the one I have trusted since I was young.

I have depended on you since birth; you have taken care of me from my mother's womb. That's why I'm always praising you!

My life has been like a miracle to many people, for you have been my powerful protector.

All day long I am full of praise for you, telling how wonderful you are!

Don't reject me now I'm getting old. When my strength is gone, please don't abandon me.

For my enemies are talking about me; those who want to kill me are plotting together.

They say, “God has given up on him. Let's go after him because there's no one to save him.”

God, please don't stay away from me. My God, hurry to help me!

Defeat my accusers, get rid of them! May those who want to cause me trouble be covered with shame and disgrace!

As for me, I will go on hoping in you, and I will praise you more and more.

I will talk about your goodness and your salvation every day, even though it's more than I can understand.

I will come and explain what the Lord has done. I will remind people that you alone do what is right.

God, you have taught me since I was young, and I still tell others about all the wonderful things you do.

Even though I'm old and gray, please don't abandon me, God. Let me tell the new generation about your power. Let me explain to all who are to come the great things you do.

God, your trustworthy and true nature is higher than the highest heaven! You have done incredible things! God, who is like you?

You had me face many troubles and plenty of misery, but you will bring me back to life; you will raise me up from the depths of the earth.

You will give me even greater prestige, and you will make me happy again.

Then I will praise you on the harp for your trustworthiness, my God. I will sing praises to you on the lyre, Holy One of Israel.

I will shout for joy as I sing praises to you, for you have redeemed me.

All day long I will tell about all the good things you have done, for those who tried to cause me misery have been disgraced and humiliated.

A psalm of Solomon.

God, please give the king fairness, and give the king's son the ability to do what's right.

May he rightly judge your people, and may he be fair to the poor.

May the mountains bring peace to the people, and the hills bring goodness.

May he defend the poor and save their children, may he crush those who oppress them.

May they respect him as long as the sun and the moon shine above, for all generations.

May his reign be like rain falling on new grass, like showers that water the earth.

May those who live right prosper under his rule; may there be great prosperity until the moon is no more.

May he rule from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth.

Desert tribes will kneel before him; and his enemies will bite the dust.

The kings of Tarshish and the islands will bring him tribute; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him with gifts.

Every king will bow down to him; every nation will serve him.

He will help the poor when they cry out to him, and help those who are suffering that have no one to support them.

He has pity on the poor and needy—he saves their lives!

He rescues them from violence and oppression, for their lives mean so much to him.

May he live long! May the gold from Sheba be given to him. May people always pray for him and bless him all day long.

May there be plenty of grain in the land, even growing on mountain-tops. May the fruit on the trees sway like the trees of Lebanon. May the people in the city flourish like grass in a field.

May his fame live forever, may it last as long as the sun. May all nations be blessed through him, and may they praise him.

Praise the Lord God, the God of Israel, who is the only one who can do such fantastic things! Praise his wonderful nature forever! May the whole world be full of his glory! Amen and amen!

(This is the end of the psalms of David, son of Jesse.)

A psalm of Asaph.

Truly God is good to Israel, to those whose minds are pure.

But I was stumbling, my feet were starting to slide,

because I was jealous of self-important people—I saw how well the wicked were doing.

They don't ever seem to get sick; they are strong and healthy.

They don't have problems like other people; they don't get hit by disasters like everybody else.

They wear their pride like a necklace; they clothe themselves with violence.

Their eyes bulge out because they're so fat; their minds are full of selfish vanity.

They mock people, and speak maliciously; they arrogantly threaten cruelty.

They talk irreverently against heaven above, and defame people here on earth.

As a result people turn to them and drink in everything they say.

“God won't find out,” they say. “The Most High doesn't even know what's going on!”

Look at these wicked people! They don't have a care in the world, and they're always making money!

It's been pointless to keep my mind pure and my hands clean.

I'm cursed with suffering all day long; every morning I'm punished.

If I'd talked like this to others, I would have betrayed your people.

So I thought about it and tried to understand, but it looked like a lot of hard work to me—

until I went into God's Temple. Then I understood what happens to the wicked in the end.

For you send them on a slippery path; you throw them down to destruction.

How quickly they're destroyed! They come to a terrifying end.

Like waking up from a dream, Lord—when you get up you will forget all about them!

At that time my thoughts were bitter. I felt like I had been stabbed.

I was stupid and ignorant. I was like a brute beast to you.

Yet I'm always with you; you hold me by the hand.

You tell me what to do; and ultimately you will welcome me in glory.

Who is there in heaven for me except you? And I want nothing on earth except you.

My body and my mind may fail, but God is the foundation of my life. He is mine forever!

Those people who are far from God will die. You destroy all those unfaithful to you.

But I love to stay close to God! I have chosen the Lord God to protect me. I will share all that you have done.

A psalm (maskil) of Asaph.

God, why have you rejected us? Is it forever? Why does your anger burn so hot against the sheep of your own field?

Remember the people you made your own long ago, the tribe you redeemed and made your own. Remember too Mount Zion, the place where you live.

Come and walk through the complete devastation. The enemy has totally destroyed your Temple.

The enemy shouted in triumph right where you met with us. There they set up their war banners as signs of their victory.

They acted like men chopping down a forest with axes.

With axes and hammers they smashed in the carved wooden panels.

Then they set fire to your Temple, burning it to the ground. They defiled the place where you live, the place that bears your name.

They said to themselves, “Let's destroy it all!” So they burned down every place where God was worshiped throughout the land.

We no longer see any signs. There are no prophets left. And no one among us knows how long this will last.

How long will the enemy ridicule you, God? Will they insult your character forever?

Why do you hold back from doing something? Take action and destroy them!

But you, God, are our king from long ago. You have saved us many times in the land.

You were the one who split apart the sea by your strength; you broke the heads of the sea monsters.

You were the one who crushed the heads of Leviathan, and you gave its body to the desert animals to eat.

You were the one who made springs and rivers flow with water. You made permanent rivers dry up.

You created the day, and also the night; you made the moon and the sun.

You set the boundaries of the earth; you made summer and winter.

So keep in mind how the enemy ridiculed you, Lord, and how irreverent people insulted your reputation.

Don't let wild animals kill your turtledoves! Don't abandon your people forever!

Remember your promises in the agreement, because the land is full of dark places and violence.

Don't let those who suffer be mistreated again. Let the poor and needy praise you for you who are.

Stand up, God, and plead your case. Don't forget how these foolish people insulted you all the time.

Don't ignore what your enemies have said, for their loud accusations against you are getting worse and worse!

For the music director. A psalm of Asaph. According to "Do Not Destroy." A song.

We thank you, God, we thank you because you are close beside us. People tell about the wonderful things you have done.

God says, "When the time I have decided comes, I will judge fairly.

When the earth quakes, and all its inhabitants tremble, I am the one who holds it steady. Selah.

To those who boast I say, 'Don't boast!' I tell the wicked, 'Don't be proud!'

No, don't be proud and arrogant, insulting heaven."

For no one, from the east to the west, or from the wilderness, should think so highly of themselves.

God is the one who decides—who he will bring down and who he will lift up.

For the Lord has a cup in his hand, full of bubbling wine mixed with spices. He pours it out, and all the wicked drink it deeply, down to the last drop.

But I will speak about you forever. I will sing praises to the God of Jacob.

For God says, "I will break the power of the wicked; but I will give my support to those who do what is good."

For the music director. To be accompanied by stringed instruments. A psalm of Asaph. A song.

God is famous in Judah; his reputation is great throughout Israel.

He lives in Jerusalem; his home is in Zion.

There he broke the flaming arrows, the shields, the swords, and the weapons of war. Selah.

You shine with light; you are more majestic than the everlasting mountains.

Our most courageous enemies have been plundered. They sleep the sleep of death. Even the strongest of them could not raise a hand against us.

At your command, God of Jacob, both horse and rider fell down dead.

You are terrifying—who can stand before you when you are angry?

From heaven you announced judgment. Everyone on earth was afraid and stood still,

when you stood up to judge, to save the oppressed people of the earth. Selah.

Even human anger against you makes you look glorious, for you wear it like a crown.

Make your promises to God and be sure to keep them. Everyone bring gifts to the awe-inspiring one.

For he humbles proud leaders; he terrifies the kings of the earth.

For Jeduthun, the music director. A psalm of Asaph.

I cry out to God for help—I even shout. If only he would listen to me!

When I was in trouble I prayed to the Lord. All night long I stretched out my hands to him in prayer but nothing brought me any comfort.

I thought about God, groaning loudly; I meditated on him, but I was discouraged. Selah.

You stop me going to sleep; I'm so upset I can't even talk.

I think of the old days, years ago.

I remember the songs I sang in the night. I meditate and ask myself:

Has the Lord given up on me forever? Won't he ever be pleased with me again?

Has his trustworthy love disappeared forever? Have his promises permanently ended?

Has God forgotten to be kind? Has he angrily slammed the door shut on his compassion? Selah.

Then I said, "This is what hurts me the most: the Most High doesn't treat me the way he used to."

I remember what you have done, Lord; I remember all the wonderful things you did long ago.

I will think about all you have accomplished; I will think deeply about how you have acted.

God, your ways are holy; is any god as great as you?

You are the God who does wonderful things! You have revealed your power to the nations.

Through your strength you saved your people, the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. Selah.

When the waters saw you, God, when they looked they trembled! Yes, they shook down to the very depths!

The clouds poured rain down; the skies crashed with thunder; your lightning flew like arrows.

Your thunder rumbled from the whirlwind; lightning flashes lit up the world; the earth quaked and shook.

Your way led through the sea; your path passed through the deep sea; yet your footprints were invisible.

You led your people like a flock, shepherded by Moses and Aaron.

A psalm (maskil) of Asaph.

Listen to what I have to teach you, my people; hear what I have to say.

I will tell you wise sayings; I will explain mysteries from the past

that we have heard before and reflected on; stories our forefathers passed down to us.

We will not keep them from our children; we will tell the next generation about God's marvelous actions—about his power and the amazing things he has done.

He gave his laws to the descendants of Jacob; his instructions to the people of Israel. He commanded our forefathers to teach them to their children,

so that the next generation—children yet to be born—would understand and grow up to teach their children.

In this way they should place their trust in God and not forget what God has done, and keep his commandments.

Then they would not be like their forefathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation that was untrustworthy and unfaithful.

The soldiers of Ephraim, though armed with bows, ran away on the day of battle.

They did not keep God's agreement, and refused to follow his laws.

They ignored what he had done, and the amazing things he had shown them—

the miracles he had performed for their forefathers near Zoan in Egypt.

He split the sea in two and led them through, making the water stand like walls on either side.

He led them with a cloud by day, and by night with a light of fire.

He split open rocks in the desert to give his people plenty to drink, water as deep as the ocean.

He made streams flow from the stone; water rushing down like rivers!

But they repeatedly sinned against him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert.

They deliberately provoked God by demanding the foods they longed for.

They insulted God by saying, “Can God provide food here in the desert?

Yes, he can strike a rock so that water gushes out like flowing rivers, but can he give us bread? Can he supply his people with meat?”

When he heard this, the Lord became very angry, burning like fire against the descendants of Jacob, furious with the people of Israel,

for they didn't believe in God and didn't trust him to take care of them.

Even so he commanded the skies above and the doors of heaven to open,

and he made manna rain down on them to eat, giving them bread from heaven.

Human beings ate the bread of angels; he sent them more than enough food.

He sent the east wind blowing across the sky; by his power he drove the south wind.

He rained down meat on them as plentiful as dust; birds as numerous as sand on a beach.

He made them fall right in the middle of their camp, all around where they were living.

They ate until they were full. He gave them the food they longed for.

But before they satisfied their appetite, while the meat was still in their mouths,

God became angry with them and he killed their strongest men, striking them down in the prime of life.

Despite all this they went right on sinning. Despite the miracles, they refused to trust him.

So he snuffed out their futile lives, bringing them to an end in terror.

When he began killing them, the rest came back to God in repentance, praying to him.

They remembered that God was their rock, that God Most High was their Savior.

They flattered him by what they told him, but they were only lying.

Deep down they were not sincere, and did not keep the agreement they had with him.

But being compassionate he pardoned their guilt and did not destroy all of them. He often held back his anger—he did not pour out all his fury.

He remembered their mortality—that they were like a puff of wind that would not return.

How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness, giving him grief in the desert!

Again and again they provoked God, causing pain to the Holy One of Israel.

They did not remember his strength when he rescued them from their oppressors,

performing miracles in Egypt, doing wonderful things on the plain of Zoan.

There he turned their rivers and their streams into blood so that no one could drink from them.

He sent flies among them to destroy them, and frogs to ruin everything.

He gave their crops to locusts; everything they worked hard for was taken by locusts.

He destroyed their vines with hail, and their fig trees with freezing rain.

He handed over their cattle to hail and their flocks to lightning bolts.

He poured out on them his fierce anger—rage and hostility and anguish—sending a band of destroying angels against them.

He sent his unrestrained anger against them; he did not spare them from death, handing them over to the plague.

He struck down all the firstborn of Egypt, the first to be conceived in the tents of Ham.

But he led out his people like sheep, and guided them like a flock in the wilderness.

He led them to safety, and they were not afraid. He drowned their enemies in the sea.

He brought them to the border of his holy land, to this mountainous land that he had conquered for them.

He drove out the heathen nations before them. He divided up the land for them to own. He settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.

But they provoked God Most High, rebelling against him. They did not follow what he had told them.

Just like their forefathers they turned away from God and were unfaithful to him, as twisted as a defective bow.

They made him angry with their pagan high places of worship; they made him jealous with their idols.

When God heard their worship he became furious and he totally rejected Israel.

He abandoned his place at Shiloh, the Tabernacle where he lived among the people.

He surrendered the Ark of his power, allowing it to be captured; handing it over into enemy hands.

He handed over his people to be slaughtered by the sword; he was furious with his chosen people.

Their young men were destroyed by fire; their young women had no wedding songs.

Their priests were killed by the sword; their widows were unable to mourn.

Then the Lord woke up as if from sleep, as a warrior sobering up from drinking wine.

He defeated his enemies, striking them on the back, causing them everlasting shame.

He rejected the descendants of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim.

Instead he chose the tribe of Judah, and Mount Zion which he loves.

There he built his sanctuary, high like the heavens, on earth that he made to last forever.

He chose his servant David, taking him from the sheep pens,

taking him from caring for the sheep and lambs to be a shepherd to the descendants of Jacob—God's special people, Israel.

Like a shepherd, he took care of them with sincere devotion, leading them with skillful hands.

A psalm of Asaph.

God, heathen nations have invaded your land. They have defiled your holy Temple. They have turned Jerusalem into heaps of rubble.

They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your faithful people to the beasts of the earth.

They have poured out the blood of Jerusalem's people like water all through the city; no one remains to bury the dead.

We have been made a mockery before our neighbors, ridiculed and laughed at by those around us.

How long, Lord? Will you be angry with us forever? Will your jealousy always burn like fire?

Pour out your anger on the heathen nations that don't know you, and on those kingdoms that don't worship you!

For they have destroyed the descendants of Jacob, and turned our country into a wasteland.

Don't hold the sins of our forefathers against us! Come to us quickly for we desperately need your compassion.

Help us, God of our salvation, because of your wonderful character! Save us and forgive us our sins because that's the kind of person you are!

Why should the heathen nations be able to say, “Where is their God?” May they experience your punishment for shedding the blood of your servants, and may we see it.

Listen to the groans of the prisoners; with your great power save those condemned to die.

Pay each of these neighbors back seven times for the scorn and ridicule they directed against you, Lord.

Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will praise you forever. We will thank you for all generations to come.

For the music director. A psalm of Asaph. To the tune “Lilies of the Covenant.”

Please hear us, Shepherd of Israel, you who lead the descendants of Joseph like a flock. You who sit on your throne above the cherubim, shine out

in the presence of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh. Gather together your power and come to save us!

God, please restore us! Let your face shine on us so we can be saved.

Lord God Almighty, how long will you be angry with the prayers of your people?

You fed them with the bread of tears, and gave them a full bowl of tears to drink.

You turn us into victims our neighbors fight over; our enemies mock us.

God Almighty, please restore us! Let your face shine on us so we can be saved!

You carried us out of Egypt like a vine. You drove out the heathen nations, and then you planted the vine.

You prepared the ground for the vine. It took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered by its shade; its branches covered the great cedars.

It sent its branches as far west as the Mediterranean Sea, and its shoots as far east as the Euphrates River.

So why have you broken down the walls that protect it so that everyone who passes by can steal its fruit?

Wild pigs from the forest eat it, wild animals feed on it.

God Almighty, please return to us! Look down from heaven and see what's happening to us! Come and care for this vine

that you planted yourself, this son that you brought up yourself.

We, your vine, have been chopped down and burned. May those who did this die when you glare at them.

Protect the man who stands beside you; strengthen the son you have chosen.

Then we will not turn away from you. Revive us so we can pray to you.

Lord God Almighty, please restore us! Let your face shine on us so we can be saved.

For the music director. On the gittith. A psalm of Asaph.

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob.

Start the song! Play the tambourine, sweet-sounding lyre, and harp.

Blow the trumpet at the new moon, and at the full moon, to begin our festivals,

for this is a rule for Israel, a regulation of the God of Jacob.

God made this statute for Joseph when he opposed the land of Egypt. I heard a voice I didn't know, saying:

“I took the load from your shoulders; I freed your hands from carrying heavy baskets.

In your suffering you cried out to me, and I saved you. I answered you from the thundercloud. I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

My people, listen to my warnings! Israel, please listen to me!

There must not be a strange god among you; you must never bow down to foreign gods and worship them.

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

But my people didn't listen to me. Israel didn't want anything to do with me.

So I sent them away to follow their stubborn thinking, living as they chose.

If only my people would listen to me; if only Israel would follow my ways!

It wouldn't take me long to conquer their enemies, to strike down their foes.

Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, forever doomed.

But I would feed you the best wheat and satisfy you with honey from the rock.”

A psalm of Asaph.

God stands in the midst of his great assembly to judge among the gods.

How long will you make unfair judgments and show favoritism to the wicked? Selah.

Defend the poor and orphans; support the rights of those who are oppressed and suffering.

Rescue the poor and those unable to help themselves; save them from the clutches of evil people.

They don't have any wisdom; they live in the dark; the foundations of the earth are shaken.

I say, “You are gods; all of you are children of the Most High.

But you will die like any human being, you will fall like any other leader.”

Stand up, Lord, and judge the earth, for all the nations belong to you.

A song. A psalm of Asaph.

God, please do not stay silent! You can't remain unmoved! God, you must not keep quiet!

Can't you hear the roars of your enemies? Can't you see how those who hate you are defiantly lifting up their heads?

They invent cunning plans to conspire against your people; they plot against those you treasure.

They say, “Come on! Let's destroy them as a nation so the name ‘Israel’ will be completely forgotten.”

They all agree in their conspiracy; they've made a treaty together to attack you—

the people of Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, and the Hagirites;

the people of Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, and the inhabitants of Tyre.

Assyria too has joined them, allied with the descendants of Lot. Selah.

Do to them what you did to Midian, what you did to Sisera and Jabin at the Kishon River.

They were destroyed at Endor and became like manure to fertilize the ground.

Make their leaders like Oreb and Zeeb; all their rulers like Zebah and Zalmunna,

for they said, “Let's take the pastures of God for ourselves!”

My God, make them like whirling tumbleweeds, chaff blown away by the wind.

Just like fire that burns the forest, a flame that sets fire to the mountains,

in the same way chase them down with your storm, terrify them with your whirlwind.

Shame them in defeat so that they come to you, Lord!

Make them ashamed, terrify them forever so that they die in disgrace.

Let them understand that you alone, called the Lord, are the Most High who rules over all the earth.

For the music director. A psalm of the descendants of Korah. On the gittith.

How wonderful is the place where you live, Lord Almighty!

I long, I ache, to be in the courts of the Lord. My mind and my body sing for joy to the living God.

Even a sparrow finds a home there, and a swallow builds a nest for herself where she can raise her chicks near to your altars, Lord Almighty, my king and my God.

How happy are those who live in your house—they are always praising you! Selah.

How happy are those whose strength is in you, those who are determined to make a pilgrimage.

As they walk through the Valley of Tears it becomes a spring of water; autumn rains cover it with pools.

They go from strength to strength, and each one will appear before God in Jerusalem.

Lord God Almighty, please hear my prayer; please listen, God of Jacob. Selah.

Please God, look at our defender, look at the face of your anointed one.

One day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else. I'd rather stand as a doorkeeper in the house of my God than live comfortably in the homes of the wicked.

For the Lord God is our sun and shield, and he gives us grace and honor. The Lord doesn't hold back anything good from those who do right.

Lord Almighty, how happy are those who trust in you.

For the music director. A psalm of the descendants of Korah

Lord, you have shown your kindness to your land; you have restored Jacob's prosperity.

You took away your people's guilt; you forgave all their sins. Selah.

You took back your fury; you turned away from your fierce anger.

Bring us back to you, God of our salvation! Take away your anger towards us.

Are you going to be furious with us forever? Will you stay angry with us for all future generations?

Won't you restore our lives so your people can find happiness in you?

Show us your trustworthy love, Lord! Give us your salvation!

Let me hear what God has to say. God speaks peace to his people, to those who trust in him. But they must not return to their foolish ways.

Truly God's salvation is with those who do as he says. His glorious presence will live with us in our land.

Trustworthiness and faithful love join together; goodness and peace have kissed each other.

What is true grows up from the earth; what is right looks down from heaven.

The Lord will certainly give us all that is good, and our land will produce fine crops.

Truth and right go ahead of him to prepare a path for him to walk on.

A prayer of David.

Please listen to me, Lord! Please answer me, for I am weak and really need your help!

Don't let me die, for I am faithful to you. Save me, for I am your servant and I trust in you. You are my God.

Be kind to me, Lord, for I call out to you all day long.

Make me happy, Lord, for I've dedicated my life to you.

For you, Lord, are good; you are forgiving and full of trustworthy love for all who come to you.

Lord, please listen to my prayer. Hear my call for help.

When I'm in trouble I cry out to you because I know you will answer me.

There's no one like you among the “gods,” Lord. No one can do the things you do.

You created all the nations, and they will come and bow down before you, Lord. They will declare how wonderful you are.

For you are great, and do wonderful things! Only you are God.

Lord, please teach me your way, so I can depend on your trustworthiness. Make me single-minded, so I can consistently honor the kind of person you are.

Lord my God, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I will praise your character forever.

For your trustworthy love for me is so great; you have saved me from death.

God, arrogant people are attacking me, vicious people are trying to kill me. To them you count for nothing.

But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to become angry, full of trustworthy love and faithfulness.

Turn to me, have mercy on me. Give me your strength, your servant; save the son of your servant-girl.

Show me a sign that you approve of me! Those who hate me will see it, and they will be ashamed because you, Lord, have helped me.

A song. A psalm of the descendants of Korah.

The Lord founded the city on his holy mountain.

Jerusalem is the city that the Lord loves more than any other city in Israel.

Many wonderful things are said of you, city of God! Selah.

I mention Egypt and Babylon as those who know me, and in addition Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia—"this man was born there."

It will be said concerning Jerusalem, "Everyone was born there," and the Most High will make it secure.

When the Lord registers the nations, he will write, "They were born there." Selah.

Singers and dancers alike say, "Living here I am at home."

A song. A psalm of the descendants of Korah. For the music director. To the tune "Mahalath Leannoth." A maskil by Heman the Ezrahite

Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out to you day and night.

Please listen to my prayer; hear my words as I plead with you.

My life is full of troubles, and my death is approaching.

I'm counted among the dying; a man with no strength.

I am abandoned among the dead, lying like a corpse in the grave, forgotten and beyond your care.

You have placed me in a deep pit, in the depths of darkness.

Your hostility crushes me; you are drowning me under your crashing waves. Selah.

You have made my friends avoid me by making me look repulsive to them. I'm trapped, I can't go out.

I've cried my eyes out begging you every day for your help, Lord, holding out my hands to you.

Do you do miracles among the dead? Do the dead stand up to praise you? Selah.

Your faithful love—is it mentioned in the grave? Your trustworthiness—is it discussed in the place of destruction?

Are the wonderful things you do known in the darkness? Is your goodness known in the land of forgetfulness?

But I cry out to you for help; every morning I pray to you.

Lord, why do you reject me? Why do you turn away from me?

I have been sick since I was young, often at death's door. I have had to bear the terrible things you've done to me. I'm in despair!

Your anger has overcome me; the terrible things you do have destroyed me.

They surround me all the time like floodwaters, swallowing me up.

You have made my family and friends avoid me. Darkness is my only friend.

A psalm (maskil) of Ethan the Ezraite

I will sing of the Lord's trustworthy love forever; I will tell all generations of your faithfulness.

For I have said, "Your unfailing love lasts forever; your faithfulness endures as long as the heavens."

You said, "I have made an agreement with my chosen one, I gave a binding promise to my servant David:

I will make sure your lineage lasts forever; I will keep your throne secure for all generations." Selah.

All the heavenly beings will sing of the wonderful things you have done, Lord; angels will gather to sing of your faithfulness.

For who in heaven can compare to the Lord? Who is like the Lord even among the angels?

The heavenly council are in awe of God; all who surround him are overwhelmed by him.

Lord God Almighty, who is as powerful as you? In all this, Lord, you are completely trustworthy.

You rule the restless seas; you calm their stormy waves.

You crushed Rahab the sea-monster to death; by your power you scattered your enemies.

The heavens belong to you, and the earth too; you made the world and everything in it.

You created north and south; Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon celebrate you.

Your arm is powerful. Your hand is strong. Your right hand is held up high in command.

Your character of goodness and fairness is the basis for the way you rule; dependable love and trustworthiness are always with you.

How happy are those who know how to shout your praises, Lord. They live in the light of your presence.

They celebrate the person you are all day long, so glad that you do what's right.

They rely on you, their glory and strength; by your grace you lift us up.

Yes, the Lord is the one who shields us, and our king belongs to the Holy One of Israel.

Once you spoke in a vision to your faithful servant and said, "I have given strength to the warrior I have chosen from the people to become king.

I have selected David my servant, and I have anointed him with the oil of my holiness.

I have placed my hand on him to steady him; and I have made him strong by my powerful arm.

His enemies will not deceive him; the wicked will not bring him down.

I will wipe out his enemies before him; I will strike down those who hate him.

My trustworthiness and unfailing love will be with him, and through me he will be victorious.

I will extend his rule from the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates River.

He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation.'

I will also make him my first-born son, the highest of the kings of the earth.

I will love him faithfully forever; my agreement with him shall never come to an end.

I will make sure his royal line lasts forever; his dynasty will continue as long as the heavens endure.

But if his descendants abandon my laws, if they do not follow my rules,

if they break my decrees, and do not keep my commandments,

I will punish their rebellion by beating them with a rod, and their sin by lashing them with a whip.

However, I will not take away my love from him; I will not break my promise to him.

I will not annul the agreement I have with him; I will not alter a single word I've said.

By my holy character I have made a vow to David that I will not lie to him.

His royal line will last forever, and his dynasty will continue before me as long as the sun endures.

It will continue forever like the moon, an enduring witness in the heavens." Selah.

But you have rejected and abandoned him! You are angry with your chosen king!

You have broken the agreement you had with him; you have thrown his crown to the ground!

You have torn down his defensive walls; you have ruined his fortresses.

Everyone who passes by has robbed him; he has become an object of mockery to the nations nearby.

You have made his enemies strong; you have made them celebrate their victory.

You have repelled his sharp sword; you have not helped him in battle.

You took away his glory; you threw his throne to the ground.

You have made him grow old before his time; you have totally humiliated him. Selah.

How long, Lord? Will you hide yourself from us forever, your anger burning like fire?

Remember me—my life is so short! Why did you bother creating futile humanity?

There's no one who doesn't die—no one can save themselves from the power of the grave. Selah.

Where is the trustworthy love you used to have, Lord, that you faithfully promised to David?

Don't forget, Lord, how your servants are being humiliated! I'm burdened down with the insults of so many nations!

Your enemies taunt me, Lord, mocking your king wherever he goes.

May the Lord be blessed for ever. Amen and amen.

A prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, through every generation, you have been "home" for us!

Before the mountains were born, before you gave birth to the earth and the universe, from eternity past to eternity future, you are God.

You turn people back into dust, saying, "Return to dust, human beings."

In your eyes, a thousand years are like a day that's already gone; like a few passing hours of the night.

You bring people's lives to a sudden end, like dreams that vanish. They are like grass that grows up in the morning—

it sprouts in the morning, fresh and new, but by the evening it is withered and dead.

We are burned up by your anger, terrified by your fury.

You have set out our sins before you—our secret sins are visible in the light of your presence.

Our lives fade away under your anger, coming to an end as quickly as a sigh.

We live for seventy years—eighty if we have the strength. But even in the prime of life all that we have is hardship and suffering. Soon our lives are over and we're gone.

Who can know the power of your anger? Who understands your fury so you can be shown reverence?

Teach us to value every one of our days so we can live wisely!

Lord, how long will it be before you come back to us and have pity on us your servants?

Show us every morning your trustworthy love so we may be happy, full of joy throughout our lives.

Make us glad for as many days as you made us sad, for all the years we suffered!

May we, your servants, see you at work for us again; may our children see your glory.

May our Lord God be pleased with us, blessing what we do, blessing what we do.

Those who live under the protection of the Most High are kept safe by the Almighty.

This is what I say about the Lord: "He is the one who defends and protects me. He is my God, and I trust in him."

For he will save you from hidden traps and deadly diseases.

He will hide you under his feathers, and shelter you with his wings. His trustworthiness shields and protects you.

You will not be afraid of terror at night or an arrow that flies in the day,

or disease that attacks at night, or catastrophe that falls at noon.

A thousand may fall beside you, ten thousand die at your right hand, but you won't be harmed.

You only have to open your eyes and you will see how the wicked are repaid.

Because you have made the Lord your protection, and the Most High your home,

nothing evil will happen to you; no plague will come near where you live.

For he will command his angels to take care of you in everything you do.

They will hold you up with their hands so you won't trip and fall down.

You will trample lions and snakes; you will tread young lions and serpents underfoot.

I will save anyone who loves me; I will protect anyone who accepts me.

When they call out to me for help, I will answer; when they are in trouble, I will be with them. I will save and honor them.

I will grant them long lives, and show them my salvation.

A psalm. A song for the Sabbath day.

How good it is to thank the Lord, to sing praises to you, Most High,

to tell of your trustworthy love in the morning, and your faithfulness in the night,

to the music of a ten-stringed harp and the melody of a lyre.

You've made me so happy, Lord, because of all you've done for me! I sing for joy at what you've done!

Lord, what you do is amazing; your thoughts are very profound!

Only senseless people and fools don't know and understand this:

even though the wicked grow up quickly like grass, and even though people who do evil flourish, they will be destroyed forever!

But you, Lord, rule on high forever.

Your enemies, Lord, your enemies will die; everyone who does evil will be destroyed!

But you have made me as powerful as a wild bull; you have anointed me with the best olive oil.

My eyes look with pleasure to see my enemies defeated; my ears have heard the downfall of those who tried to attack me.

Those who live right flourish like a palm tree; they grow tall like a cedar tree in Lebanon.

They are planted in the house of the Lord; they thrive in the courts of our God.

Even when they are old they will still produce fruit, staying fresh and green.

They will declare, “The Lord does what is right! He is my rock! There is no wrong in him!”

The Lord reigns, clothed in majesty! He wears his royal robes, with his power worn like a belt. The world is held together firmly—it cannot be broken apart.

Your throne has existed from ages past; you are from eternity.

The floods have raised up, Lord; the floods have raised their voices; the floods have raised up their crashing waves.

But greater than the most violent ocean, greater than the largest waves of the sea, the greatest is the Lord above.

Your laws are totally trustworthy. Your house, Lord, is holy forever.

The Lord is a God of vengeance! God of vengeance, shine out!

Stand up, judge of the earth, and pay back those who are proud what they deserve.

How long, Lord? How long will the wicked celebrate in triumph?

How long will you let them pour out their arrogant words? How long will these evil people go on boasting?

Lord, they crush your people; they oppress those you call your own.

They kill widows and foreigners; they murder orphans.

They say, “The Lord can't see what we're doing. Israel's God doesn't pay any attention to us.”

Take another look, you stupid people! Fools—when will you ever get the point?

Do you think the creator of the ear can't hear? Do you think the maker of the eye can't see?

Do you think that the one who punishes nations won't punish you too? Do you think that the one who teaches human beings knowledge doesn't know anything?

The Lord knows the thoughts of human beings—he knows they are pointless.

Those you discipline are happy, Lord; those you teach from your Law.

You give them peace in days of trouble, until a pit is dug to trap the wicked.

For the Lord will not give up on his people; he will not abandon his own.

Justice will once again be based on what is right; those who are sincere will support it.

Who came to my defense against the wicked; who stood up for me against those who do evil?

If the Lord hadn't helped me, I would have soon gone down into the silence of the grave.

I shouted out, “My foot's slipping!” and your trustworthy love, Lord, kept me from falling.

When my mind was full of worries, you comforted me and encouraged me.

Can unjust judges really be on your side, Lord, when their corrupt use of the law causes misery?

They work together to destroy good people; they condemn those who are innocent to death.

But the Lord protects me like a fortress; my God is the rock that keeps me safe.

He will turn the wickedness of evil people back upon them; he will destroy them because of their sins; the Lord our God will destroy them.

Come, let's sing for joy to the Lord! Let's shout in triumph to the rock of our salvation!

Let's go before him with thanksgiving! Let's sing loudly to him in celebration!

For the Lord is a great God, a great king above all gods.

He rules over the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains.

The sea is his, because he made it; the dry land, because he formed it.

Come, let's enter in and worship, let's kneel before the Lord our Creator.

For he is our God, and we are the people he looks after like a shepherd, the flock he cares for. If you hear his voice calling you today,

don't have a hard-hearted attitude, “as you did at Meribah, as you did that day at Massah in the desert,

when your forefathers provoked me, testing my patience, even though they had seen everything I'd done.

For forty years I was disgusted with that generation, and I said, ‘They are people who are unfaithful to me in their minds, and they refuse to accept my ways.’

So in my frustration I vowed, ‘They will certainly not enter my rest.’”

Sing to the Lord a new song! All the earth, sing to the Lord!

Sing to the Lord, and of his wonderful reputation! Each day let everyone know of his salvation!

Declare his glorious acts among the nations, the amazing things he does among all peoples.

For the Lord is great, and deserves the best praise! He is to be respected with awe above all gods.

For all the gods of other nations are idols; but the Lord made the heavens!

Splendor and majesty are his; power and glory are in his sanctuary.

Give the Lord acclamation, nations of the world, acclaim him with glory and strength.

Give the Lord the glory he deserves; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Worship the Lord in his magnificent holiness; let all the earth tremble in his presence.

Tell the nations, “The Lord is in charge!” The world is held together firmly—it cannot be broken apart. He will judge everyone fairly.

Let the heavens sing for joy, let the earth be happy, let the sea and everything in it shout with praise!

Let the fields and everything there celebrate; let all the trees in the forest sing for joy.

In fact, let everything that stands before the Lord sing praises, for he is coming, coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with fairness, and the nations with his truth.

The Lord reigns! Let the earth be glad, and distant lands be full of joy!

He is surrounded by clouds and thick darkness; his throne is founded on justice and right.

Flames proceed him, burning up his enemies on every side.

His flashes of lightning light up the world; the earth watches and trembles.

The mountains melt like wax in the presence of the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth.

The heavens proclaim his goodness; everyone sees his glory.

All those who worship idols are humiliated, those who are proud of their idols—for all “gods” bow down before him.

Jerusalem hears this and celebrates; all the towns of Judah are happy because of your judgments, Lord.

For you, Lord, are the highest of all, ruling over the whole earth; your position is far above any other god.

You who love the Lord, hate evil! He protects the lives of those who are faithful to him, and saves them from the power of wicked people.

Light shines on those who do good, giving joy to those who live right.

Be happy in the Lord, you who do right, and thank him for his holy nature!

A psalm.

Sing the Lord a new song, for he has done wonderful things: by his powerful right hand and his strong arm he has won the victory.

The Lord has revealed his salvation to the nations, and shown them his goodness.

He has not forgotten to show his trustworthy love and faithfulness to the descendants of Israel. Our God has made his salvation clear to the ends of the earth.

Everyone on earth, shout in triumph to the Lord; break out in joyful songs of praise!

Sing praises to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and melodious voices;

with trumpets and the sound of the ram's horn sing in happiness before the Lord, the King.

Let the sea and everything in it shout with praise, together with the earth and everything living in it.

Let the rivers celebrate, let the hills join in the celebration

before the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world justly, and the nations fairly.

The Lord reigns; let the nations tremble! He sits on his throne above the cherubim; let the earth shake!

The Lord rules supreme in Zion, he is sovereign over all the nations.

Let them praise his greatness, and respect him for who he is—for he is holy,

having kingly power. You love justice; you make impartial decisions. You have made sure everything is done in fairness and according to what's right.

Give respect to the Lord our God! Bow down at his feet, for he is holy!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests; Samuel also prayed to him. They called out to the Lord for help, and he answered them.

He spoke to the people from the pillar of cloud, and they kept the laws and decrees he gave them.

Lord our God, you answered them. You were a forgiving God to them, but you punished them when they did wrong.

Honor the Lord our God, and worship at his holy mountain. For the Lord our God is holy!

A psalm of thanksgiving.

Everyone on earth shout for joy to the Lord!

Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with joyful songs!

Know that the Lord is God! He made us, so we belong to him. We are his people, the flock he cares for.

Go in through his gate with thanks; enter his courts with praise. Thank him; praise him for who he is.

For the Lord is good. His trustworthy love lasts forever; his faithfulness continues for all generations.

A psalm of David.

I will sing of your faithful love and good judgment. I will sing praises to you, Lord.

I will make sure my life is blameless. When will you come and help me? My life will be one of integrity even in private.

I will not look at anything evil. I hate doing wrong—I won't have anything to do with it.

I won't think bad thoughts—I won't even consider anything evil.

I will silence anyone who secretly slanders their neighbor. I won't tolerate anyone who is proud and arrogant.

I look for faithful people to live with me; only those who are trustworthy will serve me.

No one who is dishonest will live in my house; no liars will be allowed in my presence.

I work every day to silence the wicked in the land, to rid the city of the Lord of all who do evil.

A prayer from someone who is suffering and is tired out, pouring out their troubles to the Lord.

Lord, please hear my prayer, my cry for help!

Don't hide your face from me in my time of trouble! Turn and listen to me, and answer me quickly when I call.

My life is disappearing like smoke; my body feels like it's on fire!

I'm like grass that's dried up, withered away—I even forget to eat!

All my groaning has worn me out; my bones show through my skin.

I'm like a desert owl, like a little owl among the ruins.

I can't sleep. I'm like a lonely bird on a rooftop.

My enemies taunt me all day long. They mock me and swear at me.

Ashes are the food I eat; my tears drip into my drink,

because of your anger and hostility, for you have picked me up and tossed me away.

My life is fading away like a shadow that lengthens —I'm withering away like grass.

But you, Lord, reign forever, your fame will last for all generations.

You will take action and have pity on Jerusalem, for it's time to be kind to the city, the time has come.

For the people who follow you love its stones; they value even its dust!

Then the nations will be in awe of who you are, Lord; all the kings of the earth will be in awe of your glory.

For the Lord will rebuild Jerusalem; he will appear in glory.

He will pay attention to the prayers of the homeless; he will not disregard their requests.

Let this be recorded for generations to come, so that people yet to be born may praise the Lord:

The Lord looked down from above, from the heights of his holy place; he looked down from heaven to the earth,

to respond to the groans of prisoners, to set free the children of death.

As a result the wonderful nature of the Lord will be celebrated with praise in Jerusalem,

when the people of many kingdoms gather together to worship the Lord.

But as for me, he broke my health while I was still young, cutting my life short.

I cried out, “My God, don't take my life while I'm young! You are the one who lives forever.

Long ago you created the earth; you made the heavens.

They will come to an end, but you will not. They will all wear out, like clothes—you will change them, and throw them away.

But you are the one who always is; your years never come to an end.

Our children will live with you, and our children's children will grow in your presence.”

A psalm of David.

Let every part of me praise the Lord; let my whole being praise his holy character.

Let every part of me praise the Lord; don't let me forget the wonderful things he's done for me.

He forgives my sins, and he heals all my diseases.

He saves me from death; he honors me with trustworthy love and mercy.

He fills my life with all that's good; he makes me young again, strong as an eagle.

The Lord does what is right, and vindicates those who are exploited.

He explained his ways to Moses: he told the people of Israel what he was going to do.

The Lord is kind and gracious, not quick-tempered, and full of trustworthy love.

He doesn't keep on accusing us; he doesn't stay angry with us forever.

He does not punish us for our sins as he ought to; he does not pay us back for our wrongdoing as we deserve.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth is the extent of his trustworthy love to those who honor him.

As far as the east is from the west is how far the Lord has taken our sins away from us.

Like a loving father, the Lord is kind and compassionate to those who follow him.

For he knows how we are made; he remembers we are only dust.

Human lifetimes are like grass: we blossom like flowers in a field,

but then the wind blows and we are gone, disappearing without a trace.

But the Lord's trustworthy love lasts for all eternity to those who accept him; his goodness to all generations,

to those who keep his agreement and who remember to follow his commandments.

The Lord has set up his throne in the heavens, and he rules over all.

Praise the Lord, you angels, you powerful ones who do what he says, listening to what he tells you!

Praise the Lord, you heavenly armies who serve him and carry out his will!

Praise the Lord, everything in his creation, everyone under his rule, and let every part of me praise the Lord!

Let every part of me praise the Lord! Lord my God, you are so great, clothed with majesty and splendor!

You wear light as your clothing; you stretch out the fabric of the heavens.

You place the roof-beams of your house in the rain-clouds. You make the clouds your chariots. You ride on the wings of the wind.

You make your angels winds, and your servants flames of fire.

You set the earth on its foundations; it will never be shaken.

It was clothed with ocean depths—the waters even covered the mountains—

but at your command the waters fled; at the sound of your thunder they rushed away.

The mountains rose up and the valleys sank down to where you had determined.

You set a boundary for the oceans so they would not come back and cover the earth.

You make springs flow into the streams, running down between the hills.

They provide water for all the wild animals, and wild donkeys quench their thirst.

Birds build their nests in trees along the streams, singing from among the leaves.

You send down rain on the mountains from your home high above; you fill the earth with good things.

You make the grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to eat—crops produced by the earth for food,

and wine to make them happy, olive oil to make their faces shine, and bread to make them strong.

The Lord's trees are well-watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

Sparrows make their nests there; herons make their homes in the tall trees.

Wild goats live high in the mountains; hyraxes hide among the rocks.

You made the moon to mark the months, and the sun knows when to set.

You make darkness fall and the night comes, the time when the forest animals come out to hunt.

The young lions roar as they seek their prey, looking for the food that God provides for them.

When the sun rises they return to their dens to rest.

Then people leave for work, working until the evening.

Lord, how many different things you have made —all of them wisely created! The earth is full of your creatures.

Consider the sea, deep and wide, full of all kinds of living things, large and small.

Ships sail there, and Leviathan, that you made to play in it.

All creatures look to you to give them food at the right time.

When you provide it, they gather it up. You hand out food to them, and they are well-fed.

When you turn away from them, they're terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to dust.

When you send your breath, they are created, and life covers the earth again.

May the Lord's glory last forever! The Lord is happy with all he has made.

He only has to look at the earth and it trembles; mountains pour out smoke at his touch.

I will sing to the Lord for as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God my whole life.

May he be pleased with my thoughts because I am happy in the Lord.

Let sinners be destroyed from the earth; let the wicked cease to exist. Let every part of me praise the Lord!

Give the Lord thanks, worship his wonderful nature, let people know what he's done!

Sing to him, sing his praises; tell everyone the great things he's done!

Be proud of his holy character; be happy, all who come to the Lord!

Look for the Lord, and his strength; always look to be in his presence.

Remember all the wonderful things he's done, the miracles he's performed, and the judgments he's carried out,

descendants of Abraham, children of Israel, his chosen people.

He is the Lord, our God, his judgments cover the whole earth.

He remembers his agreement forever, the promise he made lasts for a thousand generations;

the agreement he made with Abraham, the vow he gave to Isaac.

The Lord legally confirmed it with Jacob, he made this binding agreement with Israel:

saying to you, “I will give the land of Canaan for you to possess.”

He said this when they were only a few, just a small group of foreigners in the land.

They wandered from country to country, from one kingdom to the next.

He didn't let anyone treat them badly; warning kings to leave them alone:

“Don't touch my chosen people; don't harm my prophets!”

He caused a famine in the Land of Canaan so that there was no food.

Before that he sent a man, Joseph, who was sold as a slave.

They hurt his feet by placing them in shackles, and they put an iron collar around his neck,

until the time predicted came when the Lord tested him.

The king sent for him and released him; the king of the people set him free.

He put Joseph in charge of the royal household, manager of everything he had,

to teach the king's officials whatever he wanted, to make the king's advisors wise.

Then Israel entered Egypt—Jacob settled as a foreigner in the land of Ham.

The Lord made his people more fertile and more powerful than their enemies.

He made the Egyptians change their minds and hate his people and act deceptively towards them.

He sent his servant Moses, together with Aaron, whom he had chosen.

They carried out his miraculous signs among the Egyptians, his wonders in the land of Ham.

He plunged the country into darkness—for hadn't they defied what the Lord had said?

He turned their water into blood, killing all the fish.

Then he sent a plague of frogs across the land that even entered the bedrooms of their rulers.

He gave the command, and flies spread throughout their land; mosquitoes were everywhere.

He rained down hail on them, and lightning flashed across their land.

He struck down their grape vines, and tore down their trees.

He gave the command, and swarms of locusts came —countless locusts:

they ate up all the vegetation in their land; they consumed all the growing crops.

He killed all the firstborn in Egypt, the first to be produced in their vigor and strength.

Then he led his people out of Egypt, carrying silver and gold—not one among the tribes was stumbling along.

The Egyptians were delighted to see them go, for they were frightened of the Israelites.

He spread a cloud above them as a covering, and at night a fire to give them light.

He gave them quails to eat when they asked him; he fed them with the bread of heaven until they were full.

He split the rock open, and water gushed out—a river flowing through the desert.

For he remembered his holy promise to his servant Abraham.

So he led his people out, his chosen ones, as they sang for joy.

He gave them the lands of the heathen nations, and they inherited what other people had worked for.

The Lord did this so they could follow his instructions and keep his laws. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Thank the Lord, for he is good! His trustworthy love lasts forever.

Who can give an account of all the wonderful things the Lord has done? Who can give him all the praise he is due?

Happy are those who treat people fairly, who always do what is right.

Please remember me when you are generous to your people; think of me when you come to save.

Let me see your chosen people prosperous; let me be happy together with your nation; let me share in being proud of you with those who belong to you.

We have sinned just like our forefathers. We have done wrong. We are guilty.

They didn't pay attention to the wonderful things you did. They didn't keep in mind how much you loved them, but chose to rebel at the sea, the Red Sea.

Even so he saved them because of the kind of person he is, and to show his power

He gave his order to the Red Sea, and it dried up. He led his people across the seabed as if it were a desert.

He rescued them from those who hated them; he saved them from their enemies' power.

The water drowned their enemies—none of them survived,

Then his people trusted in what he promised, and sang his praises.

But they quickly forgot what he had done for them, and they didn't listen to his advice.

They were filled with desperate cravings in the wilderness; they provoked God in the desert.

He gave them what they wanted, but sent them a plague as well.

In the camp the people became jealous of Moses, and of Aaron, the Lord's holy priest.

The earth split open and swallowed up Dathan; it buried Abiram and his followers.

Fire broke out among them—a flame that burned them up.

At Mount Sinai they made a calf, they bowed down before a metal idol.

They replaced their God of glory with a bull that eats grass!

They forgot God, their Savior, who had done marvelous things in Egypt;

performing miracles in the land of Ham, doing amazing things at the Red Sea.

So he said he was going to destroy them. But Moses, his chosen leader, placed himself between the Lord and the people to persuade the Lord not to destroy them in his anger.

Later the people refused to enter the Promised Land; they didn't trust him to do as he'd promised.

They complained in their tents about the Lord, and refused to obey what he told them.

So he raised his hand to give them a serious warning that he would bring them down in the wilderness,

that he would disperse their descendants among the heathen nations, scattering them among countries far away.

They gave their allegiance to Baal Peor, and ate food sacrificed to the dead.

They provoked the Lord by what they did, making him angry, so a plague broke out among them.

But Phinehas took a stand for the Lord and intervened, and the plague was stopped in its tracks.

He has been considered as a man who lived right from that time on and for all generations.

They also angered him at the waters of Meribah where things went badly for Moses because of them.

They upset him so much that he spoke without thinking in the heat of the moment.

They did not destroy the heathen peoples as the Lord had told them to do,

but instead they joined in with them and adopted their way of life.

They worshiped their pagan idols which became a trap for them.

They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to these demons.

They shed the blood of innocent children, their sons and daughters, sacrificing them to the idols of Canaan. By doing so they defiled the land with blood.

They also defiled themselves by what they did: their actions were spiritual adultery.

So the Lord was angry with his people—he loathed those who belonged to him.

He handed them over to the heathen nations. These people who hated them now became their rulers.

Their enemies dominated and subdued them with their power.

The Lord repeatedly rescued them, but they continued with their rebellious ideas, until they were finally destroyed by their own sins.

Despite all this, the Lord was moved by their suffering; he heard their sad cries.

He remembered the agreement he had made with them, and he held back because of his great kindness and love.

He made the people who captured them treat them with mercy.

Save us, Lord, our God! Bring us back together from among the nations, so we can thank you and declare how magnificent and holy you are.

How wonderful is the Lord, the God of Israel, who lives forever and ever! Let all the people say “Amen”! Praise the Lord!

Thank the Lord, for he is good! His trustworthy love continues forever!

Let those the Lord has saved say that they are saved; those he has rescued from the power of the enemy.

He has gathered them together from distant lands, from the east and the west, the north and the south.

They wandered in the desert wilderness, unable to find a way to a city where they could live.

Hungry and thirsty, they became very discouraged.

Then they cried out to the Lord to help them in their troubles, and he saved them from their suffering.

He led them along a straight way to a city where they could live.

Let them praise the Lord for his trustworthy love, and for all the wonderful things he does for people.

For he gives drink to those who are thirsty, and food to those who are hungry.

Some sat in complete darkness, prisoners of misery and bound with iron chains,

for they had rebelled against what God had said; they had rejected the guidance of the Most High.

So he humbled their pride with the troubles of life; they tripped over and no one was there to stop them falling.

Then they called out to the Lord for help in their troubles, and he saved them from their suffering.

He brought them out of complete darkness, he broke their chains to pieces.

Let them praise the Lord for his trustworthy love, and for all the wonderful things he does for people.

For he breaks down the bronze doors, and cuts through the iron bars.

They were stupid because they rebelled; they suffered for their sins.

They didn't want to eat; they were at death's door.

Then they called out to the Lord for help in their troubles, and he saved them from their suffering.

He gave the command and he healed them; he saved them from the grave.

Let them praise the Lord for his trustworthy love, and for all the wonderful things he does for people.

Let them present thank offerings and sing with joy about what he has done.

Those who set sail in ships, crossing the seas to earn their living,

they have seen the Lord's incredible power at work —the wonderful things he did in the deepest oceans.

He only had to speak to cause a stormy wind that stirred up towering waves,

lifting the ships high in the air and then plunging them down. The sailors were so terrified that their courage melted away.

They staggered around, falling from side to side like drunks—all their seamanship skills were useless.

Then they cried out to the Lord to help them in their troubles, and he saved them from their suffering.

He calmed the storm, the waves were quiet.

The sailors were so happy when it all calmed down, and he brought them to the harbor they wanted.

Let them praise the Lord for his trustworthy love, and for all the wonderful things he does for people.

Let them say how wonderful he is in front of the whole congregation and the elders.

He dries up rivers and turns the land into a desert; the water springs stop flowing and the earth turns dry and dusty.

Fruitful ground becomes a salty wasteland because of the wickedness of those living there.

But he also turns around and makes pools of water in the desert, and makes water springs flow in a dry and dusty land.

He brings hungry people to live there—a place they can build their cities.

They sow their fields and plant their vineyards, producing a good harvest.

He takes care of them, and their numbers increase dramatically—their cattle too!

When they become few, brought low by oppression, misery, and sorrow,

He pours out his contempt on their leaders, making them wander, lost in the wilderness.

But he lifts the poor out of their troubles, and makes their families as big as flocks.

Those who live right will observe what is happening and be glad, but the wicked will be silenced.

Those who are wise will pay attention to all this, and thoughtfully reflect on the Lord's trustworthy love.

A song. A psalm of David.

God, I have complete confidence in you! My whole being sings praises to you!

Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake up the dawn!

I will thank you among the peoples, Lord, I will sing your praises among the nations.

For your trustworthy love reaches higher than the heavens, your faithfulness is higher than the clouds.

God, your greatness is above the highest heavens; and your glory is over all the earth!

Rescue those you love! Answer us, and save us by your power!

God has spoken from his Temple: “Triumphantly I divide up Shechem, and portion out the Valley of Succoth.

Both Gilead and Manasseh belong to me. Ephraim is my helmet, and Judah is my scepter.

I will treat Moab as my washbasin; I will place my sandal on Edom; I will shout in triumph over Philistia.”

Who will bring me into the fortified city? Who will lead me into Edom?

Have you rejected us, God? Won't you go out with our armies?

Please give us help against our enemies, for human help is worthless.

Our strength is in God, and he will crush our enemies.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

God, the one I praise, please don't remain silent,

because wicked and deceitful people are attacking me, telling lies about me.

They surround me with words of hate, fighting against me for no reason.

I love them, but they respond with hostility towards me, even while I'm praying for them!

They pay me back with evil instead of good, with hatred instead of love.

“Appoint someone wicked over him. Have someone stand as an accuser against him.

When he is judged and sentenced, may he be found guilty. Let his prayers be counted as sins.

May his life be short; let someone else take over his position.

May his children be left fatherless, and his wife become a widow.

May his children be homeless, wandering beggars, driven from their ruined houses.

May creditors seize all that he owns; may strangers take all that he worked for.

May no one be kind to him; may no one take pity on his fatherless children.

May his descendants die; may his family name be wiped out in the next generation.

May the Lord be reminded of the sins of his fathers; may his mother's sins not be blotted out.

May their sins be constantly before the Lord; may his name be totally forgotten by people.

For he didn't think to be kind to others, instead he harassed and killed the poor, the needy, the brokenhearted.

He loved to put a curse on others—let it come back on him. He had no time for blessings—so may he never receive any.

He cursed as often as he got dressed. May his curses go into him like the water he drinks, like the olive oil he rubs on his skin that enters his bones.

May his curses stick to him like clothing, may they be pulled tight around him like a belt."

May all this be the punishment of the Lord on my enemies, on those who speak evil of me.

But treat me well, Lord God, because of your own reputation. Save me because you are faithful and good.

For I am poor and needy, and my heart is breaking.

I am fading away like an evening shadow; I am like a locust that is shaken off.

I am so weak from lack of food that my legs give way; my body is just skin and bones.

People ridicule me—they look at me and shake their heads!

Help me, Lord my God; save me because of your trustworthy love.

May they recognize that this is what you are doing—that you are the one who saves me.

When they curse me, you will bless me. When they attack me, you will defeat them. And I, your servant, will be happy.

May those who accuse me be clothed with disgrace; may they cover themselves with a cloak of shame.

But I will keep on thanking the Lord, praising him to everyone around me.

For he takes a stand to defend the needy, to save them from those who condemn them.

A psalm of David.

The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for you."

The Lord will expand your royal power from Zion; you will rule over your enemies.

Your people willingly follow you on the day when your power is revealed on the holy mountains, renewed in strength every morning like dew at dawn.

The Lord has made a vow he will not break: "You are a priest forever, following the order of Melchizedek."

The Lord stands right beside you to support you; he will strike down kings in his anger.

He will execute judgment on the nations, filling their lands with corpses. He will strike down those who rule all over the earth.

He will drink from streams beside the path. Therefore he will be victorious.

Praise the Lord! I will thank the Lord with all my heart in the congregation of the faithful.

All the wonderful things the Lord has done are studied by everyone who loves them.

His majesty and honor are revealed by what he does; his goodness lasts forever.

He wants the wonderful things he has done to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and kind.

He feeds those who respect him; he always remembers the agreement he made.

He demonstrated to his people the powerful things he could do by giving them the lands of other nations.

Everything he does can be depended on, and is right; all his commandments are trustworthy.

They remain rock-solid forever. He was true and right in saying what should be done.

He delivered his people. He commanded that his agreement would continue forever. How holy and awesome is his reputation!

The beginning of wisdom is honoring the Lord. Those who follow what he says do well. He is to be praised forever!

Praise the Lord! Happy are those who respect the Lord, who love to do what he says!

Their descendants will prosper in the land; the children of those who do good will be blessed.

Their families will be wealthy; the good they do has eternal results.

Light shines in the darkness for those who live right, for those who are gracious, compassionate, and good.

Good things come to those who are generous in their lending and are honest in doing business.

They will never fall. Those who live right won't be forgotten.

They aren't afraid of bad news because they rely totally on the Lord.

They are confident and brave, and see their enemies defeated.

They share generously, giving to the poor; the good they do has eternal results. They are greatly respected.

The wicked observe all this and are mad; they gnash their teeth in anger. They waste away, and all that they hoped for comes to nothing.

Praise the Lord! Praise him, servants of the Lord! Praise the Lord as he is!

Let the Lord's nature be praised, now and forever.

Let everyone everywhere, from the east to the west, praise the Lord as he is!

The Lord rules supreme over all nations; his glory extends higher than the heavens.

Who is like the Lord our God? He is the one who lives on high, seated on his throne.

He has to stoop low to look down on the heavens and the earth.

He helps the poor up from the dust; he lifts the needy from the dump.

He gives them positions of honor together with important leaders, with leaders of his own people.

He makes the childless woman happy in her home by giving her children. Praise the Lord!

At the time of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, when the descendants of Jacob left that foreign country,

the land of Judah became the Lord's sanctuary, Israel his kingdom.

The Red Sea saw them and ran away; the Jordan River retreated.

Mountains jumped in fright like rams, hills were startled like lambs.

Red Sea—why did you run away? Jordan River—why did you retreat?

Mountains—why did you jump in fright? Hills—why were you startled like lambs?

Earth, tremble in the presence of the Lord, tremble in the presence of the God of Jacob!

He is the one who turned the rock into a pool of water; making water flow from the hard rock.

Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to you all glory should be given, because of your trustworthy love and faithfulness.

Why should the heathen nations ask, “Where is your God?”

Our God is in heaven, and he does whatever he wants.

Their idols are just things of silver and gold made by human hands.

They have mouths, but can't speak. They have eyes, but can't see.

They have ears, but can't hear. They have noses, but can't smell.

They have hands, but can't feel. They have feet, but can't walk. No sound comes from their throats.

Those who make idols become just like them, and so does everyone who trusts in them.

Israel, trust in the Lord! He is the one who helps you and protects you.

Descendants of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is the one who helps you and protects you.

Those who honor the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is the one who helps you and protects you.

The Lord keeps us in mind and will be good to us. He will bless Israel, he will bless the descendants of Aaron.

The Lord will bless all those who worship him, whoever they are.

May the Lord be good to you, you and your children.

May you be blessed by the Lord who made heaven and earth.

The heavens belong to the Lord, but he has given the earth to humankind.

The dead do not praise the Lord, those who have gone down into the silence of the grave.

But we the living will always praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!

I love the Lord because he listens to me, he hears my calls for help.

Because he pays attention to what I say I will pray to him as long as I live.

I was caught in the snares of death; I was trapped by terrors of the grave. All I experienced was suffering and grief.

Then I cried out to the Lord, “Lord, please save me!”

The Lord is so kind and good! Our God is so compassionate!

The Lord takes care of those who are powerless; when I was brought down he saved me.

I can once again be at peace because the Lord has been good to me.

For you have saved me from death, my eyes from crying, and my feet from stumbling.

Now I can walk with the Lord in the land of the living.

I trusted in you, so I told you, “I'm suffering terribly!”

I was so upset that I said, “Everyone's a liar!”

What can I give the Lord in return for all he's done for me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and worship the Lord.

I will keep my promises to the Lord so everyone can see.

It hurts the Lord when those who trust in him die.

Lord, I really am your slave, serving you as my mother served you before me, yet you have set me free.

I will offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to you and I will worship you.

I will keep my promises to the Lord so everyone can see,

there in the house of the Lord, right in Jerusalem. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, all nations; everyone everywhere, praise how wonderful he is!

For his trustworthy love for us is above all; his faithfulness is eternal. Praise the Lord!

Thank the Lord, for he is good! His trustworthy love lasts forever.

Let all Israel say, “His trustworthy love lasts forever.”

Let Aaron's descendants say, “His trustworthy love lasts forever.”

Let those who honor the Lord say, “His trustworthy love lasts forever.”

I was suffering badly, so I cried out to the Lord for help. He answered me and set me free from my pain.

The Lord is with me, so I have nothing to fear. No one can harm me.

The Lord is with me, he will help me. I will see those who hate me defeated.

It's better to rely on the Lord than to trust in people.

It's better to rely on the Lord than to trust in the rich and powerful.

Even though all the heathen nations surrounded me, I defeated them with the help of the Lord.

They completely surrounded me, but even so I defeated them with the help of the Lord.

Like a swarm of bees they attacked, but their attack died out as quickly as burning thorn twigs. I defeated them with the help of the Lord.

They tried as hard as they could to kill me, but the Lord helped me.

The Lord is my strength, and the one I sing about. He is the one who saves me.

Songs of celebration and victory come from the tents of the faithful. The Lord's powerful hand has done amazing things!

The Lord raises his powerful hand in victory! The Lord's powerful hand has done amazing things!

I'm not going to die. In fact I'm going to live, and let people know what the Lord has done.

Even though the Lord punished me severely, he did not let me die.

Open the gates of the faithful for me so I can go in and thank the Lord.

These are the gates of the Lord where God's faithful people enter.

I want to thank you for answering me and for being the one who saves me.

The stone rejected by the builders has turned out to be the chief cornerstone.

The Lord has done this, and it looks wonderful to us!

The Lord made this day happen! We will celebrate and be happy for it!

Lord, please save us! Lord, please make us successful!

May the one who comes in the power of the Lord be blessed! We bless you from the house of the Lord!

The Lord is God, and his goodness shines on us. Branches in hand, start the procession up towards the altar.

You are my God, and I will thank you! You are my God, and I will praise you!

Thank the Lord, for he is good! His trustworthy love lasts forever!

Aleph

Happy are those who do what is right, who follow what the Lord says.

Happy are those who keep his commandments, who sincerely want to follow him.

They don't do what's wrong; they walk in his ways.

You have ordered us to follow your instructions carefully.

May I be reliable in the way I keep your rules!

Then I won't be ashamed when I compare what I do to what you have said.

I will praise you sincerely as I learn from you the right way to live.

I will observe your laws. Please never give up on me!

Beth

How does a young person remain pure? By following what you say.

I worship you sincerely; please don't let me stray from your commands.

I keep what you say in mind so I won't sin against you.

Thank you Lord! Teach me what to do!

I repeat out loud your instructions.

I enjoy your laws more than having plenty of money.

I will think deeply about your teachings, and reflect on your ways.

I will take pleasure in following your directions; I won't forget what you say.

Gimel

Be kind to your servant so I can live and follow what you teach.

Open my eyes so I may discover wonderful things in your law.

I'm only here for a short time—don't let me miss what you have to say.

I'm always so keen to know your instructions.

You reprimand those who are arrogant; those who don't follow your commandments are cursed.

Don't let me be scorned and insulted, for I have kept your laws.

Even leaders sit down together and slander me, but I, your servant, will think seriously about your instructions.

Your laws make me happy—they are my wise advisors.

Daleth

I'm dying here, lying in the dust. Keep me alive as you promised.

I explained my situation to you, and you answered me. Teach me to follow your directions.

Help me understand what your laws mean, and I will meditate on the wonderful things you do.

I'm weeping because I'm so sad; please encourage me as you promised.

Stop me fooling myself; kindly teach me your law.

I have chosen to trust in you. I always pay attention to what you say.

I hold on to your teachings, Lord. Don't let me be ridiculed.

I run to follow your commands, for you have expanded my mind!

He

Teach me the meaning of your laws, and I will always keep them.

Help me to understand so I can be totally committed to doing what you want.

Lead me to follow your commands, for this is what I love to do

Help me to concentrate on what you say rather than on making a profit.

Don't let me focus on things that are worthless. Help me live in your ways.

Please keep your promise to me, your servant, that you made to those who worship you.

Take away the shame I dread, for your law is good.

I always want to do what you say. Please let me live, for you do what is right.

Waw

Lord, please love me with your trustworthy love; please give me the salvation you promised.

Then I can reply to those who mock me, for I trust what you say.

Don't ever prevent me from being able to speak your words of truth, for I place my complete confidence in your just judgments.

I will continue to follow your teachings, forever and ever.

I shall live in freedom, for I have committed myself to obeying you.

I will instruct kings about your laws—I won't be embarrassed.

I'm so happy for your instructions. I love them!

I lift up my hands in prayer, honoring your commandments. I will think deeply about all you say.

Zayin

Remember your promise to me, your servant. It's my only hope.

This is what brings me encouragement in my misery—your promise keeps me going!

Arrogant people mock me terribly, but I don't give up on your teachings.

I think about the instructions you gave long ago, Lord, and they reassure me.

I am angry with the wicked because they have rejected your law.

Your instructions have been music to my ears wherever I have lived.

At night I think about the kind of person you are, Lord, and do what you say.

For this is how I live my life—by following your principles.

Heth

Lord, you are mine! I have promised to do as you say.

My whole being wants your blessing—please be kind to me, as you have promised!

As I think about my life, I turn to follow what you have said.

I hurry to keep your commandments without delay

Even though wicked people try to tie me up, I won't forget your instructions.

I get up in the middle of the night to thank you for your good laws.

I identify with all those who follow you, those who do what you tell them.

Lord, you love everyone on earth; please teach me what to do.

Teth

Lord, you have been so good to me, your servant, as you have promised.

Now teach me wise judgment and discernment because I believe in your instructions.

Previously I was suffering, wandering away from you, but now I do what you say.

Since you are good, everything you do is good. Teach me your ways.

Arrogant people smear my reputation with lies; but I whole-heartedly follow your commands.

They are cold and unfeeling, but I love your law.

The suffering I went through was good for me, so I could think about what you have stipulated.

What you tell me to do is worth more to me than much gold and silver.

Yodh

You created me and made me what I am; help me to learn and better understand your commandments.

May those who worship you be happy when they see me, for I place my confidence in your word.

Lord, I know that what you decide is right; you brought me down in order to help me because you are trustworthy.

May your trustworthy love comfort me as you promised me, your servant.

Be compassionate to me so I may live, for I love your teachings.

Bring down those proud people who wronged me with their lies. I will spend time thinking about your instructions.

Let those who follow you turn to me, those who understand your laws.

May I be innocent in the way I keep your rules so that I won't be ashamed.

Kaph

I'm exhausted waiting for you to save me, but my hope is in your word.

I strain my eyes looking for you to keep your promises, asking “When will you comfort me?”

I've become like a wineskin that's been shriveled up by smoke, but I have not forgotten to do as you say.

How long do I have to wait before you punish my persecutors?

These arrogant people have dug pits to trap me, these people who don't care anything about your law.

All your commands are trustworthy. Help me against these people who persecute me with their lies!

They have almost killed me, but I have not given up on what you say.

Since you love me with your trustworthy love, don't let me die, so I can go on following the instructions you have given.

Lamedh

Your word, Lord, lasts forever. It stands firm in the heavens.

Your faithfulness lasts for all generations, as permanent as the earth you created.

Your judgments stand—they are as true today as ever—for everything serves your will.

If I didn't love your teachings, my suffering would have killed me.

I will never forget your instructions, for through them you give me life.

I belong to you, so please save me! I am committed to following your rules.

Even though wicked people are waiting to ambush and kill me, I will focus my mind on what you say.

I recognize that human perfection has its limits, but your law is limitless.

Mem

I really love your law! I meditate on it all day long.

Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for I'm always thinking about your instructions.

In fact I have a better insight than all of my teachers because I spend time concentrating on what you say.

I even understand more than the elders because I follow your directions.

I avoid any course of action that leads to evil, because I want to remain faithful to your word.

I have not disregarded your instructions because you yourself taught me what to do.

Your words taste so sweet to me! They are sweeter than honey to my mouth.

I gain understanding from what you say, so I hate any way of life that's just a lie.

Nun

Your word is a lamp that shows me where to walk, it's a light for my path.

I've made a promise, and I will keep it: I will keep your rules that are always right!

Lord, I'm really suffering! Please let me live, as you have promised.

Lord, please accept my offerings of praise that I freely give you. Teach me your rules.

My life is always at risk, but I will not forget your law.

Wicked people have set a trap for me, but I will not stray from your commandments.

I will always hold on to what you say for your words make me really happy,

I have made up my mind to follow your instructions to the very end.

Samekh

I hate people who are two-faced, but I love your law.

You keep me safe and you defend me, your word gives me reason to hope.

Leave me alone, you evil people, and let me keep the commandments of my God.

Support me, Lord, as you promised, so I can live. Don't let my hope turn into discouragement.

Support me, so I can be saved and always pay attention to your instructions.

You reject all those who don't follow your instructions—they're fooling themselves by living a lie.

You treat the wicked people on earth as something worthless to be discarded; therefore I love your laws.

I have goose bumps thinking of you—I'm in awe! I'm scared of your judgments!

Ayin

I have done what's fair and right, so please don't abandon me to my enemies.

Please promise you'll take care of me, your servant. Don't let these arrogant people mistreat me.

I strain my eyes looking for your salvation, watching for you to fulfill your promise to make everything good.

Please treat me, your servant, according to your trustworthy love. Teach me what you want me to do.

I am your servant. Please give me discernment so I can understand your instructions.

Lord, it's time for you to act, for these people have broken your laws.

This is why I love your commandments more than gold, more than the finest gold.

All of your rules are right in every way, and so I hate any way of life that's just a lie.

Pe

Your laws are truly wonderful—that's why I keep them!

Studying your words brings light so that even the uneducated can understand.

With keen desire I long for what you have to say.

Please pay attention to me and be kind to me, as you are with those who love you.

Tell me by your word the way I should go, and don't let any kind of evil control me.

Save me from cruel people so I can follow your instructions.

Please look favorably on me, your servant, teach me what I should do.

My tears stream down as I weep for those who don't keep your law.

Tsadhe

Lord, you are right, and what you decide is just!

You have given your instructions which are fair and totally trustworthy.

My devotion is burning me up inside because my enemies ignore your words.

Your promises have been proved true, and that's why I, your servant, love them.

I may be unimportant and looked down on, but I don't forget your commandments.

Your goodness and justice last forever; and your law is the truth.

When I have problems and sadness, your commands make me happy.

Your laws are always right; help me to understand what they mean so I can live.

Qoph

My whole being is crying out! Lord, please answer me! I will follow your instructions.

I pray to you, asking, “Please save me!” so I can do what you say.

I get up before dawn, and call out to you for help and put my hope in your word.

During the night I stay awake, meditating on your word.

Listen to what I have to say, Lord, because of your trustworthy love. Keep me alive, Lord, because you always do what's right.

Evil people come running to attack me—they totally disregard your law.

But you, Lord, are close beside me; all your commandments are true.

Long ago I realized that your laws will last forever.

Resh

Please look at my suffering and save me! I have not forgotten your teachings.

Plead my case, and save me as you promised! Let me live!

Wicked people can't be saved, because they don't care about what you say.

Lord, your mercy is so great! Because you are always fair, please let me live!

Despite the many people who persecute and mistreat me, I have not strayed from your laws.

Watching these unfaithful people disgusts me because they take no notice of your word.

See how much I love your commandments, Lord. Please let me live because of your trustworthy love.

Your word can be summed up in one word: truth! All of your just laws will last forever.

Shin

Leaders persecute me for no reason, but I am in awe only of your word.

Your word makes me so happy—I'm like someone who discovers immense treasure.

I hate and detest lies, but I love your teachings.

I praise you seven times a day because your laws are good.

Those who love your teachings have wonderful peace and nothing trips them up.

Lord, I look forward to your salvation. I keep your commandments.

I obey your laws and love them very much.

I keep your commandments and laws because you see everything I do.

Taw

Lord, please listen to my sad cry; help me to understand, as you promised.

Please hear what I have to say to you, and save me, as you promised.

Let me pour out my words of praise, for you teach me what to do.

I will sing about your word, for all your commandments are right.

Please be ready to help me, for I have chosen to follow your instructions.

I long for your salvation, Lord; your teachings make me happy.

May I live my life in praise to you, and may your instructions help me.

I have wandered away like a lost sheep, so please come looking for me, for I have not forgotten your commandments.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

I called out to the Lord for help in all my troubles, and he answered me.

Lord, please save me from liars and cheats!

What will the Lord do to you, you liars? How will he punish you?

With the sharp arrows of a warrior and burning coals made from a broom tree.

I'm sorry for myself, because I live as a foreigner in Meshech, or among the tent-dwellers of Kedar.

I have lived for far too long among people who hate peace.

I want peace, but when I talk of peace, they want war.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

I look to the hills—but is that where my help comes from?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let you fall; he who watches over you won't fall asleep.

In fact he who watches over you doesn't take naps or fall asleep.

The Lord keeps watch over you; the Lord protects you; he stands right beside you.

The sun won't hurt you during the day, nor the moon at night.

The Lord will protect you from all kinds of evil; he will keep you safe and sound.

The Lord will look after you when you leave, and when you return, now and forever.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

I was so happy when they said to me, “Let's go to the house of the Lord.”

Now we're standing inside your gates, Jerusalem!

Jerusalem is built as a city where people can be together.

All the tribes—the tribes of the Lord—go up there, following the command given to Israel to give thanks to the Lord.

This is where the thrones are placed, where judgment is given, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray that Jerusalem may be at peace. May everyone who loves Jerusalem be kept safe.

May there be peace within your walls, and safety within your fortresses.

On behalf of my family and friends, I will now say, “May you be at peace.”

On behalf of the house of the Lord our God, I pray that everything goes well for you.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

I look up to you, the one who rules from heaven.

Just as servants look to their master, or a maid looks to her mistress, so we keep our eyes on you, Lord our God, waiting for you to be merciful to us.

Please have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy. We've had enough of people's contempt.

We've had more than enough of the scorn of the proud, and the contempt of the arrogant.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

If the Lord hadn't been for us, what would have happened? Let everyone in Israel say:

If the Lord hadn't been for us, what would have happened when people came and attacked us?

They would have swallowed us alive when their anger raged against us.

Like a flood they would have swept over us; like a rushing torrent they would have submerged us.

They would have rushed over us like raging waters, drowning us.

Praise the Lord, who didn't hand us over to them as prey to be ripped apart by their teeth.

We escaped from them like a bird flying out of a hunter's trap. The trap was broken and we flew away!

Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, for it is unshakeable and endures forever.

In the same way that the mountains surround Jerusalem, the Lord surrounds his people, now and forever.

The wicked will not always rule over the land of the faithful, otherwise the faithful might also end up doing wrong.

Lord, please do good to those who do good, those who sincerely do what is right.

But as for those who turn aside to follow their own crooked ways—the Lord will lead them away together with those who do evil. May Israel be at peace!

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

When the Lord brought his people back from captivity to Zion, it was as if we were dreaming!

We laughed so much, we sang for joy. The other nations said, “The Lord has done wonderful things for these people.”

The Lord certainly has done wonderful things for us. How happy we were!

Please return and help us again, Lord. Renew us like streams of water that renew the Negev desert.

Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy!

Those who weep as they go out to sow their seed will be singing in celebration when they carry the harvest home.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. A psalm of Solomon.

If the Lord doesn't build the house, the work of the builders is futile. If the Lord doesn't guard the city, the work of the guards is pointless.

It's useless to get up early in the morning and go to work, and stay late into the evening, worrying about earning enough to eat, when the Lord gives rest to those he loves.

Children certainly are a gift from the Lord, for a family is a blessing.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of a young man.

Happy is the father who fills his quiver with them! Such fathers will not be embarrassed when they confront their enemies at the city gate.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Happy are all those who worship the Lord, everyone who follows his ways!

You will eat what your own hands have produced. You will be happy and do well.

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine growing in your home. Your children will be like the shoots of an olive tree around your table.

This will certainly be the Lord's blessing on those who worship him.

May the Lord go on blessing you from Zion; may you see Jerusalem prosper all the days of your life.

May you see your children's children. May Israel be at peace!

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Many enemies have attacked from the time I was young. Let everyone in Israel say:

Many enemies have attacked from the time I was young, but they never defeated me.

They beat me on my back, leaving long furrows as if it had been plowed by a farmer.

But the Lord does what is right: he has cut me free from the ropes of the wicked.

May everyone who hates Zion be driven back in humiliating defeat.

May they be like grass that grows on a roof that withers before it can be harvested,

There's not enough even for a reaper to hold, not enough even for the binder to bind.

May passers-by not say to them, “The blessing of the Lord be on you; we bless you in the name of the Lord.”

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Lord, I cry out to you from the depths of my pain.

Please listen to my cry, and pay attention to what I'm asking.

Lord, if you kept a list of sins, who could escape being condemned?

But you are forgiving so that we might respect you.

I'm waiting for the Lord, longingly waiting, for I trust in his word.

I long for the Lord to come, more than watchmen longing for the dawn to come, more than watchmen longing for the dawn to come.

Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for the Lord loves us with a trustworthy love and his salvation knows no limits.

He will save Israel from every sin.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

Lord, I'm not proud or arrogant. I don't worry about things that are beyond me, matters that are far beyond my experience.

On the contrary, I have chosen to be calm and quiet, like a weaned child with its mother. I am like a weaned child with its mother.

Israel, hope in the Lord, now and forever!

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Lord, remember David, and all that he went through.

He made a promise to the Lord, a vow to the Mighty One of Jacob:

“I will not go home, I will not go to bed,

I will not go to sleep, I will not take a nap,

until I find a place where the Lord can live, a home for the Mighty One of Jacob.”

In Ephrathah we received information about the Ark of Agreement, and we found it in fields near Jaar.

Let's go to the place where the Lord lives and bow down at his feet in worship.

Come, Lord, and enter your home, together with your Ark of your power.

May your priests wear goodness like clothing; may your faithful people shout for joy.

For the sake of your servant David, don't reject the king you have chosen.

The Lord made a solemn promise to David, one he will never cancel—“I will put one of your descendants on your throne.

If your sons keep to my agreement and my laws that I will teach them, then their sons will always occupy your throne.”

For the Lord has chosen Zion, wanting to make his home there, saying:

“This will always be my home; this is where I want to live.

I will provide the people of the city with all they need; I will feed the poor.

I will clothe its priests with salvation; and its faithful people will shout for joy.

I will make the line of David even more powerful. I have prepared a lamp for my chosen king.

I will humiliate his enemies, but the crown he wears will shine brightly.”

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

How good, how delightful it is when people live together in harmony!

This is as precious as the oil used to anoint Aaron, running down from his head onto his beard, onto the collar of his clothes.

It's like the dew of Mount Hermon that falls on Zion's mountains. That is where the Lord gave his blessing of life that lasts forever.

A song for pilgrims going up to Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who worship at night in the house of the Lord.

Lift up your hands towards the holy place and praise the Lord.

May the Lord bless you from Zion, he who made the heavens and the earth.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord's reputation! Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord

who worship in the house of the Lord, in the courts of our God.

Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praises to his character because it is wonderful!

For the Lord has chosen Jacob for himself; Israel as his very own.

I know how great the Lord is—our Lord is greater than all gods.

The Lord does whatever he wants throughout heaven and earth, on the seas and in the ocean depths.

He causes the clouds to rise all over the earth, he makes lightning flash and give rain, he sends the winds from his storehouses.

He struck down the firstborn of Egypt, both human and animal.

He did wonderful miracles among you in Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants.

He struck down many nations, he killed powerful kings, such as

Sihon, king of the Amorites, Og, king of Bashan, and all the kings who ruled in Canaan.

He handed over their lands to Israel, his special people, for them to possess.

Your reputation, Lord, stands forever; you, Lord, are remembered for all generations.

The Lord will vindicate his people; he will show compassion to those who follow him.

The idols of the foreign nations are only objects of silver and gold, made by human hands.

They have mouths, but can't speak; they have eyes, but can't see.

They have ears, but can't hear; they can't even breathe!

Those who make idols will become just like them, and so will everyone who trusts in them.

People of Israel, praise the Lord! Descendants of Aaron, praise the Lord!

Levites, praise the Lord! Everyone who worships the Lord, praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from Zion, for he lives in Jerusalem! Praise the Lord!

Thank the Lord, because he is good! For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

Thank the Lord, the God of gods! For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

Thank the Lord of lords! For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who alone does amazing things! For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who knew how to make the heavens. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who spread out the earth over the waters. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who made the lights above. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

The sun to rule the day. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

The moon and stars to rule the night. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who struck down the firstborn in Egypt. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He led his people out of Egypt. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He did this with his strong hand and outstretched arm. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who parted the Red Sea. For his trustworthy love lasts forever,

And led Israel through it. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

But threw Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who led his people through the wilderness. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who struck down powerful kings. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To him who killed powerful kings. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

Sihon, king of the Amorites. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

Og, king of Bashan. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He gave Israel their land to possess. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He granted ownership to his servant Israel. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He remembered us even in our humiliation. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

He rescued us from our enemies. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

To the one who provides food for every living creature. For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

Thank the God of heaven! For his trustworthy love lasts forever.

When we sat down by the rivers of Babylon we wept as we remembered Zion.

We hung up our harps on the willow trees.

For those who had taken us captive asked us for a song—our tormentors wanted us to sing a happy song from Jerusalem.

But how could we sing a song dedicated to the Lord in a pagan land?

If I forget Jerusalem, may my right hand forget how to play;

May my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I don't remember you—if I don't consider Jerusalem my greatest joy.

Lord, please remember what the people of Edom did on the day Jerusalem fell, the ones who said “Tear it down! Destroy it down to its foundations!”

Daughter of Babylon, you will be destroyed! Happy is the one who pays you back, who does to you what you did to us!

Happy is the one who grabs your children and smashes them against the rocks!

A psalm of David.

I thank you with my whole being; I sing your praises before the heavenly beings.

I bow down before your holy Temple, and I am thankful because of who you are—for your trustworthy love and faithfulness—and for the fact that your promises are even greater than what people expect of you.

On the day I cried out to you for help, you answered me. You encouraged me and made me strong.

All the kings of the earth will praise you, Lord, for they have heard what you have said.

They will sing about what the Lord has done and about the great glory of the Lord.

Though the Lord is high above, he pays attention to the lowly; but he recognizes the proud a long way off.

Even though I walk into a great deal of trouble, you protect me. You reach out to defend me from the anger of those who hate me—your strong hand saves me.

The Lord vindicates me! Lord, your trustworthy love lasts forever! Don't give up on what you have made!

For the music director. A psalm of David.

Lord, you have examined me from the inside out—you know everything about me!

You know when I sit down and when I get up. You know what I'm thinking even when I'm a long way away.

You observe where I go and when I rest. You're familiar with everything I do.

Lord, you even know what I'm going to say before I say it.

You're always there—behind me, in front of me, and all around me. You place your caring hand on me.

This amazing knowledge you have is far beyond me, way beyond my understanding!

Where can I go that you're not already there? Where can I run to escape your presence?

If I go up to heaven, you are there. If I lie down in Sheol, look—you are there too!

If I were to fly away on wings of the dawn to the east; if I were to live on the far western shore of the sea,

even there your hand would lead me, your right hand would support me.

If I asked the darkness to hide me, and light to become night around me,

Even darkness would not be dark for you, and the night would be bright as day, for darkness is like light to you.

You made me from the inside out, shaping me in my mother's womb.

I praise you for making me in such an awesome and wonderful way. What you do is incredible—I realize this completely!

My growing body was not hidden from you as I was formed in secret, as I was intricately put together "in the depths of the earth."

You saw me as an embryo, and in your book all my days were written down—the days that were made for me before any of them existed.

God, your thoughts are so valuable to me! Taken together, they can't be counted!

If I tried to count them, they would be more than every grain of sand. Yet when I awake I am still with you.

God, if you would only kill the wicked! Murderers, get away from me!

When they speak of you they're being deceptively evil. Since they are your enemies, they call on you in vain.

Lord, don't I hate those who hate you? I despise those who rebel against you!

I hate them with absolute hatred—they have become my enemies!

Examine me carefully, God, so you can be sure of my true feelings. Check me out so you can know what I really think.

Please show me if I'm following any kind of idol, and lead me along the path of eternal life.

For the music director. A psalm of David.

Lord, please save me from those who do evil; protect me especially from those who are violent!

Their minds are busy plotting evil things, stirring up trouble all day long.

Their tongues are as sharp as those of snakes; viper's venom is on their lips. Selah.

Lord, please keep me from falling into the hands of the wicked; protect me especially from those who are violent, who are plotting my downfall.

Proud people have hidden a trap for me—they have strung out a net on the path, they have set snares to catch me. Selah.

I told the Lord, "You are my God! Lord, please listen to my cries for help!"

Lord God, my powerful Savior, you covered my head like a helmet on the day of battle.

God, don't allow the wicked to get what they want—don't let them be successful in what they plan so they don't become proud. Selah.

May the harm spoken against me by those who surround me fall back on them,

Let burning coals rain down on them! Let them be thrown into the fire, or into bottomless pits, never to rise again.

Don't let people who slander others live in our land. May disaster strike down violent people.

Yet I know the Lord defends the rights of those who are persecuted, and gives justice to the poor.

Truly those who live right are thankful for the kind of person you are, and those who are honest will live in your presence.

A psalm of David.

Lord, I'm calling out to you! Please hurry up and help me! Please listen to me when I cry out to you!

May my prayer be like incense before you, my uplifted hands like an evening offering.

Lord, make sure I don't say anything I shouldn't—keep a watch over my conversations.

Don't let me think about evil things or take part in doing anything wrong with wicked people. I won't join in eating fancy food at their feasts.

Let a good person punish me in love—let them correct me. It will be like an anointing—I won't refuse it. But I still pray against those who do evil.

They shall be thrown down by the power of the rock that judges them, and then they will recognize what I said was true!

Just as the earth is broken up by the plow, so shall their bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol.

But I'm looking to you, Lord God, for I find protection in you. Don't let me die!

Keep me safe from the traps they have set to catch me, from the snares of evil people.

Let them fall into their own traps while I pass by unharmed.

A maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.

I call out to the Lord for help; pleading with the Lord for mercy.

I pour out my complaints before him; I tell him what's troubling me.

When I'm totally discouraged, you know the direction I should take. But whichever way I go, people set traps for me.

I look to my right for someone to support me—but no one pays me any attention. There's no safe place for me—no one cares about me at all.

I cry out to you, Lord, for help, saying, "You are the one who keeps me safe; you are all I need in life.

Please listen to my sad cry, for I'm feeling very low. Please save me from those who are after me, for they're too strong for me.

Release me from my prison so I can praise you for the person you are! Those who live right will gather round me because you have treated me so well."

A psalm of David.

Lord, please hear my prayer. Because you are faithful, please listen to my appeal for mercy. Answer me because you do what is right!

Please don't place me, your servant, on trial, because nobody is innocent in your sight.

The enemy has chased me down. He crushes me to the ground. He makes me live in darkness like those who died a long time ago.

I sense myself fading away inside; I am overwhelmed by a sense of desolation.

I think of days long ago, and as I meditate I talk to myself about all you have done, I reflect on what you have accomplished.

I stretch out my hands to you, thirsting for you like dried-out land. Selah.

Please answer me quickly, Lord! I'm dying! Don't turn away otherwise I'll be just like those who are going down into the grave.

Tell me every morning about your trustworthy love, because I put my confidence in you. Show me the way I should go, because I dedicate myself to you.

Save me from those who hate me, Lord—I run to you for protection.

Teach me your will for you are my God. May your spirit of goodness lead me and make my way smooth.

Because of the kind of person you are, let me go on living. Because you always do what's right, get me out of the trouble I'm in.

In your trustworthy love, get rid of those who hate me, destroy all my enemies, for I am your servant.

A psalm of David.

Praise the Lord—he is my rock. He trains me for battle, he gives me skill for war.

He is the one who faithfully loves me, protects me, and defends me. He is the one who rescues me, shields me from danger, and keeps me safe. He defeats nations and places them under my rule.

Lord, what are human beings that you should care about them? What are people that you should concern yourself with them?

Humanity is like a breath; their lives are like a passing shadow.

Part your heavens and come down. Touch the mountains so that they give off smoke.

Scatter your enemies with flashes of lightning! Let your arrows fly and send them running in confusion!

Stretch down your hand from heaven and set me free. Rescue me from raging waters, from the oppression of foreign enemies.

They are such liars, even telling lies under oath.

God, I will sing a new song to you, accompanied by a ten-stringed harp,

to you, the one who gives victory to kings. You saved your servant David from death by the sword.

Set me free. Rescue me from the oppression of foreign enemies. They are such liars, even telling lies under oath.

Then our sons will grow up like plants in their youth and become mature, and our daughters will be like beautiful pillars carved to support a palace.

Our storehouses will be full of all kinds of crops; our flocks of sheep will grow by thousands, increasing by tens of thousands in the pastures.

Our cattle will grow fat. No one will break down our city walls, there will be no exile, no cries of mourning in our town squares.

The people who live like this will be happy. Happy are those whose God is the Lord.

A psalm of David. A song of praise.

I will glorify you, my God and King! I will praise who you are forever and ever!

I will praise you every day; I will praise your character forever and ever!

The Lord is great and deserves much praise! His greatness cannot be measured!

Let every generation tell the next all that you do, sharing the stories of your amazing miracles!

They will speak of your majesty, your glorious splendor, and I will meditate on the wonderful things you have done.

They will speak of the power of your awesome actions, and I will say how wonderful you are.

They will explain to everyone how famous you are for your tremendous goodness, and joyfully celebrate how you always do what is right.

The Lord is gracious and merciful, not easily angered, and full of trustworthy love.

The Lord is good to everyone, and he shows mercy to all his created beings.

All the created beings will thank you, Lord, and all who faithfully follow you will praise you.

They will praise the glory of your kingdom, and talk about your power.

They will explain to people your wonderful miracles, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom never ends, and your rule continues for all generations. What the Lord promises can always be trusted; he is merciful in all he does.

The Lord helps up all those who fall down; he lifts up all those who are bowed down.

All eyes are on you, waiting in hope, and you give food at just the right time.

You give generously and satisfy the needs of every living thing.

The Lord does right in everything—his actions are always trustworthy.

The Lord is close to all who ask for his help, to all who ask in sincerity.

He satisfies the needs of those who follow him. He hears their cries for help and he saves them.

The Lord takes care of all those who love him, but he will destroy all those who are wicked.

I will speak in praise of the Lord, and may everyone honor his holy character, forever and ever.

Praise the Lord! With my whole being I praise the Lord!

I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have breath.

Don't put your confidence in human leaders—they can't save you.

Once they breathe no more, they go back to dust. On that very day everything they planned dies with them.

Happy are those who have the God of Jacob to help them—their hope is in the Lord their God—

the one who made heaven and earth, and the sea along with everything it contains. He is trustworthy forever.

He makes sure the oppressed receive justice. He gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free.

The Lord makes the blind see. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down. The Lord loves those who do what's right.

The Lord takes care of strangers among us. He looks after widows and orphans. But he makes life difficult for the wicked.

The Lord will reign forever. Zion, he will be your God for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord, for it's good to sing praises to our God! Praise is wonderful and beautiful!

The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem, gathering together the people of Israel who have been scattered.

He heals the broken-hearted, and bandages the wounded.

He knows how many stars he made, and commands all of them by name.

Our Lord is great! His power is immense! There's no limit to what he understands!

The Lord helps those who are bowed down to get up; but he grinds the wicked into the ground.

Sing thanks to the Lord! Sing praises to our God with a harp!

He covers the sky with clouds to bring rain to the earth, and makes the grass grow on the hills.

He gives food to the animals, and to the baby ravens when they call.

The Lord doesn't appreciate the strength of warhorses or value human power.

What the Lord values are those who follow him, those who put their confidence in his trustworthy love.

Jerusalem, praise the Lord! Zion, praise your God!

He makes the bars on your city gates strong, and blesses your children around you.

He keeps the borders of your land safe from attack; he provides you with plenty of the finest wheat.

He sends his commands around the world—they're quickly implemented.

He sends snow as white as wool, and scatters frost like ashes.

He throws hail like stones. Who can stand the cold he sends?

Then he sends out his command and it melts; he blows on it and the water flows.

He proclaims his word to Jacob; his rules and laws to Israel.

He has not done this for any other nation—they don't know his laws. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from heaven; praise him in the heights above!

Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly armies!

Praise him, sun and moon! Praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, highest heavens, and the waters above the heavens!

Let them all praise the Lord and his nature, for he gave the order and they were created.

He placed them in their positions forever and ever; he established a law that will never end.

Praise the Lord from the earth, and creatures from all the depths of the seas,

lightning and hail, snow and clouds, and stormy wind—everything that does as he commands.

Mountains and all the hills, fruit trees and all the trees of the forest,

wild animals and all livestock, crawling animals and wild birds,

earthly kings and all peoples, leaders and rulers of the world,

young men and women, old people and children—

Let them all praise the Lord, for his reputation is unequalled; his glory is above anything on earth or in heaven.

He has given his people a source of strength, bringing praise to his faithful followers, the people of Israel who are dear to him. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Sing a new song to the Lord! Praise him wherever his faithful followers gather!

Let Israel celebrate their Creator; let the people of Zion be happy in their King.

Praise his nature with dancing; sing praises to him, accompanied by tambourine and harp.

For the Lord enjoys his people; he honors the oppressed with salvation.

Let the faithful celebrate how he honors them; let them sing happily even from their beds.

May their praises of God always be on their lips, a double-edged sword in their hands,

ready to take revenge on the nations, to punish the foreign peoples,

to imprison their kings in shackles and their leaders in iron chains,

to impose the judgment decreed against them. This is an honor for all his faithful followers. Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord! Praise God in his holy place! Praise him in the great expanse of heaven!

Praise him for the amazing things he does! Praise him for how wonderfully great he is!

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet, praise him with harp and lyre!

Praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with strings and flutes!

Praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with really loud cymbals!

Let everything that breathes praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Proverbs

Proverbs of Solomon

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel. They are for achieving wisdom and instruction, and to recognize sayings that bring insight. They provide education in what makes sense, living right, judging correctly, and acting fairly. They give discernment to the immature, knowledge and discretion to the young. Wise people will listen and gain in learning, and those who have good judgment will gain skills in guidance, understanding the proverbs and puzzles, the sayings and questions of the wise.

Honoring the Lord is where true knowledge begins, but fools treat wisdom and good advice with contempt.

My son, pay attention to your father's instruction, and don't reject your mother's teaching. They are a wreath of grace to decorate your head; they are pendants for your neck.

My son, if evil people try to tempt you, don't give into them. They may tell you, “Come with us. Let's go and hide, ready to kill someone. Let's ambush someone for fun! Let's bury them alive; let's put them in the grave while they're still healthy! We'll take from them all kinds of valuable things and fill our homes with the stuff we steal! Come and join us and we'll all share what we get!”

My son, don't follow their ways. Don't go in that direction with them. For they rush to do evil; they hurry to commit violence and murder. There's no point in trying to lure birds into a net when they can see it. However, these evil people hide ready to kill others, but they themselves are the victims. They're only ambushing themselves! This is what happens to you if you try to become rich through crime—it kills you!

Wisdom calls out in the streets; she shouts aloud in the squares. She cries out at busy corners; she explains her message at the town gates:

“How long will you stupid people love stupidity? How long will scornful people enjoy their mocking? How long will fools hate knowledge? Pay attention to my warnings, and I'll pour out my deepest thoughts to you—I'll explain what I know to you.

For I have called you, but you refused to listen; I reached out my hand to you, but you didn't care. You ignored everything I said; you wouldn't accept any of my warnings.

So I'll laugh at you when you're in trouble; I'll mock you when you're in a panic. When panic rains down on you like a storm, when trouble hits you like a whirlwind, when sorrow and pain come on you, then you'll call out to me for help, but I won't answer; you'll search hard for me, but won't find me. Why?—because they hated knowledge, and they didn't choose to respect the Lord. They're not willing to accept my advice; they despise all my warnings.

So they'll have to eat the fruit of their own choices, bloated by their own devious schemes. Stupid people are killed by their rebellion; foolish people are destroyed by their lack of concern. But everyone who listens to me will be kept safe, and will live without worrying about problems.”

My son, if you accept what I say and value my instructions, if you pay attention to wisdom and really try to understand; if you cry out for insight and call loudly for help in understanding; if you look for it as if it were silver and search for it as if it were hidden treasure; then you will understand how to relate to the Lord and discover the truth about God.

The Lord is the source of wisdom; what he says provides knowledge that makes sense. He gives good judgment to those who live right; he defends those who have good sense. He supports those who act fairly and protects those who trust in him. Then you will be able to recognize what is right and just and fair, in fact all that is good in the way you should live. For wisdom will fill your mind, and knowledge will make you happy. Good decisions will keep you on track; thinking logically will keep you safe.

Doing this will save you from the ways of evil, from men who tell twisted lies, who turn away from following what is right to walk down paths of darkness. They happily do wrong; they love how twisted evil is. They live crooked lives doing deceitful things.

Doing this will also save you from a woman who acts immorally, from a woman who like a prostitute tries to seduce you with flattering words. Such a woman has left her husband she married when she was young, forgetting the promises she made before God. What happens in her house leads to death; following her way leads to the grave. No one who goes to her comes back; they don't ever find the way back to life again.

So you should follow the way of the good, and make sure you stay on the paths of those who do right. For only people who live right will live in the land; only honest people will remain there. But the wicked will be thrown out of the land; those who are untrustworthy will be pulled out by the roots.

My son, don't forget my instructions. Always keep my commands in mind. Then you will live a long time, and have a full life. Hold on to kindness and truth. Tie them around your neck; write them in your mind. That way you'll gain a good reputation and be appreciated by both God and people. Put your trust totally in the Lord—don't rely on what you think you know! Remember him in everything you do, and he'll show you the right way. Don't think you're wise—respect God and avoid evil. Then you will be healed and made strong.

Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all the crops you grow. Then your barns will be filled with produce, and your vats will overflow with new wine.

My son, don't reject the Lord's discipline or resent it when he corrects you, for the Lord corrects those he loves, as a father corrects a son who pleases him.

Happy are those who find wisdom and gain understanding, for wisdom is worth more than silver, and pays better than gold. She is more valuable than rubies—everything you could ever want just doesn't compare! She offers long life in one hand, and riches and honor in the other. She brings true happiness, and leads to

peaceful prosperity. Wisdom is a tree of life to everyone who embraces her, blessing those who accept her.

It was through wisdom that the Lord created the earth, and through understanding he set the heavens in place. It was through his knowledge the waters of the deep were broken open, and the clouds sent down the dew. My son, hold on to good judgment and wise decisions—don't let them out of your sight, for they will be life to you, and an ornament for your neck. You will be able to walk confidently on your way, and you won't trip up. When you rest, you won't be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. You won't be afraid of a sudden panic, or of disasters that hit the wicked, for the Lord will be the one you can trust in, and he will prevent you being caught in a trap.

Don't hold back good from those who deserve it when it's something you have the power to do. Don't tell your neighbor, "Go away. Come back tomorrow and then I'll give it to you," when you've already got it. Don't plan to harm your neighbor who lives nearby and trusts you. Don't quarrel with anybody for no reason, when they haven't done anything to hurt you. Don't be jealous of violent people—don't choose to follow their example! For the Lord hates deceitful people, but he is a friend to those who do what is good. The houses of the wicked are cursed by the Lord, but he blesses the homes of those who live right. He mocks those who mock, but he is kind to the humble. The wise will receive honor, but fools are held up in disgrace.

Listen, sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and discover what makes sense, for what I am passing on to you is reliable. Don't reject my teachings. When I was a son with my father—a tender young boy, my mother's only child— he was the one who taught me. He told me, "Pay attention to the words I say and keep them in mind; do what I tell you and you will live. Get wisdom, find out what makes sense. Don't forget my words or reject them.

Don't give up on wisdom for she will keep you safe. Love wisdom and she will protect you. The first thing in becoming wise is to get wisdom! Whatever else you gain, gain insight. Treasure wisdom, and she will praise you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will place on your head a wreath of grace; she will present to you a crown of glory."

Listen, my son, if you accept what I tell you, then you will live a long life. I have explained to you the way of wisdom; I have guided you along the right paths. Nothing will block your way when you walk, you won't stumble when you run. Hold on to these instructions —don't let them go. Protect them, for they are life's foundation.

Don't go the way of the wicked or follow the example of those who do evil. Avoid that way completely. Don't go there! Turn away, and walk on. Evil people won't rest until they've done something wrong; they can't sleep unless they've tripped someone up. For they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.

The way of life of the good is like the light of the sunrise, glowing brighter and brighter until the full light of day shines out. But the way of life of the wicked is like complete darkness; they don't even know what they're tripping over.

My son, pay attention to what I tell you; listen to the words I'm saying. Don't lose sight of them; think about them deeply, for they are life to anyone who finds them, and make the whole body healthy. Most of all, protect your mind, for everything in life flows from it. Don't ever lie, and don't say anything dishonest. Focus on what's ahead of you; look at what's in front of you. Pay attention to the path you decide to follow, and you'll be safe wherever you go. Don't deviate to the right or the left, and turn away from evil.

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen carefully as I explain what makes sense, so you can make good decisions and protect knowledge with your lips. For the lips of an immoral woman may taste as sweet as honey, the kisses of her mouth may be as smooth as oil, but in the end what you get from her is the bitterness of wormwood and the sharp pain of being cut with a two-edged sword. She leads you down to death; she takes you down to the grave. She doesn't follow the path that leads to life—she wanders away and doesn't even know she's lost.

Now, my son, listen to me; don't reject what I have taught you. Stay far away from her! Don't go near the door of her house! Otherwise you'll surrender your honor to others, and your character to cruel people. Strangers will spend your wealth; everything you've worked for will go to someone else. When you come to the end of your life you'll moan in pain as disease destroys your body. You'll say, "How I used to hate discipline, and my mind rebelled against being corrected! I didn't listen to what my teacher said. I didn't pay attention to my instructors. Now I'm on the verge of being completely disgraced before everyone in the community."

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. Why should your springs be spilled outside, your streams of water poured out in the streets? Keep them for yourselves alone. They're not for you to share with strangers. May your spring of water be blessed, and may you enjoy the wife you married when you were young. May she be to you a loving deer, a graceful doe. May her breasts always be intoxicating to you; may you be drunk on her love forever. Why, my son, become intoxicated with an immoral woman? Why embrace the breasts of a woman who acts like a prostitute? For the Lord sees everything people do, the Lord investigates everywhere they go.

The wicked are trapped by their evil actions; the cords of their sins tie them up. They will die because they lack self-control, lost because of their great stupidity.

My son, suppose you have pledged to guarantee your neighbor's debt, or you have shaken hands in agreement with a stranger, then you've trapped yourself by what you promised, you've been caught by what you said.

So this is what you have to do. You need to get out of it, because you've put yourself in that person's power. Go to your neighbor in all humility and ask him to release you from the commitment. Don't delay, saying that you'll sleep on it. Don't rest until you've done it. Get

out of it like a gazelle escaping from a trap, like a bird from a bird-catcher's net.

Go and observe the ants, you slacker! Learn from what they do and become wise. They don't have a leader, an officer, or a ruler, yet they work hard during the summer getting their food, gathering what they need during the harvest.

So how long are you going to lie there, you slacker? When are you going to get up from your sleep?

You may say, “Please, just a little more sleep, a little longer snooze, a little more folding of the arms to rest”— and poverty will attack you like a robber, destitution like an armed warrior.

Rebellious and wicked people go around telling lies, winking slyly, giving sneaky foot gestures, rudely pointing with their fingers. Their warped minds plot evil schemes; they're always causing trouble. As a result, disaster falls suddenly on such people; in just a moment they're destroyed without hope of healing.

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven things that he absolutely detests: arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that murder the innocent, a mind that plots evil schemes, feet that hurriedly run to do wrong, a false witness that speaks lies, those who caused arguments in families.

My son, pay attention to your father's instruction, and don't reject your mother's teaching. Keep them always in mind. Tie them around your neck. They will lead you as you walk along; they will watch over you as you sleep; when you wake up they will talk with you. For the instruction is a lamp, and the teaching is a light. The correction that comes from discipline is the way to life.

It will protect you from an evil woman and the seductive words of a prostitute. Don't let your mind lust after her beauty, or let her hypnotize you with her fluttering eyelashes. You can buy a prostitute for the price of a loaf of bread, but adultery with another man's wife can cost you your life. Can you put fire in your lap and not burn your clothes? Can you walk on hot coals and not scorch your feet? It's the same for anyone who sleeps with another man's wife. No one who touches her will remain unpunished. People don't condemn a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he's hungry. But if he's caught, he has to pay back seven times what he stole, even if it means handing over everything he has in his house. Any man who commits adultery with a woman has no sense; he who does so destroys himself. He will be wounded and dishonored. His disgrace will never be removed. For jealousy makes a husband furious, and he won't hold back when he takes revenge. He refuses any compensation, and won't be paid off, however big the amount.

My son, accept what I say and value my instructions. Do what I tell you and you will live. Observe my teachings, valuing them as your main focus in life. Tie them to your fingers; write them in your mind. Tell wisdom, “You're my sister,” and call insight your best friend. They will protect you from the immoral woman, from the prostitute with her seductive words.

One time I looked through the lattice of the window in my house, and I saw among the immature young men one who had no sense at all. He was walking down the street near the corner where she lived and took the road passing her house. It was at dusk in the evening, as the light was fading and the dark night closed in.

Then out came a woman to meet him. She was dressed as a prostitute and had deceptive intentions. (She was loud and provocative, never wanting to stay at home. One moment she'd be walking the streets, the next she'd be there in the town squares, loitering at every corner.) She grabbed hold of him and kissed him, and with a bold face she told him, “I sacrificed my peace offering today, and paid my vows. That's why I came out to meet you. I was looking for you and now I've found you! My bed is made, covered with colorful linens from Egypt. I've sprinkled perfume on my bed—myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Come with me, let's make love until the morning. Let's enjoy one another in our love-making! My husband isn't home; he's gone on a long trip. He took a bag of money with him, and he won't be coming back until the full moon.” She convinced him with all that she said; she seduced him with her smooth talking. He followed her right away, like an ox to the slaughter. Like a stag that's caught in a snare until an arrow pierces its liver, like a bird flying into a trap, he's unaware he will pay with his life.

So now listen to me, my sons, and pay attention to what I'm saying. Don't even think about following her. Don't stray down her road. For she has brought down and destroyed a lot of men; she's killed so many. Her house leads to the grave—it goes down to the rooms of death.

Isn't wisdom calling? Isn't understanding raising her voice? On the top of the hill by the road, she stands up at the crossroads. Beside the gates of the town, right there at the entrance, she cries out:

“I'm calling out to you, everyone! My call is to everyone in the whole world! If you're immature, learn how to grow up. If you're stupid, learn what makes good sense. Listen to me because I have valuable things to explain to you. I say what's right, because I tell the truth and I hate wickedness in all its forms. All the words I say are true; none are false or misleading. My words are straightforward to anyone with understanding; they are correct to those who have knowledge. Choose my instruction over silver; choose knowledge over pure gold. For wisdom is more valuable than rubies; everything you could ever want just doesn't compare!

I, wisdom, am at home with good decisions. I know how to find knowledge and discernment. Honoring the Lord means hating evil. So I hate pride and arrogance, wicked behavior and telling lies. I have advice and good judgment; I know what makes sense, and I have power. It's because of me that kings reign, and rulers issue fair decrees. It's because of me that leaders and nobles govern—all who rule justly. I love those who love me, and those who really look for me will find me. With me go riches and honor, lasting wealth and prosperity. The fruit I produce is better than gold, even pure gold, and my harvest is better than even the best silver. I live in a way that's right; I follow the paths of justice. I grant wealth to those who love me; I fill their treasure storehouses.

The Lord created me first of all; I was made before anything else. I was formed a long time ago, at the first,

before the world began. I was born when there were no ocean depths, when there were no springs pouring out water. I was born before the mountains or the hills had been formed, when he hadn't made the earth and its fields or any of the earth's dust. I was there when he placed the heavens in position, when he drew the horizon over the ocean, when he made the clouds in the sky above, when he created the springs of the oceans, when he set limits on the sea so that the waters would not go farther than he ordered, and when he laid out the foundations of the earth. Then I was beside him as a master craftsman. I made him happy every day, and I was always full of joy in his presence. I was so happy in the world he created, celebrating together with human beings.

And now, my sons, listen to me, for happy are those who follow my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise—do not reject it. Happy are those who listen to me, watching for me every day at my doors, waiting at my entrance way. For those who find me, find life, and are accepted by the Lord. But those who don't find me hurt themselves; everyone who hates me loves death."

Wisdom has built her house; she has prepared its seven pillars. She has slaughtered her animals for meat; she has mixed her wine; and she has set her table. She has sent out her servant girls with invitations. She calls out from the highest places of the town, "Everybody who needs to learn, come and see me!" To people who don't have any sense she says, "Come, eat my food, and drink the wine I have mixed. Leave your foolish ways and you will live; follow the path that makes sense."

If you correct a mocker all you get are insults; if you argue with the wicked all you get is abuse. So don't argue with mockers or they'll only hate you; argue with the wise and they'll love you. Educate the wise and they'll become even wiser; teach those who live right and they will increase their learning. Honoring the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; knowledge of the Holy One brings insight. Through wisdom you'll have many more days, increasing the years of your life. If you are wise, you are the one to profit from it; if you scoff, you alone will have to suffer the consequences.

Stupidity is like a loud, ignorant woman who doesn't know anything. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the town, calling out to those passing by, going about their business, "Everybody who needs to learn, come and see me!" To people who don't have any sense she says, "Stolen water is sweet, and food eaten in secret tastes good!" But they don't know that the dead are there, that those she's invited are in the depths of the grave.

Solomon's proverbs.

A wise son makes his father happy, but a stupid son only brings his mother grief.

Wealth gained through evil does you no good; but living right saves you from death.

The Lord doesn't let good people go hungry, but he stops the wicked from getting what they want.

Lazy hands make you poor, but hard-working hands make you rich.

A son who gathers crops during the summer is sensible, but the one who sleeps during harvest brings disgrace.

Those who are good are blessed, but what the wicked say hides their violent nature.

The good are remembered as a blessing, but the reputation of the wicked will rot.

Those who think wisely pay attention to instruction, but a stupid chatterbox ends up in disaster.

Honest people will live in safety, but those who behave deceitfully will be caught out.

People who wink slyly cause trouble, but someone who gives a strong rebuke brings peace.

What good people say is a spring that gives life, but what the wicked say hides their violent nature.

Hatred causes conflict, but love covers all wrongs.

Wisdom comes from people with good judgment, but stupid people are punished with a rod.

Wise people accumulate knowledge, but the chattering of stupid people is a prelude to disaster.

The wealth of the rich provides them protection, while the poverty of the poor ruins them.

If you do right you're rewarded with life, but if you're wicked all you gain is sin.

If you accept instruction, you're on the path to life, but if you reject correction you'll go astray.

Anyone who hides their hatred is lying, and anyone who spreads slander is stupid.

If you talk too much, you'll say something wrong. Be wise and take care what you say.

What good people say is like the best silver, but the mind of the wicked isn't worth much.

Advice from good people helps feed many others, but stupid people die because they have no sense.

The Lord's blessing makes you rich, and he doesn't add any sadness to accompany it.

Stupid people think it's fun to do wrong, but someone who has wisdom understands what's right.

What the wicked fear will happen to them, while what good people hope for will be granted.

When the storm hits, the wicked are no more, but the good are safe and secure forever.

In the same way vinegar irritates the teeth and smoke irritates the eyes, lazy people irritate their employers.

Honoring the Lord makes your life longer, but the years the wicked live will be cut short.

Good people look forward to happiness, but the hopes of the wicked come to nothing.

The way of the Lord protects those who do right, but he destroys those who do evil.

The good will never be removed from the land, but the wicked will not remain there.

What good people say produces wisdom, but liars will have their tongues cut out.

Good people know the right thing to say, but the wicked always lie.

The Lord hates dishonest scales, but accurate weights please him.

With pride comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

Honesty guides the good, but deceit destroys liars.

Wealth won't help you on judgment day, but goodness saves you from death.

The goodness of the innocent keeps them on track, but the wicked fall by their own wickedness.

The goodness of those who live right will save them, but the dishonest are trapped by their own desires.

When a wicked person dies, their hopes die with them; what the godless look forward to is gone.

The good are saved from trouble, while the wicked get into trouble.

Godless people mouth off and destroy their neighbors, but the good are saved by wisdom.

The whole town celebrates when good people are successful; they also shout for joy when the wicked die.

Ethical people are a blessing to a town, but what the wicked say destroys it.

People who run down their neighbors have no sense; someone who's sensible keeps quiet.

A gossip goes around telling secrets, but trustworthy people keep confidences.

A nation falls without good guidance, but they are saved through much wise counsel.

You'll get into trouble if you guarantee a stranger's loans—you're far safer if you refuse to make such pledges.

A gracious woman holds on to her honor just as ruthless men hold on to their wealth.

If you're kind, you'll be rewarded; but if you're cruel, you'll hurt yourself.

The wicked earn wages that cheat them, but those who sow goodness reap a genuine reward.

Do what's right, and you will live; chase after evil and you will die.

The Lord hates perverted minds, but is happy with those who live moral lives.

You can be certain of this: the wicked won't go unpunished, but the good will be saved.

A beautiful woman who lacks good judgment is like a gold ring in a pig's snout.

Good people want what's best, but what the wicked hope for ends in death.

If you give generously you receive more, but if you keep back what you should give, you end up poor.

If you're generous, you'll become rich; give someone a drink of water, and you'll be given one in return.

People curse those who hoard grain; but they bless those who sell.

If you look to do good, you'll be appreciated; but if you look for evil, you'll find it!

If you trust in your riches, you'll fall; but if you do good, you'll flourish like green leaves.

If you cause trouble in your family, you'll inherit nothing but air. Stupid people end up as servants to those who think wisely.

The fruit of the good is a tree of life, and the wise person saves people.

If the good are repaid here on earth, how much more will the wicked who sin be repaid!

If you love knowledge, you will love discipline. Anyone who hates being corrected is stupid!

The Lord blesses the good, but he condemns anyone with evil schemes.

Wickedness doesn't provide security, but those who live right are deeply rooted and cannot be moved.

A good wife is a crown for her husband, but one who brings shame is like rot in his bones.

Good people make plans that are fair, but the advice of the wicked is deceptive.

The words of the wicked are like a violent ambush, but those of honest people save them.

The wicked are destroyed, and they're gone, but the family of the good stands firm.

People are appreciated for talking sense, but those with perverted minds are despised.

Better to be a humble man serving himself than a boastful man who has nothing to eat.

Good people look after their animals, but the care given by wicked is really cruelty.

If you cultivate the land you'll have plenty of food, but if you chase after worthless things you're stupid.

Wicked people long for ill-gotten gains, but good people are productive themselves.

The wicked trap themselves by their own sinful words, but good people escape trouble.

What you say brings you rewards, and your work returns to bless you.

Stupid people think they're on the right track, but if you're wise you listen to advice.

Stupid people get angry immediately, but if you're sensible you ignore an insult.

Whoever tells the truth is being honest, but a false witness tells lies.

Some people's hasty words cut like a knife, but the words of the wise bring healing.

Words of truth last forever, but lies are gone in a moment.

Deceit is in the mind of those planning evil, but those who plan peace have joy.

No harm comes to the good, but trouble fills the wicked.

The Lord hates liars but is happy with those who are trustworthy.

If you're sensible, you don't show off your knowledge, but stupid people announce their stupidity.

Hard work brings leadership, but laziness brings slavery.

If you're anxious, you're weighed down, but an encouraging word will cheer you up.

Good people look out for their friends, but the way the wicked live leads them astray.

Lazy people don't catch their prey, but if you work hard you can become rich.

The path of right leads to life, it doesn't lead to death.

A wise son accepts his father's discipline, but a mocker doesn't listen to correction.

You'll be rewarded for saying good things, but dishonest people want violence.

Watch what you say and save your life—saying too much leads to disaster.

Lazy people want a lot, but get nothing; if you work hard you'll be well rewarded.

Good people hate lies, but the wicked cause a stink and bring disgrace.

Goodness protects those who live right, but sin overcomes the wicked.

Some pretend to be rich, but don't have anything, while others pretend to be poor and are very rich.

The rich can pay a ransom to save their lives, but the poor aren't troubled in this way.

The life of good people shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

Pride only causes conflict; but those who take advice are wise.

Wealth gained by fraud quickly disappears, but those who gather bit by bit prosper.

Hope that's delayed makes you feel sick, but a wish that comes true revives you.

If you despise words of advice, you'll pay for it; but if you respect what you're told, you'll be rewarded.

The teaching of the wise is like a fountain of life, so you can avoid the snares of death.

Good sense earns appreciation, but the way of the unfaithful is hard.

All wise people act intelligently, but stupid people demonstrate their stupidity.

A bad messenger creates trouble, but a faithful representative brings healing.

Poverty and disgrace come to those who ignore instruction, but those who accept correction are honored.

It's nice to see a wish come true, but stupid people hate to turn away from evil to achieve this.

Being friends with wise people will make you wise, but being friends with stupid people will only cause you problems.

Tragedy chases after the sinner, but prosperity rewards the good.

Good people leave an inheritance to their grandchildren, but the sinner's wealth is saved for those who live right.

The unplowed ground of the poor could produce a lot of food, but it's stolen through injustice.

People who don't discipline their children hate them. Those who love their children carefully discipline them.

The good eat until they're full; but the belly of the wicked is empty.

Every wise woman builds her house, but the stupid woman tears it down with her own hands.

Those who live right respect the Lord, but those who live dishonestly despise him.

What stupid people say punishes their pride, but what wise people say will protect them.

Without oxen, the manger is empty, but a good harvest comes through the ox's strength.

A trustworthy witness doesn't lie, but a false witness is deceptive.

It's pointless for a scoffer to look for wisdom, but knowledge comes easily to someone who understands.

Stay away from stupid people—you won't learn anything from them.

Sensible people use their wisdom to decide where they're going, but the foolishness of stupid people is treacherous.

Stupid people laugh at sin, but good people want forgiveness.

The mind alone knows its sadness, and no one else can share its happiness.

The house of wicked people will be destroyed, but the tent of good people will prosper.

There's a way that seems to be right, but in the end it's the way of death.

Even when you're laughing you can be feeling sad—joy can end in grief.

Disloyal people are repaid for what they do, and good people are rewarded.

Stupid people believe whatever they're told, but sensible people think about what they're doing.

Wise people are careful and avoid evil, but stupid people are confidently reckless.

Quick-tempered people act foolishly, while people who make evil plans are hated.

The inheritance of stupid people is stupidity, but sensible people are rewarded with knowledge.

Evil people bow down before good people, and the wicked bow down at the doors of those who do right.

The poor are hated even by their neighbors, while the rich have many friends.

People who look down on their neighbors are sinners, but those who are kind to the poor are blessed.

Aren't people who plan to do evil wrong? But those who plan to do good have trustworthy love and faithfulness.

There's profit in hard work, but just talking leads to poverty.

The wise are rewarded with wealth, but stupid people are rewarded with stupidity.

A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is treacherous.

People who honor the Lord are completely safe; he will protect their children.

Respecting the Lord is like a fountain of life, so you can avoid the snares of death.

The glory of a king is the number of his subjects, for a ruler is nothing without them.

If you're slow to get angry, you're very wise; but if you have a short fuse you glorify stupidity.

A peaceful mind makes your body healthy, but jealousy makes your bones rot.

Anyone who oppresses the poor insults their Maker, but anyone who is kind to the needy honors him.

Wicked people are brought down by their own evil actions, but those who live right are confident even in death.

Wisdom is at home in a mind that understands, but it's not found among stupid people.

Doing right makes a nation successful, but sin is a disgrace to any people.

A servant who acts wisely is appreciated by the king, but he gets angry with a servant who acts disgracefully.

A kind reply wards off anger, but hurtful words make people mad.

What wise people say makes knowledge attractive, but stupid people talk a lot of nonsense.

The Lord sees everywhere, watching the evil and the good.

Gentle words are a source of life, but telling lies does a lot of damage.

Only a foolish son despises his father's instruction, but one who accepts correction is sensible.

There's plenty of treasure where good people live, but the income of the wicked brings them trouble.

Wise people share their knowledge, but stupid people don't think like that.

The Lord hates the sacrifices of the wicked, but he loves the prayers of the good.

The Lord hates the ways of the wicked, but he loves those who do what is right.

If you leave the right path you will be severely disciplined; anyone who hates correction will die.

Those already dead have no secrets from the Lord —how much more does he know our thoughts!

Scoffers don't like to be corrected, so they don't go to the wise for advice.

If you're happy inside, you'll have a cheerful face, but if you're sad, you look crushed.

An insightful mind looks for knowledge, but stupid people feed on foolishness.

The life of poor people is hard, but if you stay cheerful, it's a continual feast.

It's better to respect the Lord and only have a little than to have plenty of money and the trouble that comes with it.

Better a dinner of vegetables where there's love than eating meat with hatred.

Short-tempered people stir up trouble, but those slow to anger calm things down.

The way of lazy people is overgrown with thorns, but the path of the good is an open highway.

A wise son makes his father happy, but a stupid man despises his mother.

Stupidity makes people with no sense happy, but sensible people do what is right.

Plans fall apart without good advice, but with plenty of advisors they're successful.

A good answer makes people happy—it's great to say the right thing at the right moment!

Life's path for the wise leads upwards, so that they can avoid the grave below.

The Lord pulls down the house of the proud, but he protects the boundaries of the widow's property.

The Lord hates the thoughts of the wicked, but he honors the words of the pure.

People greedy for ill-gotten gains make trouble for their families, but those who hate bribes will live.

Good people think how best to answer questions, but stupid people say all kinds of evil things.

The Lord keeps his distance from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the good.

Bright eyes make you happy, and good news makes you feel good.

If you pay attention to positive advice you'll be one of the wise.

If you ignore instruction you have no self-esteem, but if you listen to correction you gain understanding.

Respect for the Lord teaches wisdom; humility goes before honor.

Human beings may make plans in their minds, but the final decision is the Lord's.

People think that whatever they do is fine, but the Lord looks at their intentions.

Trust whatever you do to the Lord, and your plans will be successful.

The Lord has a purpose in everything he does, even the wicked for the day of trouble.

The Lord hates the arrogant. You can be certain of this: the wicked won't go unpunished.

Sin is forgiven through trustworthy love and faithfulness; by honoring the Lord people are saved from evil.

When the way that people live pleases the Lord, he makes even their enemies be at peace with them.

Better to have just a little and be honest than to have a lot and be dishonest.

You can plan in your mind what to do, but the Lord will guide you.

The king is inspired in what he says; he is not unreliable in his decisions.

Accurate scales and balances are important to the Lord. He has determined all the weights in the bag.

It's a terrible thing for a king to do evil, for his throne is based on doing right.

People who tell the truth please kings; they love those who say what is right.

An angry king can put you to death. If you're wise you'll try and calm him down.

If the king is smiling, you'll live; his blessing is like the clouds that bring spring rain.

Far better to get wisdom than gold; far better to choose knowledge than silver.

The highway of the good leads away from evil. If you watch where you're going you'll save your life.

Pride leads to destruction; and an arrogant spirit leads to a fall.

Better to have a humble spirit and live with the poor than to share plunder with the proud.

If you pay attention to wise instruction you will do well; you'll be happy if you trust in the Lord.

If you think wisely you'll be called perceptive; if you speak pleasantly you'll be persuasive.

If you have good sense it will be a fountain of life to you, but stupid people are punished by their stupidity.

A wise mind makes sure to say sensible things; the words spoken are persuasive.

Kind words are like a honeycomb—they taste sweet and are healthy for the body.

There's a way that seems to be right, but in the end it's the way of death.

A good appetite helps workers—hunger encourages them.

Worthless people plot evil and their words burn like fire.

Quarrelsome people cause conflict, and a gossip comes between the closest friends.

Violent people lure their friends, and lead them in a direction that's not good for them.

People who give you a sly wink are plotting bad things; they purse their lips and make evil happen.

Gray hair is a glorious crown; it's achieved by living right.

Better to be slow to anger than to be powerful, better to have self-control than to conquer a town.

The lot is thrown into the lap, but the Lord makes every decision.

Better to eat a dry scrap in peace than to feast in a house full of people arguing.

A servant who acts wisely will be put in charge of a disgraced son, and will share the family inheritance with the brothers.

A crucible tests silver, and a furnace tests gold, but the Lord tests the attitude of mind.

Evil people listen to spiteful talk, and liars pay attention to malicious words.

Anyone who oppresses the poor insults their Maker, and anyone who enjoys the suffering of others will be punished.

Old people are proud of their grandchildren, and children are proud of their parents.

Fine words don't suit stupid people, how much less are lies suited to a ruler.

Whoever gives a bribe thinks it's a magical stone—that wherever they turn they'll have success!

If you forgive a wrong you encourage friendship, but if you keep talking about it you'll lose your friend.

A reprimand hits a thinking person more than one hundred blows hit someone stupid.

Evil people are only looking to rebel, so a cruel messenger will be sent to attack them.

Better to meet a she-bear robbed of her cubs than a stupid person and their foolishness.

If you repay evil for good, evil will never leave your house.

The beginning of a quarrel is like the first leak in a water dam, so drop it before a major argument bursts out.

The Lord hates it when the wicked are acquitted and the innocent condemned.

Is there any point in stupid people trying to buy wisdom when they don't want to learn?

A true friend is always there to love you, and family provides help when troubles come.

It's not a wise idea to make a pledge and guarantee a neighbor's debt.

People who love sin like to argue; those who build high gates invite destruction.

People with warped minds don't succeed; those who tell lies get into trouble.

A stupid son brings grief to his father; the father of a child who does stupid things has no joy.

A cheerful attitude is like good medicine, but discouragement makes you sick.

The wicked take hidden bribes to pervert the course of justice.

Sensible people focus on wisdom, but the eyes of stupid people are always wandering.

A stupid son brings grief to his father and sadness to his mother who gave birth to him.

It's not right to impose a fine on someone who's innocent or to flog good leaders for their honesty.

If you're wise, you'll be careful what you say; and if you're sensible, you'll keep your temper.

Even stupid people who keep quiet are considered wise; if they don't say anything they appear intelligent.

Selfish people only please themselves, they attack anything that makes good sense.

Stupid people have no interest in trying to understand, they only want to express their opinions.

With wickedness comes contempt; with dishonor comes disgrace.

People's words can be profound like deep waters, a gushing stream that is the source of wisdom.

It's not right to show favoritism to the guilty and rob the innocent of justice.

What stupid people say gets them into fights, as if they're asking for a beating.

Stupid people are caught out by what they say; their own words trap them.

Listening to gossip is like gulping down bites of your favorite food—they go deep down inside you.

Laziness and destruction are brothers.

The Lord is a protective tower that good people can run to and be safe.

Rich people see their wealth as a fortified town—it's like a high wall in their imagination.

Pride leads to destruction; humility goes before honor.

Replying before hearing is stupidity and shame.

With a brave spirit you can put up with sickness, but if it's crushed, you can't bear it.

An intelligent mind acquires knowledge; the wise are ready to hear knowledge.

A gift opens doors for you, and gets you into the presence of important people.

The first person to plead a case sounds right until someone comes to cross-examine them.

Casting lots can end disputes and decide between powerful people.

A brother you've offended is harder to win back than a fortified town. Arguments keep people apart like bars on the doors of a fortress.

Make sure you're satisfied with what you say—you have to live with your words.

What you say has the power to bring life or to kill; those who love talking will have to deal with the consequences.

If you find a wife, that's great, and you'll be blessed by the Lord.

The poor beg for mercy, but the rich reply harshly.

Some friends give up on you, but there's a friend who stays closer to you than a brother.

Better to be poor but honest than stupid and tell lies.

It's not good to be someone who doesn't think. If you rush, things go wrong.

People mess up their lives by their own stupidity, and then get angry with the Lord.

If you're rich, you get a lot of friends, but if you're poor, you lose any friends you had.

A false witness will be punished; liars won't get away with their lies.

Many ask favors from important people, and everyone's a friend of the generous.

If a poor man's relatives can't stand him, how much more will his friends avoid him! He tries to talk with them but they don't listen.

If you become wise, you have good self-esteem; if you learn good sense you'll be successful.

A false witness will be punished; people who tell lies will perish.

It's not right for stupid people to live in luxury, and it's even worse for a slave to rule over leaders.

If you have good sense you'll be slow to get angry; you gain respect by forgiving wrongs.

When a king gets angry, he sounds like a roaring lion; but his kindness is as soft as dew on the grass.

A stupid son makes his father miserable, and an argumentative wife is like dripping that never stops.

You inherit a house and wealth from your father, but a sensible wife is a gift from the Lord.

Lazy people are often fast asleep, but idleness means they're hungry.

Keep the commandments, and you'll live; despise them and you'll die.

If you're kind to the poor, you're lending to the Lord, and he will repay you well for what you've done.

Discipline your son while there's still hope, but don't kill him.

People who often get angry have to pay the penalty; if you help them, you'll have to do it again.

Listen to advice and accept instruction so that you'll eventually become wise.

Human beings make many plans in their minds, but the final decision is the Lord's.

The most desirable thing in anyone is trustworthy love; it is better to be poor than a liar.

Honoring the Lord is life, and you will rest contentedly, safe from harm.

Lazy people put their hands in a dish, and won't even lift the food to their mouths.

If you punish someone who mocks, you may help an immature person to learn. Correct the wise, and they become wiser.

A son who abuses his father and chases away his mother brings shame and disgrace.

My son, stop listening to my instruction and you'll soon give up following wisdom.

A crooked witness makes a mockery of justice; and the wicked wolf down evil.

Punishment is ready for those who mock; flogging is ready for the backs of the stupid.

Wine turns you into a mocker, alcohol makes you aggressive; you're stupid to be deceived by drink.

When a king gets terribly angry, he sounds like a roaring lion; anyone who makes him furious is liable to be killed.

Avoiding conflict is the proper thing to do, but stupid people are quick to argue.

Slackers don't sow when they should, so when harvest comes they don't have anything.

Discovering what someone is planning in their mind is like looking at deep water, but a person who has understanding will find out.

Many people tell you they're loyal, but can you find someone really trustworthy?

Good people live honestly; how happy are their children if they follow them.

When a king sits in judgment he recognizes all that isn't right.

Who can claim, “I've made sure my conscience is clean; I've purified myself from sin”?

The Lord hates both dishonest weights and dishonest measures.

Even children reveal what they're like by what they do, whether their actions are good and right.

The Lord made our ears to hear and our eyes to see.

If you love sleeping you'll become poor. Wake up and get busy, and you'll have plenty to eat.

“It's really rubbish,” says the one buying, but afterwards goes and boasts to others about making a good deal.

There's gold and plenty of expensive gemstones, but talking sense is a more valuable jewel.

If someone guarantees a stranger's debt with their cloak, be sure to take it! Make sure you have whatever is pledged to foreigners!

Food you get by cheating may taste sweet, but afterwards it will be like a mouthful of gravel.

With sound advice, plans are successful; if you're going to war, make sure you have good guidance.

A gossip goes around revealing secrets; stay away from people who talk a lot.

Anyone who curses their father or mother will have their light put out and end in utter darkness.

Wealth gained too soon won't do you any good in the end.

Don't say, “I'll get you back for doing me wrong.” Leave it to the Lord, and he'll help you.

The Lord hates incorrect weights; using dishonest scales is wrong.

The Lord shows us the way to go, so how would we decide for ourselves?

It's a mistake to make a promise to God and then have second thoughts about it later.

A wise king separates out the wicked by winnowing and punishes them by threshing.

The Lord's light shines on the conscience, revealing our deepest thoughts.

Trustworthy love and faithfulness keep a king safe; trustworthy love supports his rule.

Young men value their strength, but the old value even more the wisdom that comes with gray hair.

Wounds and blows clean away what's evil; beatings clean what's deep down inside.

The Lord directs the king's decisions like a stream of water that he sends whichever way he wants.

People think that whatever they do is fine, but the Lord looks at their motives.

Doing what's right and fair pleases the Lord more than sacrifices.

Pride and arrogance are the sins the wicked live by.

Those who plan ahead and work hard will have plenty, while those who act rashly end up poor.

Money made by lies is like smoke in the wind—a chase that ends in death.

The destruction caused by the wicked will destroy them, for they refuse to do what's right.

Guilty people live crooked lives, but the innocent follow straight paths.

It's better to live in a corner of a housetop than to share a whole house with an argumentative wife.

Evil people love to do wrong, they don't care what pain they cause anyone.

When a mocker is punished, an immature person can learn wisdom. When the wise are educated, they gain knowledge.

The God of justice sees what happens in the homes of the wicked, and brings the wicked down in disaster.

If you refuse to hear the cries of the poor, your cries won't be heard either.

A gift given in secret calms down anger, and a hidden bribe soothes furious rage.

When justice is done, the good are happy, but it brings terror to those who do evil.

Anyone who wanders away from the path of understanding ends up with the dead.

If you love pleasure you'll become poor; if you love wine and olive oil you won't ever be rich.

The wicked pay the price and not the good; those who are deceitful and not those who live right.

It's better to live in a desert than with an argumentative and bad-tempered wife.

The wise hold on to their wealth and olive oil, but stupid people use up everything they have.

If you pursue goodness and trustworthy love, you'll find life, prosperity, and honor.

The wise can overcome a city belonging to strong warriors, and tear down the fortress they trusted to protect them.

If you watch what you say, you can save yourself a lot of trouble.

A proud, conceited, mocker—that's the name of those who act with insolent arrogance.

Slackers die hungry because they refuse to work.

Some people only want more and more all the time, but the good give generously.

The sacrifices given by the wicked are obnoxious, worse still when they're offered with evil motives.

The lies of a false witness vanish away, but the words of a reliable witness will stand.

The wicked act as bold as brass, but those who live right consider carefully what they're doing.

Whatever wisdom, understanding, or guidance you may have is nothing before the Lord.

You can get your horse ready for battle, but the victory is the Lord's.

A good reputation is a much better choice than plenty of money; respect is better than silver and gold.

The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord created them all.

If you're sensible you see danger coming and get out of the way; but stupid people just keep going and pay for it.

The reward you receive for being humble and respecting the Lord is wealth, honor, and life.

Thorns and traps lie in the path of crooked people; those who value their lives will stay away from them.

Teach children the right way to live, and when they grow up they'll go on doing so.

The rich rule the poor, and borrowers are slaves to their lenders.

Those who sow injustice will reap disaster, and the angry beatings they inflict on others will be stopped.

If you're generous, you'll be blessed, for you share your food with those in need.

Get rid of the scornful, and you'll get rid of conflict too—no more arguments or insults!

Anyone who loves sincerity and a gracious way of speaking will have the king as their friend.

The Lord watches over true knowledge, but counteracts the words of liars.

Lazy people make claims like, “There's a lion outside! I might be killed if I go out there!”

The seductive words of an immoral woman are a dangerous trap—if the Lord's angry with you, then you'll fall right in.

Children are naturally foolish; physical correction helps them to see sense.

If you oppress the poor to make yourself rich, or if you're generous to the rich, you'll end up poor yourself.

Pay attention and listen to the words of the wise, and think carefully about my teachings—

for it's good to keep them in mind so you can be ready to share them.

I'm explaining this to you today so you can trust in the Lord—yes, you!

Haven't I written down for you thirty sayings of advice and wisdom?

They are to make it clear to you what's right and true, so you can give a truthful explanation to those who sent you.

For you shouldn't steal from the poor just because they're poor; and you shouldn't crush those with limited means in court,

for the Lord will plead their case, and he will take back whatever was stolen from them.

Don't make friends with someone who gets upset easily; don't associate with angry people,

in case you learn to be like them and make a mess of your life.

Don't shake hands and guarantee someone's debt,

for if you can't pay, why should your bed be taken away from beneath you?

Don't move ancient boundary markers that your forefathers put in place.

If you see someone skilled in what they do, they'll work for kings and not for ordinary people.

When you sit down for a meal with a ruler, look carefully at what is placed before you,

and cut down if you have a big appetite.

Don't be greedy for his fancy food, for it's offered with deceptive motives.

Don't wear yourself out trying to get rich—be wise enough not to bother!

It disappears in the blink of an eye, suddenly growing wings and flying off into the sky like an eagle.

Don't accept meal invitations from miserly people; don't be greedy for their fancy food,

for what they're thinking inside is what they really are. They say, “Come on, eat and drink!”—but in their minds they don't really care about you.

You'll vomit up the little pieces you've eaten, and your kind words of appreciation will be wasted.

Don't talk to stupid people because they'll ridicule your wise words.

Don't move ancient boundary markers, and don't encroach on fields belonging to orphans,

for their Protector is powerful and he will plead their case against you.

Focus your mind on instruction; listen intently to words of knowledge.

Don't keep from disciplining your children—a beating won't kill them.

If you use physical correction you can save them from death.

My son, if you think wisely then I'll be happy;

I'll be delighted when you say what's right.

Don't think enviously of sinners, but always remember to honor the Lord,

for there's definitely a future for you, and your hope will not be crushed.

Pay attention, my son, and be wise; make sure your mind concentrates on following the right way.

Don't join in with people who drink too much wine or who stuff themselves with meat.

For people who get drunk and overeat lose all they've got, and they spend so much time dozing that all they have left to wear is rags.

Pay attention to your father, and don't disregard your mother when she's old.

Invest in truth—and don't sell it! Invest in wisdom, instruction, and understanding.

Children who do right make their fathers very happy; a wise son brings joy to his father.

Make your father and mother happy; bring joy to her who gave birth to you.

My son, give me your undivided attention, and cheerfully follow my example.

A prostitute is like being trapped in a pit; an immoral woman is like getting stuck in a narrow well,

Like a robber, she lies in wait ready to ambush men and make more of them unfaithful to their wives.

Who's in trouble? Who's in pain? Who's arguing? Who's complaining? Who's injured for no reason? Who's got bloodshot eyes?

—those who spend a long time drinking wine, those who are always trying some new cocktail.

Don't let the look of wine tempt you—how red it is, how it sparkles in the cup, how smooth it feels as it goes down.

In the end it bites like a serpent, it stings like a snake.

You'll hallucinate, seeing strange things, and your confused mind will make you say all kinds of craziness.

You'll stumble around like you're on the rolling ocean, you'll be tossed about like someone lying down at the top of a ship's mast, saying,

"People punched me, but it didn't hurt me; they beat me, but I didn't feel a thing. I've got to get up because I need another drink."

Don't be jealous of evil people; don't long to spend time with them,

for they think up cruel plans and discuss how to cause trouble.

A house is built by wisdom; its foundation is made secure through understanding.

Its rooms are filled by knowledge with all kinds of valuable and beautiful objects.

If you have wisdom, you are strong; if you have knowledge, your power increases,

for with wise guidance you can go to war; you will be victorious by having many good advisors.

Wisdom goes over the heads of stupid people; they have nothing to contribute when important matters are discussed.

Anyone who plans to do evil will be seen as a troublemaker.

Plans thought up by stupid people are sinful. Everyone hates those who are scornful of others.

If you give up in times of trouble, it shows how weak you are.

Rescue those who are being led away to be executed; save those who are stumbling on their way to be slaughtered.

If you say, "Look, we didn't know anything about this," don't you think the God who judges your motives will see what's happening? He who watches over you knows, and he will pay people back for what they've done.

My son, eating honey is good for you; the honeycomb tastes sweet.

In the same way, you should know that wisdom is good for you; if you find it, there will be a future for you, and your hope will not be crushed.

Don't be like a criminal waiting to ambush the home of good people; don't attack the place where they live.

Those who do right may fall down seven times, and still get up again; but the wicked are brought down by disaster.

Don't celebrate when your enemies fall; don't be glad when they trip up,

otherwise when the Lord sees it, he'll be unhappy with you and won't punish your enemies as he planned.

Don't get all upset over the wicked, or be jealous of those who do wrong,

for evil people have no future—the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.

My son, honor the Lord and the king, and don't join those who are rebellious,

for disaster will suddenly fall on them. Who knows how the Lord and king will punish them?

These are more sayings of the wise: Showing favoritism when passing judgment is wrong.

Those who tell the guilty, "You're innocent," will be cursed by the people and hated by the nation,

while those who convict the guilty will be appreciated, and will receive a rich blessing.

An honest answer is a kiss on the lips.

Do the work you need to do outside first, then prepare and sow your fields, and only after that start building your house.

Don't testify against your neighbors without having a good reason, and don't tell lies.

Don't say to yourself, "I'm going to do to him what he did to me! I'll pay him back for what he's done!"

I walked past the field of a lazy man, past a vineyard of someone with no sense.

It was all overgrown with thorns, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall had fallen down.

As I looked I thought about it, and what I saw taught me a lesson:

You may say, "Please, just a little more sleep, a little longer snooze, a little more folding of the arms to rest"—

and poverty will attack you like a robber, destitution like an armed warrior.

These are more proverbs of Solomon, collected by the scribes of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

God's greatness is in doing things that can't be known, while the greatness of kings is in revealing things.

Just as the height of the heavens or the depth of the earth can't be known, the king's thinking can't be known.

Remove the waste from the silver, and the silversmith has pure silver to work with.

Remove the wicked from the king's presence and the king will rule securely and justly.

Don't try to make yourself look great before the king, and don't pretend to be among the important people,

for it's better to be told, "Come up here," than to be humiliated before a nobleman. Even though you've seen something with your own eyes,

don't rush to take legal action, for what are you going to do in the end when your neighbor shows you're wrong and humiliates you?

Discuss the case with your neighbor himself, and don't betray someone else's secret,

otherwise whoever hears it will make you ashamed and you'll never lose your bad reputation.

Advice given at the right time is like golden apples set in silver.

Constructive criticism from the wise to someone who listens is like a gold ring and a necklace of fine gold.

Faithful messengers are as refreshing to their master as cold snow on a hot harvest day.

Someone who boasts about a gift they never give is like cloud and wind without rain.

If you're patient you can persuade your superior, and soft words can break down opposition.

If you find honey, eat just enough, for if you eat too much, you'll be sick.

Don't set foot in your neighbors' homes too often, otherwise they'll get fed up with you and hate you.

Telling lies in court against a friend is like attacking them with a mace, or a sword, or an arrow.

Trusting in unreliable people in times of trouble is like eating with a broken tooth or walking on a bad foot.

Singing happy songs to someone who's broken-hearted is like taking off your coat on a cold day, or pouring vinegar onto an open wound.

If your enemy is hungry, give him something to eat; if he's thirsty, give him a drink of water.

This will make him ashamed as if he had burning coals piled on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

In the same way that the north wind brings rain, slandering people makes them angry.

It's better to live in a corner of a housetop than to share a whole house with an argumentative wife.

Good news from a distant country is like cold water to an exhausted traveler.

Good people who give in to the wicked are like a muddied spring or a polluted well.

It's not good to eat too much honey, or to want too much praise.

Someone without control is as exposed as a town whose walls have been breached.

Honoring someone stupid is as inappropriate as snow in the summer or rain during harvest.

A curse that isn't deserved won't land on the person, like a fluttering sparrow or a flitting swallow.

Horses need a whip, donkeys need a bridle, and stupid people need a rod on their backs!

Don't answer stupid people following their stupidity, or you'll become as bad as them.

Answer stupid people following their stupidity, otherwise they'll think they're wise.

Trusting someone stupid to deliver a message is like cutting off your feet or drinking poison.

A proverb spoken by someone stupid is as useless as a lame person's legs.

Honoring someone stupid is as pointless as tying a stone into a sling.

A proverb spoken by someone stupid is as ridiculous as a thorn bush waved around by a drunk.

Anyone who hires someone stupid or just a passer-by is like an archer wounding people by shooting arrows at random.

Stupid people repeat their stupidity like a dog returning to its vomit.

Have you seen a man who is wise in his own eyes? There's more hope for stupid people than for him!

Lazy people are the ones who say, “There's a lion on the road—a lion running around the streets!”

A lazy person turns in bed like a door turns on its hinge.

Lazy people put their hands in a dish, but are too tired to lift the food to their mouths.

In their own eyes lazy people are wiser than many sensible advisors.

Interfering in someone else's quarrel is like grabbing a stray dog by the ears.

You're like a crazy person firing off blazing arrows and killing people

if you lie to your friend and then say, “I was only joking!”

Without wood, the fire goes out; and without gossips, arguments stop.

An argumentative person fires up quarrels like putting charcoal on hot embers or wood on a fire.

Listening to gossip is like gulping down bites of your favorite food—they go deep down inside you.

Smooth talking with evil intent is like a shiny lead glaze on an earthenware pot.

People say nice things to you even though they hate you; deep down they're just lying to you.

When people talk nicely to you, don't believe them—their minds are full of hate for you.

Even though their hatred may be hidden by cunning tricks, their evil will be revealed to everyone.

Those who dig pits to trap others will fall in themselves, and those who start boulders rolling will be crushed themselves.

If you tell lies, you show you hate your victims; if you flatter people, you cause disaster.

Don't boast about what you're going to do tomorrow, because you don't know what the day may bring.

Let others praise you, not you yourself; someone else, not you personally.

Stone may be heavy, and sand may weigh a lot, but the annoyance caused by stupid people is the biggest burden of all.

Fury may be fierce and cruel, anger may be a destructive flood, but who can withstand jealousy?

Open criticism is better than hidden love.

A friend's honest comments may hurt you, but an enemy's kisses are over the top.

If you're full up, you can't face honey; but if you're starving, even bitter food tastes sweet.

Having to leave home is like a bird having to leave its nest.

Perfume and scented oils make you feel happy, but good advice from a friend is even better.

Don't give up on your friends or your family's friends. Don't go to a relative's house when you've got trouble. A friend nearby is more useful than a relative far away.

My son, make me happy by being wise, so I can respond to anyone who criticizes me.

If you're sensible you see danger coming and get out of the way; but stupid people just keep going and suffer the consequences.

If someone guarantees a stranger's debt with their cloak, be sure to take it! Make sure you have whatever is pledged to an immoral woman!

If when you get up every morning you shout a loud hello to your neighbors, they will see that as a curse!

An argumentative wife is as irritating as constant dripping on a rainy day.

Trying to stop her is like trying to make the wind stop or trying to hold olive oil in your hand.

An iron blade is sharpened with an iron tool, and one person's mind is sharpened by another's.

Those who care for a fig tree eat its fruit, and those who care for their master are rewarded.

Just as water reflects your face, your mind reflects who you really are.

In the same way that the grave and destruction are never satisfied, human desire is never satisfied.

Just as a crucible tests silver, and a furnace tests gold, people are tested by the praise they receive.

Even if you ground stupid people in a mortar, crushing them like grain with the pestle, you can't get rid of stupidity from them.

You should know the condition of your flocks really well and take good care of your herds,

for wealth doesn't last forever—is a crown passed down through all generations?

Once the hay is cut, and the new growth begins, and fodder from the mountains is gathered,

and the lambs have provided you wool to make clothing, and the sale of goats have paid for a field,

there'll be enough milk from your goats to feed you, your family, and your servant girls.

The wicked run away even when no one is chasing them, but the good have the trusting boldness of lions.

When a country is in rebellion, it has many rulers, but a ruler who is wise and knowledgeable provides strength and continuity.

When someone poor oppresses the poor, it's like heavy rain that beats down the crops.

People who reject the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law fight against them.

Evil people understand nothing about justice, but those who follow the Lord understand it completely.

Better to be poor and have integrity than to be devious and rich.

If you keep the law, you're a wise son, but if you keep bad company you shame your father.

Anyone who gets rich through charging interest and profiteering is only storing it up for someone who is kind to the poor.

God hates the prayers of people who disregard the law.

Those who lead good people astray into evil ways will fall into their own traps, but the innocent will receive a good reward.

The rich see themselves as wise, but poor people with insight see right through them.

When good people win, everyone celebrates, but when the wicked come to power, people hide.

People who hide their sins won't succeed, but those who confess and renounce their sins will be shown kindness.

Blessed are those who always respect the Lord, but those who are stubborn end up in a lot of trouble.

A wicked ruler lording it over poor people is like a roaring lion or a charging bear.

An unwise ruler thoroughly extorts his people, but one who refuses to profit illegally will live long.

Someone guilty of murder will go on running away from it until they die. Don't try and stop them.

If you have integrity, you'll be kept safe, but if you live deviously, you'll fall.

If you cultivate the land you'll have plenty of food, but if you chase fantasies you'll end up with nothing.

If you're trustworthy, you'll be richly rewarded; but if you try to get rich quick, you won't go unpunished.

Showing favoritism isn't good, but some people will do wrong just for a piece of bread.

Envious people are in a rush to get rich; they don't realize they'll end up poor.

Honest criticism is appreciated later far more than flattery.

A man who robs his father and mother, and says, “It's not a crime,” is one step away from becoming a murderer.

Greedy people stir up trouble, but those who trust in the Lord will be successful.

People who trust their own minds are foolish, but those who follow wise ways will be kept safe.

If you give to the poor, you won't be in need; but if you look the other way, you'll have many curses.

When the wicked come to power, people hide; but when they fall, the good do well.

Anyone who goes on stubbornly rejecting many warnings will be suddenly destroyed, without hope of healing.

When good people are in charge, everybody celebrates; but when the wicked rule, everybody groans.

A man who loves wisdom makes his father happy, but one who visits prostitutes throws away his money.

A king who rules justly makes the country secure, but one who asks for bribes will destroy it.

Those who flatter their friends lay a net to trip them up.

Evil people are trapped by their own sins, but those who do right sing and celebrate.

Good people care about treating the poor fairly, but the wicked don't think about it at all.

Cynical people can inflame a whole city, but the wise calm angry people down.

When a wise man takes a stupid man to court, there's raging and ridicule, but nothing is settled.

Murderers hate people of integrity, but those who live right try to help them.

Stupid people let all their anger out, while wise people quietly hold it in.

A ruler who listens to lies will have nothing but wicked officials.

Poor people and their oppressors have this in common: the Lord gives life to all of them.

If a king judges the poor fairly, he will have a long rule.

Discipline and correction provide wisdom, but a son left undisciplined is an embarrassment to his mother.

When the wicked are in power, sin increases; but the good will see their downfall.

Discipline your children and they won't give you any worries; they will make you very happy.

Without a revelation from God, the people go out of control, but those who keep the law are happy.

A servant can't be disciplined by words alone; though they understand, they don't follow what they're told.

Have you seen a man who speaks without thinking? There's more hope for stupid people than for him!

A servant indulged from childhood will in the end become unmanageable.

Angry people stir up trouble, those with short tempers commit many sins.

If you're proud, you'll be humiliated; but if you're humble, you'll be honored.

A thief's partner hates his life; even under the threat of being cursed he can't tell the truth.

Being afraid of people traps you, but if you trust in the Lord you're safe.

Many people look for favors from a ruler, but justice comes from the Lord.

Good people hate those who are unjust; the wicked hate those who do what's right.

These are the words of Agur, son of Jakeh. An oracle. This is what the man says, God, I'm really tired, I'm worn out.

I'm so stupid I'm not really a man; I can't even think like a human being.

I have not learned wisdom; I have no knowledge of the Holy One.

Who has gone up to heaven, and come down? Who holds the winds in the palm of his hands? Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak? Who has set the earth's boundaries? What is his name, and what is his son's name? Are you sure you don't know?

Every word God says has been proved true. He defends everyone who comes to him for protection.

Don't add anything to his words, or he will criticize you and you'll be shown to be a liar.

God, I want to request two things from you. Please don't refuse to let me have them before I come to die.

Keep me from being false, help me not to tell lies. Don't make me poor or rich; just provide me with the food I need.

Otherwise if I have plenty of money, I may give up on you, saying, “Who is the Lord?” while if I'm poor I may steal and bring the name of my God into disrepute.

Don't slander a servant to his master, or he will curse you and you'll suffer for it.

There are some who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers.

There are some who see themselves as pure but they're still filthy—they have not been washed.

There are some who think themselves so high and mighty, and who look down on others.

There are some who have teeth like swords, incisors like knives, ready to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from society.

The leech has two daughters who cry out, “Give me! Give me!”

There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, “Enough!”:

The grave, the womb that doesn't become pregnant, the earth thirsty for water, and the fire that never says, “Enough!”

People who ridicule their fathers and despise obedience to the mother will have their eyes pecked out by wild ravens and eaten by young vultures.

These three things are amazingly hard for me, four things I just can't understand:

The way an eagle soars in the sky, the way a snake slides over a rock, the way a ship sails across the sea, the way a man and a woman fall in love.

This is the way of a woman who commits adultery: she eats, she wipes her mouth, and then says, “I haven't done anything wrong!”

Three things make the earth tremble, there are four things it can't support:

a slave becoming a king, a stupid person eating like a pig,

an unbearable woman getting married, and a maidservant taking her mistress's place.

There are four things on earth that are small, but very wise:

Ants—they're not strong, but they work hard all summer storing up food.

Hyraxes—they don't have much power, but they make their homes in the rock.

Locusts—they don't have a king, but they all march in line abreast.

Lizards—you can catch them in your hands, but they live in the king's palace.

There are three things that are glorious to watch as they walk, four that look dignified as they move:

The lion, supreme among wild animals, who isn't frightened of anything.

The strutting starling, the male goat, and a king with his army.

If you have been foolishly boasting about yourself, or if you've been planning to do something wrong, stop and put your hand over your mouth.

Just as churning milk produces butter, and twisting someone's nose makes it bleed, so stirring up anger causes arguments.

These are the words of King Lemuel, an oracle, taught to him by his mother.

What shall I tell you, my son?—the son I gave birth to, the son given in response to my vows.

Don't waste your strength sleeping with women, those that bring down kings.

Lemuel, kings shouldn't be drinking wine, rulers shouldn't be drinking alcohol.

For if they drink, they'll forget what the law says, and pervert the rights of those who are suffering.

Give alcohol to those who are dying, and wine to those who are in terrible distress.

Let them drink so they can forget their poverty, and not remember their troubles any longer.

Speak up for those who have no voice, for the rights of those marginalized by society.

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the poor and destitute.

Who can find a strong, capable wife? She's worth more than jewels!

Her husband has complete confidence in her, and with her he'll never be poor.

She brings him good, not evil, all her life.

She gets wool and flax, and with her eager hands turns them into clothes.

Like a merchant's ship, she brings food from far away.

She gets up while it's still dark to make breakfast for her family, and to plan what her servant girls need to do.

She looks at a field, and decides to buy it; from the money she's earned she buys a vineyard.

She's keen to get ready, and works hard with her strong arms.

She knows that the things she makes are valuable. She keeps busy—her lamp burns late into the night.

She spins the thread and weaves the cloth.

She's generous to the poor, and gives help to the needy.

She doesn't worry if it snows, because her whole family has warm clothing.

She makes herself bedspreads; she dresses in fine linen and purple clothes.

Her husband is well-respected in the council at the town gates, where he sits with the town elders.

She makes linen clothes for sale, and supplies merchants with belts.

She's clothed with strength and dignity, and she is happy about the future.

She speaks wise words, and she's kind when she gives instructions.

She looks after the needs of her whole household, and she's never idle.

Her children are quick to bless her. Her husband praises her too, saying,

“Many women do great things, but you are better than all of them!”

Charm can deceive, and beauty fades, but a woman who honors the Lord should be praised.

Give her the recognition she deserves; praise her publicly for what she's done.

Ecclesiastes

Here are the words of the Teacher, the king of Jerusalem, David's son.

“Everything passes—it's so temporary! It's all so hard to understand!” says the Teacher. What benefit do you get for slaving away in this life? People come, and people go, but the earth lasts forever! The sun comes up, and the sun goes down, and then rushes to its place to rise again. The wind blows south, and then turns to the north. Round and round it spins, finally coming full circle. Streams all flow into the sea, but the sea never becomes full. The streams return to the place from where they came. Everything just keeps on going. You can't say all there is to say. You can't see all there is to see. You can't hear all there is to hear.

Everything that was will continue to be; everything that has been done will be done again. Nothing new ever happens here. There's nothing anyone can point to and say, “Look! Here's something new.” In fact it's been around for ages, long before our time. The problem is we don't remember people from the past, and people in the future won't remember those who came before them.

I am the Teacher, and I was king over Israel, reigning from Jerusalem. I decided to focus my mind to explore, using wisdom, everything that happens here on earth. This is a tough assignment that God has given people to keep them busy! I examined everything people do here on earth, and discovered that it's all so temporary—trying to understand it is like trying to pin down the wind!

You can't straighten what is twisted, and you can't count what isn't there.

I thought to myself, “I've become very wise, wiser than all the kings of Jerusalem before me. My mind has gained a great deal of wisdom and knowledge.” So I decided to use my mind to learn everything about wisdom, and madness and foolishness as well. But I found out that this is as hard as trying to catch hold of the wind. For with great wisdom comes great frustration. The greater the knowledge, the greater the pain.

So then I thought to myself, “Alright, let me examine pleasure and see how good that is.” But this too turned out to be something temporary that passes. I conclude that laughing your way through life is stupid, and pleasure—what use is that? Then I used my mind to examine the attraction of wine to my body. My mind still guiding me with wisdom, I took it until I acted like a fool, so that I might see whether this was good for people to do during their time here.

Then I tried great construction projects. I built houses for myself; I planted vineyards for myself. I made for myself gardens and parks, planting them with all kinds of fruit trees. I constructed for myself reservoirs to water all these growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and their children also belonged to me. I also owned many herds and flocks, more than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I collected for myself great quantities of silver and gold, paid to me as tribute by kings and provinces. I brought in for myself male and female singers, and enjoyed many concubines—all a man could want!

I became great—greater than anyone in Jerusalem before me. All the while my wisdom stayed with me. I didn't stop myself trying anything I wanted. Whatever I felt like enjoying, I did. I even enjoyed everything I had accomplished, a reward for all my work. But when I thought about what I had worked so hard to achieve, everything I'd done, it was so short-lived—as significant as someone trying to catch the wind. There really is no enduring benefit here on earth.

So I started to think about wisdom—and madness and foolishness. For what can anyone who comes after the king do that hasn't already been done? I recognized that wisdom is better than foolishness just as light is better than darkness. The wise see where they're going, but fools walk in darkness. But I also realized that they all come to the same end. Then I thought to myself, “If I'm going to end up the same as a fool, what's the point of being so wise?” So I thought to myself, “This is also hard to understand!” Nobody remembers the wise or the fool for very long—in the future everything will be forgotten. Whether wise or foolish, they both die.

So I ended up feeling disgusted with life because everything that happens here on earth is so distressing. It's so incomprehensible, like trying to control the wind. I even ended up hating what I had achieved here on earth because I have to hand it over to whoever comes after me. And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? Yet he will rule over everything I accomplished through my wisdom here on earth. This is just so frustrating, so hard to understand! I decided to give up, my mind in despair over the significance of all my life's achievements. For you can work wisely, knowledgably, and with skill—and who benefits? Someone who hasn't worked for it! This is both frustrating and totally unjust!

What do you get here on earth for all your hard work and worry? Your working life is full of trouble and strife—even at night your thoughts keep you awake. This is tough to comprehend!

So what's the best thing to do? Eat, drink, and enjoy your work, recognizing as I did that these things are given to us by God, for who can eat or enjoy life apart from him? To those who are good, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But to the sinner God gives the task of gathering and collecting wealth, only to hand it over to someone who pleases God. This also shows how fleeting life is, and hard to understand—like trying to understand how the wind blows.

Everything has its own time—a time for all that happens here:

A time of birth, and a time of death. A time of planting, and a time of harvest.

A time of killing, and a time of healing. A time of tearing down, and a time of building up.

A time of crying, and a time of laughing. A time of mourning, and a time of dancing.

A time of throwing away stones, and a time of gathering up stones. A time of embracing, and a time of avoiding embracing.

A time of searching, and a time of giving up searching. A time of keeping, and a time of throwing away.

A time of tearing, and a time of mending. A time of keeping quiet, a time of speaking up.

A time of loving, and a time of hating. A time of warfare, and a time of peace.

So what do you get for all your hard work? I have examined what God gives us to do. Everything God does is beautifully timed, and even though he has also placed the idea of eternity in our minds, we can't fully understand what God does from beginning to end. I concluded that there's nothing better than being happy and looking for the good in life. In addition everyone should eat and drink and enjoy their work—this is God's gift to us.

I also concluded that everything God does lasts forever: nothing can be added to it or taken away from it. God acts in this way so that people may stand in awe of him. Whatever was, is; and whatever will be, has been, and God examines the whole of time.

I also observed that here on earth there was evil even in the place where there was supposed to be justice; even where things were meant to be right, there was evil. But then I thought to myself, "Ultimately God will judge both those who do right and those who do wrong, and every deed and action, at the appointed time."

I also thought to myself, "Regarding what happens to human beings—God proves to us that we're no better than animals." For what happens to human beings is the same as what happens to animals—in the same way one dies, the other dies too. They all have the breath of life—so regarding any advantage human beings have over animals, there is none. Definitely this is very hard to understand! They all end up in the same place—they all came from dust, and they all return to dust. Who really knows whether the breath of life of human beings goes up above, and the breath of life of animals goes down below to the earth? So I concluded that there's nothing better than for people to enjoy their work. This is what we are meant to do. For who can bring anyone back from the dead to show them what will happen after they die?

Then I turned to consider all the ways people oppress others here on earth. Look at the tears of the oppressed—there's no one to comfort them! Powerful people oppress them, and there's no one to comfort them! I congratulated those who were already dead, for the dead are better off than those who are still alive and being oppressed. But best of all are those who have never existed—they haven't seen the evil things people do to each other here on earth.

I observed that every skill in work comes from competition with others. Once again this is hard to understand, like trying to hold on to the elusive wind.

Fools fold their arms and do nothing—so in the end they're all used up.

It's better to earn a little without stress than a lot with too much stress and chasing after the wind.

Then I turned to consider something else here on earth that is also frustratingly hard to understand. What about someone who has no family to help him, no brother or son, who works all the time, but isn't satisfied with the money he makes. "Who am I working for?" he asks himself. "Why am I preventing myself from enjoying life?" Such a situation is hard to explain—it's an evil business! Two are better than one, for they can help each other in their work. If one of them falls down, the other can help them up, but how sad it is for someone who falls down and doesn't have anyone to help them up. In the same way, if two people lie down together, they keep each other warm, but you can't keep yourself warm if you're alone. Someone fighting against one other person may win, but not if they are fighting against two. A cord made of three strands can't be torn apart quickly.

A poor young person who's wise is better than an old and foolish king who no longer accepts advice. He may even come out of prison to reign over his kingdom, even though he was born poor. I observed everyone here on earth following the youth who takes his place. He is surrounded by crowds of supporters, but the next generation isn't happy with him. This also illustrates the passing nature of life whose meaning is elusive, like pursuing the wind for understanding.

Be careful when you go into God's house. It's better to listen and respond rather than offer meaningless sacrifices. People who do that don't even know they are doing wrong. Don't say rash things, and think before you speak to God. For God is in heaven, and you are on earth, so keep it short. When you worry too much, you get nightmares; when you talk too much, you say foolish things.

When you make a vow to God, with a curse on you if you don't keep it, don't be slow in keeping it, for he is not happy with foolish behavior. So do what you promised! Better not to make any vows at all than to make a vow you don't keep. Don't let your mouth cause you to sin. And don't tell the priest that your vow was a mistake, for why would you antagonize God by breaking your promise? He could bring your own curse down on you. There are certainly many dreams, questions of meaning, and lots of different ideas, but you are to follow God.

If you see poor people somewhere being oppressed, or truth and justice violated, don't be shocked at it, for every official is responsible to others higher up, and there are officials over them as well. However, what the land produces is for everyone—even the king benefits from what is grown.

People who love money never have enough money; those who love wealth never have enough income. This too is so temporary and makes little sense. The more you earn, the more you have eating into your income. It only looks like you have more! Those who work hard sleep well, whether they have a little to eat or plenty, but the rich own so much they don't get any rest. I observed something here that is really sickening: people who hoard money damage themselves. They put their money into bad investments and lose everything.

Now when we're born, we don't bring anything into the world. When we die, we leave just as naked as when we were born, taking nothing with us from all we've worked for. This also makes me sick! What do people gain, working for the wind? They live their lives in darkness, very frustrated, sick, and resentful.

But I observed that what is good and right is to eat, drink, and to find enjoyment in the work God gives us here in this life. This is God's gift to us. In addition, everyone to whom God gives wealth and possessions he also gives the ability to enjoy these gifts, to be grateful for what they are given, and to enjoy the work they do. This is also God's gift to us. In fact such people have little time to think about life because God keeps them busy with all that makes them happy.

I have observed another evil here on earth, and it has a great impact on humanity. God gives wealth, possessions, and honor to someone. They have everything they want. But God doesn't let them enjoy what they have. Instead somebody else does! This is hard to fathom, and is truly evil.

A man could have one hundred children, and grow old, but it wouldn't matter how long his life was if he couldn't enjoy it and at the end receive a decent burial. I would say that a stillborn child would be better off than him. The way a stillborn child comes into the world and then leaves is painfully hard to understand—arriving and departing in darkness—and who he would have been is never known. He never saw the light of day or knew what it was like to live. Yet the child finds rest, and not this man. Even if this man were to live a thousand years twice over he still wouldn't be happy. Don't we all end up in the same place—the grave?

Everyone works so they can live, but they're never satisfied. So then, what real advantage do wise people have over those who are fools? And do poor people really gain anything in knowing how to behave in front of others? Be happy with what you have instead of running after what you don't! But this is also hard to do, like running after the wind.

Everything that exists has already been described. Everyone knows what people are like, and that you can't win an argument with a superior. For the more words you use, the harder it is to make sense. So what's the point? Who knows what's best for us and our lives? During our short lives that pass like shadows we have many unanswered questions. And who can tell us what will happen when we're gone?

A good reputation is better than expensive perfume, and the day you die is better than the day you were born. It's better to go to a funeral than to a party. In the end, everyone dies, and those who are still alive should think about it. Sorrow is better than laughter, for tragedy helps us by making us think. Wise people think about the impact of death, while those who are fools only think about having a good time. It's better to listen to criticism from a wise person than to hear the song of fools. The laughter of fools is like the crackling of thorn twigs burning under a pot—without sense and quickly over.

Extorting money from others makes wise people into fools, and accepting bribes corrupts the mind.

Completing something is better than starting it. Being patient is better than being proud. Don't be quick to get angry, for anger controls the minds of fools. Don't ask, “Why were the good old days better than now?” Asking such questions shows you are not wise. Wisdom is good—it's like receiving an inheritance. It benefits everyone in life. For wisdom provides security, as does money, but the advantage for those who have wisdom is that they are kept safe and sound!

Think about what God does. If he makes something bent, you can't straighten it! On a good day, be happy. When a bad day comes, stop and think. God made each day, so you don't know what will happen to you next.

Throughout my life I've seen so much that is hard to understand. Good people who die young despite doing what is right, and wicked people who live long evil lives. Don't think you can make yourself right by a lot of religious observance, and don't pretend to be so wise. Do you want to destroy yourself? On the other hand, don't decide to live an evil life—don't be a fool! Why die before your time? You ought to keep in mind these warnings. Those who follow God will be sure to avoid both.

Wisdom gives a wise person greater power than ten town councilors.

There's not one good person in all the world who always does what is right and never sins.

Don't take to heart everything that people say, otherwise you may hear your servant talking badly about you, for you know how many times you yourself have talked badly about others!

I have examined all this using the principles of wisdom. I told myself, “I will think wisely.” But wisdom eluded me. Everything that exists is beyond our grasp—too deep for our understanding. Who can comprehend it? I turned my thoughts to discover, investigate, and to find out more about wisdom and what makes sense. I wanted to know more about how stupid evil really is, and how ridiculous it is to be a fool. I discovered something more horrible than death: foolishness like a woman who tries to entrap you, who wants to use her mind and hands to catch you and tie you up. Those who follow God will not be caught, but sinners will fall into her trap.

This is what I discovered after putting two and two together to try and find out what it all meant, says the Teacher. Although I really searched, I didn't find what I was looking for. People say, “I found one man among a thousand, but not one woman.” But I did find this one thing: God made people to do what's right, but they have followed their own ideas.

Who can compare to the truly wise? Who knows how to interpret things? If you have wisdom your face lights up, and your stern look is softened.

My advice is to do what the king says, since that's what you promised God. Don't be quick to walk out on the king without thinking what you're doing, and don't get involved with those who plot against him, for the king can do what he pleases. The king's orders have supreme authority—who is going to question him, saying, “What are you doing?” Those who follow his commands will not be involved in doing evil. Wise people think, recognizing there's a right time, and a right way. For there's a right time and a right way for everything, even when things are going badly for you.

No one knows what's going to happen, so who can say what the future holds? No one can hold onto the breath of life; no one can prevent the day when they die. There's no way of escaping that battle, and the wicked won't be saved by their wickedness! I examined

all these things, and thought about all that happens here on earth, and the damage that's caused when people dominate others. Yes, I have seen wicked people buried with great honor. They used to go to the holy place, and were praised in the very city where they did their evil. This is hard to understand! When people are not punished quickly for their crimes they are even more determined to do wrong. Even though a sinner may do wrong a hundred times, and live a long life, I'm convinced that those who do what God says will be better off. In fact, the wicked will not live long, passing like a shadow, because they refuse to follow God.

Another thing that is hard to understand is this: good people are treated as the wicked should be, and the wicked are treated as good people should be. As I say, this is difficult to comprehend!

So I recommend enjoying life. There's nothing better for us here on earth than to eat and drink and be happy. Such an attitude will go with us as we work, and as we live our lives that God gives us here on earth.

When I applied my mind to discovering wisdom and observing everything people do here on earth, I couldn't get any sleep, day or night. Then I studied everything God does, and I realized that no one can fully understand what happens here. However hard they try, however wise they claim to be, they can't really comprehend it.

I had my mind consider all this. Wise and good people and everything they do are in God's hands. Love or hate—who knows what will happen to them? Yet we all share the same destiny—those who do right, those who do evil, the good, the religiously-observant and those that are not, those who sacrifice and those who don't. Those who do good are as those who sin, those who make vows to God are as those who don't.

This is just so wrong—that everyone here on earth should suffer the same fate! On top of that, people's minds are filled with evil. They spend their lives thinking about stupid things, and then they die. But the living still have hope—a live dog is better than a dead lion!

The living are conscious of the fact that they're going to die, but the dead have no consciousness of anything. They don't receive any further benefit; they're forgotten. Their love, hate, and envy—it's all gone. They have no further part in anything that happens here on earth.

So go ahead and eat your food, and enjoy it. Drink your wine with a happy heart. That's what God intends that you should do. Always wear smart clothes and look good. Enjoy life with the wife that you love—the one God gave you—during all the days of this brief life, all these passing days whose meaning is so hard to understand as you work here on earth. Whatever you do, do it with all your strength, for when you go to the grave there's no more working or thinking, no more knowing or being wise.

I thought about other things that happen here on earth. Races are not always won by the fastest runner. Battles are not always decided by the strongest warrior. Also, the wise do not always have food, intelligent people do not always make money, and those who are clever do not always win favor. Time and chance affect all of them.

You can't predict when your end will come. Just like fish caught in a net, or birds caught in a trap, so people are suddenly caught by death when they least expect it.

Here's another aspect of wisdom that impressed me about what happens here on earth. Once there was a small town with only a few inhabitants. A powerful king came and besieged the town, building great earth ramps against its walls. In that town lived a man who was wise, but poor. He saved the town by his wisdom. But no one remembered to thank that poor man. As I've always said, “Wisdom is better than strength.” Yet the wisdom of that poor man was dismissed—people didn't pay attention to what he said.

It's better to listen to the calm words of a wise person than the shouts of a ruler of fools. It's better to have wisdom than weapons of war; but a sinner can destroy a lot of good.

Dead flies can make perfumed oil smell bad. Likewise a little foolishness outweighs great wisdom and honor. The mind of the wise person chooses the right side, but the mind of the fool goes left! Just the way that fools walk down the road shows they have no sense, making clear to everyone their stupidity. If your superior gets angry with you, don't give up and leave. If you stay calm even bad mistakes can be resolved. I also realized there's another evil here on earth: rulers make a big mistake when they put fools in high positions, while those who are richly qualified are put in low positions. I've seen slaves riding on horseback, while princes walk on the ground like slaves.

If you dig a pit, you could fall in. If you knock down a wall, you could be bitten by a snake. If you quarry stone, you could be injured. If you split logs, you could be hurt. If your ax is blunt and you don't sharpen it, you have to use a lot more force. Conclusion: being wise brings good results. If the snake bites the snake charmer before it's charmed, there's no benefit to the snake charmer! Wise words are beneficial, but fools destroy themselves by what they say. Fools begin by saying foolish things, and end up talking evil nonsense. Fools talk on and on, however no one knows what's going to happen, so who can say what the future holds? Work makes fools so worn out they can't achieve anything.

You're in trouble if the king of your country is young, and if your leaders are busy feasting from early morning. You're fortunate if your king comes from a noble family, and your leaders feast at the proper time to give themselves energy, and not to get drunk.

Lazy people let their roofs collapse; idle people don't repair their leaky houses. A good meal brings pleasure; wine makes life pleasant; money provides for all needs. Don't talk badly about the king, not even in your thoughts. Don't talk badly about leaders, even in the privacy of your bedroom. A bird may hear what you say and fly away to tell them.

Send your bread out on the surface of the water, and many days later you will find it again. Share what you own with seven or eight people, for you never know what disaster could happen.

When the clouds are full they pour rain down upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the north or to the south, it stays where it fell. The farmer who pays atten-

tion to the direction of the wind knows when not to sow, and by watching the clouds knows when not to reap.

Just as you don't know how the breath of life comes to the child in its mother's womb, so you can't understand the work of God, the Creator of everything.

In the morning, sow your seed. In the evening, don't stop. For you have no way of knowing which crop will grow well—one may be profitable, or the other—or maybe both.

How sweet it is to live in the light, to see the sun rise on another day. May you live for many years, and may you enjoy them all. But remember there will be many days of darkness, and all that is to come is uncertain.

Young people, enjoy your youth! Be happy with what's good! While you're young, let your mind guide your life, and do as you think best. But remember that God will judge you for all your thoughts and actions. So don't let your mind worry, and avoid things that hurt your body. Even so, despite youth and enthusiasm, life is still so hard to understand!

Remember your Creator while you are young, before days of trouble come and you grow old, saying, “I'm not enjoying life anymore.” Before the light fades—sun, moon, and stars—and rain clouds return to darken the skies.

Before the guards of the house tremble and the strong men are bent over, the grinders stop working because there are only a few left, and the ones looking through the windows only see dimly, and the doors to the street are shut. Before the sound of the grinding mill grows low, and you wake up early when the birds are singing, but you can hardly hear them.

Before you develop a fear of heights and worry about going out on the streets; when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper crawls along, and desire fails, for everyone has to go to their eternal home as the mourners go up and down the street. Before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is broken; before the water jug is smashed at the spring, or the pulley is broken at the well. Then the dust returns to the earth from which it came, and the breath of life returns to God who gave it.

“Everything passes! It's all so hard to understand!” says the Teacher. Not only was the Teacher a wise man, he also taught what he knew to others. He thought about many proverbs, studying them and arranging them. The Teacher looked for the best way to explain things, writing truthfully and honestly. The words of the wise are like cattle prods. Their collected sayings are like nails driven home, given by one shepherd.

In addition, my student, take care, for there's no end to book writing, and too much study wears you out. To sum up now that everything has been discussed: Respect God by keeping his commandments, for that's what everyone should do. God is going to judge us for everything we do, including what we do secretly, whether good or bad.

Song of Solomon

Solomon's song of songs.

Kiss me, kiss me with your mouth again and again, for your love is sweeter than wine. I love the way you smell from the perfumed oils you use. You have quite a reputation—it spreads like spilled perfumed oil. It's not surprising that all the young women adore you! Take me by the hand—let's run! (The king has brought me to his bedroom.) Let's be happy together and find pleasure in your love. Your love is far better than wine! Women are right to adore you so!

I'm black, but I'm beautiful, women of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon. Don't look down on me because I'm black, because the sun has burned me. My brothers were angry with me and made me look after the vineyards, so I couldn't look after my own vineyard. My love, please tell me where you're taking your flock. Where will you rest them at noon? For why should I have to wear a veil while looking for you among the flocks of your companions?

If you really don't know, you who are more beautiful than any other woman, then follow the tracks of my flock, and let your goats graze near the shepherd's tents. My darling, to me you're like a mare among Pharaoh's horses that pull his chariots, Your beautiful cheeks adorned with ornaments, your neck with strings of jewels. Let's make you some gold ornaments inlaid with silver.

As the king lay on his couch, my nard perfume gave off its fragrance. My love is like a pouch of myrrh, lying all night between my breasts. My love is like a bunch of fragrant henna flowers in the vineyards of Engedi.

Look at how very beautiful you are, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are as gentle as doves.

And you, my love, are so handsome—how charming you are! The green grass is our bed, with cedar trees as beams for our “house,” and pine trees for the rafters.

I'm just a flower from the plain of Sharon, a lily found in the valleys.

Just as a lily stands out among the brambles, so you, my darling, stand out among other women.

My love is like an apple tree among the forest trees, compared to other young men. I love to sit down in his shade and his fruit tastes sweet to me. He took me to drink of his wine, wanting to show his love for me. Feed me raisins to give me energy, give me apples to revive me, for love has made me weak! He supports my head with his left hand, and holds me close with his right. Women of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles or the wild deer that you won't disturb our love until the right time.

Listen! I hear the voice of my love! Look! Here he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping over the hills— my love is like a gazelle or a young deer! Look, he's there, standing behind our wall, looking through the window, peering through the screen. My love calls out to me, “Get up, my darling, my beautiful girl, and come away with me! Just look! Winter has finished; the rains are over and gone. Flowers are blooming everywhere; the time when birds sing has come; the call of the turtledove is heard in the countryside. Fig trees start producing ripe fruit, while grape vines blossom, giving off their fragrance. Get up, my darling, my beautiful girl, and come away with me!”

My dove is out of sight in the crevices of the rock, in the hiding places of the cliff. Please let me see you! Let me hear you! For you speak so sweetly, and you look so beautiful!

Catch the foxes for us, all the little foxes that come and destroy the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom! My love is mine, and I am his! He feeds among the lilies, until the morning breezes blow and the shadows disappear. Come back to me, my love, and be like a gazelle or a young deer on the split mountains.

One night when I was lying in bed, I longed for the one I love. I longed for him, but he was nowhere to be found. So I said to myself, “I will get up now and go through the city, looking in its streets and squares for the one I love.” I looked for him but I didn't find him. The watchmen found me as they went through the city. “Have you seen the one I love?” I asked them. Only a little farther on after I'd passed them I found my love! I held him close and would not let him go until I'd brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me. Women of Jerusalem, swear to me by the gazelles or the wild deer that you won't disturb our love until the right time.

Who is this coming in from the wilderness like a plume of smoke, like a burning sacrifice scented with myrrh and frankincense, with all kinds of imported perfumed powders?

Look, it's Solomon's sedan chair, accompanied by sixty of Israel's best warriors. All of them are expert swordsmen who have battle experience. They each carry a sword strapped to the thigh, ready for any nighttime attacks. (Solomon's sedan chair was made for him with wood from Lebanon. Its posts were covered in silver, and the back was covered in gold. The seat cushion was purple. The interior was lovingly decorated.)

Women of Jerusalem, come out! Look, women of Zion! See King Solomon wearing the crown that his mother placed on his head on his wedding day, his happiest day.

How beautiful you look, my darling, how beautiful! Your eyes are like doves behind your veil. Your hair flows down like a flock of goats descending Mount Gilead. Your teeth are as white as a flock of sheep that are just shorn and washed. None of them are missing —they are all perfectly matched. Your lips are as red as scarlet thread. Your mouth is gorgeous. Your cheeks are the blushing color of pomegranates behind your veil. Your neck is as tall and shapely as David's tower, with your necklaces like the hanging shields of a thousand warriors. Your breasts are like two fawns, two gazelles feeding among the lilies.

Before the morning breezes blow and the shadows disappear, I must hurry to those mountains of myrrh and frankincense. You are incredibly beautiful, my darling—you are absolutely flawless!

Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come from Lebanon. Come down from the peak of Amana, from the peaks of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains where leopards live. You have

stolen my heart, my sister, my bride. With just one look you stole my heart, with just one sparkle from a single one of your necklaces. How wonderful is your love, my sister, my bride! Your love is sweeter than wine. The way you smell from your perfumed oils is better than any spice. Nectar drips from your lips; milk and honey are under your tongue. The smell of your clothes is like the fragrance of Lebanon.

My sister, my bride, is a locked garden, a spring of water that is closed, a fountain that is sealed. Your channel is a paradise of pomegranates, full of the best fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all kinds of trees producing frankincense, myrrh, aloes, and the finest spices. You are a garden fountain, a well of living water, a flowing stream from Lebanon.

Wake up, north wind! Come, south wind! Blow on my garden so its scent may be carried on the breeze. Let my love come to his garden and eat its best fruits.

I enter my garden, my sister, my bride! I gather myrrh with my spice. I eat my honeycomb with my honey. I drink wine with my milk. Let us eat our fill of love! Let us be drunk with love!

Though I was asleep, my mind was racing. I heard my love knocking, and calling out, “Please open the door, my sister, my darling, my dove, my perfect love. My head is soaked with dew, my hair is wet from the night mist.”

I replied, “I've already got undressed. I don't have to get dressed again, do I? I've already washed my feet. I don't have to make them dirty again, do I?” My love thrust his hand into the opening. Deep inside I longed for him. I got up to let my love in. My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, as I grabbed the handles of the bolt. I opened up to my love, but he had left—he was gone! I was crushed as a result. I looked for him but I couldn't find him. I called him but he didn't answer. The watchmen found me as they went through the city. They beat me, they hurt me, and stole my cloak, those watchmen of the walls. Women of Jerusalem, promise me if you find my love and wonder what you should tell him, tell him I am weak with love.

Why is the one you love better than any other, most beautiful of women? In what way is the one you love better than any other that we should promise you that?

My love has dazzling good looks and is very fit—better than ten thousand others! His head is like the finest gold, his hair is wavy and black as the raven. His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, washed with milk and mounted like sparkling jewels. His cheeks are like a flowerbed of spices that produces fragrance. His lips are like lilies, dripping with liquid myrrh. His arms are round bars of gold inlaid with jewels. His abdomen is like carved ivory inlaid with lapis lazuli. His legs are columns of alabaster set on bases of gold. He looks strong, like the mighty cedars of Lebanon. His mouth is the sweetest ever; he is totally desirable! This is my love, my friend, women of Jerusalem.

So where has your love gone, most beautiful of women? Which direction did he go so we can look for him with you?

My love has gone down to his garden, to his flowerbeds of spices. He enjoys feeding in the gardens and plucks lilies. I am my love's, and my love is mine! He is the one who feeds among the lilies.

You are beautiful, my darling, as pretty as Tirzah, as lovely as Jerusalem—you look stunning! Please turn your eyes away from me—they're driving me insane! Your hair flows down like a flock of goats descending Mount Gilead. Your teeth are as white as a flock of sheep that are just shorn and washed. None of them are missing—they are all perfectly matched! Your cheeks are the blushing color of pomegranates behind your veil. There may be sixty queens and eighty concubines, and countless more women, but my love, my perfect love, she's the only one! She's her mother's favorite, special to the one who gave birth to her. Young women see her and say how lucky she is; queens and concubines sing her praises.

Who is this who is like the dawn shining down from above, beautiful as the moon, bright as the shining sun? You look stunning! I went down to the walnut orchard to see if the trees were in leaf in the valley, to find out whether the grapevines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom.

I was so excited it was like I was riding in a royal chariot. Come back, come back, Shulammite woman; come back, come back, so we can look at you!

Why do you want to look at the Shulammite dancing the dance of two camps?

How beautiful are your sandaled feet, princess! Your curved thighs are like ornaments made by a master craftsman. Your navel is like a round bowl—may it never lack spiced wine! Your abdomen is like a mound of wheat surrounded by lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is as elegant as a tower made of ivory. Your eyes shine like the pools of Heshbon by the Bathrabbin gate. Your nose is beautiful, prominent like the tower in Lebanon that faces Damascus. Your head is as magnificent as Mount Carmel; your black hair has a purple sheen, as if a king was held captive in your locks! How beautiful you are, my love—how attractive are your charms! You are as tall and slender as a palm tree; your breasts are like its clusters of fruit. I tell myself, “I will climb the palm tree and take hold of the fruit.” May your breasts be like bunches of grapes on the vine, and your breath have the scent of apples! May your kisses be like the best wine, going down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth.

My love is mine, and I am the one he desires! Come, my love, let's go out into the countryside, and spend the night among the henna flowers. Let's go early to the vineyards and see if the vines have budded and are in flower, and if the pomegranates are blossoming. There I will give my love to you. The mandrakes give off their fragrant scent; we are surrounded by all kinds of delights, new as well as old, which I have saved up for you, my love.

How I wish you were like a brother to me, one who nursed at my mother's breasts! Then if I met you on the street I could kiss you and no one would tell me off. Then I could take you home to my mother's house, where she used to teach me. I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranate. He supports my head with his left hand, and holds me close

with his right. Women of Jerusalem, swear to me that you won't disturb our love until the right time.

Who is this coming in from the wilderness holding her love close to her?

I woke you up under the apple tree where your mother conceived you, and where she gave birth to you. Stamp my name as a seal on your heart, like a seal on your arm, for love is strong as death, passion as unyielding as the grave—its arrows flash like fire, a blazing flame of the Lord. Floods of water cannot extinguish love; rivers cannot submerge it. If a man offered everything he owned in order to buy love he would be completely rejected.

We have a younger sister whose breasts are still small. What shall we do for our sister when someone asks to marry her? If she is a wall, we will build a silver tower on it. But if she is a door, we will bar the way with cedar planks.

I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. So when he looks at me he's happy!

Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon which he leased to tenant farmers. Each of them paid him one thousand silver coins for the fruit it produced. But I own my vineyard, it is mine alone. One thousand silver coins are for you, Solomon, and two hundred for those who look after it.

My darling, sitting there in the gardens with companions listening to you—please talk to me!

Come quickly, my love! Be like a gazelle or a young deer on the mountains of spices.

Isaiah

Book of Isaiah

This is the vision that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw about Judah and Jerusalem in the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Heavens, listen! Earth, pay attention! For the Lord has spoken! I brought up children, I cared for them, but they have rebelled against me. An ox knows its owner, and a donkey knows its feeding trough; but my people don't know me, they don't understand me.

What a sinful nation—a people carrying such a load of guilt, an evil generation, corrupt children! They have abandoned the Lord. They have despised Israel's Holy One. They have become strangers. They have gone backwards. Are you wanting to be punished? Are you going to continue to rebel? The whole of your head is damaged, and your heart is totally giving out. You're injured from head to toe, bruised and sore, with open wounds that haven't been cleaned or bandaged or treated with olive oil.

Your country has been devastated, your towns burned down, your fields stripped bare by foreigners right in front of you, as they turn it all into a wasteland. The daughter of Zion is left like a shack in a vineyard, like a hut in a cucumber field, like a city under attack. If the Lord Almighty hadn't let a few of us survive, we would have become like Sodom and Gomorrah.

Listen to what the Lord has to say, you rulers of Sodom! Pay attention to the instructions of our God, you people of Gomorrah! What use are all your many sacrifices to me? asks the Lord. I am sick and tired of your burnt offerings of rams and the fat of sacrificial animals. I don't delight in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats! When you come to appear before me in worship, who asked you to proudly tramp around my courts? Don't bring me any more meaningless offerings; your incense is offensive to me. Your new moon festivals and Sabbath observations and your calling of special religious meetings—I can't stand them because they're evil, as are your solemn assemblies. I detest your new moon and yearly festivals with my whole being! They've become just a burden to me—I can't bear them anymore!

When you hold up your hands to me in prayer, I'll look away. Even though you pray many prayers, I won't pay attention to them, because your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves and clean yourselves up. Get rid of your sins—I don't want to see them! Stop doing evil! Learn to do good; strive for justice, condemn those who oppress others; support the rights of orphans, take up cases to defend widows.

Come on, let's argue this out, says the Lord. Even though your sins are like scarlet, they will become white like snow. Even though they are red like crimson, they will become like wool. If you really want this, and if you do as you're told, then you yourselves will eat the best things that the land produces. But if you are defiant, and if you are rebellious, you'll be killed by the sword. This is what the Lord has declared!

The city that used to be faithful has turned into a prostitute! Once she operated on principles of justice and followed what was right, but now only murderers live there. Your silver has become worthless waste; your wine has been watered down. Your leaders are rebels, friends of thieves. They all love bribes and want to get kickbacks. They don't defend the rights of orphans, and refuse to take cases to help widows.

So this is what the Lord says, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel: Ha! I will take satisfaction in punishing my enemies, by paying back those who hate me! I will turn against you. I will refine you in a furnace, removing all impurities. I will give you good leaders as you used to have before, wise counselors as you had in the beginning. After that you will once again be called the City of Integrity, the Faithful City.

Zion will be rescued by justice, those who repent by doing right. But rebels and sinners will be destroyed together, and those who abandon the Lord will die.

You will be ashamed about how you enjoyed your pagan worship among the oak trees; you will be embarrassed because you chose the pleasure gardens of idols. As a result you will become like an oak whose leaves have withered, a dried-out garden that has no water. Your strong people will become like tinder, and their work will become like a spark. They will burn together, and nobody will be able to put out the flames.

This is the vision that Isaiah, son of Amoz, saw about Judah and Jerusalem. In the last days the mountain where the Lord's Temple stands will be recognized as the highest of all mountains, rising above other hills. Many from the other nations will travel to it. People will come and say, “Let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob. There God will teach us his ways and we will follow his directions. God's teachings will spread out from Zion, his word from Jerusalem.”

The Lord will decide the cases of the nations; he will settle arguments between nations. They will hammer their swords and turn them into plow blades, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not fight against each other anymore; they will no longer learn methods of warfare.

Come, you Israelites, let's walk in the Lord's light. For you, Lord, have given up on your people the Israelites, because they have adopted pagan practices from the East, they use spells like the Philistines, and make friends with foreigners. Their country is full of silver and gold, and endless wealth. Their land is full of horses; and they have an endless amount of chariots. Their country is full of idols; they bow down and worship what they have made themselves—produced by their own hands! These people will be brought down and humiliated—Lord, don't forgive them!

Run away into rock caves, hide underground from the terrifying presence of the Lord, from the glory of his majesty. Those who look with arrogance will be brought low; those who are proud will be humbled. On that day only the Lord will be lifted high. The Lord has set aside a day when he will deal with the proud and arrogant. He will end all self-glorification, bringing it

down. He will cut down the cedars of Lebanon, tall and high, and all the great oaks of Bashan, He will bring down the tall mountains and the high hills. He will tear down every high tower and every defensive wall. He will wipe out all the commercial ships of Tarshish as well as the pleasure vessels. The arrogant will be humbled; the proud will be brought low. On that day only the Lord will be lifted high. Idols will completely vanish away.

People will run away into rock caves and holes in the ground to try and hide from the terrifying presence of the Lord, from the glory of his majesty, when he arrives to shake the earth. On that day the people will take the idols of silver and gold that they made to worship and throw them away to the rats and the bats. They will run to cracks in the rocks and gaps on the cliffs to try and hide from the terrifying presence of the Lord, from the glory of his majesty, when he arrives to shake the earth.

Don't bother trusting human beings who only live for a while. How much do they count?

Take a look! The Lord, the Lord Almighty, is going to take away from Jerusalem and from Judah everything they rely on—all their stocks of food and all means of supplying water, their strong fighters and soldiers, leaders and prophets, fortune-tellers and elders, army captains, state officials, counselors, craftsmen, masters of magic, and experts in the occult. I will give them boys as their leaders who will rule over them in childish ways. People will mistreat one another, person against person, neighbor against neighbor; the young will assault the old, and the dregs of society will attack those who are reputable.

A man will grab hold of one of his brothers in their father's house, and tell him, “You've got a coat, you can be our leader! Take over the running of this pile of ruins!”

But immediately his brother will shout back, “No, not me! I can't take care of this family's problems. In my house I don't have food or clothes. Don't put me in charge as your leader!”

For Jerusalem has collapsed and Judah has fallen because of what they said and did in opposition to the Lord, rebelling right in front of him. The look on their faces proves what they've done, proclaiming their sin just like Sodom—they don't even bother to try and hide it! Tragedy is coming to them! They have brought disaster down upon themselves.

Tell those who live right that they will be fine, for they will be happy to receive the reward for what they have done. But tragedy comes to the wicked, for what they did will be done to them.

Leaders who act in childish ways mistreat my people; women rule over them. My people, your leaders are misleading you, confusing you about which way to go. The Lord stands up to prosecute his case. The Lord stands up to judge the people. The Lord comes to give his judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: You are the ones who have destroyed my vineyard; your houses are full with everything you've stolen from the poor. Why have you crushed my people? Why have you ground the faces of the poor into the dirt? the Lord Almighty demands to know.

The Lord says, The women of Zion are so conceited, walking with their heads held high, giving flirty glances, tripping along with their ankle bracelets jingling. So the Lord will make their heads full of scabs, and the Lord will expose their private parts. At that time the Lord will remove their fine ornaments: ankle bracelets, headbands, crescent necklaces, pendant earrings, bracelets, veils, headdresses, bangles, sashes, perfume holders, lucky charms, rings, nose rings, festival clothes, gowns, cloaks, handbags, hand mirrors, fine linen underwear, head wraps, and shawls.

What will happen is that instead of smelling of perfume, she will stink. Instead of wearing a sash, she will be tied with a rope. Instead of styled hair, she will be bald. Instead of fine clothes, she will wear sackcloth. Instead of looking beautiful, she will be shamed. Your men will be killed by the sword; your soldiers will die in battle. The gates of Zion will cry and mourn. The city will be like a banished woman sitting on the ground.

At that time seven women will grab hold of one man and tell him, “We'll eat our own food and we can provide our own clothes. Just let us take your name by being married to you. Please take away our disgrace!”

But at that time, the “branch of the Lord” will be attractive and glorious; the fruit the land produces will be the pride and glory of the survivors who are left in Israel. Everyone who remains in Zion will be called holy—all of those who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem— once the Lord has washed away the excrement of the daughters of Zion, and cleaned the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.

Then the Lord will create over the whole of Mount Zion and over the assembly of those who meet there a cloud of smoke during the day and a blazing flame of fire during night—over everything there will be this glorious canopy. It will provide a place to stay in the shade of the daytime heat, and a shelter to hide from storm and rain.

Let me sing a song for my love, about his vineyard. My love owned a vineyard on a productive hill. He dug it over, cleared the ground of stones, and planted it with the very best vines. In the middle of it he built a watchtower, and he also cut out a winepress from the rock. Then he waited for a good harvest of grapes, but it only produced wild, sour grapes.

“Now, you people who live in Jerusalem and Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard than I've already done? When I looked for sweet grapes, why did it only produce sour ones?

So let me tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard. I'll remove its hedge, and it will be destroyed. I'll tear down its wall, and it will be trampled underfoot. I'll turn it into a wasteland. It won't be pruned or weeded —it will be overgrown with brambles and thorns. I'll order the clouds not to rain on it.”

Israel is the vineyard of the Lord Almighty, and the people of Judah are the plants in his garden that made him happy. Yet while he hoped for justice, he only saw injustice; he hoped people would live right, but he only heard the cries of those who were suffering.

Tragedy is coming to you who buy house upon house and field upon field, joining them all together until no one else has anywhere to live and you live alone in the land. I heard the Lord Almighty declare: You can be sure that many houses are destined to become ruins, and beautiful mansions destined to become uninhabited. Ten acres of vineyard will only produce six gallons of wine, and a measure of seed only a tenth of that in grain.

Tragedy is coming to you who get up early in the morning wanting a drink, and who stay up late drinking wine until you're drunk. At their feasts you have lyres and harps, tambourines and flutes, and wine, but you don't ever consider what the Lord is doing, and you don't recognize his help. As a result my people will be exiled for their lack of understanding. Their honored leaders will starve, and the crowds will be dying of thirst. The grave's appetite increases, its mouth opens wide, and Jerusalem's nobility and the masses will go down into it, along with the rowdy, drunken mobs. Everyone will be brought down, everyone will be humbled; the proud will lower their eyes in humiliation.

But the Lord Almighty will be vindicated because he does what is right; the holy God will be shown to be holy because of his goodness. Lambs will graze as in their own pasture; fattened livestock and goats will feed among the ruins of the rich.

Tragedy is coming to you who drag along your sins behind you with cords made of lies, pulling with ropes your cartful of wickedness. You are among the people who say, “God should hurry up! Why doesn't God get a move on with what he's doing so we can see it? Why doesn't the Holy One of Israel execute his plan? Let's see it happen so we can understand what it is!”

Tragedy is coming to you who say evil is good, and good is evil; who turn darkness into light and light into darkness; who make bitter sweet, and sweet bitter.

Tragedy is coming to you who are wise in your own eyes and think you're so clever.

Tragedy is coming to you who are wine-drinking champions, and experts at mixing alcoholic drinks; you who set the guilty free for a bribe, and yet deny justice to the innocent. In the same way fire burns up stubble and dry grass falls down in the flames, so their roots will decay and their flowers disintegrate into dust. For they have rejected the law of the Lord Almighty, and have treated with contempt what the Holy One of Israel has said. That's why the Lord burns with anger against his people. He has lifted up his hand and hit them, shaking the mountains, and leaving their corpses lying like refuse in the streets. Despite all this, his anger is not finished, and his hand is still lifted up.

He will send a signal to the distant nations, and will whistle for those living at the ends of the earth. See how quickly they respond, how speedily they come! None of them gets tired or stumbles; none of them rests or sleeps. No belt comes loose, and no sandal strap breaks. Their arrows are already sharpened, and all their bows have been strung. The hooves of their horses are hard as flint; their chariot wheels spin like a whirlwind. They roar like lions, like young lions. They growl, and pounce on their prey. They drag it off so it can't be rescued. At that time they will roar over their prey like the roaring of the sea. Anyone who looks out over the land will see only darkness and distress—even the sunlight will be darkened by clouds.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated in majesty on a high throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Seraphim stood above him, and each of them had six wings: They used two wings to cover their faces, two to cover their feet, and two to fly. They were calling out to one another: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; his glory fills the whole earth. The sound of their shouts made the doorposts and doorsteps shake, and the Temple was filled with smoke.

I cried out, “I'm doomed! I'm going to die because I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, for I've seen the King, the Lord Almighty!”

Then one of the seraphim flew over to me. He was holding a glowing coal that he had picked up with tongs from the altar. He touched me on my mouth with it and told me, “Look! This has touched your lips, so now your guilt is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

Then I heard the Lord asking, “Who shall I send? Who will go and speak for us?” So I said, “I'm here! Please send me!”

He replied, “Go and tell this people: ‘Keep on listening, but never understanding. Keep on seeing, but never comprehending.’ Make the minds of this people insensitive; make their ears deaf and shut their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their minds, and repent and be healed.”

Then I asked, “How long will this last, Lord?”

He replied, “Until towns are ruined and empty, houses are abandoned, and the land is devastated and destroyed; until the Lord sends the people far away and the country is totally deserted. Even though a tenth of the population remains in the land, it will be destroyed again. But in the same way as the terebinth and oak trees leave stumps when they're cut down, so the holy seed will remain as a stump.”

It was during the reign of Ahaz son of Jotham, son of Uzziah, king of Judah, that Rezin, king of Aram, marched to attack Jerusalem. Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, joined in the attack, but they couldn't conquer the city.

When the royal family of Judah was told, “Aram and Ephraim have an alliance,” Ahaz and his people were terrified and they shook like trees in the forest tossed about by the wind.

Then the Lord told Isaiah, “Take your son Shear-jashub with you and go and meet Ahaz. He'll be at the end of the aqueduct of the upper pool, by the road to the laundry field. Tell him, ‘Calm down and keep quiet. Don't be afraid or scared over a couple of smoldering bits of firewood, over the burning anger of Rezin and Aram, and of Remaliah's son. Aram has plotted to destroy you together with Ephraim and Remaliah's son saying, Let's go and attack Judah! We'll terrorize it and conquer it for ourselves, and make Tabeel's son its king.’”

But this is what the Lord God says, “This plan won't materialize—it just won't happen! For the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin. In addition, within sixty-five years Israel as a nation will

be destroyed. The head of Israel is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you don't trust in me, then you won't survive."

Later the Lord sent another message to Ahaz, "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether as deep as where people are buried or as high as heaven."

"No, I'm not going to ask," Ahaz replied. "I refuse to put the Lord to the test."

Then Isaiah said, "Listen, royal family of Judah! Isn't it enough for you to wear people out? Do you have to wear my God out too? This is why the Lord himself is going to give you a sign. Look! The virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and she will call him Immanuel. He will eat curds and honey until the time he knows to refuse evil and choose the good. For before the boy knows to refuse evil and choose the good, the land of the two kings you're afraid of will be deserted. The Lord will make you, your people, and the royal family experience a time unlike anything since the day Ephraim split from Judah. He will bring the king of Assyria to attack you!"

At that time the Lord will whistle to call flies from the distant rivers of Egypt and bees from the country of Assyria. They will all come and descend on the steep valleys and rock crevices, on all the thorn bushes and waterholes.

At that time the Lord will use a razor hired from beyond the Euphrates River, the king of Assyria, to shave you from head to toe, including your beards.

At that time someone who manages to keep a young cow and two sheep alive will eat curds, because they produce so much milk—for everyone who survives in the land will eat curds and honey.

At that time everywhere that once had a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels will only have brambles and thorns. People will go hunting there with bows and arrows because the land will be covered with brambles and thorns. In fact, all the hills that were once tilled by the hoe you won't want to go to because you'll worry about the brambles and thorns there. They'll just be where cattle are let loose and where sheep roam.

Then the Lord told me, "Get a large tablet and write on it with an ordinary pen, 'Maher-shalal-hash-baz.' I will need Uriah the priest and Zechariah, son of Jeberekiah, to be my trustworthy witnesses."

Then I slept with my wife the prophetess, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. The Lord told me, "Call him Maher-shalal-hash-baz. For even before the boy knows how to say 'Daddy' or 'Mommy,' the king of Assyria will carry off Damascus' wealth and Samaria's possessions."

Then the Lord spoke to me again, saying, "Because these people have rejected the waters of Shiloah that gently flow and instead have rejoiced with Rezin and Remaliah's son, the Lord is going to bring the powerful floodwaters of the Euphrates River against them—the king of Assyria with all his glorious army. It will flood all its channels and overflow all its banks. It will sweep on into Judah, overflowing and flooding through, reaching up to the neck. Like outspread wings it will engulf the whole of your land, Immanuel!

Pay attention, you nations, and be smashed! Listen, all you distant lands, get ready, but you will be smashed. Get ready, but you will be smashed. You can plan your strategy, but it will be foiled; you can say what you're intending, but it won't happen, for God is with us."

For this is what the Lord told me, holding me with a strong hand, instructing me not to follow the way of this people. He said, Don't call a conspiracy everything that these people call a conspiracy. Don't fear what they fear. Don't be overawed! The Lord Almighty is the one you should see as holy. He is the one you should fear, he is the one you should be in awe of. He will be a sanctuary for you. But to the royal families of both Israel and Judah he will be a stone they trip over and a rock that makes them stumble, a trap and a snare to the people who live in Jerusalem. Many people will stumble over them. They will fall and be broken. They will be trapped and caught. Safeguard this testimony, seal these instructions—they are for my disciples.

I will wait for the Lord, the one who is hiding his face from Jacob's descendants. I will wait in hope for him.

Look, I'm here, together with the children the Lord has given me. They are signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord Almighty, who lives on Mount Zion.

When someone suggests to you, "Go and ask mediums and spiritists who whisper and mutter," shouldn't people ask their God? Why should they ask the dead on behalf of the living? Go and examine God's law and his instructions! If what they say doesn't correspond with God's word, there will be no dawn for them. They will wander around the country, depressed and hungry. When they are starving they will become furious, and looking up they will curse their king and their God. Then they will look towards the earth and see only misery and gloom and agonizing depression, and they will be thrown out into the darkness.

Even so, there will be no more darkness for those who suffered. In the past he humiliated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will bring honor to Galilee of the foreigners that is on the route that leads from Jordan to the sea.

People walking in the dark will see a bright light; a light will shine on those living in a land of total darkness. You will make the nation grow enormously, and will make it extremely happy. The people will celebrate before you as people celebrate at harvest-time, as soldiers celebrate when dividing up what has been looted. For you will smash the yoke that burdens them down, the bar across their shoulders, and the oppressors' rod used to beat them just as you did when you defeated the Midianite army. For every army boot that noisily trampled people down, and every uniform soaked in blood—they are going to be burned, fuel for the fire.

For a child will be born for us, a son will be given to us. He will bear the responsibility to rule. He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His rule and the peace he brings know no limits and will never come to an end. He will sit on David's throne and rule his kingdom, making it secure. He will operate from principles of justice and goodness, from the time he begins his rule and for all eternity. The Lord Almighty is determined to make this happen.

The Lord has sent a message directed against Jacob, and its consequences will fall upon Israel. All the people will soon realize it—Ephraim and the people who live in Samaria. Proudly and arrogantly they say, “The brick buildings have collapsed, but we will rebuild them with dressed stone; the sycamore fig trees have been cut down, but we will replace them with cedars.”

But the Lord has strengthened Rezin's enemies against Israel and has encouraged them. Arameans from the east and Philistines from the west have greedily swallowed Israel up. In all of this he is still angry and his hand is still raised.

But the people didn't return to the one who punished them; they didn't come to worship the Lord Almighty. So in just a single day the Lord will chop off Israel's head and tail, palm branch and reed. Elders and honorable people are the head, and prophets who teach lies are the tail. The people's leaders have misled them; those who were guided by them are confused. As a result the Lord isn't pleased with their young men, he has no compassion for their orphans and widows, because all of them are hypocrites and do what's evil—they all talk stupidly. In all of this he is still angry and his hand is still raised.

For wickedness blazes like a fire, burning up brambles and thorns, setting the forest on fire, sending a column of smoke swirling upwards. The anger of the Lord Almighty burns the land. People are like fuel for the fire, and nobody tries to help anyone else.

People destroy others on the right, yet they're still hungry for more; people destroy others on the left, but they're still not satisfied. In the end they even destroy themselves! Manasseh destroys Ephraim, and Ephraim destroys Manasseh. Together they turn to destroy Judah. In all of this he is still angry and his hand is still raised.

Tragedy is coming to those who pass evil decrees and who write laws to harm people. They pervert the legal rights of the needy, and rob justice from the poor of my people. They steal from widows and cheat orphans. What are you going to do on the day you're punished, when disaster falls on you from far away? Who are you going to run to so you can get help? Where are you going to leave all your wealth? All you'll be able to do is to bow down as prisoners, or lie among the dead! In all of this he is still angry and his hand is still raised.

Tragedy is coming to the Assyrians, even though the rod they use represents my anger and the stick they hold in their hands represents my fury! I am sending the Assyrians against a nation that has given up on its God, against a people that make me angry. I order the Assyrians to loot them, to take their possessions, and to trample them down like mud in the street.

But this isn't what is behind the thinking of the king of Assyria. This isn't the plan he has in mind. What he wants to do is to destroy and eliminate many nations. He says: “All my commanders are kings! We conquered Calno like we did Carchemish; Hamath like Arpad; Samaria like Damascus. I was the one who conquered these kingdoms along with the idols of their gods. These kingdoms had images of their gods that were better than those of Jerusalem and Samaria. Why shouldn't I do to Jerusalem and her idols just what I did to Samaria and her idols?”

Once the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will punish the king of Assyria for his terrible arrogance and for the conceited look in his eyes.

For the king of Assyria says: “I have done this in my own strength. It was through my wisdom, because I'm clever. I have wiped out the boundaries of nations and looted their treasures. Like a bull I knocked their rulers off their thrones. Like robbing a bird's nest, I took the wealth of the nations. Like collecting abandoned eggs, I collected the whole earth. There wasn't a fluttering wing or an open beak, not even a chirp!”

Does an ax say it's more important than the person swinging it? Does a saw boast that it's greater than the person sawing with it? It would be as if a rod waved the person holding it, or a walking stick lifted up a person—who certainly wasn't wood!

So the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a disease on the king of Assyria's strong warriors that will make them waste away; a flaming fire will be set under everything he's so proud of. Israel's light will become a fire, and his Holy One will become a flame. It will burn up his thorns and brambles in just one day. It will totally destroy its splendid forests and orchards. Assyria will waste away, staggering off like someone sick. The trees left in its forests will be so few that a child could count them.

At that time those who are left in Israel and the survivors of the house of Jacob will no longer trust in those who turn on them, but they will truly trust in the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will come back to the Mighty God. Israel, even though your people are as numerous as sand on the seashore, only a remnant will return. The Lord has rightly decided to destroy his people. The Lord God Almighty has rightly decided to bring destruction throughout the whole country.

So this is what the Lord, the Lord Almighty, says, My people living in Zion, don't be afraid of the Assyrians who beat you with rods and hit you with clubs, just like the Egyptians did. Very shortly I will stop being angry with you. Then I will turn my anger on them and I will destroy them.

The Lord Almighty will lash them with a whip, just as he did when he attacked the Midianites at the rock of Oreb. He will hold up his rod over the sea, just as he did in Egypt. At that time he will remove the burden from your shoulders and the yoke from your neck. The yoke will be broken because of the anointing with oil.

The Assyrians came to Aiath, passed through Migron, and stored their supplies at Michmash. They cross the pass, saying, “We'll stay overnight at Geba.” The people of Ramah tremble in fear; the inhabitants of Gibeah of Saul run away. Shout out a warning, people of Gallim! Pay attention, those living in Laishah! You poor people of Anathoth! The people of Madmenah, are all running away. The inhabitants of Gebim are looking for somewhere safe. Today the invaders stop at Nob, shaking their fists at the mountain of the Daughter of Zion, at the hill of Jerusalem.

Look how the Lord Almighty is going to chop off the branches with great force. The tall trees will be cut down, the proud trees will be brought crashing down. He will cut down the thick forest with an ax, and Lebanon will fall at the hand of the Mighty One.

A shoot will grow from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will produce fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him, which is a Spirit of wisdom and understanding, a Spirit of advice and power, a Spirit of knowledge and awe of the Lord. His happiness will be in giving reverence to the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees, and he will not make decisions based on what he hears. Instead, he will judge the poor justly, and make decisions fairly on behalf of the destitute people of the earth. He will strike the earth when he pronounces judgment, and he will execute the wicked with just a word from his lips. He will wear goodness like a sash and trustworthiness like a belt.

Wolves will live with lambs; leopards will lie down with young goats, calves and young lions and young livestock will be together, and a small child will lead them along. Cows and bears will graze side by side; young lions will eat straw like cattle. Babies will be able to play safely near snake holes, little children will be able to put their hands into a vipers' den. Nothing will cause any harm or damage anywhere on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord in the same way that water fills the sea.

At that time the root of Jesse will stand like a banner for the nations. Foreigners will come to him, and the place of where he lives will be glorious.

At that time the Lord will act a second time to bring back the remnant of His people from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, and from the Mediterranean islands. He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiled people of Israel; he will bring together the scattered people of Judah from the ends of the earth. Ephraim's jealousy will disappear, and Judah's enemies will be destroyed; Ephraim won't be jealous of Judah, and Judah won't treat Ephraim as an enemy. Together they will fly downhill to attack the Philistines to the west; they will plunder the people of the east. They will defeat Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will become their subjects. The Lord will divide the Gulf of Suez; he will wave his hand over the Euphrates River creating a scorching wind. He will split it into seven streams so that people can cross easily on foot. There will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of his people that are left, just as there was for Israel when they left the land of Egypt.

At that time you will say, “I will praise you, Lord! Though you were angry with me, your anger is over, and now you comfort me. Look! God is my salvation! I will trust in him and I won't be afraid! For the Lord is my strength and song, and he has saved me!” With great happiness you will take water from the well of salvation.

At that time you will say: “Praise the Lord, shout out his name! Tell the nations what he has done—let them know of his wonderful character! Sing to the Lord for all the glorious things he's done—let the whole world know! Shout loudly and sing for joy, you people of Zion, for the Holy One of Israel is great, and is among you.”

This is the message Isaiah, son of Amoz, received about Babylon.

Set up a banner on a bare hilltop; shout out to them; wave your hand to encourage them to enter the palaces of princes. I have ordered the ones I have chosen to attack; I have called my warriors to execute my furious judgment and to celebrate my triumph.

A noise comes from the mountains, sounding like that of a huge crowd! It's the roaring sound from the kingdoms, from nations gathering together! The Lord Almighty is calling up an army for war. They are coming from distant lands, from beyond the far horizons—the Lord and the weapons of his fury—coming to destroy the whole country.

Howl in fear, for the day of the Lord is approaching—the time when the Almighty destroys. Everyone's hands will fall limp, and everyone will lose their minds in panic. They will be terrified; pain and anguish will seize them; they will suffer like a woman giving birth. They will look in shock at each other, their faces burning in fear. Look! The day of the Lord is coming—cruel, with fury and fierce anger—to devastate the land and to wipe out its sinners. The stars in the constellations of heaven above will not shine. When the sun rises it will stay dark. The moon will give no light.

I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their sin, says the Lord. I will put an end to the conceit of the arrogant, and I will humiliate tyrants and their pride. I will make people scarcer than pure gold, rarer than the gold of Ophir. So I will shake the heavens and make the earth jump out of its place because of the fury of the Lord Almighty, at the time when his anger burns.

Like a gazelle being hunted, or like sheep without a shepherd, the Babylonians will return to their own people, they will run away to their own land. Anyone who is captured will be stabbed to death; anyone who is caught will be killed by the sword. Their little children will be dashed to pieces as they watch, their houses will be looted, and their wives will be raped.

I'm going to get the Medes to attack them, people who don't care about silver or gold. Their bows will slaughter their young men; they will show no mercy to babies; they will have no pity on children. Babylon, the most marvelous city of any kingdom, the greatest pride of the Babylonian people, will be demolished by God like Sodom and Gomorrah. No one will ever live in Babylon again. It will be deserted—no desert nomad will set up a tent there, no shepherd will bring a flock to rest there. Only desert animals will make their homes there, and the ruined houses will be inhabited by wild dogs. Owls will live there, and wild goats will leap around. Hyenas will howl in her fortresses and jackals in her lavish palaces. Babylon's time is coming soon—they will not last much longer.

But the Lord will be merciful to the descendants of Jacob. Once again he will choose Israel and he will bring them back to live once more in their own land. Foreigners will come and join them there, and they will unite with the descendants of Jacob. Nations will go with them and escort them to their own land. The foreigners who stay in the Lord's land will serve the

Israelites. In this way the captors become their captives, and they rule over their former oppressors.

At that time the Lord will give you relief from your pain and trouble, and from the hard labor you were forced to do. You will mock the king of Babylon, saying, “How your oppressive rule has been ended, and your insolence stopped! The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked, the rulers' scepter. You kept on furiously hitting foreign peoples without stopping, and aggressively ruled nations with unrestrained persecution. Now the whole earth rests peacefully, and everyone starts celebrating! The cypress and cedar trees are glad you're gone. They sing, ‘Since you were cut down no woodcutters are coming to cut us down!’

Those in the grave beneath are keen to meet you when you arrive. It wakes the spirits of the dead to welcome you, those of all the rulers of the earth. All the kings of the nations stand up from their thrones. They will all speak up and tell you, ‘So you too are as weak as we are—you've become just like us! Your pride is now buried with you in the grave, along with the harp music you loved. Maggots are the bed you lie on, and worms are your blanket.’

Morning star, son of the dawn, how you have fallen from heaven! Destroyer of nations, you have been cut down to the ground! You said to yourself: ‘I will ascend to heaven. I will raise my throne above the stars of God. I will sit enthroned on the mountain of meeting, the summit of the northern mountain. I will ascend to the high places above the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’ But you are dragged down to the grave, into the depths of the pit. Those who see you will stare at you, examining you closely, asking, ‘Is this the man who shook the earth, who made kingdoms tremble? Is this the one who turned the world into a desert, destroyed cities, and never let his prisoners return home?’

All the other kings of the nations lie in splendor in their great mausoleums. But you are thrown out of your grave like a branch nobody wants, buried underneath the bodies of those killed by the sword. You are like a corpse trodden underfoot. You are tossed into a pit full of rocks— you will not be buried like those other kings because you destroyed your own land and killed your own people. The descendants of those who do evil will never survive. Get ready to execute his sons because of their fathers' sins. Don't let them take over the earth; don't let them fill the whole world with their cities.

I will come and attack them, declares the Lord Almighty. I will destroy everything: their reputation, those who remain, their children, and their descendants, says the Lord. I will make Babylon into a place for water birds and into marshland. I will sweep her away with the broom of destruction, declares the Lord Almighty.”

The Lord Almighty has sworn an oath: It will be as I have planned. It will happen as I have decided. I will smash the Assyrians when they are in my country Israel; I will trample them underfoot on my mountains. I will remove their yoke from my people, and take away the burdens they place on my people's shoulders. This is the plan I have made regarding the whole earth; my hand stretches out to control all the nations.

The Lord Almighty has made his plan, and who will block it? His hand stretches out, and who will push back against it?

The following message came in the year King Ahaz died. All you Philistines, don't celebrate the fact that the rod that was hitting you is broken, because from the root of that snake will grow up a viper, its fruit will be a flying serpent. The poor will have food, and the needy will live in safety, but you Philistines will die in a famine, and I will kill those who survive. Howl, gates! Weep, town! Melt away in fear, all you Philistines! For a cloud of smoke is approaching from the north—an army with no soldier hanging back. What will be the answer given to the messengers from that nation? “The Lord was the one who laid the foundations of Zion, and that's where his suffering people will be kept safe.”

A message about Moab. The town of Ar in Moab is devastated, destroyed in a single night! The town of Kir in Moab is devastated, destroyed in a single night! The people of Dibon go up to their temple to weep at its high places. The Moabites weep over the towns of Nebo and Medeba. Every head has been shaved, every beard has been cut off in mourning. They wear sackcloth in their streets. On the rooftops and in the open squares they all weep, falling down crying. The people of Heshbon and Elealeh cry out in sadness, their voices heard as far as Jahaz. That's why even the bravest soldiers of Moab shout—because they're so terrified.

I weep over Moab. Moabite refugees run all the way to Zoar and to Eglath-shelishiyah. Weeping they go up Luhith hill; crying for their destruction they walk along the road to Horonaim. The waters of Nimrim have all dried up. The grass is withered, all the vegetation has disappeared—nothing green is left. Everything they had gained, all their possessions, they have to carry across Willow River. Their cry of grief echoes through the whole country of Moab; their wailing and mourning extends all the way from Eglaim to Beer-elim. River Dimon is full of blood, but I will bring more upon the town of Dimon—a lion to attack the Moabite refugees and those who are left in the country.

Send lambs as tribute to the ruler of the land, from Sela through the desert, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion. The Moabite women at the fords of the Arnon are like birds fluttering around when their nest is destroyed. Think about it and make a decision. Make your shadow as invisible at midday as during the night. Hide the refugees; don't betray them as they run away. Let my refugees stay among you, Moab. Hide them from our enemies until the destroyer is no more, the destruction is over, and the aggressive invaders have gone.

Then a kingdom will be set up based on trustworthy love, and on its throne will sit a faithful king from the line of David. He will judge fairly, and will be passionately committed to doing what is right.

We know all about the pride of the Moabites, how terribly vain and conceited they are, completely arrogant! But their boasting is false. All the Moabites grieve for Moab. They all mourn the loss of the raisin cakes of Kir-hareseth, all of them destroyed. Heshbon's fields have dried up, as have Sibmah's grapevines. The rulers of the nations have trampled down the vines that once

branched out to Jazer and east towards the desert, and west as far as the sea.

So I cry with Jazer for Sibmah's vines; I soak Heshbon and Elealeh with my tears. Nobody shouts in celebration over your summer fruit and your harvest any more. Joy and happiness are gone. Nobody celebrates in the harvest fields or the vineyards; nobody shouts happily. Nobody treads grapes in the winepresses. I have stopped their cheering. Heartbroken I cry for Moab like sad music on a harp; deep inside I weep for Kir-hareseth. The Moabites go and wear themselves out worshiping at their high places. They go to their shrines to pray, but it does them no good.

This is the message that the Lord has already delivered about Moab. But now the Lord speaks again, and says, In three years, just as a contract worker precisely counts years, Moab's glory will turn into something to be laughed at. Despite there being so many Moabites now, soon there will only be a few feeble people left.

A message about Damascus. Look, Damascus will cease to exist as a city. Instead it will become a pile of ruins. The towns of Aroer will be abandoned. Flocks will live in the streets and rest there, because there won't be anyone to chase them away. The fortified city will disappear from Ephraim, Damascus will no longer be a kingdom, and those that are left of the Arameans will be like the lost glory of Israel, declares the Lord Almighty.

At that time the glory of Jacob will fade away; he will lose his strength. It will look as empty as fields after reapers have harvested the grain, gathering up the grain in their arms. It will be like when people pick the heads of grain in the Valley of Rephaim. Yet there will be some left behind, like an olive tree that has been shaken—two or three ripe olives are left at the top of the tree, four or five on its lower branches, declares the Lord, the God of Israel.

At that time people will pay attention to their Creator and look to the Holy One of Israel. They won't believe in the altars they built and the idols they made; they will not look to the Asherah poles or the altars of incense.

At that time their fortified cities will be like places left to be taken over by bushes and trees, just as they were previously abandoned when the Israelites invaded. The country will become completely desolate.

You have forgotten the God who saves you; you have not remembered the Rock who protects you. So, even though you plant beautiful plants and grow exotic vines, even though you make them grow on the day that you plant them, and have them blossom in the morning that you sow them, your harvest will be a heap of trouble on a day of grief and pain that cannot be cured.

Disaster is coming to the many nations that growl, growling like the raging sea! Disaster is coming to the peoples who roar, roaring like thundering waters! The nations roar like the roaring of crashing waves. But he confronts them, and they run far away, blown by the wind like chaff on the mountains, like tumbleweeds driven by a storm. Sudden terror comes in the evening! By morning, they're gone! This is what happens to those who loot us, the fate of those who plunder us.

Tragedy is coming to the land of whirring wings that lies along the rivers of Ethiopia, They send messengers downriver in papyrus boats. Swift messengers, go and take a message to a tall and smooth-skinned people, to a people feared by everyone, to a very powerful nation of conquerors, whose land is washed away by rivers.

All you people of the world, everyone who lives on earth—you will see when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will hear when a trumpet sounds. For this is what the Lord has told me: I will watch quietly from where I live, quiet as heat haze in sunlight, quiet as a mistcloud in the heat of harvest. For before the harvest, after the flower is gone and becomes an unripe grape, he prunes the vine with a knife to take out the shoots and branches. They will all be left as carrion for the birds of prey of the mountains, and for the wild animals. The birds will eat them in summer, and all the wild animals in winter.

At that time a gift will be brought to the Lord Almighty from a tall and smooth-skinned people, from a people feared by everyone, from a very powerful nation of conquerors, whose land is washed away by rivers. It will be brought to Mount Zion, the place identified with the Lord Almighty.

A message about Egypt. Look, the Lord is riding on a fast-moving cloud on his way to Egypt. The idols of Egypt will tremble before Him, and the Egyptians will become weak with fear. I will encourage Egyptians to attack other Egyptians. They will fight each other, neighbor versus neighbor, town versus town, and kingdom versus kingdom. I will destroy the confidence of the Egyptians. I will have their plans become all mixed up. They will ask their idols and the spirits of the dead what to do through mediums and spiritists. I will hand the Egyptians over to a harsh dictator. A cruel king will rule over them, declares the Lord.

The waters of the Nile will fail, and its riverbed will be sunbaked and dry. The channels will start to stink; the branches of the Nile in Egypt will dry to a trickle and dry up; the reeds and rushes will wither away. The vegetation along the banks of the Nile, and all the plants in the cultivated land along the Nile, will dry up and be blown away. Everything will be gone. Fishermen will mourn: all of them all who use hooks to fish in the Nile will weep and wail, along with those who fish by throwing nets into the water. The workers who prepare the flax for linen and the weavers of white fabric will be in despair. The cloth workers will be depressed, and everyone who earns a wage will feel sick inside.

The leaders of Zoan are stupid. Pharaoh's wise counselors give advice that doesn't make sense. How can you tell Pharaoh, “I myself am a wise man, descended from ancient kings”? So where are your wise counselors? Let them tell you so you can understand what the Lord Almighty has planned to do to Egypt. The leaders of Zoan have become stupid; the leaders of Memphis have been fooled; the important leaders of Egypt have misled their people. The Lord has mixed up a spirit of confusion for them to drink, making the Egyptians stagger around in everything they do, like a drunk slipping up on his own vomit. Nobody in Egypt

can do anything, whoever they are—head or tail, palm tree or reed.

At that time the Egyptians will become like women. They will shake with fear when the Lord Almighty raises his arm against them. The land of Judah will be a source of terror to Egypt for whenever Judah is mentioned, all Egyptians will tremble over what the Lord Almighty has planned to do to them.

At that time there will be five cities in Egypt that speak the language of Canaan and who have sworn to worship the Lord Almighty. One of them will be called the City of the Sun.

At that time there will be an altar to the Lord right in the middle of Egypt, and a stone monument to the Lord on its border. This will be a sign and a witness to the presence of the Lord Almighty in the land of Egypt. When they cry out to the Lord for help because they are being oppressed, he will send them a savior to fight for them and to rescue them. The Lord will make himself known to Egypt, and at that time Egypt will come to know the Lord. They will worship him with sacrifices and offerings; they will make promises to the Lord and keep them.

The Lord will inflict a plague on Egypt. He will do this, but he will heal them. They will come back to the Lord. He will respond to their prayers and heal them.

At that time there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. The Assyrians will go to Egypt, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria. The Egyptians and Assyrians will worship together.

At that time Israel will be the third part of this alliance, joining with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing to the whole of the earth. The Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, “Blessed be Egypt, my people, Assyria, the creation of my hands, and Israel, my special possession.”

In the year when Sargon, king of Assyria, sent his army commander to attack the town of Ashdod and conquered it, at that time the Lord spoke through Isaiah, son of Amoz. He told him, “Take off the sackcloth clothes from your body and remove your sandals.” Isaiah did so and went around naked and barefoot.

Then the Lord said, “In the same way that my servant Isaiah has gone naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a warning against Egypt and Ethiopia, so shall the king of Assyria lead the Egyptian prisoners and the Ethiopian exiles, both young and old, naked and barefoot. Their buttocks will be bare, to Egypt's shame. They will be discouraged and humiliated because they had put their hope in Ethiopia and proudly trusted in Egypt. At that time the people living in the coastal lands will say, ‘Look what has happened to those we were depending on! We ran to them for help to save us from the king of Assyria. We don't stand a chance!’”

A message about the desert by the sea. Like storm winds passing through the Negev, something is coming from the desert, from a land of terror— a horrifying vision that has been explained to me. The betrayer still betrays; the destroyer still destroys. Elamites and Medes, go ahead, attack and lay siege to Babylon, for I'm putting a stop to all the pain it has caused.

As a result my body is filled with agony. I'm overwhelmed with pain, like the pain of a woman giving birth. I am confused by what I hear; I am distressed by what I see. My mind falters; I shake in panic. The night I looked forward to has become terrifying.

They set the table, they spread out the rugs, they eat and drink…

“Get up, officers! Prepare your shields for battle!”

This is what the Lord told me: “Go! Have a lookout keep watch, and make sure he reports what he sees. When he sees chariots coming pulled by pairs of horses, riders on donkeys and on camels, he should watch very carefully, paying close attention.”

Then the lookout shouted “Sir, I've stood here on the watchtower day after day; night after night I've remained at my post. Now look! A man in a chariot with a pair of horses is coming.”

Then he said, “Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the idols of its gods lie smashed on the ground!”

My poor downtrodden people, so badly mistreated, I have told you what I have heard from the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel.

A message about Edom. A voice is calling to me from Seir, asking, “Watchman, what time of night is it? Watchman, what time of night is it?”

The watchman replies, “Morning is coming, but the night is coming again soon. If you want to ask again, then come back and ask.”

A message about Arabia. Caravans from Dedan, spend the night in the bushes. People of Tema, take water to the thirsty, meet the refugees with food. They're running away from a fierce battle, from swords, drawn swords, from bows and arrows.

This is what the Lord told me: “Within one year, just as a contract worker precisely counts years, all the glory of Kedar will be gone. There will only be a few left of the archers, the warriors of Kedar.” The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken.

A message about the Valley of Vision (Jerusalem). What's happening? Why has everyone gone up onto the rooftops? There are shouts and commotion all over the city with people celebrating.

Your dead weren't killed by the sword or in battle. All your leaders ran away together; they were captured without resistance. All your people trying to escape were captured together, even though they had run a long way away.

That's why I said, “Go away! Let me mourn in peace. Don't insist on comforting me as the daughter of my people is ruined.”

For the Lord has a day of defeat, of panic and confusion in the Valley of Vision, a day of tearing down walls and crying for help to the mountains.

The Elamites pick up their quivers full of arrows, and prepare their chariots and horsemen, while the people of Kir uncover their shields ready for battle. Your most productive valleys are now full of enemy chariots; and their cavalry are at your gates! Judah's defenses have been stripped away and so at that time you went looking for weapons in the Palace of the Forest.

You examined the breaks in the walls of the City of David and found there were many. You had water collect in the lower pool. You reviewed the number of houses in the city and demolished some to provide stone to repair the walls. You built a reservoir inside the walls for the waters from the old pool, but you did not

respect its Maker or think about the One who planned it long ago.

At that time the Lord, the Lord Almighty, was calling you to weep and mourn, to shave your heads and wear sackcloth. Instead, you go on happily partying! You slaughter cattle and sheep so you can have your feasts, eating meat and drinking wine, saying, “Let's eat and drink, because we're going to die tomorrow!”

The Lord Almighty has made this clear to me: “I will not forgive this sin till your dying day, says the Lord, the Lord Almighty.”

This is what the Lord, the Lord Almighty, told me to do. “Go to Shebna, the palace manager, and give him this message: ‘What are you doing here? Who do you think you are, cutting out a tomb for yourself high up on a hill, carving out for yourself a place to rest? Watch out, you great man! The Lord is about to grab you and violently toss you aside. He's going to roll you up into a ball, and throw you far away into a vast country. You will die there, and that's where the chariots you were so proud of will remain. You're a disgrace to your lord's royal family. I will push you out of office, I will strip you of your position.

After that I will call for my servant, Eliakim, son of Hilkiah. I will put your robe and place your sash around him, and I will give your authority to him. He will be a father to the people living in Jerusalem and Judah. I will give him the key to the house of David. What he opens, nobody can shut; what he shuts, nobody can open. I will drive him like a nail hammered securely into a wall. He will bring honor to his family.

The heavy burden of his father's family will hang on him—all the descendants and the inlaws—all the little containers, bowls and all kinds of jars. So the time will come, declares the Lord Almighty, when the nail will come out of the wall, even though it was hammered in securely. It will break off and fall down, and everything hanging on it will fall down too. The Lord has spoken.’”

A message about Tyre. Howl, people on the ships of Tarshish! Tyre has been destroyed—nothing is left of the houses and the harbor. They heard the news from the people of Cyprus. Stay shocked into silence, people of the coastlands, merchants of Sidon, and sailors. Egyptian grain came across the wide oceans. The Nile's harvest was what made Tyre money; she was the merchant to the nations.

Feel the shame, Sidon! For the fortress of the sea says, “I have no children, having never been in labor or given birth. I have not brought up young men or brought up young women.”

When the news about Tyre reaches Egypt they will be in agony.

Sail across to Tarshish! Howl, people of the coastlands! Is this really your triumphant city, whose beginnings are from the distant past, who has sent out people to colonize faraway places? Who planned this attack on Tyre? Tyre, who created kingdoms, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were honored around the world! The Lord Almighty planned it, to humble its pride in all its glory, and to bring down all who receive worldly honor.

Work your land, people of Tarshish, as they do beside the Nile, for you don't have a harbor anymore. The Lord held his hand out over the sea and shook kingdoms. He has condemned Phoenicia, giving the order to destroy their fortresses. He said, “Don't celebrate any more, mistreated virgin daughter of Sidon. Go and sail over to Cyprus—however, even there you won't find rest.”

Look at the country of the Babylonians, this people that are not as they used to be! The Assyrians have turned it into a place for desert animals. They set up their siege towers, they demolished the fortresses, and ruined the country.

Howl, people on the ships of Tarshish because your fortress is destroyed!

At that time Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years, a king's lifetime, as it were. But at the end of these seventy years, Tyre will be like the song about a prostitute, “Take a lyre and walk around the city, forgotten prostitute! Play and sing so people will remember you!” After seventy years, the Lord will restore Tyre. But then she will go back to hiring herself out as a prostitute, selling herself to all the kingdoms of the world. However, her profits and what she earns will be consecrated to the Lord. They won't be kept or saved up, for her business earnings will go to those who worship the Lord, to provide them with plenty of food and good clothes.

Watch out! The Lord is going to destroy the earth, to make it totally devastated. He's going to rip up the surface of the earth and scatter its inhabitants. It will happen the same for everybody—whether people or priests, servants or their masters, maids or their mistresses, buyers or sellers, lenders or borrowers, creditors or debtors. The earth will be completely laid waste and looted. This is what the Lord has said.

The earth dries up and withers away; the world shrivels up and withers away, the high and mighty people shrivel up along with the earth. The earth is polluted by its people; they have flouted God's laws, violated his regulations, and broken the eternal agreement with him. That is why a curse is destroying the earth. The people suffer because of their guilt. The inhabitants of the earth are burned up and only a few survive. The new wine dries up, and the vine withers. All the people celebrating groan. The happy sound of tambourines is over; the noise of the party-goers has stopped; the delightful harp music has finished. People don't sing any more as they drink wine, and the beer tastes bitter. The chaotic city is falling apart; every house is barred shut to keep others out. Crowds on the street are shouting, demanding to have wine. Joy turns into darkness. There's no happiness left on earth. The city is in a horrible state of ruin; its gates have been broken down. This is the way it's going to be all throughout the earth among the nations—only a few olives are left after the tree is shaken, only a few grapes are left to be gleaned after the harvest.

These survivors shout aloud and sing for joy. From the west they praise the Lord's majesty. From the east they glorify the Lord; from the sea shores they praise the name of the Lord, the God of Israel. We hear songs coming from the ends of the earth, singing, “Glory to the God who does right.”

But I'm miserable, miserable. Pity me! Deceitful people go on betraying, again and again. Terrors and pit-traps and snares are waiting for you, people of the earth. Those who run away in terror will fall into a pit-trap, and those who escape from the pit-trap will be caught in a snare. Heaven's windows are opened; earth's foundations shake. The earth is completely broken up; the earth is ripped apart, the earth is violently shaken. The earth staggers to and fro like a drunk, and sways this way and that like a shelter. The guilt of its rebelliousness weighs heavily on it, and it collapses—it won't rise again.

At that time the Lord will punish all the high heavenly beings and the kings of the earth. They will be brought together, prisoners in a pit. They will be imprisoned, and eventually they will be punished. The moon will be embarrassed and the sun will be ashamed, for the Lord Almighty will reign in glory on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem in the presence of its leaders.

Lord, you are my God. I will honor you and praise who you are, because you have done wonderful things that you planned long ago. You are faithful and trustworthy! You have turned the city into a pile of rubble; the fortified town is now a ruin; the foreigner palace is gone. It is no longer a city and it will never be rebuilt. Because of this powerful nations will honor you; cities of brutal nations will be in awe of you.

But you have protected the poor and needy when they were in trouble, you shielded them from storms and shaded them from the heat. For the actions of brutal people are like rain beating against a wall, like heat in a desert. You end the noisy uprising of foreigners. In the same way that a cloud's shadow cools down the heat of the day, so the song sung by brutal people is silenced.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast for all nations, a lavish feast of aged wines, rich food, and the best meat. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that covers all the nations, the sheet that is over everyone. He will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away all tears, and everywhere he will take away the humiliation suffered by his people. The Lord has spoken.

At that time his people will say, “Look! This is our God; we have trusted in him and he has saved us! This is the Lord we have been looking for. Now we can be happy and celebrate the salvation he brings!” The Lord's hand of protection will be on this mountain. But the Moabites will be trampled underfoot like straw into the water of a manure pit. They will reach out their hands to try and save themselves, like swimmers using their hands to swim, but their pride will be humbled however much they thrash about. Moab, he will demolish your fortress with the high walls, bringing it down to the ground, into the dust.

At that time, this will be the song that is sung in the land of Judah: “Ours is a strong city! Its walls and defenses are our salvation! Open the gates so the nation that does right may enter, the nation that stays faithful. You will keep in complete peace those who keep their minds focused on you, because they trust in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock. He brings down those who live so high and mighty; he demolishes the proud city with its high walls, bringing it down to the ground, into the dust. The poor tread it underfoot; the oppressed walk on top of it.”

You God, do what is right, and you straighten out the way for those who live right; you smooth out their path. Yes, we follow your instructions, Lord, we put our hope in you. What we most want is to remember you and your wonderful character. I look for you in the night; deep inside me I long for you. When your laws are shown to the earth, then the people of the world learn what is right. Though grace is shown to the wicked, they don't learn to do right. Even in a country where people do what's right, they continue to do evil and they don't think about how great the Lord is. Lord, you are holding your hand up, but they don't see it. Let them see your passionate commitment for your people, and be embarrassed; may the fire reserved for your enemies destroy them!

Lord, you give us peace and prosperity; everything we've achieved you have done for us. Lord our God, there have been other lords besides you who have ruled us, but you are the only one we worship. They are dead, they will not live again; they will not rise from the grave. Lord, you punished them and destroyed them—even wiping out every memory about them. You have made the nation grow, Lord, you have made the nation grow. You have expanded our borders of the land, and we honored you. Lord, when we were suffering we came to you, pouring out our prayers like whispers as you disciplined us. Just as a pregnant woman giving birth tosses about and cries out in pain, that's what we were like in your presence, Lord. However, even though we became pregnant and we tossed about in pain, we gave birth to nothing but air. We did not bring about the salvation of the earth, and the people of the world have not become alive.

But those who died in you, Lord, will live! Their bodies will rise again! Wake up, and sing for joy, you people sleeping in the dust, for the dew you receive is like the dew of the morning giving life to those in the grave.

My people, go inside your homes and close your doors behind you. Hide there for a little while until the fury has passed. Watch out! The Lord is coming from where he lives to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will reveal the blood that has been shed on it; the earth won't hide those who have been killed any longer.

At that time the Lord will take his sharp, large, and strong sword, and punish Leviathan, the slithering serpent, and Leviathan, the coiled serpent, and he will kill the sea dragon.

At that time, sing about a beautiful vineyard. I, the Lord, take care of it, watering it often. I guard it night and day so that nobody can damage it. I'm not angry anymore. If there are thorns and brambles I would go and fight them, burning them all up, Otherwise they should come to me for protection. They should make their peace with me, yes, make their peace with me.

In the future the descendants of Jacob will be like a tree taking root. Israel will flower and send out shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit! Has the Lord hit Israel as he hit those that attacked them? Were they killed like their killers were killed? You dealt with them

by sending them into exile, by banishing them. He drove them away with his powerful force, like when the east wind blows. Through this experience Jacob's guilt will be forgiven. The removal of their sins will come to fruition when they take all the pagan altar stones and crush them to pieces like chalk—no Asherah poles or altars of incense will be left standing.

The fortified city will be abandoned, its houses as empty and lonely as a desert. Cattle will graze and rest there, stripping bare the branches of its trees. Their dry branches are broken off and used by women to make fires. This is a people that doesn't have any sense, so their Maker won't feel sorry for them, and their Creator won't help them.

At that time the Lord will thresh the grain harvested from the Euphrates River to the Wadi of Egypt, and you Israelites will be gathered up one by one. At that time a loud trumpet will sound, and those who were dying in Assyria will return along with those exiled in Egypt. They will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Tragedy is coming to the city of Samaria, the crowning glory of Ephraim's drunks, to the fading flower of wonderful beauty, sitting above a fertile valley, and beloved by those hammered by wine. Watch out, for the Lord has someone who is strong and powerful! He is going to smash it to the ground like a hailstorm and a tornado, like a torrential rain and an overwhelming flood. That crowning glory of Ephraim's drunks will be trampled underfoot. That fading flower of wonderful beauty, sitting above a fertile valley, will be like figs ripe before the summer harvest—as soon as people discover them, they grab and eat them.

At that time the Lord Almighty will be a beautiful, glorious crown that brings pride to those of his people who are left. He will be an inspiration to the judges to do what's right, and he will encourage those who fight off the attacks on the gate.

But these people also drink so much wine and beer that they sway from side to side and stumble over. Even priests and prophets stagger along, their minds muddled by beer and wine. Because of the drink they are confused about visions and make mistakes when they give decisions. All their tables are full of vomit—filth is everywhere.

"Just who is he trying to teach knowledge to?" they ask. "Who is he explaining his message to? To children just weaned from milk, to babies just removed from the breast? He tells us this blah and that blah, blah upon blah, and again blah and blah, and even more blah and blah! It's a bit here and a bit there." Fine—so now the Lord will talk to this people in foreign languages that sound strange to them! He had told them, "You can rest here. Let those who are tired rest. This is the place where you can safely relax." But they refused to listen.

Therefore the Lord's message to them will become, "This blah and that blah, blah upon blah, and again blah and blah, and even more blah and blah, a bit here and a bit there," so that they'll fall over backwards, and they'll be wounded, trapped, and captured.

So pay attention to the Lord's message, you scornful rulers who lead these people in Jerusalem. You claim, "We've made an agreement with death; we've got a contract with the grave. When the terrible disaster rushes by, it won't affect us, because our lies protect us and we hide in our own deceptions."

Consequently, listen to what the Lord God says, Look! I'm laying a foundation stone in Jerusalem, a strong, well-tested stone. It's a valuable cornerstone that provides a firm foundation. Anyone who trusts in it won't be shaken loose. I will make justice as straight as a measuring line, and doing what's right the standard rule. Hail will destroy the protection of your lies, and water will flood the place where you're hiding. Your agreement with death will be canceled; your contract with the grave will be revoked. When the terrible disaster rushes by, it will trample you underfoot. It will rush by time after time, dragging you away morning upon morning, day and night, rushing on and on. Once you understand this message you will be absolutely terrified.

The bed is too short so you can't stretch out; the blanket is too narrow so you can't cover yourself. The Lord will come on the attack like he did to the Philistines at Mount Perazim, like he shook them in the Valley of Gibeon, coming to do what he has to do, his strange work; coming to act as he must, his unusual action. So don't mock, or your imprisonment will be even worse, for the Lord, the Lord Almighty, has explained to me his decision to destroy the whole country.

Listen to what I'm saying! Listen and pay attention! Hear what I have to say! Does the farmer spend all his time plowing? Does he spend all his time preparing the soil? Once he has everything ready doesn't he sow seeds like dill and cumin, doesn't he plant wheat and barley in rows, with spelt grain as a border? His God gives him instructions and teaches him the right thing to do. You don't use a heavy tool to thresh dill! You don't use the wheel of a cart to thresh cumin! Instead you use a stick to beat out the dill, and a rod to beat out the cumin. Grain used for bread is easily damaged so you don't thresh it forever. When you drive your cart wheels over it with your horses, you don't crush it. This is also from the Lord Almighty who is very wise and gives great advice.

Tragedy is coming to you Ariel, Ariel the city where David lived! Year after year you have your festivals. But I'm going to cause trouble for Ariel; the city will cry and mourn, it will be like an altar hearth to me. I will surround you, I will besiege you with towers and build ramps to attack you. You will be brought down, you will speak from where you're lying on the ground, mumbling in the dust. Your words will come like a ghost from the grave; your voice will be a whisper from the dust.

But then all your enemies will become like fine dust; all your cruel oppressors like chaff that's blown away. Then suddenly, in no time at all, the Lord Almighty will arrive with thunder, earthquake, and tremendous noise, with whirlwind, storm, and flames of fire that burn everything up. The nations besieging Ariel, attacking its fortifications and tormenting the people, they will all disappear as if it was a dream! It will be like someone hungry dreaming that they're eating but who wakes up still hungry. It will be like someone thirsty dreaming of drinking but who wakes

up still weak and thirsty. This is what it will be like for all your enemies, the ones attacking Mount Zion.

Be shocked and amazed! Make yourselves blind so you can't see! Get drunk, but not from wine! Stagger around, but not from beer! For the Lord has made you very sleepy, and he has shut the eyes and covered the heads of those who speak for God and see visions.

This entire vision is like words in a scroll that is sealed shut. If you give it to someone who knows how to read and say, “Please read it,” they'll say, “I can't read it because it's sealed shut.” If you give it to someone who doesn't know how to read and say, “Please read it,” they'll say, “I don't know how to read.”

The Lord says, “These people come and praise me with their words, and honor me with lip service, but their thoughts are miles away. Their worship of me only consists of them following rules people have taught them. So once again I will surprise these people with miracle upon miracle. The wisdom of the wise will die, and the insight of the insightful will disappear.”

Tragedy is coming to people who take such trouble to hide their plans from the Lord. They work in the dark and say to themselves, “Nobody can see us, can they? Nobody will know, will they?”

How perverse you are! It's as if the clay was thought of as making the potter! Should something made say to its maker, “You didn't make me”? Can the pot tell the potter, “You don't understand anything”?

It won't be long and the forests of Lebanon will be turned into a productive field, and a productive field will seem like a forest. At that time the deaf will hear the words of the scroll, and the eyes of the blind will see through the gloomy darkness what's written there. The humble will be even happier in the Lord, and the poor will find their joy in the Holy One of Israel. Cruel people will no longer exist, the scornful will vanish, and those looking to do evil will be destroyed— those who say things to trick others into sin, those who trap people by legal arguments in court, those who lie to mislead the innocent.

So this is what the Lord, who redeemed Abraham, says to the descendants of Jacob: “You don't need to be ashamed anymore; your faces won't grow pale with fright any longer. When you see all your children and everything I've done for you, then you will regard my character as holy, and you will respect the Holy One of Jacob. You will have reverence for the God of Israel. Those who've gone astray will understand their mistakes; those who grumble will learn how to receive instruction.”

Tragedy is coming to my defiant children, declares the Lord. You make plans that don't come from me; you make alliances against my wishes, adding sin to sin. You go to Egypt without asking me, looking to Pharaoh for protection, hoping to find safety hiding behind Egypt. But the protection of Pharaoh will be an embarrassment to you; hiding behind Egypt will only bring you humiliation. Even though he has officials at Zoan and his messengers reach Hanes, the Egyptians will offend everyone because they are useless—they're no help and good for nothing, except for causing shame and bringing disgrace.

A message about the animals of the Negev. The messengers travel through a harsh and hostile land where lions and lionesses live, vipers and vicious snakes too. Their donkeys are burdened down with valuable gifts, their camels are loaded with treasure, to give to a worthless people that can't help. Egypt's support is an empty breath of wind. That's why I call her Pride Sitting Down.

Now go and write all this down on a tablet and on a scroll so that it will last forever and ever. For they are a rebellious people, deceitful children, who refuse to listen to the Lord's instructions. They tell people who see visions, “Stop seeing visions!” and to the prophets, “Don't give us prophecies about doing right—just tell us pleasant things and give us fake prophecies. Stop telling us straight; go a different direction! We don't want to hear any more about the Holy One of Israel.”

So this is how the Holy One of Israel replies, Since you have rejected this message, and since you trust in oppression and believe in dishonesty, your punishment will suddenly fall on you, like a high wall that bulges out and collapses in an instant. You will be smashed like a clay pot, broken into such tiny pieces that there won't be a big enough piece to pick up coals from a hearth or a little bit of water from a well.

This is what the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, said, If you repent and patiently trust in me, you would be saved; you would be strong if you had such calm confidence. But you refused to do it.

You replied, “No! We'll escape on horseback! We'll get away on fast horses!”

But the fast ones will be the ones chasing you! Just one of them will chase after a thousand of you. Just five of them will make you all run away. All that will be left of you will look like a flag fluttering on the top of a mountain, a banner waving on a hill.

So the Lord waits, wanting to be kind to you, ready to act to show you mercy, for the Lord is a God who does what is right. All who wait for him are blessed.

People of Zion, you who live in Jerusalem, you won't have to weep any more. When you cry for help he will be kind to you. He will answer you immediately when he hears you. Even though the Lord will give you the bread of hardship to eat and the water of suffering to drink, your teacher will no longer hide himself from you—you will see him with your own eyes. When you walk to the right or to the left, you will hear this command coming from behind you: “This is the way to follow.”

You will defile your silver-coated idols coated with silver and your gold-covered images. You will throw them away like a dirty cloth used for periods, and say to them, “out of here!” He will send rain when you sow, and the land will produce great harvests. At that time your cattle will feed in rich pastures. The oxen and donkeys that help cultivate the earth will eat good greens and grain, spread with fork and shovel. At that time when your enemies are killed and the fortresses fall, streams of water will flow down every mountain and hill. The moon will shine as bright as the sun, and the sun will shine seven times brighter, like having seven days light in one. This is the way it will be when

the Lord bandages the injuries of his people and heals the wounds he caused them.

Look how the Lord arrives from far away, burning with anger and accompanied by thick clouds of smoke! What he says shows his anger—it's like a fire that burns everything up. His breath rushes out like a flood that comes up to the neck. He shakes the nations in a sieve that destroys them; he puts bridles in the mouths of the different peoples to lead them away.

But you will have a song to sing like you do on the night of a holy festival. You will celebrate in happiness like those who play pipes as they go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. The Lord will shout so everyone hears him; he will reveal his great power. He will hit out in his anger and fury, with a fire that burns everything up, and with torrential rain, storm, and hail. At the Lord's command the Assyrians will be shattered, knocked down by his scepter. Every time the Lord hits them with his rod of punishment it will be accompanied by the music of tambourines and harps as he fights them, swinging into them in battle. The place of burning has been prepared a long time ago, ready for the king. Its funeral pyre is deep and wide, and has plenty of fire and wood. The breath of the Lord, like a flood of burning sulfur, sets it on fire.

Tragedy is coming to those who appeal to Egypt for help, depending on their horses and trusting in all their chariots and charioteers! They don't look to the Holy One of Israel for help; they don't ask the Lord for advice. Yet he's also wise! He will bring disaster and won't withdraw his orders. He will take action against this wicked nation and the evil people who help them. The Egyptians are only human beings—they're not God! Their horses are only physical, not spiritual. When the Lord lifts up his hand to attack, those who came to help will stumble, and those who are helped will fall. They will all die together.

This is what the Lord told me: It's like a young lion growling as it stands over its prey. Even though a lot of shepherds come to protest, it's not frightened off by their shouting or intimidated by all their noise. In the same way the Lord Almighty will come down to fight on Mount Zion. Like birds that hover above, so the Lord Almighty will take care of Jerusalem. He will protect it and save it; he will pass over it and rescue it.

Come back, Israelites, to the one you so blatantly rebelled against. For at that time every one of you will throw away all the idols of silver and gold made by your own sinful hands. The Assyrians will be killed by the sword of one who is not a man. They will be destroyed by the sword of one who is not mortal. They will run away at the sight of the sword, and the young Assyrian men will be taken away as slave laborers. Their “rock” will be scared to death, and their officers will be terrified and in panic at the sight of the battle flag, declares the Lord, who has his fire in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem.

Watch! A king is coming who does what's right when he rules, and those who rule under him will act fairly. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind, like a protection from the storm, like rivers of water in the dry desert, like the shade of a large rock in a sun-baked land.

Then everyone with eyes will be able to truly see, and everyone who has ears will be able to truly hear. Those whose minds are impulsive will be sensible and think things through; those who stammer will speak clearly. No longer will fools be called respectable or crooks highly-regarded. For fools only talk foolishness, thinking evil things. They act in opposition to the Lord, misrepresenting him in what they say. They refuse to give food to the hungry and deny water to the thirsty. Cheats use evil methods; they devise schemes to ruin the poor with lies, even when right is on the side of the poor. But noble people act unselfishly; they keep to their principles of generosity.

Get up, you women who are lying around relaxing, and pay attention to what I'm saying! You ladies without a care in the world, listen to me! In just over a year, you who think yourselves so safe will tremble with fear. The grape harvest is going to fail and there'll be no harvest. Shudder, you women relaxing! Tremble, you ladies who feel so safe! Strip off your clothes, bare yourselves and put on sackcloth around your waists. Beat your breasts in sadness over the loss of your lovely fields, your productive vines, over the loss of the land of my people. Mourn because it's now overgrown with thorns and brambles, mourn because of the loss of all the happy homes and joyful towns. The palace is abandoned, the crowded town is deserted. Castles and watch towers will forever become homes loved by wild donkeys, and places where sheep graze, until the Spirit is poured out on us from above, and the desert becomes like a good field full of crops, and a good field will grow like a forest.

Then people living in the desert will practice justice, and those living among the fields will do what is right. Living right will bring peace and security that endures. My people will live in peace, safe and secure in their homes. Even though hail can destroy a forest, and a town can be demolished, you will be happy as you sow your crops beside the waters and let your cattle and donkeys roam freely.

Tragedy is coming to you, you destroyer who has not experienced destruction yourself, you deceiver who has not experienced deception yourself! When you have finished with your destroying, you will be destroyed yourself. When you are finished with your deceiving, you will be deceived yourselves.

Lord, please be kind to us; we put our confidence in you. Be the strength we rely on every morning; be our salvation in times of trouble. When you roar, the peoples run away; when you prepare for action, the nations scatter! You plunder defeated enemy armies like caterpillars eating up plants; like an attack of swarming locusts.

The Lord is praised for he lives in highest heaven; he has filled Zion with justice and right. He will be your constant support throughout your lives an abundant source of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. Reverence for the Lord is what makes Zion rich.

But look! Even your bravest soldiers are crying loudly in the street; the messengers you sent to ask for peace are weeping bitterly. Your highways are deserted; nobody's traveling on your roads anymore. He breaks the treaty; he despises the witnesses; he doesn't

care about anybody. Israel is in mourning and fades away; Lebanon withers in shame; the fields of Sharon have become a desert; the forests of Bashan and Carmel have shed their leaves.

“But now I'm going to intervene!” says the Lord. “I'm prepared to act! I will show myself to be above all others! All you give birth to is only dry grass, all you deliver is just stubble. Your breath is a fire that will burn you up. You people will be burned to ashes like thorns that are cut down and thrown into the fire. Those of you who are far away, recognize what I have accomplished; those of you who are nearby, recognize how powerful I am.”

The sinners who live in Zion tremble with fear; those who are irreligious are overcome with terror. They ask, “Who can live with this fire that consumes everything? Who can live among such everlasting burning?”

Those who live right and speak the truth, those who refuse to profit from extortion and refuse to take bribes, who don't listen to plots to kill people, who close their eyes rather than look at evil. They will live on high; they will be protected by the mountain fortresses; they will always be provided with food and will always have water.

You will see the king in his wonderful appearance, and you will view a land that stretches into the distance. In your mind you will think about the terrifying things that were expected, and then ask yourself, “Where are the enemy officials—the scribes who were to record events, the treasurers who were to weigh the looted money, the surveyors who were to count and destroy the towers?” You won't see these offensive people anymore with their barbaric language that sounds like someone stammering and is impossible to understand.

On the contrary, you'll see Zion as a festival city. You will view Jerusalem as a quiet and peaceful place. It will be like a tent that's never taken down, whose tent-pegs are never pulled up, whose guy ropes never snap. Right here our majestic Lord will be like a place of broad rivers and waters that no enemy ship with oars can cross—no great ship can pass. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king. He is the one who will save us. The rigging on your ship hangs loose so the mast isn't secure and the sail can't be spread. Then all the looted treasure you're carrying will be divided among the victors—even those who are lame will have their share. Nobody in Israel will say, “I'm sick,” and those who live there will have their guilt removed.

Come close, you nations, and listen! You peoples, pay attention! Hear these words everyone who lives on earth, and all that comes from it! The Lord's anger is against all the nations and his fury is against all their armies. He will completely destroy them; he will have them slaughtered. Those who are killed won't be buried; the stink of their bodies will rise; mountains will be washed away with their blood. The sun, moon, and stars of heaven will fade away, and the skies will be rolled up like a scroll. All the stars will fall like dried-up leaves from a vine, like dried-up figs from a fig tree.

After my sword has finished what it has to do in the heavens, it will come down on Edom, on the people I have doomed for destruction. The sword of the Lord is coated in blood and covered with fat—the blood of lambs and goats, and the fat of rams' kidneys. For there is a sacrifice for Lord happening in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom. Wild ox will fall with them, the young bulls along with the mature ones. Their land will be soaked with blood, and their soil soaked with fat.

For the Lord has a day of punishment, a year of retribution, for the trouble caused to Zion. Edom's streams will be turned into tar, its soil into sulfur, and her land will become burning tar! The fire will burn day and night, and will never go out, its smoke will rise forever. From one generation to the next it will remain desolate—people won't ever go there again. The desert owl and screech owl will take it over, and the eagle owl and raven will live there. The Lord will stretch out over Edom a measuring line of destruction and a plumb line of desolation. Its nobles won't have anything to call a kingdom; all its princes will be gone. Thorns will grow over its palaces; weeds and thistles will take over its fortresses. It will be a place where jackals live, a home for owls. It will be a meeting place for desert animals and hyenas, and wild goats will call to each other there. Night animals will settle there and find a place to rest. There the owl will build its nest, lay and hatch its eggs, and raise its chicks in the shade of its wings. It has become a roost for birds of prey, each one with its mate.

Look in the scroll of the Lord and read what it says: Not a single one of these will be missing its mate, for the Lord has ordered this to happen, and his Spirit has gathered them together. He assigns them their territories, he divides up the land for them using a measuring line. These birds and animals will own it forever, from one generation to the next.

The wilderness and dry land will celebrate; the desert will blossom like the crocus. Bloom profusely, celebrate and sing! The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. Make the weak hands strong, and make the trembling knees firm! Tell those who are frightened, “Be strong! Don't be afraid! Look, your God is coming to punish his enemies, with divine retribution he will come to save you.”

When that happens, the blind will see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will jump like a deer, and the dumb will sing for joy. Springs will gush in the wilderness; streams will flow in the desert. The dried-up ground will become like a pool, the arid land like water springs. In the place where jackals used to live, there will be grass and reeds and rushes.

There will be a highway there, a road called “The Way of Holiness.” Nobody bad will travel on it, only those who follow the Way. Fools will not go there. No lions or other dangerous animals will be found there on the road—only the redeemed will walk along it. Those the Lord has set free will return, singing as they enter Jerusalem, wearing crowns of everlasting joy. They are overcome with thankfulness and happiness; sorrow and sadness simply disappear.

In the fourteenth year of the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, attacked and conquered all the fortified towns of Judah. The king of Assyria

sent his army general, along with a large army, from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. He stopped by the aqueduct of the upper pool, on the road to the Launderer's Field. Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace manager, Shebnah the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the record-keeper, went out to speak with him.

The Assyrian army general said to them, “Tell Hezekiah this is what the great king, the king of Assyria, says: What are you trusting in that gives you such confidence? You say you have a strategy and are ready for war, but these are empty words. Who are you relying on, now that you have rebelled against me? Now look! You're trusting in Egypt, a walking stick that's like a broken reed that will cut the hand of anyone leaning on it. That's what Pharaoh, king of Egypt, is like to everyone who trusts in him. If you tell me, ‘We're trusting in the Lord our God,’ well didn't Hezekiah remove his high places and his altars, telling Judah and Jerusalem: ‘You have to worship at this altar in Jerusalem’? Why don't you accept a challenge from my master, the king of Assyria? He says, I'll give you two thousand horses, if you can find enough riders for them! How could you defeat even a single officer in charge of the weakest of my master's men when you're trusting in Egypt for chariots and horsemen? More than that—would I have come to attack this place without the Lord's encouragement? It was the Lord himself who told me, ‘Go and attack this land and destroy it.’”

Eliakim, Shebnah, and Joah, said to the army general, “Please speak to us, your servants, in Aramaic, for we understand it. Don't speak to us in Hebrew while the people on the wall are listening.”

But the army general replied, “Did my master only send me to say these things to your master and to you, and not to the people sitting on the wall? They too, just like you, are going to have to eat their own excrement and drink their own urine!”

Then the army general shouted out in Hebrew, “Listen to this from the great king, the king of Assyria! This is what the king says: Don't let Hezekiah trick you! He can't save you! Don't believe Hezekiah when he tells you to trust in the Lord, saying, ‘I'm certain the Lord will save us. This city will never fall into the hands of the king of Assyria.’ Don't listen to Hezekiah. This is what the king says: Make a peace treaty with me and surrender to me. That way everyone will eat from their own vine and their own fig tree, and drink water from their own well! I will come and take you to a land that's like your own, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. But don't let Hezekiah trick you when he says, ‘The Lord will deliver us.’ Have any of the gods of any nation ever saved their land from the power of the king of Assyria? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where were the gods of Sepharvaim? Were they able to save Samaria from me? Which one of all the gods of these countries has saved their land from me? How then could the Lord save Jerusalem from me?”

But the people remained silent and didn't say anything, for Hezekiah had given the order, “Don't answer him.”

Then Eliakim, son of Hilkiah, the palace manager, Shebna the scribe, and Joah, son of Asaph, the record-keeper, went to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and they told him what the Assyrian army general had said.

When Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went into the Lord's Temple. He sent Eliakim the palace manager, Shebna, the scribe, and the leading priests, all wearing sackcloth, to see the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. They told him, “This is what Hezekiah says: Today is a day of trouble and of punishment. It's like when babies arrive at the entrance to the birth canal but there's no strength to deliver them. Maybe the Lord your God, hearing the message the army commander delivered on behalf of his master, the king of Assyria—a message sent to insult the living God—will punish him for his words. Please say a prayer for the remnant of us who still survive.”

After Hezekiah's officials delivered his message to Isaiah, Isaiah replied to them, “Tell your master, This is what the Lord says: Don't be frightened by the words that you have heard, the words used by the servants of the king of Assyria to blaspheme me. Look, I'm going to scare him—he'll hear a rumor, and he'll have to return to his own country. When he's there I'll have him killed by the sword.”

The Assyrian army commander left and went back to join the king of Assyria, having heard the king had left Lachish and was attacking Libnah.

Sennacherib had received a message about Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, that said, “Watch out! He is coming to attack you.” So Sennacherib sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying, “Tell Hezekiah, king of Judah: ‘Don't let your God, the one you're trusting in, fool you by saying that Jerusalem won't fall into the hands of the king of Assyria. Look! You've heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all the countries they've invaded— they destroyed them completely! Do you really think you'll be saved? Did the gods of the nations my forefathers destroyed save them—the gods of Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the people of Eden who lived in Telassar? Where today is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena, or the king of Ivvah?’”

Hezekiah received the letter from the messengers and read it. Then he went up to the Lord's Temple and opened it out before the Lord. Hezekiah prayed to the Lord, saying, “Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you who live above the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, you are Creator of heaven and earth. Please listen with your ears, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see. Listen to the message that Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God.

Yes, it's true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have destroyed these nations and their lands. They have thrown their gods into the fire because they are not really gods—they are just the work of human hands, made of wood and stone so they could destroy them. Now, Lord our God, please save us from him, in order that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that only you, Lord, are God.”

Then Isaiah, son of Amoz, sent a message to Hezekiah, saying, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Because you've prayed to me about Sennacherib, king of Assyria, this is the word of the Lord condemning him: The virgin daughter of Zion scorns

you and mocks you; the daughter of Jerusalem shakes her head as you run away. Who have you been insulting and ridiculing? Who did you raise your voice against? Who did you look at with so proud eyes? It was against the Holy One of Israel! By your servants you have mocked the Lord. You said: 'With my many chariots I have ascended to the high mountains, to the farthest peaks of Lebanon. I have chopped down its tallest cedars, the best of its cypress trees. I have reached its most distant heights, its deepest forests. I have dug wells and drunk water in foreign lands. With the soles of my feet I dried up all the rivers in Egypt.'"

The Lord replies, "Haven't you heard? I decided it long ago; I planned it in the olden days. Now I am making sure it happens—that you are to knock down fortified towns into piles of rubble. Their people, powerless, are terrified and humiliated. They're like plants in a field, like soft green shoots, like grass that sprouts on the rooftop—scorched before it can even grow.

But I know you very well—where you live, when you come in, when you leave, and your furious anger against me. Because of your furious anger against me, and because I know how you disrespect me, I'm going to put my hook in your nose and my bit in your mouth, and I will force you to return the same way you came.

Hezekiah, this will be a sign to prove this is true: This year you'll eat what grows by itself. The second year you'll eat what grows from that. But in the third year you'll sow and reap, you'll plant vineyards and eat their fruit. The remnant that's left of Judah will revive again, sending roots below and bearing fruit above. For a remnant will come out of Jerusalem, and survivors will come from Mount Zion. The intense determination of the Lord will make sure this happens. This is what the Lord says about the king of Assyria: He shall not enter this city or shoot an arrow at it. He shall not advance towards it with a shield, or build a siege ramp against it. He shall return the same way he came, and he shall not enter this city, says the Lord. I will defend this city and save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David."

Then the angel of the Lord went to the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 of them. When the survivors woke up in the morning, they were surrounded by dead bodies. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, gave up and left. He returned home to Nineveh and stayed there. While he was worshiping in the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword and then ran away to the land of Ararat. His son Esar-haddon succeeded him as king.

About this time Hezekiah fell very sick and was about to die. The prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, went to him and said, "This is what the Lord says: Put your affairs in order, because you are going to die. You won't recover."

When Hezekiah heard this, he went to pray privately to the Lord, saying "Please remember Lord how I have followed you faithfully with all my heart. I have done what is good in your sight." Then Hezekiah cried and cried.

Then the Lord sent a message to Isaiah, saying, "Go and tell Hezekiah, This is what the Lord, the God of your forefather David, says: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. I will add fifteen years to your life. I will save you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.

This is the sign from the Lord to you that the Lord will do what he promised: Look, I will make the shadow made by the sun go back the ten steps that it has gone down on the stairway of Ahaz. So the sun went back the ten steps that it had gone down on the stairway of Ahaz."

This is what Hezekiah, king of Judah, wrote after he recovered from his sickness:

I said to myself, "Do I have to go to my death just as my life is going well? Why can't I count on the rest of my years?"

I said, "I will never again see the Lord, the Lord, in the land of the living. I won't see anyone else again, none of the inhabitants of this world. Like a shepherd's tent, the place where I live has been pulled up and taken away from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up the cloth of my life and cut it from the loom. Day and night you bring me to an end. I lie there patiently until the morning, but I feel like there's a lion breaking every bone in my body. Day and night you bring me to an end. I scream like a swift or a songbird, I moan like a dove. My eyes grow dim as I look heavenwards. I'm being attacked, Lord, please come and support me!

Yet what can I say? He told me what was going to happen, and he himself did it. I will walk quietly for the rest of my life because of the painful experience I went through. Lord, we live by what you say and do, and I find life in all of this. You have given me back my health and allowed me to live. It was definitely for my own good I went through this bitter experience. You in your love saved me from the pit of destruction and you have forgiven all my sins. Those in the grave cannot praise you, the dead cannot praise you. Those who go down into the pit can no longer hope in your faithfulness. It's only the living who can praise you as I'm doing today. Parents explain to their children how you can be trusted. The Lord saved me! We will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our lives in the Lord's Temple."

Isaiah had said, "Prepare a dressing of figs and spread it on the skin sores so he may recover." Hezekiah had asked, "What is the sign to confirm that I will go to the Lord's Temple?"

At the same time Merodach-baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, sent letters and a gift to Hezekiah, because he had heard that Hezekiah was sick and had recovered. Hezekiah happily welcomed the visitors and showed them what he had in his treasury—all the silver, the gold, the spices, and the expensive oils. He also showed them his whole armory and all that he had in his storehouses. In fact there wasn't anything in his palace or in the whole of his kingdom that Hezekiah didn't show them.

Then the prophet Isaiah went to King Hezekiah and asked him, "Where did those men come from, and what did they tell you?"

"They came to see me from a long way away, from Babylon," Hezekiah replied.

"What did they see in your palace?" Isaiah asked.

“They saw everything in my palace,” replied Hezekiah. “There wasn't anything in all my storehouses I didn't show them.”

Isaiah told Hezekiah, “Listen to what the Lord says: You can be certain that the time is coming when everything in your palace, and everything that your forefathers have saved up until now, will be taken away to Babylon. There will be nothing left, says the Lord. Some of your sons, your own offspring, will be taken to serve as eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.”

Hezekiah said to Isaiah, “The message from the Lord that you have told me is fine.” For he said to himself, “There'll definitely be peace and safety in my lifetime.”

“Comfort, yes comfort my people!” says your God. “Speak lovingly to the people of Jerusalem, telling them that their hard times are over, that their sins have been forgiven, and that the Lord has paid them twice over for their sins.”

A voice is heard calling, “Prepare the way for the Lord in the wilderness, make a straight highway for our God through the desert. Fill in all the valleys; level all the mountains and hills; smooth out the uneven ground; make the rough places flat. The Lord's glory will be revealed, and everyone will see it together. This is what the Lord has declared.”

A voice is heard saying, “Shout it out.” I asked, “What shall I shout?” “All human beings are like grass, and all their trustworthiness is like the flowers of the field. The grass wilts and the flower fades when the Lord breathes on them. Yes, the people are grass! However, even though the grass wilts and the flower fades, the word of our God will endure forever.”

Zion, bringer of good news, go up a high mountain. Jerusalem, bringer of good news, raise your voice and shout out loud. Don't be afraid to shout really loud! Tell the towns of Judah, “Here is your God!” Look! The Lord God is coming with power! He will rule with a firm hand. Look! He's bringing his reward with him, coming to give his gift. He looks after his flock like a shepherd. He picks up the lambs in his arms and holds them close to his chest. He leads those that are nursing young.

Who has measured the waters he holds in the palm of his hand? Who has marked off the heavens with the span of his hand? Who has worked out the amount of dust of the earth? Who has weighed the mountains on a scale and the hills with a balance? Who has measured the Spirit of the Lord, or taught him what to do as his counselor? Who did the Lord go to for advice to help him understand? Who taught him right from wrong? Who gave him knowledge and showed him the way of wisdom?

It's obvious that the nations are just a drop in a bucket. They're like dust on a set of scales. He can pick up islands as if they weigh next to nothing. All the wood in Lebanon for a fire and all its animals as a sacrifice wouldn't be enough to provide a burnt offering. To him all the nations are like nothing. He counts them as less than nothing—like they don't exist.

Who do you think is like God? What image do you think he looks like? Is he a metal idol that a craftsman casts in a mold, and then a goldsmith overlays it with gold and makes silver chains for it? Those who are too poor to pay for that choose wood that won't rot, then they look for a skilled wood-carver to make an idol that won't fall over.

Don't you know? Haven't you heard? Hasn't it been explained to you from the very beginning? Haven't you understood from the time the world was created? God sits on his throne above the horizon of the earth; the people that live there are like grasshoppers. He stretches out the heavens like a curtain, spreading them out like a tent to live in. He brings leaders down; he makes the rulers of the world like nothing. In fact they are hardly even planted, hardly even sown, hardly even taken root, when he blows on them and they wither, and the wind carries them away like straw.

“Who are you going to compare me with? Who is equal to me?” asks the Holy One.

Look at the heavens. Who created all this? He leads the stars like an army, and calls each one by name. Because he has great power and incredible strength, not a single one of them is missing.

Why do you speak like this, Jacob, and why do you say, Israel, “The Lord doesn't see what's happening to me, and he's ignoring my rights!”

Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The Lord is the eternal God, the Creator of the whole earth. He's never weak or tired; you can't find out all he knows. He gives strength to the weary and power to the powerless. Even young people grow weak and tired—they fall down when they're exhausted. But those who trust in the Lord will have their strength renewed. They will fly high with wings like eagles. They will run and not be tired. They will walk and not be worn out.

Listen to me in silence, you people who live in lands beyond the sea. Let the nations regain their strength. Then let them come and speak, and let us join together for judgment.

Who has encouraged this one from the east who is called into God's service to do what is right? He gives him nations, and helps him trample kings underfoot. He makes them like dust with his sword, and turns them into chaff with his bow, blown before him on the wind. He chases them down, and goes on unharmed, not following the usual routes. Who has achieved and done this, calling into existence each generation from the beginning of time? I, the Lord, the first and the last, I am the one.

The islands watch in fear, the distant lands tremble. They get together and consult. They all help each other, encouraging one another to “Be strong!” The craftsman encourages the goldsmith; the one who beats out the metal with a hammer encourages the one hitting the anvil, saying the soldering is good. They nail the idol down so it won't fall over.

But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, the ones I have chosen, descendants of my friend Abraham, I brought you back from distant lands, I called you back from faraway places, telling you, “You are my servants.” I have chosen you, and I have not abandoned you. Don't be afraid, for I am with you! Don't be frightened for I, your God, will make you strong, and I will certainly help you. I will support you with my strong hand, acting for what is right.

See—everyone who is angry with you will be ashamed and disgraced. Those who fight against you will end up as nothing and die. Even though you look for your enemies, you won't find them. Those who attack you will become absolutely nothing. For I the Lord will grab you by the hand and tell you, “Don't be afraid! I myself will help you. Don't be frightened, Jacob, you little worm, you people of Israel, for I will help you,” declared the Lord your Savior, the Holy One of Israel. Look! I will make you into a new and sharp threshing device, with many pointed teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush the hills, turning them into chaff. You will throw them into the air, the wind will carry them away, and a storm will scatter them. Then you will be happy in the Lord, and boast about the Holy One of Israel.

The poor and needy search for water, but don't find any—their tongues are dry with thirst. I, the Lord, will respond to them; I, the God of Israel, won't abandon them. I will open up rivers in the desolate highlands and springs in the valleys. I will make pools in the wilderness and springs in the desert. I will plant cedars, acacias, myrtles, and olive trees in the desert. I will place evergreens in the desert, firs and box trees together. In this way everyone can see and know, they can think about it and draw the conclusion that it is the Lord who has done this, that the Holy One of Israel made it happen.

“Now you submit your case,” says the Lord. “Present your evidence,” says the King of Jacob. “Let them come and tell us what's about to happen. Let them explain the things of the past, so that we can think about them and discover the final outcome. Or they can tell us about the future. Predict what's coming so we can know for sure that you are gods. At least do something, good or bad, to impress us when we see it. But look at you! You're nothing, and you can't do anything! Anyone who chooses you is disgusting!

I have encouraged the one who comes from the north. He is from the east, and will respect me. He will tread on rulers as if they were mortar, like a potter treading on clay.

Who announced this beforehand so that we could know about it? Who let us know in the past, so that now we could say: ‘He was right’? None of you announced it, none of you predicted it, and nobody heard you say a word! I was the first to announce to Zion: ‘Look, here they are!’ I was the one who brought to Jerusalem the good news. I look at these idols, and find there is no one who can say anything. None of them can give advice; when I ask them something, they can't even answer. Look at them! They're all evil, deceptive things. They can't do anything! They're just idols full of hot air!”

Look! Here is my servant, the one I support; my chosen one who pleases me. I have placed my Spirit on him, and he will show the nations what is right. He won't shout or cry out; he won't raise his voice in the street. He won't break a damaged reed; he won't snuff out a smoldering wick. He will faithfully make sure everyone is treated fairly. He won't give up or become discouraged until he has made sure that justice is upheld throughout the world. Even lands overseas will look forward to his teachings.

This is what God the Lord says, the one who created the heavens and stretched them out, who made the earth and everything in it, who gives breath to the people on it, and life to those who live there: “I, the Lord, have called you to demonstrate what's right, and I will hold your hand. I will take care of you, and give you as a sign of my agreement with the people and as a light to the nations. You will make the blind see, set free those who are locked up, and lead those who sit in darkness out from prison.

I am the Lord—that is my name! I do not give my honor to anyone else; I do not give my praise to idols. Notice that what I foretold has come true, as will the new things I'm saying to you now. I tell you what will happen before it does.”

Sing a new song to the Lord! Sing praise from everywhere on earth, you who sail on the sea and everything in it, you islands and everyone who lives in them. Let the people in the desert and its towns shout; let the people of the villages of Kedar cry out loud. Let the people of Sela sing for joy; let them shout from the mountain-tops. Let them glorify the Lord and praise him in the islands. Like a mighty warrior the Lord will march out, like a seasoned soldier he goes out with courage. He gives his war-cry, shouting as he battles and defeats his enemies.

“I didn't say anything for a long time, I kept quiet and restrained myself. But now like a woman giving birth, I will moan and gasp and pant. I will dry up the mountains and the hills, and make all their greenery wither. I will turn rivers into islands and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind along a road they don't know; I will guide them along paths they don't know. I will turn darkness into light before them, and smooth out the rough places. This is what I'm going to do for them; I won't let them down. But those who trust in idols and say to images, ‘You are our gods!’ will be rejected in humiliation and shame.

Listen, you deaf people! Look and see, you blind people! Who is blind like my servant? Who is deaf like my messenger that I send? Who is as blind as the people of the agreement? Who is as blind as the servant of the Lord? You've looked at many things but have not really seen; you've heard but never really listened.”

Because the Lord does what is right he wanted to show how important and wonderful his instructions were. But this people ended up robbed and raided, all of them trapped in holes or hidden in prisons. They have been stolen like loot, with no one to save them from being someone's prize, no one to say “Give them back!”

Who of you is going to listen to this, or pay attention later on? Who let Jacob be taken as loot; who let Israel be taken by robbers? Wasn't it the Lord who we sinned against? The people weren't willing to follow his ways, and they refused to obey his law. So he poured out his furious anger on them, and the violence of war. Even though they were surrounded by flames, but they still didn't understand. The fire burned them up, but they still did not take the situation seriously.

But now this is what the Lord says to Jacob, the one who created you; to Israel, the one who formed you: “Don't be afraid! I have saved you! I have called you by name; you are mine! When you walk through

the water, I will be with you; and when you go through the rivers, they won't flood over you. When you walk through fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you on fire. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt to pay for your freedom; I traded Ethiopia and Seba for you. Because you are so valuable to me, because I honor you, and because I love you, I give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your lives.

Don't be afraid, for I am with you! I will bring you and your children from the east and the west, and gather you together. I will tell the north, 'Hand them over!' and the south, 'Don't stop them!' Bring my sons back from far away and my daughters from distant lands. Bring back everyone who bears my name, those I created for my honor, those I formed and made.

Bring back those who have eyes but are blind, those who have ears but are deaf. Have all the nations gather together! Have all the peoples assemble! Who among them could have said this, and predict what was going to happen? Have them bring their witnesses to prove that they're right. Then have them listen, and say, 'It's true!'

However, you are my witnesses, the Lord declares, and my chosen servant, so that you can think about it, and believe me and understand that I am God. No god preceded me, and none will come after me. I, yes I am the Lord, and there is no Savior apart from me. I predicted what was going to happen, then I saved you, then I announced it—there was no foreign god among you that did this. You are my witnesses that I am God, declares the Lord. I am God from the beginning. No one can snatch anybody from my hand. No one can reverse what I do.

This is what the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, says: For your sake I will send attackers against Babylon and bring them down. All the Babylonians will be like fugitives, escaping in the ships they're so proud of. I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, and your King. This is what the Lord says, the one who makes a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters; the one who brought out a great army with its horses and chariots and laid them down, never to rise again, snuffed out like a burning wick.

But don't dwell on the past; don't concentrate on what happened back then. Just look at something new I'm going to do now! In fact it's started already. Can't you see it? Yes, I'm making a way through the wilderness, rivers in the desert! The wild animals will be grateful to me—the jackals and the owls—because I'm providing water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, so my people, my chosen people, can drink. I made this people for myself so that through their praise for me they could make me known.

But you haven't called on me for help, Jacob. You've grown tired of me, Israel. You haven't brought me sheep for burnt offerings; you haven't honored me with your sacrifices. I haven't burdened you by asking for grain offerings; I haven't tired you out by demanding incense. You haven't used your money to buy scented calamus; you have not pleased me with the fat of your sacrifices. Instead you have burdened me with your sins, and tired me out with your guilt. I, yes I am the God who wipes out your sins because of who I am, and who doesn't remember your sins any more. Remind me of the evidence so we can come to a decision together! Present your case to prove that you're right! Your very first father sinned, and your leaders rebelled against me. So I treated the priests of the sanctuary with contempt, and I handed Jacob over to be destroyed, and Israel to be scorned."

But now listen, Jacob, my servant, Israel, the one I've chosen. This is what the Lord says, the one who made you, who formed you in the womb, and who will help you: Don't be afraid, Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun, the one I've chosen. For I'm going to pour out water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. I'm going to pour out my Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your children. They will grow up among the grass, like willows beside streams. One of them will say, "I belong to the Lord," while another will call himself by the name Jacob, and yet another will write on his hand, "Belonging to the Lord," and will name himself Israel.

This is what the Lord says, the King and Redeemer of Israel, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides me. Who is like me? Let them announce it, make a declaration, and demonstrate it before me. For I was the one who long ago established a people and predicted its future. Let them predict what's going to happen. Don't tremble, don't be afraid! Didn't I tell you long ago what I was going to do? Didn't I explain it? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? There is no other Rock—I don't know any!

All those who make idols are stupid; these things they love so much don't bring them any benefit. Those people who believe in idols can't see this, and they don't know anything, making them look foolish. Who makes a god, who molds an idol that's no use to them? Everyone who makes idols should be ashamed of themselves. Idol-makers are just human beings! Bring them all together and have them stand up, trembling in shame.

The blacksmith makes an iron tool for woodcarving. Working over hot coals, he hammers it into shape as hard as he can. He gets hungry and loses his strength, and because he doesn't drink he grows weak. The woodworker measures out a piece of wood, and draws an image on it. He carves it with a chisel and uses a compass to make an outline. He creates an idol that looks like a person, someone beautiful, to be put in a shrine. He chops down cedars, or takes a cypress or an oak. He lets them grow strong in the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain makes it grow. Some wood he burns, to keep him warm and to bake his bread. Then he uses some of the same wood to make a god to worship, an idol he bows down to! So he burns part of the wood to roast his meat to eat, and to warm him up, and says, "Ah! Look at that fire that keeps me warm!" Then he uses the rest of the wood to make himself a god, an idol he bows down to in worship and prays to, saying, "Save me, for you are my god!"

How ignorant they are, how dumb! Their eyes have been plastered over so they can't see, their minds closed so they don't have insight. They can't think things over, they don't have the wisdom or the understanding to say,

"Some of the wood I burned in the fire—I used it to bake my bread and roast my meat to eat. The rest of it I used to make a disgusting idol, and I bow down in worship to a block of wood." He is feeding on ashes, seduced by the deceptive thinking of his mind. He can't save himself, and he doesn't even ask, "Isn't this idol I'm holding just a lie?"

"Remember all this, Jacob and Israel, for you are my servant. I made you, Israel, you are my servant. I won't forget you. I have wiped away your acts of rebellion as if they were like a cloud, your sins as if they were like the mist. Come back to me, for I have set you free."

Sing in celebration, you heavens, for the Lord has done this; cry out loud, you depths of the earth. Shout with joy, you mountains, you forests and every tree. For the Lord has set Jacob free, and his glory is shown in Israel!

This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer, who shaped you in the womb: "I am the Lord, the Creator of everything. I alone made the heavens, and I myself formed the earth. I am the one who proves the signs of false prophets are wrong. I am the one who makes fools of fortune-tellers. I turn the wisdom of the wise upside down, and make their knowledge ridiculous. But I confirm the messages given by my servants, and fulfill what my messengers say. They state, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited again, the towns of Judah will be rebuilt, your ruins will be repaired.' When I order deep waters, 'Dry up!' I will make sure the rivers dry up! When I say to Cyrus, 'You are my shepherd,' he will carry out everything I wish. He will give the order, 'Jerusalem shall be rebuilt,' and he will say, 'the Temple shall be restored.'"

This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, the one he has anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to direct him to defeat nations and to make kings weak, to open doors before him and gates that will not be shut. I will go ahead of you and level the mountains. I will break down bronze gates and cut through iron bars. I will give you hidden treasure, treasure concealed in secret places, so that you can know for sure that I am the Lord, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name.

I call you by name and I have given you a title of honor, for the sake of Jacob my servant, and Israel the one I chose, even though you don't know me. I am the Lord, there is no God apart from me. Apart from me there is no God. I will make you strong, even though you don't know me, so that everyone, from the east to the west, will know that there is no God apart from me, that I am the Lord, and there is none apart from me. I create light, and I make darkness, I bring peace and I bring about disaster. I am the Lord and I do all this. Let the rain fall from the sky above, let goodness fall from the clouds, let the earth open up to receive goodness and salvation so they can grow together. I, the Lord, created them.

What trouble people face when they fight with their Creator—they're just pots among all the other pots on earth! Does the clay tell the potter who is shaping it, "What are you doing?" or "What you're making is so bad it's like you have no hands!" How bad it would be if you said to your father, "Why did you have me?" or to your mother, "Why was I ever born?"!

This is what the Lord says, the Holy One of Israel, your Creator: You can ask me about things to come. But are you going to lecture me about my children and what I do? I'm the one who made the earth, and I created human beings to live there. It was my hands that stretched out the heavens, and I ordered all the stars to come into being.

Because I do what's right, I will encourage him and smooth out all the roads he takes. He will rebuild my city and will set my exiles free without being paid or bribed to do so, says the Lord Almighty.

This is what the Lord says: The productive Egyptians and the Ethiopian traders, as well as the tall Sabean people, will come over to you and will belong to you. They will walk behind you in chains and bow down to you, pleading with you, saying, "God is certainly with you, and there is no other God besides him."

Yet you are a God who hides himself, God of Israel, Savior. Everyone who makes idols are ashamed and humiliated, all of them are disgraced. But Israel will be saved by the Lord with a salvation that lasts forever. You will never be ashamed or disgraced for all eternity.

For this is what the Lord says, the God who created the heavens, who formed and made the earth, he founded it. He didn't make it to be left empty, but formed it to be inhabited. He is the one who says, I am the Lord, and there is no God apart from me. I haven't been talking in secret in an obscure place. I didn't tell the descendants of Jacob: Look for me in a place where no one can be found. I, the Lord, tell the truth—I say what's right.

Gather yourselves together, and come, come close, you refugees of the nations. Aren't they stupid, these people who carry around their wooden idols, and who pray to a god that can't save them? Discuss this together, and then speak up, present your case. Who predicted this long ago? Who said what would happen in the future back in the past? Wasn't that me, the Lord? There is no other God except me, no other God who does what is right, and who saves. There is no God apart from me. Everyone on earth, come to me and be saved, for I am God and there is no God apart from me. I have sworn by my own self, I have spoken what is right, and I won't ever go back on it. Everyone shall bow before me; everyone shall acknowledge me. They will say about me, "Salvation and strength can only be found in the Lord." Everyone who has fought against him will come to him and will be ashamed. But in the Lord all the descendants of Israel will be made right, and they will glory in him.

Bel bows down, Nebo bends low; their idols are carried off on beasts of burden, a heavy weight for the tired animals. They bend low and bow down together—they can't help rescue their idols, and they themselves go off into captivity.

Listen to me, descendants of Jacob, all those who are left of the people of Israel. I have looked after you since you were born, carrying you from birth. Even when you're old, I will still be your God; even when your hair turns white, I will still support you. I made you, I will carry you, I will support you, and I will save you.

Can you think of anyone who is like me? Can you consider anyone to be my equal? Can you compare anyone with me, as if we were alike?

There are those who extravagantly tip out gold from their bags, and weigh out silver on the scales, and hire a goldsmith to make them a god they can bow down to and worship. They lift the idol onto their shoulders, carry it along, and then put it in place. It stays there and doesn't move. Even when people cry out to it for help, it doesn't answer—it can't save them from their troubles.

Remember this, and act like men! Think about it, you rebels! Remember what I've done for you since the beginning, for I am God, and there is no God apart from me. I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the very beginning, declaring from ancient times what the future will bring. Whatever I plan will take place; I will accomplish everything I wish. I'm calling a bird of prey from the east, a man from a distant country who will carry out my plan. I have spoken, and I will make sure it happens. I have made my plan, and I will carry it out.

Listen to me, you stubborn people, who are such a long way from doing what's right! Very shortly I am going to make things right—it won't be long. I will come with my salvation without delay—I will save Zion to demonstrate my glory to Israel.

Go down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon. Sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of Babylonia! No longer will people call you gentle and delicate. Go to work grinding flour with millstones. Remove your veil. Strip off your skirt, bare your legs, wade through rivers. You will be seen naked; what should be kept private will be shamefully exposed. I will take vengeance—I won't spare anyone.

Our Redeemer—his name is the Lord Almighty—is the Holy One of Israel.

Sit quietly, and go into the darkness, daughter of Babylonia. Never again will you be called queen of all kingdoms. I was angry with my people, and I abandoned those who belonged to me. I handed them over to you. But you didn't show them mercy—you even mistreated old people. You said, “I will reign forever as the eternal queen.” But you didn't think about what was coming; you didn't remember what would happen to you in the end.

Now listen to this, you sensual woman, sitting there so sure of yourself, saying to yourself, “I am supreme—there's nobody besides me. I shall never be a widow or experience the loss of my children.”

But both these things will happen to you in quick succession! In just one day you will lose your children and become a widow. You will have this experience in its totality, in spite of all your witchcraft, in spite of all your magic spells. You put your trust in your evil actions, saying, “No one can see what I'm doing.” Your wisdom and knowledge seduced you, and you told yourself, “I am supreme—there's nobody besides me.” Evil is going to strike you, and you won't be able to magic it away. Disaster will fall on you that you can't stop by paying a ransom. Destruction will suddenly hit you that you weren't expecting.

So keep going with your magic spells and all your witchcraft, which you have worked at since you were young. Maybe you'll be successful, maybe you'll terrify people! All the advice you've received has worn you out! Where are your astrologers, those who look to the stars for guidance, who give you their predictions every month? Let them stand up and save you from what's coming down on you! But look at them! They're like stubble that fire burns up completely—they can't even save their own lives from the flames. This is no fire to sit beside and grow warm! All those people you've worked with, all those you've traded with from when you were young—they will all go their own way, nobody will come and save you.

Listen to this, descendants of Jacob, called by the name of Israel, and who come from the lineage of Judah. Listen, you people who swear by the name of the Lord, or who invoke the God of Israel, but not truly or sincerely. You say you're from the “Holy City,” and claim you're trusting in the God of Israel, whose name is the Lord Almighty. I predicted long ago what was going to happen—I said it and let people know. Then suddenly I decided to act, and it all came true. I know how stubborn you are, with necks as unbending as iron and foreheads as hard as bronze. I predicted these things to you long ago, before they happened. I explained them to you so that you couldn't say “My idol did this,” or “My image and my metal god ordered this to happen.” You've heard all I predicted, and seen it happen. Won't you admit it? Now I'm going to tell you new things, secrets you don't know anything about. These are brand-new, not something from the past. Before today you won't have heard anything about them, so you can't say, “Oh yes, I know about that.”

No, you've never heard that, and you've never known that! Nobody's told you about that before! I know how deviously you operate—you're called “rebels from birth”! But because of my nature I am delaying my punishment; and because of my reputation, I'm not going to destroy you. Look how I've refined you, but not like silver—I chose you in the furnace of trouble. The reason I'm doing this is because of who I am, yes, because of my very nature. I won't let my reputation be damaged—I won't let anyone else have it.

Listen to me, Jacob, and Israel, the one I called. Only I am God. I am the first, and I am the last. I laid the foundations of the earth with my own hands; I personally spread out the heavens. When I call the stars, they all take their positions.

Everyone gather round and listen. Which of your “gods” told you anything like this? The one the Lord loves will carry out the Lord's wishes against Babylon—he will attack the Babylonians. I myself have spoken. I have called him to do this, and he will be successful in what he does. Come close to me, and listen to this. From the very beginning I haven't spoken in secret; I am always there right when it happens. Now the Lord God and his Spirit has sent me to tell you this:

This is what the Lord says, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, I am the Lord your God. I am the one who teaches you what is good for you, who leads you along the way you should go. If you had only listened carefully to what I told you! Then your blessings would have

flowed like a river, and goodness would have washed over you like the waves of the sea. Your children, your descendants, would have been like all those grains of sand. They wouldn't have had to be destroyed, wiped out before me. Leave Babylon! Run away from Babylonia with happy shouts! Let everyone know, telling the whole earth, “The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!” They weren't thirsty when he led them through the desert—he made water come out of the rock for them. He split the rock open and water poured out.

The wicked have no peace, says the Lord.

Listen to me, you people of the islands! Pay attention, you who live far away! The Lord called me before I was born; he gave me my name while I was still in my mother's womb. The words he gave me to speak are like a sharp sword. He has protected me by covering me with his hand. He put me in his quiver like a sharp arrow, keeping me safe there.

He told me, “You are my servant, Israel, and I will reveal my glory through you.”

But I replied, “I've worked for nothing! I've exhausted myself, and for what? Even so, I leave it with the Lord to do what's right, and my reward is with my God.”

Now my Lord is going to speak, the one who formed me in the womb as his servant to bring Jacob back to him, to gather Israel to himself. I am honored in the Lord's sight, and my God has given me strength. He says, “It's nothing much for you to be my servant to bring back the tribes of Jacob, those people of Israel that I've preserved. I'm also going to make you a light for the foreigners so that my salvation may reach everybody.”

This is what the Lord says, the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel, to the one who was despised and detested by the nation, to the one who is the servant of rulers: Kings will see you and stand up, and princes will bow down to you, because the Lord, who is trustworthy, the Holy One of Israel, has chosen you.

This is what the Lord says: I will answer you at the proper time; I will help you on the day of salvation. I will take care of you, and I will give you to the people as my agreement with them, to restore the land and to reassign the parts that have been abandoned. Tell the prisoners, “Come out!” Tell those living in darkness, “Come into the light!” Like sheep they will feed along the roads and in the pastures on hills that once were barren. They won't be hungry or thirsty, and they won't get hot in the sun, for the one who loves them will lead them to springs, and guide them to water. I will turn all my mountains into a road; my highways will be really high! Look at these people coming from far away! Look at these people coming from the north, and from the west, and from Upper Egypt. Heavens, shout for joy! Earth, celebrate! Mountains, sing out in happiness! The Lord has come to care for his people, and he will treat his suffering people kindly.

But Zion said, “The Lord has given up on me; the Lord has forgotten about me.”

Really? Can a mother forget her nursing baby? Can she forget to be kind to the child she carried in her womb? Even if she could forget, I will never forget you! Look at your names I've written on the palms of my hands! I'm always thinking about your walls. Soon your children will come running back. Your destroyers, those that devastated your land, will be gone. Take a look around. See all your children gathering and coming back to you. As I live, declares the Lord, you will wear them all as jewelry, proudly putting them on like a bride. Your ruined towns and abandoned places and devastated lands will be crowded with people, while those who took over your country will be long gone. The children born during your time of mourning in exile will say, “This place is too crowded for me! Make room so I have a place to live!” Then you will say to yourself, “Who gave birth to all these children for me? My children were killed and I was unable to have more; I was exiled and thrown aside—so who brought these children up? Look, I was abandoned, so where did they come from?”

This is what the Lord God says, Watch as I give the signal to the nations, as I raise my flag to let everyone know. They will bring them back, carrying your sons in their arms, and lifting your daughters onto their shoulders. Kings will be your childminders; queens will be your nurses. They will bow low before you, and lick the dust from your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord, and that those who put their trust in me will never be ashamed.

Can loot be taken from a warrior? Can prisoners be rescued from a dictator? But this is what the Lord says: Even the prisoners of warriors will be won back; even loot will be recovered from a dictator. I will fight with your enemies, and I will rescue your children. I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh and drink their own blood like wine. Then everyone will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel.

This is what the Lord says: Where's your mother's divorce certificate I gave her when I sent her away? Which of my creditors did I sell you to? Now look! You were sold because of your sins, and your mother was sent away because of your wrongdoing. When I came, why wasn't anyone there? When I called, why didn't anyone answer? Is it because I don't have the strength to save you, or the power to rescue you? Can't you see that if I order it, the sea will dry up? I can turn rivers into a desert. Their fish stink because they've died of thirst since there's no water. I can make the heavens go dark, covering them with sackcloth like they're in mourning.

The Lord God has given me the ability to teach others, to know how to encourage those who are exhausted with a word. He wakes me up every morning; he helps me listen as a disciple. The Lord God has instructed me, and I haven't been rebellious and I haven't turned away. I offered my back for people to beat me and my cheeks for people to pull my beard. I didn't hide my face from their mocking and spitting.

The Lord God helps me, so I haven't been disgraced. That's why I'm so determined, setting my face hard as stone, knowing I won't be humiliated. The one who vindicates me is close by, so who will bring charges against me? Let's stand to oppose one another! Come on, anyone who wants to accuse me! The Lord God defends me. Who is going to declare me guilty? Look!

Those who try will fall apart like old clothing, eaten up by moths.

Who among you respects the Lord and obeys what his servant says? Who among you walks in darkness and doesn't have light? Let them trust in the Lord and put their confidence in God. Beware all you who start a fire, who pick up blazing torches! Go ahead, walk in the light of your own fire and of the torches you yourselves have set alight! This is what you will receive from me: You are going to lie down in a place of suffering.

Listen to me, those of you who follow what is right, and who worship the Lord. Think about the rock from which you were cut, and to the quarry from which you were chiseled. Look back at Abraham your father, and Sarah who gave birth to you. When I called him, he was only one man, but then I blessed him and he had many descendants.

The Lord will care for Zion and feel sorry about all her ruined places. He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert areas like the garden of the Lord. People there will have joy and happiness, giving thanks and singing sweet songs. Pay attention to me, my people; listen to me, my nation: I will send out my law, and my justice will be a light to the nations. My rule of right will arrive soon. My salvation is coming. My power will bring judgment to the nations. The distant lands are waiting for me and my power. Look up at the heavens, and look down at the earth beneath. The heavens will disappear like smoke, the earth will wear out like old clothes. The people living there will die like flies, but my salvation will last forever, and my way of goodness and right will never be destroyed.

Listen to me, you who know what's right, and who have really accepted my teachings. Don't be afraid of people's insults—they're just human—or be terrified by their abusive language. Moths will eat them up like clothing; bugs will chew through them like wool. But my goodness will last forever, my salvation will endure for all generations.

Please wake up, wake up! Use your strength, powerful Lord! Act as you used to in olden days, in former generations. Weren't you the one who cut Rahab to pieces, who killed that sea monster? Weren't you the one who dried up the sea, making a way through the deep waters for the redeemed to cross over? Those the Lord has set free will return, singing as they enter Jerusalem, wearing crowns of everlasting joy. They are overcome with thankfulness and happiness; sorrow and sadness simply disappear.

It's me, yes, I am the one who comforts you. Why should you be afraid of mortals who die just like grass? You have forgotten the Lord, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and who laid the foundations of the earth! That's why you shake with fear all day long, because you're threatened by the anger of those who oppress you, wanting to destroy you. But where are your oppressors and their anger now? The prisoners that are bowed down will soon be set free. They're not going to die; they won't go on being hungry. For I am the Lord your God who whips up the sea so its waves roar. The Lord Almighty is his name. I have told you what to say, and I have protected you with my hand. I created the heavens and founded the earth, and told Zion, “You are my people.”

Wake up, wake up! Get up, Jerusalem! You have drunk from the cup of the Lord's anger he handed to you. You have drained it down to the bottom of the cup, the drink that makes people stagger around. Of all your children you had, there's not one left to guide you. Of all the children you raised, there's not one to take you by the hand. Two tragedies have struck you: devastation caused by famine, and destruction caused by war. Who is going to sympathize with you? Who is going to comfort you? Your children have collapsed, lying in every street like antelopes caught in a trap. They experienced the full anger of the Lord, the condemnation of your God.

So please listen to this, you poor people, sitting there in a drunken state, but not from drinking wine. This is what your Lord God says, your God, who defends his people's cause: Look! I have taken away from you the cup that made you stagger around. You will never again have to drink from that cup, the cup of my anger. Instead I will give that cup to the people who tormented you, to those who said to you, “Lie facedown so we can walk all over you.” You had to make your backs like the ground, like a street to be walked on.

Wake up, wake up, Zion! Be strong! Put on your best clothes, Jerusalem, the holy city. Heathen foreigners won't ever enter you again. Shake yourself free from the dust and get up. Sit on your throne, Jerusalem. Throw off the chains around your neck, captive daughter of Zion. This is what the Lord says: You were sold for nothing, and you will be bought back without money.

This is what the Lord God says: First of all, my people went to live in Egypt, then Assyria conquered them for no reason. What do I have to do now? asks the Lord. My people have been taken into captivity for no reason. Those who rule them mock them, and I'm treated with contempt that whole time, says the Lord. So I'm going to make sure my people know me; at that time they will know that I am the one who means what he says. Yes, it's me!

What a wonderful sight in the mountains is the one running to bring good news, announcing peace and good news, announcing salvation, telling Zion, “Your God reigns!” The city watchmen shout loudly and sing for joy together; they all see the Lord returning to Jerusalem. Let Jerusalem's ruins all sing for joy for the Lord has come to care for his people; he has set Jerusalem free. The Lord has demonstrated his holy power to all the nations; the whole world will see our God's salvation.

Leave, leave, get out of there! Don't bring anything pagan; come out and leave it all behind. Those of you who carry the Lord's sacred articles are to purify yourselves. But don't leave in a hurry, don't be in a rush as if you're running away, for the Lord will go ahead of you, and he will also protect those at the back.

Look: my servant will act wisely; he will be praised highly, he will be elevated in position, and seen as someone people look up to. But many were horrified by him, so disfigured in appearance, no longer looking like a man, so unlike anyone human. He will surprise many nations, and kings will keep quiet because of him

—for they'll see what they haven't been told, and they'll understand what they hadn't heard.

Has anyone believed our news? Who has the Lord shown his power to? Like a young shoot he grew up before him, like a root growing up from dry ground. He had no beauty or glory to make us look at him; nothing about his appearance attracted us to him. People despised him and rejected him. He was a man who really suffered and who experienced the deepest pain. We treated him like someone you turn away from in disgust—we despised him and had no respect for him.

However, he was the one who took up our weaknesses and loaded himself down with our pain—but we assumed he was being hit, beaten, and humiliated by God. But he was wounded because of our rebellious acts, he was crushed because of our guilt. He experienced the discipline that brings us peace, and his wounds heal us. All of us have wandered off, just like sheep. Each of us has gone our own way, and the Lord allowed all our guilt to fall on him.

He was persecuted and mistreated, but he didn't say anything. He was led like a lamb to be killed, and in the same way that a sheep about to be sheared is silent, he didn't say a word. Through force and a death sentence he was killed—who cared what happened to him? He was executed, removed from the land of the living; he was killed because of my people's wickedness. They buried him as if he was someone evil, giving him a rich man's grave, even though he hadn't done anything wrong, and he hadn't told any lies.

However, it was the Lord's will for him to be crushed and to suffer, for when he gives his life as a guilt offering he will see his descendants, he will have a long life, and what the Lord wants will be achieved through him. After his suffering, he will see the results and be satisfied. Through his knowledge my servant who does what is right will set many right, and he will bear their sins. That's why I'm going to grant him a place among the great, and give him the prize of the victorious, because he poured out his life in death and was counted as one of the rebels. He took on himself the sins of many and asked forgiveness for the rebels.

Sing for joy, childless woman, you who haven't had a baby! Shout aloud, and sing happily, Jerusalem, you who have never given birth! For the abandoned woman now has more children than the married woman, says the Lord. Make the tent where you live bigger; stretch the fabric to enlarge your home. Don't try and save space—extend your tent cords and make your tent pegs stronger. You're going to be spreading out right and left; your descendants will take over the land of other nations and live in towns that were once abandoned.

Do not be afraid, for you won't be humiliated; don't be upset, for you won't be disgraced. You will forget about the shame of your youth, and you won't remember the embarrassment of your widowhood any longer. For your Maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name. The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, he is called the God of the whole earth. The Lord has called you to come back, like a wife who's been abandoned and deeply hurt, a wife who was married when she was young, only to be rejected, says your God. I deserted you for just a little while, but I will bring you back, showing you a great deal of kindness. In a moment of anger I turned my face away from you, but now with trustworthy love I will always be kind to you, says the Lord, your Redeemer.

To me this is just like Noah's time, when I promised with an oath that a flood would never cover the earth again. In the same way I promise with an oath that I won't be angry with you or tell you off. Though the mountains cease to exist and the hills disappear, yet my trustworthy love for you won't cease to exist and my agreement of peace won't disappear, says the Lord, who shows you kindness.

My poor storm-damaged city that can't be comforted! Look, I'm going to reset your stones in cement made of antimony, I will use sapphires to lay your foundations. I will make your fortifications out of rubies; I will make your gates out of sparkling beryl. All your walls will be made of precious stones, and all your children will be students of the Lord, and they will live in complete peace. Your society will operate from principles of goodness and right; nobody will be there to oppress you. You won't be afraid; you won't have to face any kind of terror. If any invader comes to attack you, I didn't send them; you will defeat anyone who attacks you.

Look—I have created a blacksmith who blows the coals into a hot flame and forges a suitable weapon; and I have created the destroyer who brings destruction. None of the weapons forged against you will succeed, and you will condemn anyone who accuses you. This is how the servants of the Lord are blessed, and I am the one who vindicates them, declares the Lord.

Come, every one of you who's thirsty, come and drink the water! You who don't have money, come—you can buy and eat! Come and buy wine and milk—you don't need money; there's no cost! Why are you spending money on what isn't food, and why work for something that doesn't satisfy you? Listen carefully to me: eat what is good, and you'll enjoy the very best food.

Come here to me, and pay attention, so you can truly live. I'm going to make an agreement with you that will last forever, based on the trustworthy love I showed to David. See how I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for them. You will call nations you don't even know, and nations who don't know you will come running to you. For the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, I made you glorious.

Look for the Lord while you can still find him; call out to him while he's nearby. Wicked people should change their ways and get rid of even the thought of doing something wrong. They should turn to the Lord so he can be merciful to them. Come back to our God, because he's generous with his forgiveness.

For your thoughts are not my thoughts; and your ways are not my ways, declares the Lord. In the same way the heavens are higher than the earth, my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.

It's like the rain and snow that fall from heaven. They don't go back there until they've watered the earth, making plants grow and flower, providing seeds for the sower and food to eat. In the same way the

words I say don't come back to me unfulfilled, they accomplish what I want—they successfully achieve my purpose. You will live happily, taught the ways of peace. Mountains and hills will celebrate, singing beside you; and all the trees will clap their hands! Cypress trees will grow instead of thorn bushes; myrtle trees will grow instead of brambles. This is to confirm the Lord's reputation—an everlasting sign, never to be destroyed.

This is what the Lord says: Follow the law, and do what is right, for my salvation will soon arrive, and my goodness will be revealed. Blessed is everyone who does this—those who keep to it, who observe the Sabbath without violating it, and who don't do anything wrong.

Don't allow foreigners who have dedicated themselves to the Lord say, “The Lord will definitely exclude me from his people.” And don't allow eunuchs to say, “Look at me—I'm as worthless as a dried-up tree because I'm childless.”

For this is what the Lord says: To the eunuchs who observe my Sabbaths, who choose to do what pleases me, and to keep my agreement, I will give them, in my house and within my walls, a place to remember them and a reputation better than that of sons and daughters. I will give them an everlasting reputation that will never fade.

About the foreigners who have dedicated themselves to the Lord, who worship him, who love the Lord, and who are his servants—all who observe the Sabbath without violating it and who keep to my agreement—I will bring these foreigners to my holy mountain and make them happy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations. This is what the Lord God says, who brought back the scattered people of Israel: I will bring back still others to join you.

Come, wild animals, wild animals of the countryside and forests, come and eat my people! For all the watchmen are blind. None of them know what's going on. They're all silent—they can't bark. They spend their time lying down, dreaming, loving to sleep. They're greedy dogs that are never satisfied. They're sheepdogs who don't know their job. All of them go their own way, each of them looking out for themselves.

“Come on,” they say, “I'll get some wine and let's get drunk! We'll do this today, and tomorrow we'll drink so much more!”

Good people die, and nobody cares; the faithful pass away, and nobody thinks that they were being protected from evil. Those who follow what's right rest in peace; they find rest as they lie down in death.

But as for you, children of fortune-tellers, the product of adultery and prostitution—come here! Who are you making fun of when you make sneering faces and stick out your tongues? Aren't you the children of sin and lies? You're the ones having pagan orgies under the oak trees, under every green tree. You sacrifice your children in the valleys and among the rocky peaks. You have chosen to worship the smooth stones from the streams of the valleys—that's the choice you've made! You have poured out drink offerings to these idols—you have presented them with grain offerings. Should that make me happy? You have committed adultery by idol worship on every high mountain; you went there to offer pagan sacrifices. You've placed your pagan signs behind your doors and on your doorposts. Deserting me, you took off your clothes and climbed into bed, committing yourselves to those you love, going to bed with them. You've seen them naked. You went to offer Molech olive oil, covering yourselves with many perfumes. You sent your messengers to distant places; you even went down into the world of the dead. You wore yourselves out by such running around, but you didn't give up and say, “It's hopeless!” You found new strength and so didn't become weak.

Who were you scared of, who frightened you so much that you lied to me, didn't remember me, didn't even think about me? Is it because I've been quiet for so long that you don't even fear me? I'm going to let everyone know about how you're “so good” and the things you do—but they won't help you! When you cry out for help, let's see if your collection of idols will save you! The wind will blow them all away, just a breath and they're gone! But whoever comes to me for help will own the land and possess my holy mountain.

He will say, Build a highway, remove anything that's in the way of my people. This is what the one who is high above all says, he who lives in eternity, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, together with those who repent and who act humbly, restoring their spirits and encouraging them. I won't fight with you forever; I won't be angry with you forever. Otherwise you'd lose heart, the very people I gave life to.

Yes, I was angry with these sinful, greedy people so I punished them. I was angry, so I hid myself from them, but they went on their own rebellious way, doing whatever they wanted. I know what they're doing, but I will heal them. I will lead them and comfort those who mourn, so they will be able to say thank you. The Lord declares, Peace, peace, to those who are far away and those who are near. I will heal you. But the wicked are like the sea that is tossed about, never keeping still, churning up the mud and muck with its waves. There's no peace for the wicked, says my God.

Give a roar from the throat! Don't hold back! Shout out like a trumpet! Announce to my people how rebellious they are; denounce to the descendants of Jacob their sins. Every day they come to me, pleased to know my ways as if they were a nation that does what is right and follows the laws of their God! They ask me to treat them right; they like to be close to their God.

“Didn't you see that we fasted?” they ask. “Didn't you notice how we denied ourselves?”

That's because whenever you fast you still do whatever you want, and you treat your workers badly. Can't you see that when you're fasting you quarrel and argue, and end up having a vicious fistfight? When you fast like this you can't expect your prayers to be heard on high! Is this the kind of fast I want when people act out their humility by bowing their heads down like a reed and by lying around in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day the Lord appreciates? No, this is the fast I want: set free those who have been unjustly imprisoned, untie the cords of the yoke used to burden people, set free those who are oppressed, and get rid of

every form of abuse. Share your food with the hungry, take the poor and homeless into your house. When you see people naked, give them clothes, and don't reject your own relatives.

Then your light will shine out like the dawn, and you will be healed quickly; your salvation will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will go behind you. Then when you call, the Lord will answer; when you cry out for help, the Lord will say, “I'm here.” If you get rid of oppression among you, if you stop pointing the finger and slandering others, if you dedicate yourselves to helping the hungry and give the poor what they need, then your light will shine out in the darkness, and your night will be like the sun at noon. The Lord will always lead you; he will give you all you need in a desolate land; he will make you strong again. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring that never runs dry. Some among you will rebuild the ancient ruins; you will restore generations-old foundations. You will be called the Repairer of the Break in the Wall, the Restorer of Life's Pathways.

If you make sure you don't break the Sabbath by doing whatever you please on my holy day, if you say the Sabbath brings you pleasure and the Lord's day is to be honored, and if you honor it by leaving aside your own ways, by not doing whatever you please, and by avoiding chatting about ordinary things, then you'll find the Lord is the one who truly makes you happy, and I will give you high positions on the earth and give you what I promised to Jacob, your forefather. I, the Lord, have spoken.

Don't you see? The Lord's arm isn't too weak to save you, and his ear isn't too deaf to hear you! It's your guilt that has created a barrier between you and your God; your sins have hidden his face from you so he can't hear you. Your hands are covered in blood and your fingers tainted with guilt, your lips speak lies and your mouth whispers evil things.

Nobody wants justice, nobody pleads their case with honesty. They rely on false testimony, and tell lies. They conceive evil plans, and give birth to trouble. They hatch viper's eggs, and weave a spider's web. If you eat their eggs you'll die; if you crush their eggs you'll only hatch snakes. Their webs can't be made into clothes; they can't cover themselves by what they produce. What they do is wicked; they use their hands to commit violence. They run to do evil; they're quick to murder innocent people. Their minds are full of sinful thoughts; they only cause havoc and destruction. They don't know how to live in peace; they're not straight and fair with others. Their way is totally crooked, and anyone who follows them won't experience any peace.

So that's why we don't have justice, and we don't do what's right. We look for the light, but only find the dark; we look for bright light, but we walk in deep darkness. We grope like blind people along a wall, feeling with our hands as if we have no eyes. We stumble at noon as if it were the evening. Among those who are full of life, we are like the dead. All of us growl like bears and coo like doves as we wait for justice to be done, but it never happens; we wait for salvation, but never receive it. You are aware of all our rebellious acts; our sins witness against us. Yes, we acknowledge our rebellious acts; we know all about our sins. We have disobeyed and denied you, Lord; we have turned our backs on our God. We have encouraged oppression and rebellion, telling lies we've carefully thought out. Justice is rejected, and doing right never happens. Truth falls down in the street, and honesty is banned. There's no truth anywhere, and anyone who does give up evil is robbed. The Lord saw what was going on, and was upset that there was no justice. He looked around, and he was appalled to find there was no one who would do anything about it, so he intervened himself, and his sense of what was right kept him going. He put on integrity as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on clothes of vengeance and wrapped himself with determination as a cloak. He will repay everyone for what they've done: fury to his enemies, revenge to those who oppose him, payback to the distant lands. Those in the west will be in awe of the Lord, and those in the east will be amazed at his glory, for he will arrive like a raging flood, driven by the Spirit of the Lord.

The Redeemer will come to Zion, to Jacob's descendants who turn from their sins, declares the Lord. This is my agreement with them, says the Lord. My Spirit, who is upon you, won't leave you, and my words that I have given you to speak will always be on your lips, on the lips of your children, and on the lips of your descendants, from now until forever, says the Lord.

Stand up and shine, for your light has come; the glory of the Lord has risen on you. Even though darkness covers the earth, and deep darkness covers the people, the Lord has risen to shine on you, and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings will come to the brightness of your shining dawn.

Look all around you, and see everyone gathering and coming to you—your sons returning from far away, your young daughters being carried on the hip. Then you will see and shine brilliantly, your heart will beat wildly for joy, for the riches that cross the sea, the wealth of the nations, will be brought to you. Long caravans of camels will cover the land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. All the people of Sheba will come to you carrying gold and frankincense, shouting praises to the Lord. All the flocks of Kedar will be brought to you, the rams of Nebaioth will be placed at your disposal. I will accept them as they are sacrificed on my altar, and I will glorify the Temple where I'm honored.

What are these flying like a cloud, flying like pigeons returning to their roost? These are ships led by those of Tarshish, coming from the islands that trust in me, bringing your children home from far away, and carrying with them silver and gold. They come to honor the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has made you glorious.

Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will work for you. Even though I did hit you when I was angry with you, now I will be kind and merciful to you. Your gates will always be kept open. They won't ever be shut, day or night, so the wealth of the nations can be brought to you, with their kings being led along in a procession. Any nation or kingdom that does not serve you will be completely destroyed. The glory of Lebanon will come to you: cedars, acacias, and myrtle

trees, to make my Temple beautiful and to honor the place I choose to live. The children of those who persecuted you will come and bow before you; everyone who looked down on you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel.

Once you were abandoned and despised, somewhere people didn't go, but now I will make you a place to be proud of forever, a joy to every generation. Nations will provide you with what you need, kings will take care of you as if you were their own children. You will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob. I will bring you gold instead of bronze, silver instead of iron, bronze instead of wood, and iron instead of stone. I will appoint Peace as your watchman, and Goodness as your leader. There won't be any more violence in your land, no more devastation and destruction within your borders. You will call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.

You won't need the light of the sun during the day, or the light of the moon at night, for the Lord your God will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set, and your moon will never wane, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your time of mourning will end. All your people will be good, and they will own the land forever. They are the shoot I have planted with my hands, and they will reveal my glory. The smallest of your families will increase to a thousand, and the most insignificant will become a great nation. I am the Lord; at the right time I will do this quickly.

The Spirit of the Lord God is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to announce liberation to the captives, to set the prisoners free, to declare the year of the Lord's grace and the day of our God's punishment, to comfort those who mourn. The Lord will give to everyone who mourns in Zion a crown instead of ashes on their head, the oil of happiness instead of mourning, clothes of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of integrity, planted by the Lord to reveal his glory.

They will rebuild the old ruins; they will restore places abandoned long ago; they will restore towns that were destroyed, places left desolate for generation after generation. Foreigners will shepherd your flocks, and take care of your fields, and look after your vineyards. You will be called priests of the Lord, identified as ministers of our God. You will enjoy the wealth of nations and be proud that you have it. Instead of shame you will receive a double blessing; instead of insults, you will be happy to have a double amount of land given to you, and your joy will last forever.

I, the Lord, love what is right. I hate robbery and injustice. I will faithfully reward my people and make an everlasting agreement with them. Their descendants will be acknowledged among the nations, and their children among the peoples. Everyone who sees them will agree that they are people that the Lord has blessed.

I will happily celebrate in the Lord! My whole being will shout praises to my God. For he has dressed me with the clothing of salvation, and has wrapped around me a robe of goodness. I am like a bridegroom dressed for the wedding, like a bride wearing her jewels. Just as the earth sends up shoots, and plants grow in a garden, so the Lord makes goodness and praise grow before all nations.

I can't remain silent because of my love for Zion, I can't keep quiet because of my love for Jerusalem, until her integrity shines like a beam of light, until her salvation blazes like a burning torch. The nations will see the way you live right, and all the kings will see how you are blessed, and you will be called by a new name that the Lord gives you. You will be a crown of beauty in the Lord's hand; a royal head-dress in the hand of your God. You won't be called Abandoned anymore; your land won't be called Desolate. Instead you will be called She Makes Me Happy, and your land will be called Married, because you make the Lord happy, and your land will be married. For just like a young man marries a young woman, so your sons will marry you; and like a groom is happy with his bride, so your God will be happy with you.

I have placed watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they won't ever be silent, day or night. You who pray to the Lord, don't ever stop and take a rest. Don't give the Lord a rest either, until he finishes his work, until he makes Jerusalem the most praiseworthy place on earth. The Lord has made a solemn promise, swearing by his power and might: I won't ever again let your enemies have your grain to eat, or let foreigners drink the new wine you worked hard for.

Instead, those who harvest the grain will eat it and praise the Lord, and those who harvest the grapes for the wine will drink it in the courts of my Temple.

Exit! Exit through the gates! Clear the way for the people! Build the highway! Get rid of any rocks on the road! Lift up a flag so the nations can see! See! The Lord has announced to everyone on earth, Tell the Daughter of Zion: Look! Your Savior is coming. He's bringing his reward with him, coming to give his gift! They will be called the Holy People, the Redeemed of the Lord; and you will be called the Sought-After Place, A City No Longer Abandoned.

Who is this coming from Edom, from the town of Bozrah with clothes stained crimson? Who is this wearing robes of splendor, leaning forward in his great strength as he marches?

It is me, the one who always speaks goodness and truth, the one who has the power to save.

Why are your clothes red, like you've been treading grapes in a winepress?

I've been treading the winepress by myself; from the nations around no one came to help me. So in my anger I trod them down as if they were grapes, in my fury I trampled them. It's their blood that has stained my clothes. For I decided this was the day of my vengeance; the year of my redemption has come. I looked around, but no one came to help; I was shocked that there was no one to assist me. So I saved them through my own strength alone, and my own anger kept me going. I trampled down the nations in my anger; in my fury I made them drunk, and spilled their blood upon the ground.

I want to tell everyone about the Lord's trustworthy love. I will praise the Lord for everything he's done for us—all the good things he has done for the descendants of Israel because of his kindness and his infinite trustworthy love. He said, “Aren't they my people, children who wouldn't lie to me?” So he became their Savior. He suffered with them in all their suffering, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and kindness he redeemed them. He picked them up and carried them all throughout those years long ago. But they rebelled against him, and caused his Holy Spirit grief, so to them he became like an enemy and he fought against them.

Then they thought back to the days of old when Moses led his people out of Egypt. They shouted out, “Where is the one who took Israel through the sea, along with the shepherds of his flock? Where is the one who placed his Holy Spirit among his people? Where is the one who lifted Moses' right hand, and who used his amazing power to divide the sea in front of them, giving him such a wonderful, enduring reputation? Where is the one who led them through the depths of the sea?” They were like a horse running through the desert, they didn't stumble. Like cattle descending into a valley, the Lord's Spirit gave them rest. This is how you led your people, earning a glorious reputation for yourself.

Lord, look down on us from heaven! Watch from your high home, in your holiness and glory! Where is your enthusiasm and power? You're not showing me your feelings of sympathy and kindness! But you are still our Father, even though Abraham wouldn't know us and Israel wouldn't acknowledge us. You, Lord, are our Father; you have always been called our Redeemer from long ago. Lord, why do you make us wander from your ways, and make us stubborn so we don't respect you? Come back to us for the sake of your servants, the tribes that belong to you. Your Temple belonged to us for a little while, but then our enemies invaded and destroyed it. We were yours from ancient times, but we've ended up like people you've never ruled, never identified as yours.

If only you would rip the heavens apart and come down! The mountains would tremble in your presence! In the same way that fire burns wood and makes water boil, make your reputation known to your enemies, so that nations will tremble in your presence! In the past you did things we weren't anticipating. You came down and the mountains trembled in your presence! Since the beginning, no one has heard about, no one has paid attention to, and no one has seen any God except you, the one who helps those who place their confidence in you. You join with those who are glad, and with those who do what's right and remember to follow your ways. But when we went on sinning, you became angry. How can we be saved if we go on like this? We've all become unclean, and all the good things we do are like dirty rags. We wither and die like autumn leaves, and our sins, like the wind, blow us away. There's no one who calls for you or really wants to hold on to you, because you have hidden your face from us and let us drown in our own sins.

But you, Lord, are our Father. We're the clay, you're the potter. You made us all with your own hands. Please limit your anger, Lord, and don't remember our sins forever. Look at us, and see that we are all your people. Your holy cities have been turned into a wilderness; Zion has become a desert; yes, even Jerusalem is an abandoned ruin. Our beautiful, holy Temple where our forefathers praised you has been burned down, and all that we treasured has been destroyed. In view of all this, are you still going to refuse to help us? Are you going to stay quiet and punish us so severely?

I let myself be consulted by people who weren't even asking me questions; I let myself be found by people who weren't even looking for me. To a nation that wasn't even calling for me, I said, “I'm here, I'm here!” I spread out my hands all day long, pleading with a stubborn people who follow bad ways, doing whatever they choose. These people are always making me angry, because they present sacrifices to idols in their sacred gardens, and offer incense on pagan altars made of brick. They spend the night among the graves and in caves, eating pork and cooking other unclean meats. They tell others, “Keep your distance! Don't come close to me as I'm too holy to be touched by you!” These people are like smoke in my nostrils, a stink burning all day long!

Look—it's all written down right in front of me! I'm not going to keep quiet. I'm going to pay them back by throwing their punishment into their laps. I'm going to pay you back for both your own sins and the sins of your forefathers, says the Lord, because they burned incense on the mountains and ridiculed me on the hills. I'm going to measure into their laps full payment for what they've done.

This is what the Lord says: It's like when there's a bit of juice left in a bunch of grapes and people say, “Don't get rid of it all; there's still some good in it.” I'll do the same for my servants—I won't destroy them all. I will make sure Jacob has descendants, and people from Judah who can take ownership of my mountain. My chosen ones, my servants, will own the land and live there. Sharon will become a pasture for flocks, and the Valley of Achor a place for herds to rest, for my people who follow me.

But those of you who desert the Lord and forget about my holy mountain, who prepare feasts for the god of good luck, who fill jugs of mixed wine for the god of destiny, I will make sure your destiny is to be killed by the sword. All of you will bow down to be slaughtered, because I called out to you but you didn't answer; I spoke to you, but you didn't listen. Instead you did what's evil in my sight, choosing to do what I hate.

So this is what the Lord says, My servants will eat, but you will go hungry. My servants will drink, but you will go thirsty. My servants will celebrate, but you will feel ashamed. Listen! My servants will shout because they're so happy inside, but you will cry out in deepest pain, howling because your spirit is broken. Your name will only be used as a curse by my chosen ones, for the Lord God will kill you and give his servants another name. Whoever asks a blessing or takes an oath in the land will do so by the one true God, for I have forgotten the troubles of the past—I don't look on them anymore.

Look! I'm going to create new heavens and a new earth. The former things won't be remembered—they

won't cross anyone's mind! Be glad, and be happy forever and ever in what I'm going to create, for I will make Jerusalem a delightful place, and its people a real joy. I will be so happy over Jerusalem; I will celebrate among my people. The sound of weeping and cries for help won't ever be heard there again.

No babies will die after just a few days, and no adults will die without having lived a long life. Those who reach a hundred will be thought of as just a child, and anyone who doesn't reach a hundred will be seen as being under a curse. They will build houses and live in them; they will eat the fruit of the vineyards they themselves planted. No longer will they build houses for others to live in; no longer will they plant for others to eat. For my people will live as long as trees do; my chosen ones will live long enough to enjoy all they've worked for. They won't work for nothing, and they won't have children destined for disaster. For they are people living under the blessing of the Lord, and their children will be too. I will reply even before they ask me. While they are still speaking, I will answer them! The wolf and the lamb will eat together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. The snakes will eat dust. Nothing will cause any harm or damage anywhere on my holy mountain.

This is what the Lord says: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is where I place my feet. So where will this house be that you're going to build for me? Where will I lie down to rest? I made everything; that's how it all came into existence, says the Lord. Those I look favorably on are humble and repentant, and they tremble when I speak.

When someone sacrifices a bull it's like human sacrifice, and when someone sacrifices a lamb, it's like breaking the neck of a dog. When they present a grain offering it's like presenting pig's blood, and when they burn incense it's like worshiping an idol. Since they have chosen to act like this and to love such disgusting things, I will also choose to punish them severely and to terrify them, because I called out to them but no one answered; I spoke to them, but no one listened. Instead they did what's evil in my sight, choosing to do what I hate.

Listen to what the Lord has to say, those of you who tremble when he speaks. This is what some of your people who hate you and throw you out have said: “Let the Lord be glorified, so we can see how happy you are!” but it's them who are going to be humiliated. Hear all the shouting from the city! Hear all the noise from the Temple! It's the sound of the Lord giving his enemies back what they deserve.

She gave birth before she went into labor, she delivered a boy before the pains came. Who has ever heard of anything like this? Who has seen this kind of thing before? Can a country be delivered in a day, can a nation be born in a moment? Yet as soon as Zion went into labor, she gave birth to her children. Would I bring a baby to the point of birth and then not deliver it? the Lord asks. Would I who deliver the baby stop it from being born? the Lord asks again.

Celebrate with Jerusalem and be happy for her, everyone who loves her; celebrate with her and sing for joy, everyone who mourns over her. Like a baby you can nurse at her breasts that bring comfort, drinking deeply and being satisfied by all she has to give.

This is what the Lord says: Watch! I'm going to give her peace and prosperity like a flowing river, the wealth of nations like an overflowing stream. You will nurse and be carried on her hip and played with on her knees. Like a mother comforting her child, I will comfort you. You will be comforted in Jerusalem.

When you see this happening, you'll be happy deep inside, and you'll prosper like growing grass. The Lord's power will be recognized as blessing his servants and cursing his enemies. Look! The Lord is coming surrounded by fire, his chariots whirling like the wind, to express his anger with fury, to give his reprimand in flames of fire. The Lord will execute judgment on everyone by fire and by his sword. There will be many killed by the Lord.

Those who dedicate themselves and make themselves pure in order to enter the sacred gardens, to worship the idol placed in the center, and to eat pork and vermin and rats and other disgusting things—they will all die together, says the Lord. I know what they're doing and what they're thinking. I will soon come to gather all nations and peoples of different languages. They will come and see my glory. I will give them a sign, and I will send some who survive to the nations. They will go to Tarshish, to the Libyans and Lydians (who are famous as archers), to Tubal and Greece, and to the distant lands that haven't heard about me or seen my glory. They will announce my glory among the nations. They will bring back all your people from every nation to my holy mountain in Jerusalem as an offering to the Lord. They will come on horses, in chariots and wagons, and on mules and camels, says the Lord. They will bring them in the same way the Israelites bring their grain offerings to the Lord's Temple using vessels that are ceremonially clean. I will choose some of them as priests and Levites, says the Lord.

As the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, will last forever, so your descendants and your reputation will also last forever, says the Lord. Everyone will come and worship me, from one New Moon to the next, and from one Sabbath to the next, says the Lord. They will go out and see the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me. The worms that eat them won't die, the fire that burns them won't go out, and everyone who sees them will be horrified.

Jeremiah

Book of Jeremiah

These are the words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests living in Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.

The Lord's message came to Jeremiah beginning in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, son of Amon, king of Judah, and on through the time of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, up to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah, which was when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

The Lord came and told me, “I knew exactly who you would be before I created you in your mother's womb; I chose you before you were born to be a prophet to the nations.”

“Oh no, Lord God!” I replied. “I really don't know how to speak in public because I'm still too young!”

“Don't say you're too young,” the Lord told me. “Go to everyone I send you to. Tell them everything I order you to say. Don't be afraid of them because I'll go with you and I'll look after you. This is the Lord's promise.”

The Lord stretched out his hand, touched my mouth, and told me: “Look, I've put my words in your mouth. Today I've placed you over nations and kingdoms to pull up and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant.”

The Lord's message came to me, asking, “Jeremiah, what can you see?”

“I see a twig from an almond tree,” I answered.

“That's right, because I am watching to make sure what I say happens,” the Lord said.

The Lord's message came to me again, asking, “What can you see?”

“I see a pot that's boiling,” I answered, “and it's tipping in this direction from the north.”

Then the Lord told me, “Trouble brewing from the north will sweep out over everyone living in the country. Watch out! I'm going to summon all the nations and kings of the north,” declares the Lord. “Each of these kings will come and set up his throne right at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and attack all its fortifications and all the towns in Judah. I will carry out my sentence against the inhabitants for all their wickedness, because they abandoned me to burn incense to pagan gods, to worship idols they themselves made.

You need to get yourself ready. You are going to stand before the people and tell them everything that I order you to say. Don't be scared by them, or I will scare you in front of them. Look! Today I have made you like a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze to stand against the whole country—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the people of the country. They will fight against you but they won't defeat you, because I'll be there to rescue you,” declares the Lord.

The Lord's message came to me, saying, Go and announce to the people of Jerusalem that this is what the Lord says:

I remember when you were young how devoted to me you were. I remember how you loved me when you were my bride. I remember how you followed me in the desert, in a land where nothing is grown.

Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest. Anyone who ate this harvest was guilty of sin, and they experienced the disastrous results, declares the Lord.

Listen to the Lord's message, descendants of Jacob, all you Israelites. This is what the Lord says: What did your forefathers think was wrong with me that they went so far away from me? They went off to worship useless idols, and as a result became useless themselves! They didn't ask themselves, “Where is the Lord who led us from Egypt, who led us through the wasteland, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and darkness, a land that no one travels through and where no one lives?”

I led you into a productive land to eat all the good things that grow there. But you came and made my land unclean, making it offensive to me. Your priests did not ask, “Where is the Lord?” Your teachers of the law no longer believed in me, and your leaders rebelled against me. Your prophets prophesied by calling on Baal and followed worthless idols.

So I'm going to confront you again, declares the Lord, and I will bring charges against your children's children.

Travel over to the islands of Cyprus and take a look; go to the land of Kedar and examine carefully to see if anything like this has ever happened before. Has a nation ever changed its gods? —even though they're not gods at all! Yet my people have traded their glorious God for worthless idols.

You heavens, you should be appalled, shocked and horrified! declares the Lord. For my people have done two evil things. They have abandoned me, the source of living water, and they have dug their own cisterns—broken cisterns that can't hold water.

Are Israelites slaves? Were they born into slavery? So why have they become victims? The young lions roared at you; they growled loudly. They have devastated your country; your towns lie in ruins. No one lives there. The men of Memphis and Tahpanhes have shaved your heads.

Didn't you bring this on yourself by abandoning the Lord your God when he was leading you in the right way? Now what will you benefit as you travel back to Egypt to drink the waters of Shihor River? What will you gain on your way to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates River?

Your own wickedness will discipline you; your own disobedience will teach you a lesson. Think about it and you'll recognize what a bitter evil it is for you to abandon the Lord your God and not to respect me, declares the Lord God Almighty.

You broke off your yoke and ripped off your chains long ago. “I won't worship you!” you declared. On the contrary, you lay down like a prostitute on every high hill and under every green tree.

I was the one who planted you like the finest vine, grown from the very best seed. How could you degenerate into a useless wild vine?

Even bleach and plenty of soap can't get rid of your guilty stains. I still see them, declares the Lord God. How dare you say, “I'm not unclean! I haven't gone to worship the Baals!” Look at what you've been doing down in the valley. Admit what you've done! You're a young female camel, racing around everywhere. You're a female donkey living in the desert, sniffing the wind for a mate because she's in heat. No one can control her at mating time. All those who're looking for her won't have trouble finding her when she's in heat.

You don't have to run around barefoot or have your throat go dry. But you reply, “No, it's impossible! I'm in love with foreign gods—I must go to them.”

In the same way that a thief feels guilty when caught, so the people of Israel have been shamed. All of them—their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets. They say to an idol made of wood, “You are my father,” and one made of stone, “You gave birth to me.” They turn their backs on me, and hide their faces from me. But when they're in trouble they come begging to me, saying, “Please come and save us!” So where are these “gods” of yours that you made for yourselves? Let them come and help you when you're in trouble! Let them save you if they can, because you Israelites have as many gods as you have towns.

Why are you complaining to me? It's all of you who have rebelled against me! declares the Lord. It was pointless of me to punish your children because they refused to accept any discipline. You used your own swords to kill your prophets, destroying them like a ferocious lion.

You people of today, think about what the Lord is saying: Israel, have I treated you like an empty desert, or a land of thick darkness? Why are my people saying, “We can go where we like! We don't have to come and worship you any more”?

Does a girl forget her jewelry or a bride her wedding dress? Yet my people have forgotten me for too many years to count. How cleverly you look for your lovers! Even prostitutes could learn something from you!

On top of that, your clothes are stained with the blood of the poor and the innocent. It's not like you killed them breaking into your homes.

Despite all this, you go on saying, “I'm innocent! Surely he can't still be upset with me!”

Watch out! I'm going to punish you because you go on saying, “I haven't sinned.” You're just so fickle—you keep on changing your mind! You will end up just as disappointed by your alliance with Egypt as you were with Assyria. In fact you will go into exile with your hands on your head as prisoners, because the Lord will have nothing to do with those you trust; they will be no help to you.

If a man divorces his wife and she goes and marries someone else, could he ever go back to her? Wouldn't the country be made totally unclean by this? But you have done worse by prostituting yourselves with many lovers, and now you want to come back to me? declares the Lord.

Look up at the bare hilltops. Is there anywhere that you haven't had sex? You sat at the roadside like someone from the desert waiting for your lovers to pass by. You have made the land unclean with your prostitution and evil. That's why no showers have been sent, and no spring rains have fallen. But you just stare back shamelessly like a prostitute; you refuse to accept you've done anything wrong.

Didn't you just tell me, “My father, you've been such a close friend to me since I was little. You won't be angry with me for a long time, will you? You won't go on being like that forever?” This is what you've said, but you keep on sinning as much as you can.

During the reign of King Josiah, the Lord told me, Have you seen what unfaithful Israel has done? She has prostituted herself on every high hill and under every green tree. I hoped that after she'd done all this she'd come back to me. But she didn't come back, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw what happened. She saw that because of everything unfaithful Israel had done on committing adultery, I sent her away, giving her a certificate of divorce. But her unfaithful sister Judah wasn't afraid and prostituted herself too. Israel didn't care about the immorality, as she made herself and the land unclean, committing adultery by worshiping stones and trees. Despite all this, her unfaithful sister Judah didn't come back to me in sincerity. She only pretended to do so, declares the Lord.

The Lord told me, Unfaithful Israel showed that she wasn't as guilty as unfaithful Judah. Now go and announce this message to the north: Come back, unfaithful Israel, declares the Lord. I won't be angry with you anymore, because I am merciful, declares the Lord. I won't be angry forever. Just admit you did wrong, that you rebelled against the Lord your God. You spread yourself around, committing adultery by worshiping foreign gods under every green tree, refusing to do what I told you, declares the Lord.

Come back, unfaithful children, declares the Lord, because I am married to you. I will take you, one from a town and two from a family, and bring you to Zion. I will give you shepherds who are like me who will feed you wisely and with understanding.

At that time as you increase in number in the country, declares the Lord, no one will be talking about the Ark of the Lord's Agreement anymore. People won't need to think about it or remember it or wonder what happened to it; and certainly won't need to make a new one.

When that time comes Jerusalem will be called the Throne of the Lord, and all the nations will come together in Jerusalem to honor the Lord. They won't be stubborn or wicked anymore.

At that time the people of Judah will join with the people of Israel, and they will return from the land of the north to the country I gave to your forefathers to own. I said to myself, I really want you to be my children, and to give you the best country, the most beautiful place of any nation. I hoped you would call me “Father,” and never give up following me. But just like a wife might betray her husband, you have betrayed me, people of Israel, declares the Lord.

Voices are crying on bare hilltops—the Israelites weeping and pleading for mercy, because they have gone astray and forgotten the Lord their God.

Come back, unfaithful children, and I will heal your unfaithfulness.

"We're here! Yes, we're coming back to you, because you are the Lord our God."

There's no doubt that pagan worship from the hills is pure lies; the idolatry that comes from the mountains is just noise. Israel's salvation is in the Lord our God alone.

All our lives pagan idolatry has destroyed what our fathers worked so hard for: their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters.

We should lie down in shame, and have our disgrace bury us. We have sinned against the Lord our God, us and our fathers. From when we were young right up to now we have not obeyed what the Lord our God told us to do.

Israel, if you want to come back, then come back to me, declares the Lord. If you get rid of these disgusting idols I see, and don't wander away, and if when you make your vows, you do so only to me, sincerely, truly, and honestly, then the nations will be blessed by me, and they will praise me.

This is what the Lord is saying to the people of Judah and Jerusalem:

Plow your unplowed ground, and don't sow among the thorns. Dedicate yourselves to the Lord; be totally committed to him, people of Judah and Jerusalem. Otherwise, my anger will blaze like fire, burning so hard that no one can put it out because of the evil you've done.

Announce this warning throughout Judah and Jerusalem! Tell them: Blow the trumpet everywhere in the country! Shout out, "Hurry! Let's run to the fortified towns for protection!" Raise the danger flag; go to Zion! Find somewhere safe! Don't hesitate! I'm bringing enemies from the north who will cause terrible destruction.

A lion has left his hiding place; a destroyer of nations has started out. He has left his den to come and turn your country into a wasteland. Your towns will be demolished, and no one will live there. Wear clothes made of sackcloth, weep and wail, crying out, "The Lord's furious anger against us hasn't stopped." When that happens declares the Lord, the king and officials will lose heart, the priests will be devastated, and the prophets will be shocked.

Then I said, "Oh, Lord God, you have completely fooled the people of Jerusalem by telling them, 'You will have peace,' while holding a sword to our throats."

At that time the people of Jerusalem will be told, "A burning wind from the bare hills of the desert is blowing toward Jerusalem, but not to blow away the chaff or the dust. No, this wind is too strong for that, and it comes from me. Now I'm also going to tell them how I will punish them."

Look, he's rushing in like storm clouds; his chariots are like a whirlwind. His horses fly faster than eagles.

"What a disaster! We're ruined!"

Clean the evil from your heart, Jerusalem, so that you can be saved. How long will you hold onto your evil thoughts?

News is shouted out from Dan, announcing disaster from the hills of Ephraim.

"Let the nations know! Look what's happening! Announce this to Jerusalem: An army is coming to besiege you from a distant country; shouting war cries against the towns of Judah. They encircle her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me, declares the Lord. You've brought this on yourself by your own attitudes and actions. This is your punishment, and it's so painful, it's like being stabbed in the heart!"

"I'm in agony, absolute agony! My heart is breaking! It's beating wildly in my chest! My heart pounds within me; I can't keep quiet because I've heard the trumpet, the signal for battle.

News of one disaster after another comes flooding in, for the whole country is in ruins. My own home is destroyed in a moment, and everything inside. How long do I have to see the flags of war and hear the trumpets of battle?"

"My people are stupid; they don't know me. They are foolish children who just don't understand. They're experts at doing evil, but they don't know how to do good."

I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; I looked to the heavens, and its light was gone. I looked at the mountains, and saw that they were shaking; all the hills were swaying to and fro. I looked, and nobody was left; all the birds had flown away. I looked, and the productive fields were a desert. All the towns were demolished because of the Lord's furious anger.

This is what the Lord says: "The whole country will be devastated, but I won't do so completely. The earth will mourn and the heavens above will go dark. I have spoken; this is what I have ordered. I'm not going to stop or change my mind."

People from every town run away when they hear the enemy horsemen and archers coming. They hide in the forest and among the rocks. All the towns are abandoned; no one lives in them.

You, Jerusalem, now desolate, what are you going to do? Even though you dress in scarlet clothes, and put on gold jewelry, and paint your eyes with makeup, all your dressing-up is pointless! Your lovers hate you; they want to kill you!

I hear the cries like a woman in labor, the agonizing moans of a woman giving birth to her first child. These are the cries of the Daughter of Zion gasping for air, holding out her hands, saying, "Please help me—I'm being murdered!"

Go everywhere through the streets of Jerusalem. Look and pay attention! Search all through her city squares to see if you can find even just one person who does what's right, anyone who is faithful, and I'll forgive the city. They may make promises in my name, but they're not sincere.

Lord, aren't you always looking for faithfulness? You beat them, but they didn't care. You just about destroyed them, but they refused to accept your discipline. They were stubborn, hard as rock, and they wouldn't repent.

Then I said to myself, "These people are only the poor—they're just fools who don't know any better. They certainly don't know what the Lord wants, God's

right way of living. Let me go to and talk to the ones in charge. They would surely know what the Lord wants, God's right way of living." But they had all broken off the yoke as well, and ripped off the chains.

As a result a lion from the forest will attack them; a wolf from the desert will rip them apart. A leopard will lie in wait for them near their towns, ready to tear to pieces anyone who goes outside. For they keep on rebelling, and turn away from me so often.

Why should I forgive you? Your children have abandoned me and believe in gods that are not gods. I gave them everything they need, yet they went and committed adultery, gathering together at prostitutes' houses. They're like virile stallions wanting sex, each of them neighing with lust after his neighbor's wife.

Shouldn't I punish them for all this? declares the Lord. Shouldn't I retaliate for what this nation has done?

Go through her vineyards and damage them, but don't destroy them completely. Rip off her branches, because they don't belong to the Lord. The people of Israel and Judah have completely betrayed me, declares the Lord.

They have lied about the Lord, saying, "He won't do anything. Nothing bad will happen to us. We won't have war or famine. The prophets are just like the wind. The Lord doesn't speak through them. What they predict can happen to them!"

So this is the reply from the Lord God Almighty: Because of what you've said, I will make my words like a fire in your mouth and you people like the wood it burns up. Look! I am bringing a nation from far away to attack you, people of Israel, declares the Lord. It's a powerful nation that has existed for a long time; it's a nation whose language you don't know, and when they speak you can't understand them. Their arrows bring death; they are all strong warriors. They will consume your harvest and your food; they will destroy your sons and your daughters; they will eat your flocks and your herds; they will feed on your vines and your fig trees. They will attack and will destroy the fortified towns that you have so much confidence in.

But even at that time I won't completely destroy you, declares the Lord. When people ask you Jeremiah, "Why did the Lord our God do all these things to us?" you are to tell them, "In the same way you have abandoned me and served foreign gods here in your country, so you will serve foreigners in a country that isn't your own."

Announce this to the people of Jacob and Judah: Listen to this, you foolish, stupid people, who have eyes but don't see, who have ears but don't hear.

Aren't you afraid of what I can do? declares the Lord. Don't you think you should tremble in my presence? I am the one who set up the shore as the sea's boundary, an everlasting limit that it can't cross. The waves crash against it, but they can't defeat it. They roar, but they can't cross the barrier.

But you people have a stubborn and rebellious attitude. You have left me and gone your own way. You didn't think to say, "We should appreciate the Lord our God, who sends the autumn and spring rains at the right time, who makes sure we can have a harvest every year." Your wrong actions have taken these benefits from you; your sins have deprived you of my blessings.

For there are wicked men among my people. They're like bird-trappers, secretly watching and waiting to catch people in their snare. Their homes are full of their ill-gotten gains, like cages full of birds. That's why they've become powerful and rich. They've grown fat and smooth, and have become experts in evil. They deny justice to orphans, and they don't defend the rights of those in need.

Shouldn't I punish them for all this? declares the Lord. Shouldn't I retaliate for what this nation has done?

Something horrible, something terrible has happened here in this country. The prophets give false prophecies; the priests rule as they please. My people love it like this, but what will you do when it all falls apart?

Run and hide, descendants of Benjamin, get out of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa; light a signal fire in Beth-haccherem, for disaster and terrible destruction is arriving from the north. Even though she is pretty and delightful, I will destroy the Daughter of Zion.

"Shepherds" and their "flocks" will come to attack her; they will set up their tents all around her, each one looking after his own. They get ready for battle against her, saying, "Come on, we'll attack at noon! Oh no, the day is almost over, the evening shadows are growing long. Come on, we'll attack at night instead and destroy her fortresses!"

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Cut down the trees and make a siege ramp to use against Jerusalem. This city needs to be punished because it's full of people mistreating one another. Like a spring gushing out water, so she pours out her evil. The sounds of violence and abuse echo inside her. I see people sick and wounded everywhere. I'm warning you, people of Jerusalem, I'm going to give up on you in disgust. I will destroy you and leave your country uninhabited.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Even those left in Israel will be taken, just as grapes left on a vine are taken by the one harvesting the grapes who checks the branches again.

Who can I give this warning to? Who's going to listen to me? Can't you see that they refuse to listen? They can't hear what I'm saying. See how offensive the Lord's message is to them. They don't like it at all.

But as for me, I'm full of the Lord's anger; I have a hard time keeping it in.

The Lord replies, Pour it out on children in the street, and on groups of young people, because both husband and wife are going to be captured—it's everyone, and it doesn't matter how old they are. Their houses will be given to others, their fields and wives too, because I'm going to punish everyone living in this country, declares the Lord.

Everyone cheats because they're greedy, poor and rich alike. Even prophets and priests—they are all dishonest liars! They give my wounded people first aid, but they don't really care about them. They tell them, "Don't worry! We have peace!" even as war approaches.

Were they ashamed of the disgusting things they did? No, they weren't ashamed at all, they couldn't even blush. So they will fall just like the others, when I punish them; they will drop down dead, says the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: Go and stand where the roads divide, and look. Find out which are the old paths. Ask, “What's the right way?” Then follow it and you'll be content. But you refused, saying, “We won't go that way!” I put watchmen in charge of you and told you, Make sure you listen for the trumpet call warning you of danger. But you answered, “We won't listen!”

So now you other nations can listen and find out what's going to happen to them.

Earth, you listen too! I am bringing disaster down on this people, the end result of what they themselves planned. It's because they paid no attention to what I said, and rejected my instructions.

What's the point of offering me frankincense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a faraway land? I don't accept your burnt offerings; I'm not pleased with your sacrifices.

So this is what the Lord says: I'm going to put blocks in front of these people to trip them up. Fathers and sons will fall down dead, friends and neighbors too.

This is what the Lord says: Look! An army is invading from the north; a powerful nation is getting ready to attack all the way from the ends of the earth. They pick up their bows and spears. They are cruel and show no mercy. Their war cries are like the sea roaring, and they ride horses lined up ready to attack you, Daughter of Zion.

The people reply, “We've heard the news, and our hands are limp with shock! We're overcome with agony, suffering pain like a woman in labor. Don't go to the field! Don't walk down the road! The enemy is armed with swords! Terror is everywhere!”

Oh my people, put on sackcloth and roll around in ashes. Mourn and cry bitterly like you would for an only son, because the destroyer will come down on you suddenly.

Jeremiah, I have made you a tester of metals so you can test my people as if they were metal, so you can know what they're made of and how they act. They're all stubborn rebels going around talking slander. They are hard as bronze and iron; they are all corrupt. The bellows in the refiner's furnace blow powerfully, burning away the lead. But this refining is pointless, because the wicked are not purified. They are identified as impure silver to be rejected, because the Lord has rejected them.

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Go and stand in the entrance to the Lord's Temple, and deliver this message: Listen to what the Lord has to say, all of you from Judah who are coming in through these gates to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says:

Change your ways and do what's right, and I'll let you go on living here. Don't believe in those who try and deceive you by repeating, “The Temple of the Lord is here, the Temple of the Lord is here, the Temple of the Lord is here.”

If you sincerely change your ways and do what's right, if you treat each other fairly, if you stop mistreating foreigners and orphans and widows, and if you stop murdering innocent people and stop hurting yourselves by worshiping other gods, then I'll let you go on living here in the country that I gave to your forefathers forever and ever.

But look at you! You go on believing in these deceptions, these worthless words. Are you really going to continue stealing, murdering, committing adultery, and lying, burning incense to Baal, and worshiping other gods that you know nothing about, and then come and stand before me in my own Temple and say, “We're safe, so we can continue doing all these offensive things”? Do you see this house, my own Temple, as a den of thieves? Well, that's what it looks like to me too, declares the Lord.

So why don't you go to Shiloh where I first made myself a place for me to live with you, and see what I did to it because of the evil my people Israel did? I've warned you time and again about all these things you've done but you've refused to listen, declares the Lord. I've called out to you but you didn't want to answer me.

So now I'm going to do to my Temple, what I did to Shiloh. This is the Temple you put your faith in, the place I gave to you and your forefathers. I will throw you out of my presence, just as I expelled all your Israelite relatives, all the descendants of Ephraim.

You, Jeremiah, are not to pray for these people. Don't cry out to me in prayer for them, don't plead with me on their behalf, because I won't listen to you. Can't you see how they're behaving in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children collect the firewood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven, and they pour out drink offerings to other gods to make me angry and hurt. But is it really me they're hurting? declares the Lord. Aren't they really hurting themselves and bringing shame on themselves?

So this is what the Lord God says: Watch! My furious anger will be poured out on this country, on people and animals, on the orchards and the crops in the field. It will burn and nobody will be able to put it out.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You can add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat all the meat yourselves! When I led your forefathers out of Egypt I didn't just give them instructions about burnt offerings and sacrifices, This is the commandment I gave them: Obey me, and I will be your God, and you will be my people. Follow everything I have commanded you to do, so that all will go well for you.

But they refused to listen or pay attention. Instead they followed the desires of their own stubborn and evil thinking, so they ended up going backward and not forward. From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, I have sent you time after time my servants the prophets. But you refused to listen or pay them attention. Instead, you became more stubborn and rebellious than your forefathers!

When you tell them all this, they won't listen to you. When you call out to them, they won't answer. So you have to tell them, “This is the nation that refused to listen to what the Lord their God said, and would not

accept the Lord's discipline. Truth has died out; people don't even talk about it. Cut off your hair and throw it away. Sing a song of mourning on the bare hills, for the Lord has rejected and abandoned the generation who made him angry."

For the people of Judah have done what is evil in my sight, declares the Lord. They have placed their offensive idols in my own Temple, making it unclean. They have built pagan shrines at Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom so they could sacrifice their sons and daughters by burning them in the fire. This is something I never commanded. I never even thought of such a thing!

So watch out! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when instead of Topheth and the Valley of Hinnom this place will be called the Valley of Killing. People will bury their dead in Topheth until it's full. The dead bodies of these people will be food for birds of prey and wild animals, and there won't be anyone to scare them away.

I will put a stop to the cheerful sounds of celebration and the happy voices of the bride and bridegroom from the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the country will be turned into a wasteland.

When that happens, declares the Lord, the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of the officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be taken out of their graves. They will lie exposed to the sun and moon, and to all the stars which they loved, which they served, which they followed, which they consulted, and which they worshiped. Their bones will not be collected or reburied, but will be left like manure lying on the ground. Those who are left of this evil family will prefer to die rather than live in every place I've scattered them, declares the Lord Almighty.

Tell them this is what the Lord says: When people fall down, don't they get up again? When people go the wrong way, don't they turn around? So why have these people of Jerusalem gone the wrong way? Why do they refuse to turn around from their repeated betrayals, holding on to all their lies? I've heard exactly what they said, but they don't tell the truth. No one is sorry for doing wrong, asking, "What have I done?" Everyone chooses their own way, like a horse charging into battle.

Even storks high in the sky know when it's time to migrate. Turtledoves, swifts, and songbirds know when to fly away at the right time of the year. But my people don't know the laws of the Lord. How on earth can you say, "We're wise, and we have the Law of the Lord?" Can't you see that the writings of your teachers of the Law have turned it into lies? The wise will be shown to be foolish; they will be shocked at being caught out. Can't you see that they've rejected what the Lord says —so do they have any wisdom at all?

I'm going to give their wives to others, and their fields to different owners, since everyone cheats because they're greedy, poor and rich alike. Even prophets and priests—they are all dishonest liars! They give my wounded people first aid, but they don't really care about them. They tell them, "Don't worry! We have peace!" even as war approaches. Are they ashamed of the disgusting things they did? No, they're not ashamed at all, they can't even blush. So they will fall just like the others, when I punish them; they will drop down dead, says the Lord. I'm going to destroy them, declares the Lord. There will be no grapes left on the vines, no figs on the trees—even the leaves will wither. They will lose whatever I gave them.

The people say, "Why are we sitting around here? Let's get together and run to the fortified towns. We can die there, for the Lord our God is killing us by giving us poisoned water to drink, because we sinned against him. We hoped for peace, but instead nothing good has come; we hoped for a time of healing, but instead there was only sudden terror."

The snorting of enemy horses can be heard from Dan. The whole country shakes in fear at the sound of the neighing of these strong stallions, They have come to destroy the country and everything in it; Jerusalem and everyone who lives there. Watch out! I'm sending snakes among you, vipers that can't be charmed. They will come and bite you, declares the Lord.

Nothing comforts me in my suffering; I feel terrible inside. Listen to my people crying out for help from a distant land, asking "Isn't the Lord present in Zion anymore? Has her King left?"

Why have they made me angry, worshiping their carved images and their useless foreign idols?

"The harvest is over, the summer is finished, but we're not saved," say the people.

I'm crushed by the injuries suffered by my people; I mourn for them. I'm horrified at what's happened! Isn't there any ointment from Gilead to help heal them? Aren't there any doctors there? So why haven't my people been healed from their wounds?

How I wish my head was a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears! Then I would weep day and night over all my people who have been killed. I wish I had a temporary shelter in the desert—I would give up on my people and leave them, because they're all adulterers, a bunch of traitors! Their words are like arrows shot from a bow. Lies win out over the truth throughout the country. They go from one evil thing to the next, forgetting all about me, declares the Lord.

Everyone, watch out for your friends! Don't even trust your brother! Every brother is deceitful, and every friend slanders other people. Everyone betrays their friends; no one tells the truth. They've made themselves into expert liars; they tire themselves out doing wrong. Everyone exploits each other, and in all their lies they don't want to know me, declares the Lord.

So this is what the Lord Almighty says: Look, I'm going to test them and purify them like metal in a furnace. What else can I do because of what my people have done? Their words are arrows that kill; they always tell lies. They're nice to their friends on the outside while plotting against them inside. Shouldn't I punish them for all this? declares the Lord. Shouldn't I retaliate for what this nation has done?

I will weep and wail for the mountains, I will sing a funeral song over the pastures in the countryside, because they have been so badly burned that no one can pass through, and there are no cattle to make any noise. The birds have flown and the wild animals have run away.

I'm going to make Jerusalem into a heap of rubble, a place where jackals live. I will destroy the towns of Judah, leaving them empty. Who is wise enough to understand this? Has the Lord told anyone so they can explain what's happened? Why has the land been destroyed and burned so it's like a desert, so no one can pass through it?

The Lord replied, It's because they have given up keeping my laws that I placed before them. They haven't followed them; they haven't done what I told them. On the contrary, they have followed their own stubborn way of thinking, and went to worship the Baals, just as their forefathers taught them.

So this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Watch out! I will give these people wormwood to eat and poisoned water to drink. I'm about to scatter them among nations unfamiliar to them and their forefathers, and I will send enemies with swords to chase after them until I have wiped them out.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Be aware of what's happening! Call for the professional women mourners, ask for the best of them. Have them come as quickly as possible, and sing a funeral song about us, so we can cry our eyes out, so our tears will flow like streams.

The sound of weeping comes from Zion, “We're completely devastated! We're totally ashamed, because we've had to abandon our country, because our houses have been demolished.”

Women, listen to the Lord's message, hear what he has to say. Teach your daughters to mourn and sing songs of sadness. Death has slipped in through our windows; it has come into our fortresses. It has killed the children playing in the streets and the young people gathering in the town squares.

Tell everyone this is what the Lord says: Dead bodies will be left where they fall like manure in the fields, lying there like stalks of freshly-cut grain behind the reaper, with no one to collect them.

This is what the Lord says: The wise shouldn't boast about their wisdom. The strong shouldn't boast about their strength. The rich shouldn't boast about their riches. Anyone who wants to boast should boast that they really know and understand me, recognizing that I am the Lord who acts with trustworthy love, who shows fairness, and who does what is right everywhere on earth, because these mean the most to me, declares the Lord.

Watch out, for the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all who are only physically circumcised. Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and all the desert people who trim their hair on the sides of their heads—all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the Israelites are spiritually uncircumcised.

Listen to the message the Lord is sending to you, people of Israel. This is what the Lord says: Don't adopt the practices of other nations. Don't be terrified as they are by signs in the heavens that they interpret as predicting disaster.

The religious beliefs of the peoples are pointless. They chop down a tree in the forest and a craftsman carves the wood with a tool to make an idol. They decorate it with silver and gold, and nail it down with a hammer so it won't fall over. Just like a scarecrow in a field of cucumbers, their idols can't speak. They have to be carried around because they can't walk. You don't have to be afraid of them because they can't hurt you—and they can't do you any good either.

There's no one like you, Lord! You are so great! You are incredibly powerful! Everyone should respect you, King of the nations. This is how you should be treated. There's no one like you among all the wise men of every nation and kingdom. Yet these “wise men” are completely foolish and stupid, because they think they can be taught by useless idols made of wood!

Sheets of hammered silver are shipped in from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, to be used by craftsmen and metal-workers. These idols are dressed in clothes of blue and purple made by experts.

But the Lord is the only true God. He is the living God and eternal King. The earth shakes when he is angry; the nations can't withstand his fury.

This is what you are to tell the nations: “These gods, who didn't make either the heavens or the earth, will be wiped out from this earth and from under these heavens.”

It was God who made the earth by his power. He created the world by his wisdom and by his understanding he put the heavens in place. The waters of the heavens rain down with a roar at his command. He makes the clouds to rise all over the earth. He makes lightning to accompany rain, and sends the wind from his storehouses.

Everyone is stupid; they don't know anything. Every metalworker is embarrassed by the idols they make. For their images made of molten metal are fraudulent—they're not alive! They are useless, an object to be laughed at. They will be destroyed at the time of their punishment.

The God of Jacob is not like these idols, for he is the Creator of everything, and Israel is the tribe that belongs to him. The Lord Almighty is his name.

You people living in Jerusalem under siege, get all your things together ready to leave, because this is what the Lord says: Look! Right now I'm about to throw out the people living in this country, bringing them trouble they will really feel.

The people of Jerusalem responded, “We're suffering terribly because we've been badly hurt—our injuries are really serious. We thought it wouldn't be that bad and that we could bear it. Our tents have been destroyed; all our ropes have been broken. Our children have been taken from us and are no more. We don't have anyone left to put up our tents or hang our curtains.”

The “shepherds” have become stupid—they don't ask the Lord for advice. That's why they have failed, and all their flock has been scattered.

Listen to the news that a noisy army is invading from a country to the north. The towns of Judah will be knocked down, they will be places where only jackals live.

I realize, Lord, that people don't control their own lives—no one really knows how to choose their way. Please discipline me fairly, Lord—not while you're angry, otherwise you'll kill me! Pour out your fury on

the nations that don't recognize you as God, and on their families that don't worship you. For they have completely destroyed the Israelites, wiping us out. They have devastated our country.

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah: Listen to the terms of this agreement, and then repeat them to the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

Tell them this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: You are cursed if you don't obey the terms of this agreement. I made this agreement with your forefathers when I led them out of Egypt, out of the iron-making furnace, saying, “Obey me, and do everything I order you to do, and you will be my people, and I will be your God.” I did this to fulfill what I promised to your forefathers—to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it still is today.

Amen, Lord, I answered.

Then the Lord told me, Go and publicly announce this whole message in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying: Pay attention to the terms of this agreement and do what they say. From the time I led your forefathers out of Egypt until now, I seriously warned them time and again, saying, “Do what I tell you!” But they refused to obey, they wouldn't listen. Instead each of them followed their own stubborn and evil thinking. I had ordered them to follow the agreement, but they didn't do so. So I brought down on them all the curses contained in the agreement.

The Lord told me, There is a rebellion happening among the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. They have gone back to the sins of their forefathers who refused to obey what I said. They have gone to worship other gods. The people of Israel and Judah have broken the agreement I made with their forefathers.

So this is what the Lord says: I'm going to bring upon them a disaster they won't be able to escape. They will cry out to me for help, but I won't listen to them. Then the people in the towns of Judah and Jerusalem will go and call out for help to the gods they've been burning incense to, but these gods won't be able to do anything to save them in their time of trouble. You certainly have as many gods as you have towns, Judah! You have built shameful altars, altars to burn incense to Baal. You have as many altars as the streets of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah, don't pray for these people. Don't cry for help or offer a prayer on their behalf, because I won't be listening when they cry out to me in the time of their trouble.

What right do the people I love have to be in my Temple when they've done so many evil things? Do you think the meat of sacrifices will save you? When disaster strikes will you be happy?

At one time the Lord said you were a healthy olive tree, full of leaves and bearing beautiful fruit. But with a great noise he will set fire to it, destroying its branches. I, the Lord Almighty, was the one who planted you, but I have announced you will be destroyed because of the evil that the people of Israel and Judah have committed, making me angry by burning incense to Baal.

The Lord told me about it, so I knew. Then he showed me what they were actually doing. I was like a trusting little lamb being led away to be slaughtered. I didn't know that they had been plotting against me. They said, “Let's destroy the tree along with everything it produces. Let's kill him so no one will even remember his name.”

I appeal to you, Lord Almighty, you who judge rightly and examine people's thoughts and feelings, let me see how you punish them, because I've left my case in your hands.

So this is what the Lord says about the people of Anathoth who are trying to kill you, telling you, “Don't prophesy in the name of the Lord, or we'll kill you.” This is the reply of the Lord Almighty: I will punish them. Their young men will be killed by the sword; their sons and daughters will be killed by famine. There won't be anyone left because I will bring disaster on the people of Anathoth at the time when they're punished.

Lord, when I complain to you, you always show yourself to be in the right. Even so I still want to present my case to you. Why is it that wicked people do so well? Why do those who are unfaithful to you live so comfortably? You planted them, and they've taken root, grown, and produced fruit. They're always talking about you but they don't think of you, even for a moment.

But you know me, Lord, you see me, and examine what I think about you. Drag off these people like sheep to be slaughtered; keep them apart for the time when they're killed. How long will the land have to mourn and the grass in every field be dried up because of the evil of the people who live there? The animals and birds have died out because the people have said, “He doesn't know what's going to happen to us.”

The Lord says, Once you've become worn out in a foot race against men, how would you win racing against horses? If you trip up in open ground, how would you do in the tangled undergrowth beside the Jordan?

Even your own brothers and your father's family have betrayed you; they have publicly criticized you. Don't trust them when they talk nicely to you!

I have given up on my people; I have abandoned the nation I chose. I have handed over the ones I truly love to their enemies. They've turned into a wild lion, roaring at me—that's why I hate them. My people are like a spotted bird of prey to me with other birds of prey circling to attack it. Go and bring all the wild animals to eat up the carcass.

Many shepherds have come and destroyed my vineyard; they have trampled down the crops in my field. They have turned my pleasant land into an empty wasteland. They have made it into a desert; it mourns before me, lying desolate. The whole country is a wasteland, but no one cares. The destructive armies have crossed all the bare desert hills for the Lord's sword destroys from one end of the country to the other. No one has any peace.

My people sowed wheat but harvested thorns. They wore themselves out but gained no benefit. You should be ashamed of such a poor harvest, caused by the Lord's furious anger.

This is what the Lord says: When it comes to these evil nearby nations who attack the country that I gave to my people Israel, I'm going to uproot them from their land. I'm also going to uproot the people of Judah from among them. However, once I have uprooted them, I will have mercy on them again, and bring each one back to their property and their land.

If they will honestly learn the ways of my people and respect me, making their vows to me, just as they once taught my people to swear by Baal, then they will do well among my people. But if they refuse to obey, then I will not only uproot that nation but I will completely destroy it, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord told me to do: Go and buy yourself a linen loincloth and put it on, but don't wash it. So I went and bought a loincloth as the Lord had instructed me, and I put it on.

Then the Lord gave me another message: Take the loincloth that you bought and put on, and go immediately to the River Perath and hide it there in a hole among the rocks. So I went and hid it at the River Perath, as the Lord had told me.

A long time later the Lord told me, Go to Perath, and get the loincloth that I ordered you to hide there. I went to Perath and dug up the loincloth, and removed it from where I'd hidden it. Obviously it was ruined—completely useless.

Then a message from the Lord came to me: This is what the Lord says: I will ruin the arrogance of Judah and the great arrogance of Jerusalem in exactly the same way. These evil people refuse to listen to what I tell them. They follow their own stubborn and evil thinking and run off to worship other gods—they will be like this loincloth, completely useless.

In the same way that a loincloth holds tightly to the body, so I made all the people of Israel and Judah hold tightly to me, declares the Lord. Then they could have been my people, representing me, giving me honor and praise. But they refused to listen.

So tell them this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Every wine jar shall be filled with wine.

When they reply, “Don't we know that already? Of course every wine jar should be filled with wine!” then tell them that this is what the Lord says: I'm going to make everyone who lives in this land drunk—the kings sitting on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the people of Jerusalem. I'm going to smash them against each other like wine jars, both parents and children, declares the Lord. I won't let any mercy or pity or compassion stop me from destroying them.

Listen and pay attention. Don't be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken. Honor the Lord your God before he brings the darkness, before you trip and fall in the twilight on the mountains. You long for light to come, but he sends only gloom and complete darkness.

But if you refuse to listen, I will weep secretly inside because of your pride. My tears pour down because the Lord's flock has been captured.

Tell the king and the queen mother: Get down from your thrones, because your splendid crowns have fallen from your heads. The towns in the Negev are surrounded; no one can get through to them. The whole of Judah has been taken away into exile, everyone has been exiled. Look up and you'll see the invaders coming from the north. Where is the flock that was given to you to look after? Where are the sheep you were so proud of? What are you going to say when he puts your enemies in charge of you, people you once counted as your friends? Won't you suffer pains like a woman in labor?

If you say to yourself, Why has this happened to me? it's because you have been so wicked. That's why your skirts were stripped off and you were raped. Can Ethiopians change the color of their skin? Can a leopard change its spots? In the same way you can't change and do good because you're so used to doing evil.

I'm going to scatter you like chaff blown away by the desert wind. This is what's going to happen to you; this is what I have decided to do to you, declares the Lord, because you have forgotten me and believed in lies. I will pull your skirts up over your face, so you will be seen naked and ashamed. I watched your acts of adultery and lust, how you prostituted yourselves shamelessly, worshiping idols on the hills and in the fields. Yes, I saw the disgusting things you did.

Disaster is coming to you, Jerusalem! How long are you going to remain unclean?

This is a message from the Lord that came to Jeremiah regarding the drought: Judah is in mourning; her towns are wasting away. Her people are weeping for the land, and a cry for help comes from Jerusalem. Rich people send their servants to get water. They go to the cisterns, but don't find any water. They return with empty jars, disappointed and ashamed, covering their heads.

The ground has dried up because there hasn't been any rain in the land. The farmers are ashamed; they cover their heads. Even the deer abandons her newborn fawn because there's no grass. Wild donkeys stand on the bare hills, panting like jackals. Their eyesight fails because they have nothing to eat. Even though our sins give evidence against us, Lord, please do something for us because of your good nature. Yes, we have rebelled against you so often; we have sinned against you.

You are the hope of Israel, our Savior in times of trouble. Why do you act like a foreigner in our country, like a traveler who only stays a night? Why do you act like someone caught unawares, like a powerful warrior who can't help? You are here among us, Lord, and we are known as your people. Please don't give up on us!

This is what the Lord says about his people: They really love to wander away from me—they don't even try to stop themselves. So the Lord refuses to accept them. Now he'll remember their guilty actions and punish them for their sins.

The Lord told me, Don't pray for the welfare of this people. Even if they fast, I won't listen to their cry. Even though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I won't accept them. On the contrary I will wipe them out by sword and famine and plague.

“Oh Lord God!” I answered, “Look what prophets are telling them, claiming to be speaking for you: ‘You won't see war or suffer from famine, but I will give you peace that lasts here in this place.’”

The prophets are prophesying lies in my name, replied the Lord. I didn't send them or choose them or speak to them. It's a lying vision, an empty prediction, a deluded, deceitful product of their own minds that they are prophesying to you.

So this is what the Lord says about such prophets who prophesy in my name: I didn't send them, but even so they say, “This country won't suffer war or famine.” These same prophets will die from war or famine! The bodies of the people they prophesied to will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem because of famine and war. There won't be anyone to bury them or their wives, their sons or their daughters. I will pour out their own evil on them.

This is what you are to tell them: Tears flow from my eyes without stopping day or night, because my people have been crushed by a heavy blow, a really serious wound.

If I go out to the countryside, I see those killed by the sword; if I go into the city, I see those dying by famine. Both prophets and priests wander around the country—they don't know what they're doing.

Have you really rejected Judah? Do you hate Zion so much? Why have you wounded us so badly that we can't be healed? We hoped for peace, but instead nothing good has come; we hoped for a time of healing, but instead there was only sudden terror. Lord, we admit our wickedness, the guilt of our forefathers as well as our own sins against you. Because of your own reputation please don't hate us; don't bring dishonor on your glorious throne. Please remember your agreement with us; don't break it. Can the false gods of the other nations bring rain? Can the skies themselves send showers? No, it's you, Lord our God. So we put our hope in you, because only you can do all this.

The Lord told me: Even if Moses and Samuel were standing before me pleading with me on behalf of these people, I wouldn't feel sorry for them. Send them away from me. Have them leave. If they ask you, “Where shall we go?” tell them that this is what the Lord says: Those to be killed by the plague, to the plague; those to be killed by the sword, to the sword; those to be killed by famine, to famine; and those to be killed in captivity, to captivity.

I will put four kinds of destroyers in charge of them, declares the Lord: swords to kill, dogs to drag their bodies away, and the birds of prey and wild animals to eat them and destroy them. I will make all the kingdoms of the world horrified by them, because of the evil things Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, king of Judah did in Jerusalem.

Who will be sorry for you, Jerusalem? Who will mourn for you? Who will stop to ask you how you are? You have deserted me, declares the Lord. You have turned your back on me. So I will take action against you and destroy you; I am tired of showing you mercy. I will scatter you with a winnowing fork from every town in the country. I will destroy my people and take away their children because they refuse to give up their evil ways. There will be more widows than the sand of the sea. I will bring a destroyer at noon and mothers will lose their young sons. They will suddenly experience agony and shock. A mother of seven children will collapse; she will gasp for breath. Her sun will set while it's still daytime; she will be ashamed and humiliated. I will let the enemies kill the rest of them, declares the Lord.

How sad I am, my mother, that you gave birth to me! I'm a victim of argument and conflict wherever I go in the country. I have never lent anyone anything, or borrowed anything, but still everyone curses me.

But the Lord told me: Don't worry, I'm going to take away your problems so you can do good. I will make your enemies plead with you whenever they're in trouble or suffering.

Can anyone break iron, iron from the north, or bronze? I will give away your wealth and valuable possessions for free. They will become plunder for your enemies because of all the sins you committed throughout your country. Then I will have your enemies make you their slaves in an unfamiliar country, because my anger will be like lighting a fire that will burn you up.

You know what's happening to me, Lord. Please remember me and look after me. Punish my persecutors! Please be patient—don't let me die! You know I put up with criticism because I want to honor you.

When I received your messages, I ate them up! What you said made me really happy—I was delighted. I belong to you, Lord God Almighty! I didn't join in with a bunch of jokers as they had fun. I stayed by myself because you have called me, and you have filled me with outrage.

Why doesn't my pain ever stop? Why is my wound incurable? Why can't it be healed? You've really become like a seasonal stream to me, an unreliable source of water.

So this is what the Lord says: If you come back to me, I will take you back and you will serve me again. If what you talk about are worthwhile subjects and not nonsense, you will be my spokesman, Jeremiah. They must be the ones who follow you; you must not follow them.

Then I will make you a wall to these people, a strong wall of bronze. They will fight against you but they won't defeat you. I am with you to save you and rescue you, declares the Lord. I will liberate you from the power of the wicked, and free you from the clutches of the cruel.

A message from the Lord that came to me, saying, Don't marry or have children here.

This is what the Lord says about children born here, and about their mothers and fathers—their parents here in this country: They will die from fatal diseases. No one will mourn for them. Their bodies won't be buried, but will lie on the ground like manure. They will be destroyed by war and famine, and their bodies will be food for birds of prey and wild animals.

This is what the Lord says: Don't enter a home where people are having a funeral meal. Don't visit them to mourn or to offer condolences, for I have taken away my peace, my trustworthy love, and my mercy from these people, declares the Lord.

Everyone, from the most important to the least, will die in this country. They will not be buried or mourned; there will be no rites for the dead such as cutting oneself or shaving of heads. No funeral receptions will

be held to comfort those who mourn—not even a comforting drink is to be offered at the loss of a father or mother.

Don't go into a house where people are celebrating and sit down with them to eat and drink. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am going to put a stop right here, while you watch, to any sounds of celebration and joy, the happy voices of the groom and bride.

When you explain all this to them they'll ask you, “Why has the Lord ordered that such a terrible disaster should happen to us? What did we do wrong? What sin have we committed against the Lord our God?”

Answer them: It's because your forefathers deserted me, declares the Lord. They went and followed other gods, serving them and worshiping them. They abandoned me and didn't keep my laws. You however have done even more evil than your forefathers. Look at how all of you followed your own stubborn evil thinking instead of obeying me. So I'm going to throw you out of this country and exile you in a country unfamiliar to you and your forefathers. There you'll serve other gods day and night, because I won't help you at all.

But listen! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when people won't any longer make vows, saying, “On the Lord's life, who led the Israelites out of Egypt?” Instead they'll say, “On the Lord's life, who led the Israelites back from the northern country and all the other countries where he had exiled them?” I'm going to bring them back to the country I gave their forefathers.

But for the moment I'm going to send for many fishermen and they'll catch them, declares the Lord. Then I'm going to send for many hunters, and they'll hunt them down on every mountain and hill, even from their hiding places in the rocks.

I see everything they're doing. They can't hide from me, and their sins aren't hidden from me either. First I'm going to pay them back double for their wickedness and sin, because they have made my land unclean with the lifeless bodies of their disgusting idols, filling my special country with their offensive pagan images.

Lord, you are my strength and my fortress, my safe place in the time of trouble. Nations will come to you from all over the earth, and they will say, “The religion of our forefathers was a total lie! The idols they worshiped were useless—no good at all. How can people make gods for themselves? These aren't gods!”

Now they'll see! I'll show them, and then they'll recognize my power and strength. Then they'll know that I am the Lord!

The sin of Judah is inscribed with an iron stylus, engraved with an adamant point, on their minds and on corners of their altars where they worship. Even their children remember to worship at their pagan altars and Asherah poles, set up by the green trees and on the high hills, on my mountain in the fields. I will hand over your wealth and all your valuable possessions as plunder, because of the sin committed on your pagan high places inside your country. You will have to give up the land I gave you. I will have your enemies make you their slaves in an unfamiliar country for you made my anger blaze, and it will burn forever.

This is what the Lord says: Cursed are those who put their confidence in human beings, who trust in human strength and give up relying on the Lord. They will be like a shrub alone in the desert that isn't even aware when good things happen. It just goes on living in the dry desert, in a salt flat that's uninhabited.

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, who put their confidence in him. They are like trees planted by water, sending out roots toward the stream. They don't panic when it gets hot; their leaves are always green. They don't worry during a time of drought—they go on producing fruit.

The mind is more deceptive than anything else—it's incurably sick! Who can possibly understand it? But I, the Lord, see what people are thinking. I examine their minds, so I can reward them depending on their attitudes and the way they behave.

Like a partridge hatching eggs it didn't lay is someone who makes a fortune by cheating others. Their riches will fly away at midday, and in the end they'll look like a fool.

Our Temple is a throne of glory, raised up high from the beginning. Lord, you are Israel's hope. Anyone who deserts you will be disgraced. Anyone who turns their back on you will vanish like names written in the dust, for they have abandoned the Lord, the source of living water.

Please heal me, Lord, and I'll be healed; save me, and I'll be saved, for you are the one I praise.

See how they keep on saying to me, “Where is the disaster that the Lord's predicted? Is it ever going to happen?”

But I haven't been in a hurry to give up being your shepherd. I haven't wanted the time of trouble to come. You know that whatever I said was said in front of you.

Please don't be the one who terrifies me! You are my protection in the time of trouble. Bring shame on my persecutors, but not on me. Terrify them, but not me, Let them experience the time of trouble, and smash them to pieces.

This is what the Lord told me: Go and stand at the main gate of the city, the one used by kings of Judah, and do the same at all the other gates of Jerusalem. Tell them, Listen to the Lord's message, kings of Judah, and all you people of Judah and Jerusalem who come in through these gates.

This is what the Lord says: Pay attention, if you value your lives! Don't carry a load on the Sabbath day, and don't bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Don't carry a load out of your houses, and don't do any work on the Sabbath day. Keep the Sabbath day holy, just as I ordered your forefathers. However, they refused to listen or pay attention. Instead they were stubborn and refused to obey or accept instruction.

Listen carefully to me, says the Lord, and don't bring any load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, and keep the Sabbath day holy, and don't do any work on it. Then kings and princes will enter through the gates of this city. They will sit on the throne of David. They will ride in chariots and on horses with their officials, accompanied by the people of Judah and

those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. People will come from the towns of Judah and everywhere around Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, and from the lowlands the hill country, and the Negev. They will bring burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and frankincense, and thank offerings to the Lord's Temple.

But if you refuse to listen to me and keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying a load while entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will set its gates alight with a fire that can't be put out, and it will burn down Jerusalem's fortresses.

This message came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Go down right away to the potter's house. I will give you my message there.

I went down to the potter's house and saw him working at his potter's wheel. But the pot that he was making from the clay went wrong. So he made it into something different as he thought best.

The Lord's message came to me, saying, People of Israel, declares the Lord, can't I deal with you just like this potter does with his clay? I hold you in my hand just like clay in the potter's hand, people of Israel.

At one time it could happen that I announce that a nation or a kingdom is going to be uprooted, torn down, and destroyed. However, if that nation I warned gives up its evil ways, then I will change my mind regarding the disaster I was about to bring.

At another time I could announce that I'm going to build up and give power to a nation or a kingdom. But if it does evil in my sight and refuses to listen to my voice, then I will change my mind regarding the good I had planned for it.

So tell the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem that this is what the Lord says: Watch out! I am preparing disaster for you, and working out a plan against you. All of you, give up your evil ways. Live right and act right!

But they'll say, “We just can't! We'll do whatever we want. Each of us will stubbornly follow our own evil thinking.”

Consequently this is what the Lord says: Ask around the nations—has anybody ever heard anything like this? Virgin Israel has acted really badly.

Does the snow of Lebanon ever disappear from its rocky mountain-tops? Do its cool waters that flow from such distant sources ever dry up?

But my people have rejected me! They burn incense to useless idols which trip them up, making them leave the old roads in order to walk down unmade paths instead of the highway. They have turned their country into a horrific wasteland, a place that will always be treated with contempt. People passing by will be shocked, shaking their heads in disbelief.

Like a strong wind from the east I will scatter them before the enemy. I will turn my back on them and not look at them when their time of trouble comes.

Some people decided, “We need a plan to deal with Jeremiah. There'll still be priests to explain the law, there'll still be wise people to give advice, and there'll still be prophets to give prophecies. Let's organize a smear campaign against him so we don't have to listen to a word he says.”

Lord, please pay attention to what's happening to me! Listen to what my accusers are saying! Should good be paid back with evil? Yet they have dug a pit to trap me! Remember how I stood before you to plead on their behalf, to stop you being angry with them?

But now may their children starve; may they be killed by the sword. May their wives lose their children and their husbands; may their husbands die from disease; may their young men be killed in battle. May cries of agony be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders to attack them, because they dug a pit to capture me and hid traps to catch me as I walk along.

But Lord, you know about all their plots to try and kill me. Don't forgive their wickedness; don't wipe away their sin. Bring them down! Deal with them when you're angry!

This is what the Lord says: Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take some of the elders of the people and leaders of the priests with you, and go through the Broken Pottery Gate to the valley of Ben-hinnom. Announce this message I'm giving you.

Tell them, Listen to what the Lord says, kings of Judah and people living in Jerusalem. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am going to bring down on this place such a disaster that it will make the ears of anyone who hears about it ring. My people have deserted me and have made this a place where foreign gods are worshiped. They have burned incense in it to other gods that they and their forefathers and the kings of Judah never knew anything about. They have filled this place with the blood of innocent people. They have built pagan shrines to Baal where they burn their children in the fire as offerings to Baal. This is something I never commanded or even mentioned. I never even thought of such a thing!

So watch out! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when instead of Topheth and the Valley of Hinnom this place will be called the Valley of Killing. Right here in this place I'm going to spoil the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will let their enemies who want to kill them come and do exactly that. Their dead bodies will be food for birds of prey and wild animals.

I'm going to make this city desolate, a place that is mocked. Everyone who passes by will be horrified, shocked by all its damage. The siege brought by their enemies who want to kill them will be so terrible that I will make them eat each other, even their own sons and daughters.

Then smash the jar in front of the people with you. Tell them, This is what the Lord Almighty says: I'm going to smash this nation and this city, just like a clay jar is smashed so it can't ever be repaired. People will bury their dead in Topheth until it's full. This is what I'm going to do to this place and to the people who live here, declares the Lord. I will turn this city into Topheth. All the houses of Jerusalem and the palaces of the kings of Judah will become unclean just like Topheth, because they are all the houses on whose rooftops they used to burn incense to the sun, moon, and stars, and poured out drink offerings to other gods.

Jeremiah returned from Topheth, where the Lord had sent him to deliver this message. He went and stood

in the court of the Lord's Temple and announced to everyone, This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Watch out! I am about to bring down on this city and on all its surrounding villages every disaster I warned them about, because they have stubbornly refused to listen to what I say.

Pashhur, son of Immer, was a priest and the official in charge of the Lord's Temple. When he heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, he beat Jeremiah the prophet and had him put in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate, near to the Lord's Temple.

The following day, when Pashhur had Jeremiah released from the stocks, Jeremiah told him, “The Lord doesn't call you Pashhur (tear in pieces), but Magormissabib (terror is everywhere). For this is what the Lord says: I'm going to make you terrified—you and all those you love. Enemies will kill them as you watch. I will hand Judah over to the king of Babylon. He will kill some, and the rest he will take away into exile in Babylon.

I'm going to give it all away. All the wealth of this city, all the results of hard work, all the valuables, all the crown jewels of Judah's kings—I'm going to hand it over to their enemies, who will take it as plunder and carry it off to Babylon.

You, Pashhur, and everyone who lives with you, will go into captivity. You will go to Babylon. You will die there and be buried—you and all those you love, those to whom you prophesied lies.”

You fooled me, Lord, and I let myself be fooled! You're stronger than me—you've won! I've become a joke people laugh at all day long. Everyone is mocking me. This is because every time I open my mouth I have to shout out warnings of violence and destruction. The Lord's message has become the reason people criticize and ridicule me the whole time. If I tell myself, “I won't talk about him anymore, I won't even mention his name,” then his message is like a fire trapped within me, burning me from the inside out. I'm getting tired of holding it in. I just can't win.

I've heard many people gossiping: “He's the one who says, ‘Terror is everywhere!’ He has to be reported! Report what he's doing!” All my good friends are waiting for me to slip up. “Maybe he'll make a mistake so we can defeat him and get our revenge on him,” they say. But the Lord stands beside me like a powerful warrior. So those who are attacking me will fall. They won't win! Because they're not successful they will be totally disgraced. Their shame won't ever be forgotten.

Lord Almighty, you know without question who is living right. You examine people's thoughts and feelings. So let me see your punishment fall on them, because I've trusted you to judge my case.

Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For he saves the poor from the power of the wicked.

May the day I was born be cursed! May the day my mother gave birth to me never be blessed! May the man be cursed who brought my father the news that made him really happy, saying, “You have a son.” May that man be like the towns that the Lord destroyed without mercy. May he hear shouts of alarm in the morning and war cries at noon, because he should have killed me in the womb so that my mother would have been my grave, remaining pregnant forever. Why was I born only to see trouble and sadness, and to end my life in shame?

This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent Pashhur, son of Malchijah, and the priest Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah to talk with him. They said, “Please speak with the Lord on our behalf because Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, is attacking us. Perhaps the Lord will do some miracle for us like all those miracles he used to do, so that Nebuchadnezzar will retreat from us.”

But Jeremiah replied, “Tell Zedekiah this: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I'm going to turn the weapons you're holding against you, the weapons you're using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonian army outside the wall besieging you. I'm going to bring them right into the center of this city. I myself will fight against you with all my power and might, with the full force of my furious anger. I will kill those living in this city, human beings and animals. They will die from a terrible plague.

After that, declares the Lord, I'm going to hand you over, Zedekiah king of Judah, as well as your officers and the people who are left in this city after the plague and war and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to your enemies who want you dead. He will attack you; he won't spare you or show you any pity or mercy.

Tell the people this as well: This is what the Lord says: Look, I'm placing before you the path of life and the path of death. If you stay in this city you'll die either by sword or famine or plague, but if you leave and surrender to the Babylonians who are besieging you, you will live. In fact it will be like gaining your life as plunder from a war. For I am determined to bring disaster on this city, and not blessings, declares the Lord. It will be handed over to the king of Babylon, who will destroy it with fire.

In addition tell the royal family of the king of Judah to listen to the Lord's message: Descendants of David, this is what the Lord says: Make sure you judge fairly every day. Protect those who are being unjustly treated from those corrupt people, otherwise because of their evil actions my anger will blaze out like fire that can't be put out. Watch out, because I'm going to fight against you people who live above the valley on top of a flat rock, declares the Lord. You say, ‘Who can attack us? Who can break down our defenses?’ I'm going to punish you as you deserve for what you've done, declares the Lord. I will set your forest on fire and it will burn up everything around you.”

This is what the Lord says: Go to the palace of the king of Judah and give this message. Tell them: Listen to what the Lord has to say to you, king of Judah, sitting on the throne of David, you and your officials and the people here with you. This is what the Lord says: Do what is fair and right. Protect those who are being unjustly treated by corrupt people. Don't do anything wrong to foreigners, orphans, or the widows. Don't use violence against them. Don't kill innocent people.

If you will honestly do what I tell you, then kings who sit on David's throne will ride on chariots and horses with their officials through the gates of this

palace. They'll be accompanied by the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem. But if you refuse to obey what I say, then I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that this palace will be turned into rubble.

This is what the Lord says about the royal family of the king of Judah: You are as dear to me as the forests on Gilead and on the mountains of Lebanon. But I will turn you into a desert, into towns where no one lives. I will choose men to come and destroy you, each with his own ax. They will chop down your fine cedars and throw them in the fire.

Foreigners from many nations will pass by this city and ask each another, “Why has the Lord done such terrible things to this great city?”

People will answer, “Because they broke the agreement of the Lord their God. They went and worshiped other gods.”

Don't weep over the king that died. Don't mourn for him. Instead weep for the king who is exiled, who will never return, who will never see his homeland again.

This is what the Lord says about Jehoahaz of Josiah, king of Judah. He succeeded his father Josiah but was taken away. He will never return. He will die in exile; he will never see this country again.

Trouble is coming to Jehoiakim because he mistreats others in building his palace, by dealing unfairly with those constructing the upper floors. He makes his own people work for nothing—he doesn't pay them any wages.

He says to himself, “I'm going to build myself a great palace, with large upper rooms.” He has windows inserted, puts in cedar panels, and paints it bright red with vermilion.

Does it make you a king just because you have more cedar than anyone else? Your father had food and drink, didn't he? He ruled fairly and honestly, and he had a good life because of this. He defended the poor and those in need, and so things went well. Isn't this what knowing me really means? declares the Lord.

But all you're looking for, all you think about, is getting whatever you want, however dishonestly. You kill the innocent, you violently mistreat and exploit your people.

So this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah:

They won't mourn for him, saying: “How sad, my brother! How sad my sister!”

They won't mourn for him, saying: “How sad, my lord! How sad, his majesty!”

His burial will be that of a donkey. He'll be dragged off and thrown away outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Go to Lebanon and cry for help! Shout in Bashan! Scream from Abarim! For all your lovers have been destroyed. I warned you when you thought you were safe and sound. But you replied, “I'm not going to listen!” That's been your attitude since you were young—you never did what I told you.

The wind will blow away all your “shepherds,” and your lovers will go into exile. Then you will be shamed and disgraced because of all the evil things you've done.

You who live in “Lebanon” in your cedar nest, how much you're going to groan when agonizing pains hit you like a woman in labor.

The Lord said to Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah: As I live, declares the Lord, even if you were a signet ring on a finger of my right hand, I would pull you off. I'm going to hand you over to those who terrify you and who want to kill you, to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and the Babylonians. I'm going to throw you out—you and the mother who gave birth to you—sending you to another country. Neither of you were born there, but both of you will die there. You won't ever return to the country you love so much.

Who is this man Jehoiachin? A broken pot that's been thrown away, something nobody wants? Why have he and his children been thrown out, exiled in an unfamiliar country?

My country, my country, my country! Listen to what the Lord has to say!

This is what the Lord says: Put this man down as having no children. He's a man who won't ever be successful in his whole life. None of his children will ever be successful either. None of them will sit on David's throne or be king in Judah.

What trouble is coming to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the shepherds who were meant to look after my people: You have scattered my flock. You have chased them away. You didn't take care of them, so now I will take care of you for all the evil you've done, declares the Lord.

I myself will gather what's left of my flock from all the countries where I exiled them, and I will bring them back to their pasture, where they will increase in number. I will put shepherds in charge of them who will take care of them, and they won't be afraid or discouraged anymore, and none of them will be missing, declares the Lord.

Look, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will choose a descendant of David who does what is right. As king he will rule with wisdom and do what is just and right throughout the country. When he is king, Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety. This is the name he will be called: The Lord Who Makes Us Right.

Look, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when people won't say anymore, “On the Lord's life, who led the Israelites out of Egypt.” Instead they'll say, “On the Lord's life, who led the Israelites back from the northern country and all the other countries where he had exiled them.” Then they'll live in their own country.

When it comes to the prophets: I'm really disturbed—I'm shaking inside! I stagger like a drunk, like someone who's had too much wine, because of what the Lord is like, because of his holy words. For the country is full of people committing adultery so it's under a curse. The land mourns and the desert pastures have dried up. The people live evil lives, using their energy to do wrong. Both prophets and priests show no respect for me. I see wickedness even in my Temple, declares the Lord. That's why their path will become slippery; they will be chased away in the dark and fall down. I'm going to bring disaster on them at the time when they're punished, declares the Lord.

I saw the prophets of Samaria doing something really offensive: They prophesied in the name of Baal and led my people Israel to sin.

But now I see the prophets of Jerusalem doing something even more disgusting: They commit adultery and their lives are a lie. They support the wicked, so no one stops sinning. To me they're all like Sodom; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah.

So this is what the Lord Almighty says about the prophets: I will give them wormwood to eat and poisoned water to drink, because evil has spread across the country from the prophets of Jerusalem.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Don't pay attention to what these prophets say when they prophesy to you. They're fooling you with visions they make up in their own minds. They're not from me. They keep on telling people who don't respect me, “The Lord says that you'll live in peace,” and to everyone following their own stubborn attitude, “Nothing bad is going to happen to you.”

But who of them has attended the Lord's council to hear and understand what he's saying? Who has paid attention to his instructions and followed them? Watch out! The Lord has sent out a furious storm, a tornado swirling around the heads of the wicked. The Lord's anger won't fade until he's finished doing everything he wants. Only then will you really understand.

I didn't send these prophets, but they run to deliver their messages. I didn't tell them to say anything, but they still go on prophesying. Now if they had attended my council, they would have delivered my instructions to my people and brought them back from their evil way of life, from their evil actions.

Am I only a local God and not a God who operates widely? asks the Lord. Can people hide in secret places where I can't see them? asks the Lord. Don't I operate everywhere in heaven and on earth? asks the Lord.

I've listened to the prophets who prophesy lies in my name. They say, “I've had a dream! I've had a dream!” How long will this continue? How long will these prophets go on prophesying these lies which are just the product of their own deluded minds? They think the dreams that they repeat to one another will lead my people to forget me, just like their forefathers forgot me by worshiping Baal.

A prophet who has a dream should say it's just a dream, but anyone I've spoken to should deliver my message faithfully. What is straw in comparison to grain? asks the Lord. Doesn't my word burn like fire? asks the Lord. Isn't it like a hammer smashing a rock?

Pay attention to this, declares the Lord. I'm opposed to those prophets who steal words from one another and then say it's a message from me.

Pay attention to this, declares the Lord. I'm opposed to those prophets who make up their own stories and then announce, “This is what the Lord says.”

Pay attention to this, declares the Lord, I'm opposed to those who prophesy fictional dreams. They tell them in order to lead my people into sin with their wild lies. I didn't send them or give them any instructions, and they don't do anybody any good, declares the Lord.

So when a prophet or priest or anyone else comes and asks you, “What is ‘the burden of the Lord?’” tell them, I'm not giving you a burden. I'm giving up on you, declares the Lord.

If a prophet or priest or anyone else claims, “This is the burden of the Lord,” I will punish that person and their family.

This is what everybody should say to their friends and relatives: “What answer has the Lord given?” or, “What has the Lord said?” Don't talk about “the burden of the Lord” anymore, because everybody has different ideas about this “burden,” perverting the words of the living God, the Lord Almighty, our God.

This is what you are to ask any prophet: “What message has the Lord given you?” and “What has the Lord told you?”

If they say, “This is the burden of the Lord,” then this is the Lord's response: Because you said, “This is the burden of the Lord,” and I warned you not to, now I'm going to pick you up like a burden and throw you away, you and the city that I gave to you and your forefathers. I will disgrace you forever, your shame will never be forgotten.

The Lord showed me in vision two baskets of figs placed in front of the Lord's Temple. This happened after Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken to Babylon Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, as well as the leaders of Judah, and the craftsmen and metal-workers from Jerusalem.

One basket was full of very good figs, like those that ripen early, but the other basket only had very bad figs, so bad they couldn't be eaten.

“Jeremiah,” the Lord asked, “what can you see?”

“I see figs!” I replied. “The good figs look very good, but the bad figs look very bad, so bad they can't be eaten.”

Then a message from the Lord came to me, saying, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: The good figs represent to me the exiles from Judah, those I have sent away from here to the country of Babylonia. I will watch over them and I will bring them back to this country. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them the desire to know me, to know that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will come back completely committed to me.

But the bad figs, so bad they cannot be eaten, says the Lord, represent the way I will deal with Zedekiah, king of Judah, his officials, and those who are left of Jerusalem, as well as those remaining in this country and those living in Egypt. I'm going to make an example of them that will horrify and offend everyone on earth. They will be disgraced, mocked, ridiculed, and cursed everywhere I've exiled them. I'm going to attack them with war and famine and plague, until they're completely wiped out from the country that I gave to them and their forefathers.

This is the message that came to Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. It concerned all the people of Judah. So the prophet Jeremiah went and spoke to all the people of Judah and all the people living in Jerusalem, telling them:

From the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah, son of Amon, king of Judah until now, twenty-three years in total, messages from the Lord have come to me, and I have told you what he said time and again, but you have not listened. Even though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you time and again, you don't bother to listen or pay any attention.

The consistent message has been: Give up your evil ways and the evil things you're doing so you can live in the country that the Lord has given to you and your forefathers forever. Don't follow other gods and worship them, and don't anger me by making idols. Then I won't do anything to hurt you.

But you've hurt yourselves by not listening to me, declares the Lord, because you angered me by making idols. So this is what the Lord Almighty says: Because you have not obeyed what I told you, watch as I summon all the people of the north, declares the Lord. I'm going to send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to attack this country and the people who live here, and all the surrounding nations. I will set them apart for destruction. I'm going to totally destroy you, and people will be horrified at what's happened to you and will mock you.

I will also put a stop to the cheerful sounds of celebration and the happy voices of the bride and bridegroom. No noise will come from millstones being used; no lamps will be lit. This whole country will become an empty wasteland, and Judah and these other nations will serve the king of Babylon for seventy years.

However, when these seventy years are over, I'm going to punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the country of Babylonia, for their sin, declares the Lord. I will completely destroy them.

I will bring down on that country everything I threatened to do, everything that's written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the different nations. Many nations and powerful kings will make slaves of them, the Babylonians, and I will pay them back for the evil they've done.

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, told me: Take this cup I'm handing to you. It contains the wine of my anger. You are to make all the nations I send you to drink from it. They will drink and stumble around and go mad because of the war brought by the armies I'm sending to attack them.

I took the cup the Lord handed to me and made all the nations drink from it that he sent me to: to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, destroying them so that people were horrified at what happened to them and mocked them and cursed them (and they are still like this today); to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and his officials, leaders, all his people and all the foreigners living there; to all the kings of the country of Uz; to all the kings of the Philistines: Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and what's left of Ashdod; to Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites; to all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; to the kings of the Mediterranean sea coast; to Dedan, Tema, Buz, and all those who trim their hair on the sides of their heads; to all the kings of Arabia; and to all the kings of the different tribes living in the desert; to all the kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media; to all the kings of the north; in fact to all the kingdoms on earth whether close or far away, one after another. After all of them, the king of Babylon will drink it too.

Tell them this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, make yourselves drunk, and vomit. Because of the war you'll be killed, falling down never to get up again.

If they should refuse to take the cup and drink from it, tell them that this is what the Lord Almighty says: You can't avoid drinking it—you have to! Can't you see that I'm about to bring disaster down on my own city, so do you really think you wouldn't be punished as well? You won't go unpunished, for I am bringing war to everyone on earth, declares the Lord Almighty. Give this whole message as a prophecy against them. Tell them:

The Lord will thunder from high above. He will thunder loudly from the holy place where he lives. He will give a great roar against the sheepfolds. He will give a loud shout like people treading the grapes, frightening everyone who lives on earth. The sound will reach everywhere on the earth because the Lord is accusing the nations. He is judging everyone, executing the wicked, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Watch out! Disaster is falling on one nation after another; an immense storm is building up in the far distance. Those killed by the Lord at that time will cover the earth from one end to the other. No one will mourn them, or collect them, or bury them. They will be like piles of manure lying on the ground.

Cry out and weep, you shepherds! Roll around on the ground mourning, you leaders of the flock. The time for you to be killed has come; you will fall, smashed like the finest pottery. The shepherds won't be able to run away; the leaders of the flock won't escape. Listen to the cries of the shepherds, the weeping of the leaders of the flock, for the Lord is destroying their pasturelands. The peaceful sheepfolds have been ruined because of the Lord's fierce anger. The Lord has left his den like a lion, because their country has been devastated by the invading armies, and because of the Lord's fierce anger.

This message came from the Lord at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah king of Judah, This is what the Lord says: Go and stand in the Temple courtyard and deliver the whole message I have ordered you to give to everyone who comes from all the towns of Judah to worship there. Don't leave out a single word. Maybe they will listen, and each of them will give up their evil ways so that I won't have to carry out the disaster I'm planning to bring down on them because of the evil things they do.

Tell them that this is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have given you, and if you don't listen to the messages of my servants the prophets—I've sent them to you time and again, but you refused to listen— then I will destroy this Temple like I did Shiloh, and I will make this city a curse word used by everyone on earth.

The priests and prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah deliver this message in the Lord's Temple. As soon as he had finished telling everyone all that the Lord had ordered him to say, the priests and prophets and all the people grabbed him, shouting, “You'll die for this! How dare you claim to speak in the Lord's

name here in the Temple and declare that it will be destroyed like Shiloh, and that this city will be left empty and abandoned?" Everyone crowded around Jeremiah threatening him in the Lord's Temple.

When the leaders of Judah heard what happened they came from the king's palace to the Lord's Temple and sat at the entrance of the New Gate of the Temple to judge the case.

The priests and prophets complained to the leaders and all the people, "This man deserves the death penalty because he has committed treason by prophesying against this city. You heard it yourselves!"

Jeremiah addressed all the leaders and all the people, saying, "The Lord sent me to deliver every word of this prophecy against this Temple as you've heard. So change your ways and do what's right, and do what Lord your God tells you, so that he won't have to carry out the disaster he has announced he will bring down on you. As far as I'm concerned, I'm in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. But be careful, because you need to be aware that if you kill me, you will make yourselves, this city, and everyone who lives here guilty of murder, because it's true that the Lord sent me to tell you everything he said."

Then the leaders and all the people told the priests and prophets, "This man doesn't deserve the death penalty because he was speaking on behalf of the Lord our God."

Some of the country's elders stood up and addressed everyone gathered there. "Micah of Moresheth prophesied during the reign of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah that this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Zion will become like a plowed field; Jerusalem will end up a pile of rubble; and the Temple mount will be overgrown with trees.'

Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in the country have him killed? Didn't Hezekiah respect the Lord and plead with him? Didn't the Lord change his mind about the disaster he had announced against them? But we are about to bring a great disaster on ourselves!"

At around that time there was another man prophesying in the name of the Lord, Uriah, son of Shemaiah, from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against Jerusalem and against the country just as Jeremiah did. King Jehoiakim and all his military officers and officials heard what he was saying, and the king wanted to have him executed. But when Uriah found out about it, he was frightened and ran away to Egypt.

But King Jehoiakim sent Elnathan, son of Achbor, along with some others. They brought Uriah back from Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim. The king killed him with a sword and had his body thrown into the public graveyard. However, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, took Jeremiah's side so he was not handed over to the people to be killed.

This message came to Jeremiah from the Lord at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah. This is what the Lord told me: Make for yourself a harness and a yoke and strap it on your neck Send a message to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon through the ambassadors who have come to Jerusalem to see Zedekiah king of Judah.

Give them this order from the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, to convey to their masters: It was by my strength and creative power that I made the earth and the human beings and animals that live there, and I give it to those who are right in my sight. Now I have placed my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in charge of all these countries. I have even given him control over the wild animals. All nations will serve him and his son and grandson, until the time that his own land comes under the control of other nations and powerful kings. Any nation or kingdom that doesn't serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and doesn't submit to him I will punish that nation by war and famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I let Nebuchadnezzar destroy it completely.

Don't you listen to your prophets, your fortune-tellers, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums, or your magicians when they tell you, "You won't serve the king of Babylon." They're prophesying a lie to you that will lead to your removal from your country. I will expel you and you will die. But a nation that submits to the king of Babylon and serves him, I will leave in its own land, to cultivate it and live in it, declares the Lord.

I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah: Submit to the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and live! Why should you and your people die by war and famine and plague, as the Lord has said he would bring against any nation that does not serve the king of Babylon? Don't listen to messages from prophets who say, "You won't serve the king of Babylon," for they are prophesying a lie to you. I didn't send them, declares the Lord, and yet they are giving false prophecies in my name. So I will expel you and you will die—you and the prophets who prophesy to you.

Then I told the priests and all the people, This is what the Lord says: Don't listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, "Look! The objects from the Lord's Temple will shortly be returned from Babylon." They are prophesying a lie to you. Don't listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon and live! Why should this city be destroyed?

If they are truly prophets and really have the word of the Lord with them, they should be pleading now with the Lord Almighty that what's left in the Lord's Temple, in the palace of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem, isn't taken to Babylon.

This is what the Lord Almighty says about the pillars, the bronze sea, the bases, and the rest of the objects that are left in Jerusalem— everything Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon didn't take when he took Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, together with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem. Again, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the objects left in the Lord's Temple, in the palace of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem. They will be taken away to Babylon and will stay there until the time I see to them again, declares the Lord. Only then will I bring them back so they will be in Jerusalem again.

This is what happened in the beginning of the reign of King Zedekiah of Judah, in the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year.

The prophet Hananiah, son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, told me in the Lord's Temple in front of the priests and all the people: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. Before two years have passed I'm going to bring back to Jerusalem all the Temple objects that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to Jerusalem Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with all the exiles from Judah who were taken to Babylon, declares the Lord, because I'm going to break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

Then the prophet Jeremiah responded to the prophet Hananiah in front of the priests and all the people who were standing in the Lord's Temple. “Amen!” said Jeremiah. “I wish the Lord would do just that! I wish the Lord would fulfill your prophetic words and bring back the Temple objects and all the exiles back to Jerusalem from Babylon.

But even so, pay attention to this message I'm going to tell you and everyone here. The prophets of long ago who came before you and me prophesied war, disaster, and disease against many countries and great kingdoms. When it comes to a prophet who prophesies peace, see if their prophecies come true. Only that will prove they are really sent by the Lord.”

Then the prophet Hananiah removed the yoke from the prophet Jeremiah's neck and broke it. Hananiah announced in front of everyone, “This is what the Lord says: Just like this, before two years have passed I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.” Jeremiah the prophet left. However, right after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from his neck, a message of the Lord came to Jeremiah: “Go and tell Hananiah that this is what the Lord says: You may have broken a wooden yoke of wood, but you have replaced it with an iron yoke. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I have tied iron yokes on the necks of all these nations to force them to serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I have even given him control over the wild animals.”

Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah, “Listen to this, Hananiah! The Lord didn't send you, but you have convinced these people to believe in a lie. So this is what the Lord says: I'm going to get rid of you from the earth. You will die this year because you have promoted rebellion against the Lord.”

The prophet Hananiah died in the seventh month of that very year.

Jeremiah the prophet wrote this letter and sent it from Jerusalem to the elders who were left among the exiles, to the priests, the prophets, and everyone else who had been exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. This was after King Jehoiachin, the queen mother, the court officials, the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen, and the metalsworkers had been exiled from Jerusalem. Elasah, son of Shaphan, and Gemariah, son of Hilkiah, took the letter with them when Zedekiah king of Judah sent them to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. In the letter Jeremiah wrote:

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all the exiles who were taken from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build yourselves houses there to live in. Plant gardens and grow food to eat. Get married and have children. Arrange for your children to get married so they can have children too. Increase in number, don't decrease. Help make the city where I've exiled you more prosperous. Pray to the Lord for it, since as it prospers, so will you.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Don't be fooled by your prophets and fortune-tellers, and don't listen to any dreams they interpret for you. They are prophesying lies to you in my name; I have not sent them, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: When the seventy years exile in Babylon is over, I will see to you and keep my promise to bring you back to Jerusalem. I know what I intend to do for you, declares the Lord. I plan good things for you and not bad. I'm going to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call for my help, you will come and pray to me, and I will answer you. You will look for me and you will find me when you're completely committed to looking for me. I will let you find me, declares the Lord. I will end your captivity, gathering you from all the nations and places where I scattered you, declares the Lord. I will bring you back home to the place from where I sent you into exile.

But if you argue, “The Lord has provided prophets for us in Babylon,” this is what the Lord says about the king who sits on David's throne and everyone who's left in Jerusalem, your fellow citizens who weren't taken with you into exile. This is what the Lord Almighty says: I'm going to send war and famine and disease against them. I'll make them like rotten figs, so bad that they can't be eaten. I will chase them down with war and famine and disease. I will make all the kingdoms of the earth horrified by them. They will become a curse word, totally ruined, people to be mocked and criticized among all the nations where I scatter them. I'm going to do this because they haven't obeyed my words, declares the Lord, which I sent to them time and again through my servants the prophets. You exiles haven't obeyed me either, declares the Lord.

So listen to the word of the Lord, all you exiles I sent from Jerusalem to Babylon. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name. I'm going to hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will kill them right before your eyes. Because of what happens to them, all the exiles of Judah in Babylon will curse others like this: “May the Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, burned alive by the king of Babylon!” They did outrageous things in Israel—they committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and told lies in my name. I didn't tell them to say anything. I am the one who knows what they did, and I can witness to it, declares the Lord.

Tell Shemaiah the Nehelamite that this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: On your own authority you sent out letters to all the people of Jerusalem, to the priest Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah, and to all the priests, saying, “Zephaniah, the Lord has

chosen you as priest to replace Jehoiada, to be in charge of the Lord's Temple. In that capacity you are required to put in the stocks and neck irons any crazy person who claims to be a prophet. So why haven't you punished Jeremiah of Anathoth, who claims to be a prophet among you? You should have done this because he has sent a letter to us here in Babylon, stating, 'The exile will last a long time. So build yourselves houses there to live in. Plant gardens and grow food to eat.'"

However, Zephaniah the priest read this letter to Jeremiah the prophet.

Then the Lord told Jeremiah: Send this message to all the exiles: This is what the Lord says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite. Since Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I didn't send him, and has convinced you to believe in a lie, this is what the Lord says: I'm going to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He won't have any family left among this people, and he won't experience the good things that I'm going to do for my people, declares the Lord, for he has promoted rebellion against the Lord.

This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Write down in a book everything I've told you. Look, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will bring back my people Israel and Judah from captivity, declares the Lord. I will bring them back to the country I gave to their forefathers, and they will own it again.

This what the Lord said about Israel and Judah. This is what the Lord says: Hear the cries of panic, cries of fear, not peace. Think about it! Can men give birth? No. So why do I see every man holding his stomach with his hands like a woman in labor. Why is every face white as a sheet?

What a terrible day it will be—a day like never before! This is the time of trouble for Jacob's descendants, but they will be rescued from it. On that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will break the yoke from their necks and tear off their chains. Foreigners won't make them slaves anymore. They will serve the Lord their God, and their king, David's descendant whom I will give them.

As far as you're concerned, my servant Jacob, don't be afraid, declares the Lord, Israel, don't be discouraged. I promise to save you from your distant places of exile, your descendants from the countries where they're being held captive. The descendants of Jacob will go home to a quiet and comfortable life, free from any threats. I am with you and I will save you, declares the Lord.

Even though I'm going to completely destroy all the nations where I scattered you, I won't completely destroy you. However, I will discipline you as you deserve, and you can be sure I won't leave you unpunished.

This is what the Lord says: You have a wound that cannot be healed, you have a terrible injury. There's no one to take care of your case, no cure for your sores, no healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten about you; they don't bother looking for you anymore, because I have beaten you as if I were your enemy, the discipline of a cruel person, because of how wicked you are, because of your many sins.

Why are you crying over your wound? Your pain can't be cured. I did this to you because of how wicked you are, because of your many sins. Even so, everyone who destroys you will be destroyed. All your enemies, every last one, will be sent into exile. Those who plunder you will be plundered, and all who rob you will be robbed. But I will give you back your health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord, because people say you've been abandoned and that no one cares about you, Zion.

This is what the Lord says: I will bring Jacob's descendants back to their homes and have mercy on their families. The city will be rebuilt on top of its ruins, and the palace once again stand where it should. People will be singing songs of thanks, the sounds of celebration. I will increase their number—they will not become less. I will honor them—they will not be treated as insignificant. Their children will be looked after like they used to be. I will make their nation strong again, and punish anyone who attacks them. Their leader will be from their own country, their ruler will be chosen from among them. I will invite him to come close to me, and he will do so, for would anyone dare to approach me without being asked? declares the Lord.

You will be my people, and I will be your God.

Watch out! The Lord has sent out a furious storm, a tornado swirling around the heads of the wicked. The Lord's anger won't fade until he's finished doing everything he wants. Only then will you really understand.

At that time, I will be the God of all Israel's families, and they will be my people, declares the Lord. This is what the Lord says: The Israelites who survive death by the sword were blessed by the Lord in the desert as they looked for peace and quiet.

Long ago the Lord came and told us, My love for you will last forever. I hold you close to me with my trustworthy love. I'm going to rebuild you, and it will happen. You will be rebuilt, Virgin Israel. You will pick up your tambourines again and run outside to dance with joy. You will replant vineyards on Samaria's hills; those who plant will enjoy the grapes.

A day is coming when watchmen will call out from the hills of Ephraim, "Come on, let's go up to Zion, to worship the Lord our God!"

This is what the Lord says: Sing happily for the descendants of Jacob; shout for the greatest of all nations! Let everybody know! Praise and call out, "Lord, save your people, those who are left of Israel!"

Watch, because I will bring them back from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Everyone will return, even the blind and the lame, pregnant women, even mothers giving birth—a great gathering coming home, They will come back with tears in their eyes, and they will be praying as I take them home. I will lead them beside streams of waters, on level paths where they won't stumble. For I am Israel's Father; Ephraim is my firstborn.

Listen, nations, to what the Lord has to say, and let others know about in faraway countries: The Lord who scattered Israel will gather them together and keep them safe, just like a shepherd looks after his flock. The Lord has redeemed the descendants of Jacob and rescued them from their enemies who had defeated them.

They will return and celebrate with happy shouts on Mount Zion; their faces will beam over the Lord's wonderful gifts—the grain, new wine, and olive oil, and the young of their flocks and herds. Their life will be like a well-watered garden; and they won't ever be depressed again. The girls will dance in celebration; young men and old people will join in too. I will turn their sorrow into joy, and I will comfort them and change their sadness into happiness. I will give my priests everything they need and more, and my people will be more than satisfied with my goodness towards them, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: The sound of terrible weeping and mourning is heard in Ramah. It's Rachel crying for her children. They are dead, and she can't be comforted This is what the Lord says: Don't cry anymore, don't weep anymore, because you're going to be rewarded for what you've done, declares the Lord. Your children will return from the country of your enemies. So you can have hope for the future, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their own country.

Don't worry, I've heard Ephraim's groans, saying, "You disciplined me really hard as if I was a calf that hadn't been trained. Please bring me back, let me return, for you are the Lord my God. When I came back to you I was sorry, and once I understood, I held my head in sadness. I was ashamed and I blushed, embarrassed at what I'd done when I was young."

But isn't Ephraim still my precious son, my lovely child? Even though I often have to scold him, I can't forget him. So I'm torn inside with longing, wanting to show how much I care about him! declares the Lord.

Put up markers on the road; make signposts for yourselves. You need to be sure you can find the highway, the road you traveled on. Come back, Virgin Israel, come back to your towns. How long are you going to waver in your decision, you unfaithful daughter? For the Lord has made something new happen here: a woman is going to protect a man.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: When I bring them back home from exile, they will say again in the land of Judah and in its towns: "May the Lord bless you, holy mountain of Jerusalem, home of what is good and right. The people of Judah and all its towns will live together in the land, the farmers and those who move around with their flocks, because I'm going to give rest to those who are tired and give strength to all those who are weak."

At this I woke up and looked around. I'd had a very pleasant sleep.

Look! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make the numbers of people and livestock grow in Israel and Judah. I took care of them by uprooting them and tearing them down, by wiping them out and destroying them and bringing them disaster. Now I will take care of them by building them up and helping them grow, declares the Lord.

At that time people won't repeat this proverb, "The fathers ate the unripe grapes, but their children got the sour taste." No. Each person will die because of their own sins. If anyone eats unripe grapes, they will get the sour taste themselves.

Look! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and Judah. It won't be like the agreement that I made with their forefathers when I held their hands and led them out of Egypt. They broke that agreement, even though I was faithful like a husband to them, declares the Lord.

But this is the agreement I'm going to make with the people of Israel at that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws inside them and write them in their minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No one will need to teach a neighbor or their brother, telling them, "You ought to know the Lord." For everyone will know me, from the smallest to the greatest. I will forgive them when they do wrong, and I will forget about their sins.

This is what the Lord says, who provides the sun to give light during the day, who places in order the moon and stars to give light at night, who makes the sea rough so that its waves roar; his name is the Lord Almighty:

Only if these natural laws disappeared before my eyes would Israel's descendants stop being my people, declares the Lord. This is what the Lord says: Only if the heavens above could be measured, and the foundations of the earth below could be investigated, would I reject all of Israel's descendants because of everything they've done, declares the Lord.

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when this city will be rebuilt for the Lord, all the way from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The builder's measuring line will again stretch out directly to Gareb Hill and then turn toward Goah. The entire valley, where the dead are buried and the trash is dumped, and all the fields from the Kidron Valley as far as the Horse Gate to the east, will be holy to the Lord. Jerusalem will never again be torn down or destroyed.

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah's reign, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. This was when the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem. Jeremiah the prophet was imprisoned in the guard's courtyard, part of the king of Judah's palace.

Zedekiah king of Judah had put him in prison, telling him: "Why do you have to prophesy like this? You say the Lord is saying, 'Look, I'm going to hand over this city to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it. Zedekiah king of Judah won't escape from the Babylonians. He will be captured and taken to the king of Babylon to speak with him personally and see him face to face. He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he'll remain until I deal with him, declares the Lord. You won't be successful if you fight against the Babylonians.'"

Jeremiah answered, "The Lord gave me a message, saying: Your cousin Hanamel, son of Shallum, is coming to tell you, 'Why don't you buy my field in Anathoth because you have the right to redeem it and buy it?'

Just as the Lord had said, my cousin Hanamel arrived to see me in the guard's courtyard and asked me, 'Please buy my field in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin because you have the right of family owner-

ship to redeem it. You should buy it for yourself.'" This convinced me that this was a message from the Lord.

So I bought the field in Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel. I weighed out seventeen shekels of silver to pay him. I signed the deed and sealed it, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver using the scales. Then I took the deed of sale, both the sealed original containing the terms and conditions, and the unsealed copy, and handed them to Baruch son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah. I did this in the presence of my cousin Hanamel, the witnesses who had signed the deed of sale, and all the people of Judah who were sitting there in the guard's courtyard.

I gave Baruch these instructions in front of them, "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Put these deeds of sale, the sealed original and the open copy, in a clay jar so they can be kept safe for a long time. For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: The time will come when once again houses, fields, and vineyards will be bought in this country."

After I had given the deed of sale to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord: "Ah, Lord God! You created the heavens and the earth by your great strength and power. Nothing is too hard for you! You give your trustworthy love to thousands, but the consequences of your punishment of the sins of the fathers affect their children too. Great and powerful is the God whose name is the Lord Almighty— you are the one who is supremely wise and who does incredible things. You watch what everyone does, and you reward them according to the way they live and what their actions deserve.

You carried out signs and miracles in Egypt, and you still do so today, both here in Israel and among all people everywhere. As a result you gained a great reputation, and this is still true today. You led your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and miracles, with your great power and strength that terrified people. You gave them this land that you had promised to give their forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.

They came and took it over, but they didn't do what you said or follow your laws. They didn't do everything you ordered them to do, which is why you've brought all this disaster down on them. Look at the siege ramps piled up against the city to capture it! Through war and famine and disease, the city will be taken by the Babylonians who are attacking it. You can see that everything you said would happen has happened.

Yet, Lord God, you have told me, 'Buy yourself the field with silver in front of witnesses, even though the city has been handed over to the Babylonians!'"

Then the Lord gave Jeremiah this message: Look! I am the Lord, the God of everyone. Is anything too hard for me to do?

So this is what the Lord says: Listen! I'm going to hand over this city to the king of Babylon and the Babylonians, and they will capture it. The Babylonians who are attacking the city are going to come and set fire to it. They will burn it down, including the houses belonging to the people who made me angry by burning incense to Baal on their rooftops, and by pouring out drink offerings in worship of other gods.

From their earliest days all the people of Israel and of Judah have ever done has been evil in my sight. In fact all they've ever done is to make me angry through their actions, declares the Lord. This city has been such a source of anger and frustration from the time it was built right up till now. So I'm going to get rid of it, because of all the evil things the people of Israel and Judah did that made me angry—their kings, and officials, their priests and prophets, all of those living in Judah and Jerusalem, everyone. They have turned their backs on me. They wouldn't even look at me. Even though I kept on trying to teach them, they refused to listen or accept instruction.

They have put their disgusting idols in my Temple, making it unclean. They have built pagan shrines to Baal in the Valley of Hinnom so they could sacrifice their sons and daughters by burning them in the fire. This is something I never commanded. I never even thought of such a thing—doing something so awful and making the people of Judah guilty of sin.

Now about this city. You are correctly saying, "It's going to be handed over to the king of Babylon through war and famine and disease." However, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I promise to gather my people from all the lands where I exiled them because they made me so very angry. I will bring them back here and they will live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will make sure they think the same way and act in harmony, so that they will always honor me so all will be good for them and their descendants.

I will make an everlasting agreement with them: I'm never going to stop doing them good and I will help them to respect me so that they won't ever abandon me. I will be delighted to treat them well, and I will commit myself with the whole of my being to helping them to grow as a nation in this land.

This is what the Lord says: Just as certainly as I have brought this whole disaster down on my people, so I'm going to give to them all the good things I have promised. Fields will once again be bought in this country that you're describing, saying, "It's been completely destroyed—no people or animals are left. It's been handed over to the Babylonians." People will buy fields with silver again, deeds will be signed, sealed, and witnessed. This will happen here in the land of Benjamin, in the areas surrounding Jerusalem, and in all the towns of Judah—including the towns of the hill country, the foothills, and the Negev—because I will bring the people back from exile, declares the Lord.

A second message came from the Lord to Jeremiah while he was still being held in the courtyard of the guard.

This is what the Lord says, the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who shaped it and set it in place, the Lord is his name: Call out to me, and I will answer you, explaining to you amazing, hidden things about which you don't have any idea. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about Jerusalem's houses and the palaces of the kings of Judah that were demolished for materials to be used to defend against the siege ramps and the enemy attacks. They come to fight the Babylonians but will only fill those houses with the dead bodies of those I'm going to kill in my furious anger. I have given up on this city because of all its wickedness.

But even so, in the future I will restore and repair it, and I will heal its people and give them lasting peace and safety. I will bring Judah and Israel back from exile and will make them as strong as before. I will wash away all their sins that they committed against me, and I will forgive all their guilt from when they sinned in rebelling against me.

Then this city will bring me a glorious reputation, celebrated and praised by all the nations of the earth who get to hear of all the good things I do for it. They will tremble, amazed at how much good I have done for it, how I have made it so prosperous.

This is what the Lord says: You call this place “a wasteland where there are no people or animals.” Well, here in the towns of Judah and in the empty streets of Jerusalem where no people or animals live, one day the sounds of joy and celebration will be heard there again, the happy voices of bride and bridegroom, and the shouts of praise of those bringing thank offerings to the Lord's Temple, saying: “Thank the Lord Almighty! For the Lord is good; his trustworthy love lasts forever.” For I will bring the land back from its “captivity” too, says the Lord.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: In this wasteland where there are no people or animals, and in all its towns, once again there'll be pastures where shepherds can take their flocks. In all the towns, whether in the hill country, or the foothills, or the Negev, or the land of Benjamin or the towns around Jerusalem, or throughout the cities of Judah, flocks will once again be counted by their shepherds, says the Lord.

Look! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will keep my promise to do good to the people of Israel and Judah. At that time, right there and then, I will give you a good king from the line of David. He will do what is just and right throughout the country. This is when Judah will be saved, and the people of Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name he will be called: The Lord Who Makes Us Right.

This is what the Lord says: David will always have a descendant who will be king of Israel, and the Levitical priests will always have a descendant to present burnt offerings, grain offerings, and sacrifices to me.

A message from the Lord came to Jeremiah: This is what the Lord says: If you were able to break my agreement with the day and with the night, so that they wouldn't come at the right time, only then would my agreement be broken with David my servant and with the Levites who serve as my priests, so that David would not have a descendant to rule on his throne. In the same way that the stars of heaven can't be counted, and the sand on the seashore can't be measured, that's how many times I will multiply the number of my servant David's descendants and the Levites who serve me.

Another message from the Lord came to Jeremiah: Have you heard what people are saying: “The Lord chose two families, but now he's rejected them”? So they look down on my people and don't consider them worthy of being called a nation. This is what the Lord says: Just as I can't break my agreement with the day and the night and the laws that regulate heaven and earth, so I can't reject the descendants of Jacob and of my servant David, and I can't fail to make his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will bring them back from exile and I will be kind to them.

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, all his army, along with troops from all the countries he ruled and other nations were attacking Jerusalem and all its nearby towns:

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Go and talk to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him that this is what the Lord says: Listen! I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he is going to burn it down. You yourself won't escape being captured by him. You will certainly be taken prisoner and brought before him to speak with him personally and see him face to face. You will be taken to Babylon.

Listen to what the Lord is telling you, Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the Lord says about you: You won't be killed; you will die in peace. You will have a proper funeral with incense burned for you as they did for your forefathers, the kings who ruled before you. They will weep for you, crying, “The king is dead.” I myself am telling you this, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah the prophet told Zedekiah king of Judah all this there in Jerusalem. At that time the king of Babylon's army was attacking the city and the Judean towns of Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities that had not yet been conquered in Judah.

A message from the Lord came to Jeremiah after King Zedekiah had made an agreement with everyone in Jerusalem to announce a proclamation of freedom. This meant that every slave owner should free their Hebrew slaves, both male and female. No one was to force their fellow citizens to remain slaves any longer. All the officials and all the people who accepted this agreement did what they said. They freed their male and female slaves, not forcing them to remain slaves any longer. They obeyed and let them go free. However, later on they changed their minds and took back the male and female slaves they'd freed, forcing them back into slavery.

A message from the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying, This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I made an agreement with your forefathers when I led them out of Egypt, out of the prison house of slavery, saying: Every seventh year, each of you must set free all fellow Hebrews who have sold themselves to you. They can serve you for six years, but then you must set them free. But your forefathers didn't pay attention and didn't obey what I told them.

A little while ago you decided to do what's right, which made me happy. You all announced that you would free your slaves. You made an agreement before me in my Temple. But now you've changed your minds and dishonored me. Each of you took back the male and female slaves you'd set free to do whatever they wanted. You forced them to become your slaves again.

So this is what the Lord says: You haven't obeyed me. You haven't announced freedom for your slaves, your own people. So now I announce “Freedom” for you, declares the Lord: Freedom to be killed by war, by

disease, and by famine! I will make all the kingdoms of the world horrified by you.

They have broken my agreement, and have not kept the terms of the agreement they promised before me. So I'm going to cut them up just like the calf they cut in half to pass between its two pieces. I will hand them over to their enemies who are trying to kill them. This includes the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests, and everyone else who passed between the pieces of the calf. Their dead bodies will become food for birds of prey and wild animals. I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials to their enemies who are trying to kill them, to the army of the king of Babylon which has paused its attack on you.

Listen! I will give the order, declares the Lord, and bring them back to Jerusalem. They will attack it, capture it, and burn it. I'm going to destroy the towns of Judah so nobody will live there.

This is the message that came to Jeremiah from the Lord during the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: Go to where the Rechabites live. Invite them to come with you to one of the rooms in the Lord's Temple and offer them wine to drink.

So I went to visit Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons—the whole Rechabite family. Then I took them into the Lord's Temple, to a room used by the sons of Hanan, son of Igdaliah, a man of God. It was next to the one used by the officials, which was above the room of Maaseiah son of Shallum, who was the Temple doorkeeper. I placed some jugs full of wine and some cups before the Rechabites and told them, “Have some wine to drink.”

“We don't drink wine,” they said, “because our forefather Jonadab son of Rechab gave us these orders: ‘You and your descendants must never drink wine. Don't ever build houses or sow crops or plant vineyards. You're not to do this. Instead, you are to always live in tents so that you may have long lives as you move from place to place in the country.’

We have done exactly what our forefather Jonadab son of Rechab told us. None of us have ever drunk wine, and that includes our wives and our sons and daughters as well as us. We haven't built houses to live in, and we haven't had any vineyards or fields or grown any crops. We've lived in tents and have obeyed our forefather Jonadab, following everything he ordered us to do.

So when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded the country we decided, ‘Come on, let's go into Jerusalem to be safe from the armies of the Chaldeans, Babylonians, and Arameans.’ That's why we've stayed in Jerusalem.”

Then a message from the Lord came to Jeremiah: This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem: Why don't you accept my instructions and obey what I tell you? the Lord asks. The instructions of Jonadab son of Rechab have been followed. He ordered his descendants not to drink wine, and they have not drunk it to this day because they have obeyed their forefather's command. But I have told you what to do time and again, and yet you refuse to obey me!

Time and again I've sent you so many of my servants the prophets to tell you: Everyone, stop your evil ways and do what's right! Don't go following other gods and worshiping them. Live in the land that I gave you and your fathers. But you haven't paid attention or obeyed me. These descendants of Jonadab son of Rechab have followed the command given to them by their forefather, but these people haven't obeyed me.

So this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Watch as I bring down on Judah and on all the people living in Jerusalem all the disasters I have threatened to do to them, because I have told them what to do but they haven't obeyed; I have appealed to them but they haven't responded.

Then Jeremiah told the Rechabites: This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Because you have obeyed your forefather Jonadab's instructions and have followed his orders and have done everything he told you to do, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Jonadab son of Rechab will always have someone who will be in my presence serving me.

This message from the Lord came to Jeremiah in the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: Get a scroll and write down everything I've told you condemning Israel, Judah, and all the other nations, from the time I first spoke to you during the reign of Josiah right up till now. Maybe when the people of Judah hear about all the disasters I plan to bring down on them, everyone will stop their evil ways. Then I will forgive their guilt and sin.

So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah to come, and while Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote down on a scroll everything that the Lord had told Jeremiah. Then Jeremiah gave Baruch these instructions: “I'm a prisoner here so I can't go into the Lord's Temple. So you have to go to the Lord's Temple on a day when people are fasting, and read to them the Lord's messages from the scroll I dictated to you. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns. Maybe they will come and ask the Lord for forgiveness, and all of them will stop their evil ways, for the Lord is threatening terrible anger against them.”

Baruch son of Neriah did exactly what Jeremiah the prophet had told him to do. He went and read the Lord's message from the scroll in the Temple.

This is how it happened. A fast to honor the Lord was declared involving all the people of Jerusalem and everyone who had come there from the towns of Judah. This was in the ninth month of the fifth year of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah. Baruch read from the scroll what Jeremiah had dictated so that everyone could hear. He read it from the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the scribe. This was in the upper Temple courtyard at the New Gate entrance.

When Micaiah son of Gemariah, son of Shaphan, heard all the Lord's messages read from the scroll, he went down to the royal secretary's room in the king's palace, where all the officials had gathered. Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Achbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials were there. Micaiah gave them a report of everything he'd heard Baruch read from the scroll to the people.

The officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, son of Shelemiah, son of Cushi, to summon Baruch, telling him, “Bring the scroll that you read to the people, and come here.” So Baruch went to see them taking the scroll with him.

“Please sit down and read it to us,” they said. So Baruch read it to them.

After they'd heard everything, they were frightened and looked at each other. They said to Baruch, “We've got to tell the king about all this.”

Then they asked Baruch, “Now tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it to you?”

“Yes, he dictated it,” Baruch replied. “I wrote down in ink on the scroll everything he told me.”

The officials told Baruch, “You and Jeremiah are going to have to hide. Don't tell anyone where you are.”

Then the officials went to see the king in the courtyard. They had kept the scroll safe in Elishama the secretary's room while they gave a full report to the king.

The king sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll. He went and got it from Elishama the secretary's room. Then Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who were there standing next to him.

It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in front of a fire in his winter quarters. Whenever Jehudi finished reading three or four columns, Jehoiakim would chop them off with a scribe's knife and toss them into the fire. Eventually the whole scroll was completely burned up.

Despite hearing all these messages, the king and his attendants weren't frightened and didn't tear their clothes in remorse. Even when Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he refused to listen to them. In fact the king ordered Jerahmeel, one of the princes, as well as Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel, to go and arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. But the Lord hid them.

After the king burned the scroll Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch, a message from the Lord came to Jeremiah: Get another scroll and write everything out that was on the first scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah burned.

Regarding Jehoiakim king of Judah announce that this is what the Lord says: You have burned the scroll and asked, “Why did you write that the king of Babylon is going to come and destroy this country and kill all its people and animals?” So this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He won't have anyone to succeed him as king, sitting on David's throne. His body will be thrown out to lie in the heat of the day and the cold of the night. I'm going to punish him and his descendants and officials for their sins. I will bring down on them and on the people living in Jerusalem and Judah, all the disasters I warned them about but they refused to listen.

Jeremiah got another scroll and gave it to Baruch. Jeremiah dictated everything that was in the scroll that Jehoiakim had burned in the fire and Baruch wrote it down. Even more messages of a similar kind were added.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon replaced Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim with Zedekiah son of Josiah as the ruling king of Judah. But Zedekiah and his officers and everyone else in the country refused to obey what the Lord had said through Jeremiah the prophet.

However, King Zedekiah sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah and Zephaniah the priest, son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah the prophet with the message, “Please pray to the Lord our God for us!”

(At this time Jeremiah could come and go freely, because as yet they hadn't put him in prison.)

Pharaoh's army was advancing from Egypt, and when the Babylonian army heard about it, they moved away from Jerusalem.

Then a message from the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, instructs you to tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask me for help: Look! Pharaoh's army, which set out to help you, is going to return home to Egypt. Then the Babylonians will return and attack Jerusalem. They will capture it and burn it down.

This is what the Lord says: Don't fool yourselves by saying, “The Babylonians are gone for good,” because they're not! In fact, even if you were able to kill the whole Babylonian army attacking you, leaving only wounded men in their tents, they would still get up and burn this city down.

When the Babylonian army moved away from Jerusalem because of the threat of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah was on his way out of Jerusalem to go to his home in the territory of Benjamin to claim his share of his family's property. However, when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the guard captain, whose name was Irijah son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, arrested him, saying, “You're defecting to the Babylonians!”

“That's not true,” Jeremiah replied. “I'm not defecting to the Babylonians!”

But Irijah refused to listen to him. He arrested Jeremiah and took him before the officers. The officers were furious with Jeremiah. They had him beaten and locked up in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which had been turned into a prison. Jeremiah was placed in a cell in the underground dungeon and was kept there for a long time.

Some while later King Zedekiah secretly sent for him and had him brought to the royal palace where he asked, “Is there a message from the Lord for me?”

“Yes there is,” Jeremiah replied. “You are going to be handed over to the king of Babylon.”

Then Jeremiah asked King Zedekiah, “What wrong have I done to you or your servants or these people, for you to put me in prison? Where are your prophets now, the ones who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon won't come and attack you and this country’? Now please listen to me, my lord the king, and respond positively to my request. Don't send me back to prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe, otherwise I'll die there.”

King Zedekiah gave the order for Jeremiah to be held in the guard's courtyard and be provided with a loaf of bread every day from a bakery until there was no bread left in the city. So Jeremiah stayed in the guard's courtyard.

Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malchijah heard what Jeremiah was telling everyone: This is what the Lord says: Anyone who remains in this city will die

from war and famine and disease, but anyone who goes over to the Babylonians will live. Their reward will be to save their lives. This is what the Lord says: Be sure of this—Jerusalem will be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon. He is going to capture it.

The officers told the king, "This man deserves to die because he's demoralizing the defenders left in the city, and all the people too, by telling them this. This man isn't trying to help these people, he's only going to destroy them."

"Well, you can do whatever you want to him," King Zedekiah replied. "I can't stop you." So they took Jeremiah and put him in the cistern belonging to Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the guard's courtyard. They lowered Jeremiah down with ropes into the cistern. It didn't have any water, only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.

Ebed-melech the Cushite, a royal official in the king's palace, found out that they had put Jeremiah in the cistern. The king was sitting at the Benjamin Gate, so Ebed-melech left the palace and went to talk to the king "My lord the king, all these terrible things these men have done to Jeremiah the prophet are evil. They've put him in the cistern, and he'll starve to death there because there's no more bread left in the city."

So the king gave the order to Ebed-melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men with you and go and pull Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies." Ebed-melech took the men and went to the storehouse under the palace. He took some rags and old clothes from there and then went to the cistern where he lowered them with ropes to Jeremiah.

Ebed-melech the Cushite called down to Jeremiah, "Put these rags and old clothes under your arms to protect you from the ropes." Jeremiah did so, and using the ropes they pulled him up and took him out of the cistern. Jeremiah stayed there in the guard's courtyard.

Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and met him at the third Temple entrance. "I need to ask you something," the king told Jeremiah. "You mustn't hide anything from me."

"If I tell you then you'll definitely have me killed," Jeremiah replied. "Even if I were to give you advice, you wouldn't listen to me anyway."

King Zedekiah solemnly promised Jeremiah in private, "As the Lord lives, who gave us this life, I won't have you killed, and I won't hand you over to those who want to kill you."

Then Jeremiah told Zedekiah, "This is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you hand yourself over to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you'll live. Jerusalem won't be burned down, and you and your family will survive. But if you don't hand yourself over to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given to the Babylonians. They will burn it down, and you yourself won't escape being captured.'"

But King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of those people of Judah who have gone over to the Babylonians, because the Babylonians might hand me over to them so they could abuse me."

"They won't hand you over," Jeremiah replied. "If you obey what the Lord says by doing what I tell you, then things will go well for you and you'll live. But if you refuse to hand yourself over, this is what the Lord has told me: All the women who are left in the palace of the king of Judah will be led out and handed over to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say: 'Those good friends of yours! You were taken in by them and conquered by them. Your feet got stuck in the mud, so they abandoned you.' All your wives and children will be handed over to the Chaldeans. And you yourself will not escape, for you will be captured by the king of Babylon, and Jerusalem will be burned down."

Zedekiah warned Jeremiah, "Nobody can find out about this conversation, otherwise you'll die. If the officers find out that I've talked with you, and they come and ask you, 'Tell us what you and the king were talking about! Don't hide anything from us, or we'll kill you;' then you are to tell them, 'I was asking the king to grant my request not to return me to the house of Jonathan to die there.'"

When all the officers came to Jeremiah wanting to know, he repeated to them exactly what the king had told him to say. So they didn't ask him anything more because no one had heard what had been said. Jeremiah remained there in the guard's courtyard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

In the tenth month of the ninth year of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his whole army arrived at Jerusalem and besieged it. On the ninth day of the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, the city wall was broken through. All the officials of the king of Babylon came in and took over the city, making their headquarters at the Middle Gate. They were Nergal-sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-sarsekim the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, and all the other officials of the king of Babylon.

When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the defenders saw them there, they ran away. They escaped from the city during the night through the king's garden, passing through the gate between the two walls, and took the road to the Arabah. But the Babylonian army chased after them and caught up with Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and brought him before Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he put him on trial and punished him. The king of Babylon had Zedekiah's sons killed as Zedekiah watched, and he also executed all of Judah's leaders there in Riblah. Then he had Zedekiah's eyes gouged out, and had him bound with bronze chains and taken away to Babylon. The Babylonians burned down the king's palace and the people's houses, and they demolished Jerusalem's city walls.

Then Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried off to Babylon the rest of the people who had stayed in the city, together with those who had deserted and gone over to him. But he left behind in the land of Judah some of the poorest people who didn't have any property. He gave them vineyards and fields at that time.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given orders to Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard regarding Jeremiah, saying, "Go and get Jeremiah and watch out that nothing bad happens to him. Do whatever

he wants." So Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, Nebushazban the Rabsaris, Nergal-sharezer the Rabmag, and all the army captains of the king of Babylon took Jeremiah from the guard's courtyard, and they handed him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to take him home. Jeremiah stayed there with his own people.

During the time that Jeremiah had been kept prisoner in the guard's courtyard, a message from the Lord had come to him: "Go and tell Ebed-melech the Cushite that this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to keep my promise I made against this city—to harm it and not to help it—you'll see it for yourself when it happens. But when that day comes I'm going to save you, declares the Lord. You won't be handed over to the people you're afraid of. I promise to rescue you so that you won't be killed. Your reward will be your life, because you trusted in me, declares the Lord."

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah after Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard had released him at Ramah Nebuzaradan had discovered Jeremiah bound in chains along with all the prisoners from Jerusalem and Judah who were being taken into exile in Babylon.

When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah he told him, "The Lord your God announced that disaster would come to this place, and now the Lord has made it happen—he has done just what he said he would. This happened to you people because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey what he said. But notice that now I'm removing the chains from your wrists and releasing you. If you want to come with me to Babylon then you can come, and I will look after you. But if you think it's a bad idea to come with me to Babylon, you don't have to go any farther. Look, you're free to go anywhere in the country. Go wherever is good for you—do what you think is right."

Since Jeremiah didn't answer right away, Nebuzaradan went on, "Go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan. He's been appointed as governor over Judah by the king of Babylon. You can stay with him with your people, or you can go anywhere you want." The commander of the guard gave him a food allowance and some money and let him go. So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him with the people who were still left in the country.

The Judean army commanders and their men who were still in the field found out that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor of the country and had put him in charge of the poorest people of the country—the men, women, and children who hadn't been exiled to Babylon. So they along with their men came to Gedaliah at Mizpah—Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah son of the Maacathite.

Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, made them a solemn promise, saying, "Don't worry about serving the Babylonians. Stay here in the country and serve the king of Babylon, and things will go well for you. I myself will stay here in Mizpah to represent you to the Babylonians when they come to meet with us. You yourselves should get busy harvesting grapes and summer fruit and olive oil, storing them in jars, and living in the towns you have occupied."

Those people of Judea who were living in Moab, Ammon, Edom, and all the other countries heard that the king of Babylon had left some people behind in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as their governor. So they all came back from the different places where they'd been scattered and went to Gedaliah at Mizpah in Judah. They were able to harvest a large quantity of grapes and summer fruit.

Johanan son of Kareah and all the commanders of the men in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and told him, "Do you know that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to kill you?" But Gedaliah didn't believe them.

Johanan went and talked privately to Gedaliah at Mizpah. "Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah," he told him. "No one will find out. Why should he be allowed to kill you? All the people of Judah who have joined you would be scattered, so that even those who have survived here would be killed!"

But Gedaliah said to Johanan, "Don't do it! What you're saying about Ishmael isn't true."

In the seventh month of the year, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, a member of the royal family and one of the king's chief officers, came with ten of his men to see Gedaliah at Mizpah. While they were eating to have a meal together, suddenly Ishmael and his ten men got up and attacked Gedaliah, killing him—the one appointed by the king of Babylon as the country's governor. Ishmael also killed all the other Judeans who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with the Babylonian soldiers there.

The day after Gedaliah had been murdered and before anyone knew about it, a group of eighty men arrived from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria. They had shaved off their beards, torn their clothes, and cut themselves. They were carrying grain offerings and frankincense for the Lord's Temple. Ishmael came out to meet them from Mizpah, weeping as he went along. When Ishmael met the men, he said, "Come and see what's happened to Gedaliah son of Ahikam!"

But when they arrived in town, Ishmael and his men killed most of them and threw their bodies into a cistern. But ten of them pleaded with Ishmael, "Don't kill us! We've got some good things hidden in the fields—wheat, barley, olive oil, and honey." So Ishmael didn't kill them along with the others.

(The cistern where Ishmael had thrown all the bodies of the men he'd killed, including Gedaliah, was a large one that King Asa had dug because of the threat of attack by Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael filled it with bodies.)

Then Ishmael took all the people left in Mizpah prisoner, including the daughters of the king, as well as everyone else living there. These were the people that Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard had put under the care of Gedaliah. Ishmael took them prisoner and left to go to the Ammonites.

Johanan and all the army commanders of the armies with him found out about all of Ishmael's crimes. So they assembled all their men and went to attack Ishmael. They caught up with him near the large pool in Gibeon.

When Ishmael's prisoners saw Johanan and all the army commanders with him, they were happy. All those that Ishmael had taken prisoner at Mizpah turned around and ran back to Johanan. Ishmael and eight of his men managed to escape from Johanan and get away to the Ammonites.

Then Johanan and all the army commanders with him took charge of the survivors from Mizpah he'd rescued from Ishmael in Gibeon—the soldiers, women, children, and court officials that Ishmael had taken prisoner after he'd killed Gedaliah. They set off for Geruth Chimham near Bethlehem and stayed there, before leaving for Egypt to get away from the Babylonians. They were afraid of what the Babylonians would do because Ishmael had assassinated Gedaliah, the governor of the country appointed by the king of Babylon.

Then all the army commanders, together with Johanan son of Kareah, Jezaniah son of Hoshaiah, and everyone from the least to the most important came to Jeremiah the prophet and said, “Please listen to our request. Pray to the Lord your God for all of us. As you can see there are only a few of us left compared to how many there were before. In your prayer please ask the Lord your God to tell us where to go and what to do.”

“I'll do as you ask,” Jeremiah replied. “I will definitely pray to the Lord your God as you've requested, and I'll tell you everything he says. I won't keep anything back from you.”

Then they said to Jeremiah, “May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we don't do everything that the Lord your God tells you we should. Good or bad, we will obey what the Lord our God says, the one we're asking you to speak to. That way everything will go well with us, because we will be obeying what the Lord our God says.”

Ten days later a message from the Lord came to Jeremiah. He summoned Johanan, all the army commanders, and everyone from the least to the most important.

Jeremiah told them, This what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to those of who you sent to me to present your request: If you will stay right here in this country, then I will build you up and I won't tear you down; I will plant you and I won't uproot you; because I'm very sad about the disaster I have brought down on you.

I know you fear the king of Babylon, but you don't need to be afraid of him, declares the Lord. I am with you to save you and rescue you from him. I will be merciful to you, so that he will be merciful to you and will let you stay in your own country.

But if you say, “We won't stay here in this country,” and by doing so disobey what the Lord your God says; or if you say instead, “No, we're going to Egypt to live there, where we won't experience war or hear trumpets sounding or go hungry;” then listen to what the Lord says, you survivors from Judah! This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: If you're absolutely determined to go to Egypt and live there, then the war you're so frightened of will catch up with you there, and the famine you're so terrified of will chase after you into Egypt, and you will die there. Everyone who decides to go to Egypt and live there will die by war and famine and disease. Not a single one will survive or escape the disaster I will bring down on them.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: In the same way that my furious anger was poured out on the people living in Jerusalem, so will my anger be poured out on you if you go to Egypt. People will be horrified at what happens to you, and you will become a curse word, an insult, an expression of condemnation. You won't ever see your homeland again.

“The Lord has told you, survivors from Judah, ‘Don't go to Egypt,’” Jeremiah concluded. “Be absolutely clear about this warning I'm giving you today! You've made a big mistake that will cost you your lives by sending me to the Lord your God, asking, ‘Pray to the Lord our God for us, and let us know everything the Lord our God says and we'll do it.’

I have told you today what he said, but you have not obeyed everything the Lord your God sent me to tell you. So you should know that without question you're going to die by war and famine and disease in Egypt where you want to go and live.”

After Jeremiah finished telling everyone everything that the Lord their God had sent him to say, Azariah son of Hoshaiah, Johanan son of Kareah, and all the proud and rebellious men told Jeremiah, “You're lying! The Lord our God hasn't sent you to tell us, ‘You are not to go and live in Egypt.’ No, it's Baruch son of Neriah who's turned you against us in order to hand us over to the Babylonians so they can kill us or exile us to Babylon!”

So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army commanders refused to obey the Lord's command to stay in the land of Judah. Instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the army commanders took with them all who were left of the people of Judah, those who had returned to the country from all the nations where they had been scattered. These included men, women, and children, the king's daughters, and everyone Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard had allowed to remain with Gedaliah, as well as Jeremiah and Baruch. They went to Egypt because they refused to obey the Lord's command. They went all the way to Tahpanhes.

A message from Lord came to Jeremiah at Tahpanhes: As the people of Judah watch, get some large stones and set them into the cement of the brick pavement in the entrance way to Pharaoh's palace at Tahpanhes.

Tell them that this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I'm going to send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bring him here. I will place his throne over these stones that I have set into the pavement, and he will spread out his royal tent over them. He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined to die, imprisonment to those destined to be imprisoned, and the sword to those destined to be killed by the sword. I will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar will burn them and loot their idols. He will pick the land of Egypt clean like a shepherd picks his cloak clean of fleas, and he will leave unharmed. He will knock down the sacred

pillars of the temple of the sun in Egypt, and he will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt.

This is the message that came to Jeremiah regarding all the people of Judah living in Egypt—in Migdol, Tahpanhes, and Memphis—and in Upper Egypt. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You saw the complete disaster that I brought down on Jerusalem and all the towns of Judah. You can see how today they're ruined and abandoned because of the evil they did. They made me angry by burning incense and serving other gods that they hadn't ever known, and you and your forefathers hadn't known either. I sent you all my servants the prophets time and again to warn you: "Don't do these offensive things that I hate."

But you refused to listen or to pay attention. You didn't stop their wickedness or burning incense in worship of other gods. That's why my furious anger poured out and set fire to the towns of Judah and burned in the streets of Jerusalem, making them the abandoned ruins they still are today.

So this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Why are you hurting yourselves so badly by removing from Judah every man, woman, child, infant, so you don't have anyone left? Why are you making me angry by what you do, burning incense to other gods in Egypt where you have come to live?

Because of this you will be destroyed, and you will become a curse word, an expression of condemnation among all the nations on earth. Have you forgotten the evil of your forefathers and the evil of the kings of Judah and the evil of their wives, as well as your own evil and the evil your wives, all practiced in the country of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? Even up to now you haven't shown any remorse or reverence. You haven't followed my rules and regulations I gave you and your forefathers.

So this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster and to wipe out everyone from Judah. I'm going to destroy you who are left who decided to go to Egypt to live there. You will die there, killed by the sword or by famine. Whoever you are, from the least to the most important, you're going to die by sword or by famine; and you will become a curse word, something horrible, an insult, an expression of condemnation. I'm going to punish you who live in Egypt like I punished Jerusalem, by war and famine and disease. Nobody who is left from Judah who has gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the country of Judah. You long to go back and live there, but nobody will return except a few stragglers.

All the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, and all the women who were there, a great crowd of people, those living in Egypt and Upper Egypt all told Jeremiah, "Even though you say this message is from the Lord, we're not going to listen to you. In fact we're going to do everything we said we would. We'll burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and offer drink offerings to worship her as we did before, just like our fathers, our kings, and our officials who did the same things in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. Back then we had plenty of food and we were well off and nothing bad happened to us. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to worship her, we've lost everything and have been dying as a result of war and famine."

"On top of that," the women added, "when we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to worship her, did we do this without our husbands knowing about it, that we baked cakes stamped with her image and poured out drink offerings to worship her?"

Jeremiah replied to all the people, both men and women, who were responding to him, "About that incense you burned to other gods in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, as well as your fathers, your kings, your officials, and the ordinary people—don't you think the Lord wouldn't remember and think about it? The Lord couldn't take it anymore—the evil things you did and your disgusting acts—so your country was turned into an uninhabited wasteland, a place of horror and a curse word to others, as it still is today. As you can see today, the disaster you've experienced happened because you burned incense to other gods and sinned against the Lord, refusing to listen to the Lord or to follow his instructions, his rules, and his regulations."

Then Jeremiah told everyone, including all the women, "Listen to the Lord's message, all you people from Judah living here in Egypt. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives, you've said what you're going to do, and you've done what you said! You said, 'We're going to keep our promise to burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and to pour out drink offerings to worship her.' So go ahead! Do what you've said! Keep your promises!

But even so, listen to what the Lord says, all you people from Judah living here in Egypt: I guarantee by all that I am, says the Lord, that none of you living in Egypt will ever use my name or swear, 'As the Lord God lives.'

I will take care of them in the bad sense, and not in the good sense. All the people from Judah who are in Egypt will die by sword or famine, until they are wiped out. Those who manage to avoid being killed by the sword will go back to Judah from Egypt. But there will only be a few of them, and then all who were left from Judah and went to live in Egypt will know who's telling the truth—me or them!

This is your sign to prove that I'm going to punish you here, declares the Lord, so that you'll know for certain that my threats against you will really happen. This is what the Lord says: Look! I'm going to hand over Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt to his enemies who are trying to kill him, in the same way that I handed over Zedekiah king of Judah to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, his enemy who was trying to kill him."

This is what Jeremiah the prophet told Baruch son of Neriah when he wrote out on a scroll these messages that Jeremiah dictated. (This happened in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah.)

This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You've been complaining, saying, "I'm in so much trouble because the Lord has given me sorrow to make my pain worse! I've worn myself out with my groans. I can't get any relief."

This is what Jeremiah was told to say to Baruch: This is what the Lord says: Across the whole country I'm going to tear down what I have built and uproot what I have planted. So in your case, do you think you'll get special treatment? Stop looking for something like that! I'm going to bring disaster down on every living thing, declares the Lord. However, I promise you that your reward will be that you will continue living, wherever you go.

In the fourth year of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, the Lord's message came to Jeremiah the prophet about foreign nations.

This concerns Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt and the Egyptian army which was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

Pick up both your small and large shields, and advance ready for battle! Put the harnesses on the horses and get into your chariots; take your positions with your helmets on! Sharpen your spears; put on your armor!

Why do I see their lines broken and retreating? Their soldiers are defeated. They run away so quickly they don't even look back because they're so terrified by what's happening around them, declares the Lord. Even the fastest of them can't get away; the soldiers can't escape. There in the north beside the Euphrates they fall and die.

Who is this that's coming, rising like the Nile, like swirling rivers whose waters flood? Egypt is rising like the Nile; its waters swirl like flooding rivers, boasting, “I will rise and sweep over the earth; I will destroy towns and the people in them.” Horses, charge in! Chariots, drive like crazy! Have the infantry advance: soldiers from Ethiopia and Put carrying their shields, archers from Lydia with their bows.

But this is the day of the Lord God Almighty, a day of retribution when he takes vengeance on his enemies. The sword will destroy until it is satisfied, until it's had enough of their blood. The Lord God Almighty is having a sacrifice in the north country beside the Euphrates.

Go and find some healing ointment in Gilead, Virgin Daughter of Egypt! But whatever you use to help you will fail, because there's nothing that will heal you. The other nations have heard how you were humiliated in defeat. Everyone can hear your cries of pain. Soldiers fall over each other, and die together.

This is the message that the Lord gave to Jeremiah the prophet about the attack by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon on Egypt: Shout a warning in Egypt! Tell everyone in Migdol, and in Memphis and Tahpanhes: Get ready to defend yourselves, because war is destroying everything around you.

Why did Apis, your bull-god, run away? He couldn't stand his ground because the Lord knocked him down.

Many soldiers trip and fall over one another and say, “Come on! Let's get back home to our people where we were born, otherwise we're going to be killed.” When they get there they'll say about Pharaoh king of Egypt, “He just makes a lot of noise. He wasted his opportunity.”

As I live, declares the King who has the name “the Lord Almighty,” the king of Babylon will come. He is like Mount Tabor that stands out from the other mountains, like Mount Carmel high above the sea. Pack your bags ready for exile, daughter living in Egypt! Memphis is going to be destroyed, an empty place where no one lives. Egypt is a beautiful young cow, but a stinging insect from the north is coming to attack her. The soldiers that Egypt hired are like calves made fat for slaughter. They will also retreat. They won't stand and fight—they will all run away. Their day of destruction is coming; the time when they'll be punished. The Egyptians will retreat with a rustle like a snake sliding away, because the enemy will attack them with axes, coming at them like wood-cutters chopping down trees. They will cut them down like a thick forest, declares the Lord, because the invaders are like a swarm of locusts—there are so many of them that they can't be counted.

The people of Egypt will be humiliated. They will be handed over to the people of the north. The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Watch, because I will punish Amon, the god of Thebes, and Pharaoh. I will punish the people of Egypt with their gods and kings, and everyone who trusts in Pharaoh. I'm going to hand them over to those who want to kill them, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. But after all this happens, people will live in Egypt as they used to, declares the Lord.

But you, descendants of Jacob my servant, you don't have to be fearful. Israelites, you don't need to be discouraged. I promise to rescue you from your distant places of exile, your descendants from the countries where they're being held captive. You will go home to a quiet and comfortable life, free from any threats. You descendants of Jacob, don't be afraid! declares the Lord, for I will be with you. I will completely destroy all the nations where I've scattered you, I won't completely destroy you. However, I will discipline you as you deserve, and you can be sure I won't leave you unpunished.

This is the message from the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet about the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza. This is what the Lord says: Look at the waters rising from the north! They will become an overflowing river that sweeps across the country and everything in it, flooding the towns and everyone's homes. The people will cry out for help; everyone who lives in the country will weep, as they hear the sound of stallions charging, the rattling of chariots and the rumble of their wheels. Fathers won't go back to help their sons—they have no strength because they're terrified.

The day has arrived when all the Philistines will be destroyed, when Tyre and Sidon will have no more allies to help them. The Lord is going to destroy the Philistines, those who are left from the island of Crete. The people of Gaza will shave their heads; the town of Ashkelon lies in ruins. You who are left on the coastal plain, how long will you go on cutting yourself?

Oh sword of the Lord, when are you going to stop killing? Go back in your sheath. Stop killing and stay there! But how can the sword stop killing when the Lord has given it orders to attack Ashkelon and its coastlands?

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Moab: Disaster is coming to the town

of Nebo, because it will be destroyed. The town of Kiriathaim will be captured and humiliated; the fortress will be torn down and its people shamed. No one praises Moab anymore. People in Heshbon are plotting, “We will destroy Moab as a nation. People of the town of Madmen, we will silence you too—you will be attacked by swords and chased down.”

Listen to the cries from Horonaim: “Violence and terrible destruction!” Moab will be smashed. Hear the little ones crying for help. People weep as they go up to Luhith; and as they come down to Horonaim their sad cries at the destruction echo around.

Run away! Save yourselves! Be like a scrawny tamarisk tree in the desert! It's because you put your confidence in what you do and what you own that you too will be captured. Your god Chemosh will be taken into exile along with his priests and leaders. The invaders will attack every town; not a single one will escape destruction. The valley will be ruined, and the plain will be destroyed, for the Lord has spoken.

Put up gravestones in Moab, because the country will become a wasteland. Its towns will be turned into ruins where no one lives. A curse on those who don't do the Lord's work properly. A curse on those who don't use their swords to kill. The people of Moab have been living comfortably since the country was founded. They're like wine that hasn't been disturbed, not poured from one container to another. So the taste and fragrance remains the same. They haven't experienced exile.

But watch out, the time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will send them “winemakers” who will pour them out like wine. They will empty out the Moabites, and smash them like jars. Then the Moabites will feel let down by Chemosh, just as the people of Israel felt let down when they trusted in the golden calf idol at Bethel.

How on earth can you Moabites say, “We're heroes, strong men ready to fight in battle”? Moab is going to be destroyed and its towns conquered. Its finest young men will be killed, declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty. Moab's doom is about to happen; destruction is rushing down on them.

Mourn for them, all you surrounding nations, everyone who knows them! Let others know how the great scepter has been smashed, the rod that once proudly ruled!

Come down from your glory and sit on the dusty ground, you who live in Dibon, for Moab's destroyer will come and attack you, destroying your fortresses. Stand at the roadside and watch, you who live in Aroer. Ask the men and women who are running away to escape, “What's happened?”

Moab has been humiliated because it has been defeated. Weep and wail! Shout out beside the River Arnon that Moab has been destroyed! Punishment has arrived on the towns of the high plain—on Holon, Jahzah, and Mephaath, on Dibon, Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim, on Kiriathaim, Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon, on Kerioth, Bozrah, and on all the towns of Moab, whether far away or nearby.

Moab's strength is gone; their power has been broken, declares the Lord. Make the people of Moab drunk, because they defied the Lord. Then they will roll around in their own vomit, as people laugh at them.

Didn't you Moabites used to ridicule the Israelites? But they weren't ever found to be thieves, were they? Yet whenever you talk about them, you shake your heads in contempt.

You people living in Moab, run from your towns, go and live among the rocks. Be like a dove nesting on the cliffs at the entrance to a ravine.

We know all about how pompous Moabites are, how extremely proud and conceited they are, arrogantly thinking so highly of themselves.

I'm well aware of how disrespectful they are, declares the Lord, but it doesn't matter. They make empty boasts, and what they do is just as empty.

So I will weep for Moab; I will cry out for all the Moabites; I will mourn for the people of Kir-heres. I will weep for you, people of the town of Sibmah with its vineyards, more than I weep for the town of Jazer. Your vines have spread to the sea, and all the way to Jazer. But the destroyer has stolen your harvest of summer fruit and grapes. There's no more celebration and happiness in Moab's orchards and fields. I have stopped the grape juice flowing from the winepresses. No one shouts for joy as they tread out the grapes. No, their shouts now are not because of joy!

Cries for help reach from Heshbon to Elealeh and all the way to Jahaz. They're shouting out from Zoar to Horonaim and Eglath-shelishiyah, for even the water in the Nimrim Brook has dried up.

I'm going to finish off those in Moab who sacrifice on the pagan high places and burn incense to their gods, declares the Lord. So I mourn inside like a flute playing a sad song for Moab; like a flute playing a funeral tune for the people of Kir-heres, because they've lost everything of value that they worked for.

As signs of their mourning, every head is shaved, every beard is trimmed, every hand has a gash, and every waist is wearing sackcloth. Everyone is mourning on all the flat roofs and streets of Moab, because I have smashed the country like a jar nobody wants, declares the Lord.

Moab is completely shattered! Listen to them cry! See how the Moabites turn away in shame! All the surrounding nations are horrified at what's happened to the country, and ridicule its people.

This is what the Lord says: Watch as an enemy like an eagle swoops down, spreading its wings as it attacks Moab. Kirioth has been conquered, and the fortresses captured. At that time Moab's warriors will be as scared as a woman in labor. Moab will cease to exist as a nation because they defied the Lord.

You people living in Moab, what's waiting for you are terror, traps, and snares, declares the Lord. You will run away in terror and fall into a trap, and when you climb out of the trap, you'll be caught in a snare. I will do this to the Moabites at the time when they're punished, declares the Lord.

Those who run away will be left defenseless in Heshbon where they went for protection, because fire blazes out from Heshbon, a fire from where Sihon once reigned. It burns up the whole country of Moab and its defiant people.

What a disaster has come to you Moabites! The people of Chemosh have been wiped out. Your sons and daughters have been taken prisoner and have gone into exile.

But even so, later on, I will bring the people of Moab back from exile, declares the Lord. This is the end of the description of the judgment on Moab.

This is what the Lord says about the Ammonites:

Don't the Israelites have any children? Don't they have heirs to inherit their property? So why has Milcom taken over the territory belonging to the tribe of Gad? Why are his people living in their towns?

Watch out! The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will signal the attack on the Ammonite town of Rabbah. It will be turned into a pile of ruins, and its villages will be burned down. Then the Israelites will drive out the people who took over their land, says the Lord.

Weep, people of Heshbon, for the town of Ai has been destroyed. Cry for help, people of Rabbah! Put on clothes made of sackcloth and start mourning; run to and fro inside your city walls, because your god Milcom will go into exile along with his priests and leaders.

Why do you boast that your valleys are so productive, you unfaithful people? You trust in your wealth, saying, “Who would dare attack us?”

Watch out! I'm going to bring the surrounding nations to terrorize you, declares the Lord God Almighty. You will all be driven out and scattered, and no one will be able to gather you refugees together again. However, later on I will bring you Ammonites back from exile, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord Almighty says about Edom:

Aren't there any wise people left in Teman? Isn't there any good advice from those with insight? Has their wisdom rotted away? Turn and run away! Find somewhere to hide, people of Dedan, because I'm bringing disaster down on you descendants of Esau when I punish you.

If people harvesting grapes came to you, they'd leave some behind, wouldn't they? If thieves came during the night, they'd only steal what they wanted, wouldn't they? But I'm going to strip the whole country bare, leaving its people with nowhere to hide. All of Esau's descendants will be destroyed, along with their relatives and friends—they will all be gone.

However, you can leave your orphans to me because I will protect them. Have your widows put their trust in me.

This is what the Lord says: If those who were not required to drink from the cup of judgment had to do so, how could you not be punished yourselves? You won't go unpunished, because you have to drink it too. I made myself a solemn promise, declares the Lord, that the town of Bozrah will become a place that horrifies people, a complete humiliation, a pile of ruins, and a name that's used as a curse word. All its surrounding towns will also be left in ruins forever.

I received this message from the Lord. He has sent a messenger to the nations:

Get yourselves ready to attack Edom! Prepare for battle! Watch as I will make you insignificant compared to other nations—everyone will look down on you. The fear you once created in others, and your pride in yourselves, has fooled you into overconfidence, you people living on the rocky mountain tops. Though you make your homes high out of reach like an eagle's nest, I will tear you down, even from there, declares the Lord. People will be horrified at what's happened to Edom. Everyone passing by will be shocked, and will sneer at all its damage. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, along with their neighboring towns, says the Lord, nobody will live there—they will become uninhabited. Watch out! I'm going to come like a lion from the tangled undergrowth beside the Jordan to attack the animals grazing the green pasture. In fact I'm going to chase the Edomites from their land very quickly.

Who will I choose to conquer them? Who is like me? Who can challenge me? Which leader could oppose me?

So listen to what the Lord has planned to do to Edom and the people of Teman: Their children will be dragged away like lambs from the flock, and because of them their pasture will become a wasteland. When they fall, the sound they make will make the earth shake; their cries will be heard all the way to the Red Sea. Watch as an enemy like an eagle flies high, then swoops down, spreading its wings as it attacks Bozrah. At that time Edom's warriors will be as scared as a woman in labor.

A prophecy about Damascus:

The towns of Hamath and Arpad are disturbed, because they've received bad news. They are fearful, restless like the sea. Nothing can calm their worries. The people of Damascus are demoralized—they turn and run away in panic, overcome by pain and anguish like a woman in labor.

Why isn't the city that is praised deserted, the city that made me happy?

For on that day its young men will die in its streets, all its defenders will be killed, declares the Lord of Hosts. I'm going to set fire to the walls of Damascus; that will burn down the fortresses of Ben-hadad.

A prophecy about the land of Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that were attacked by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. This is what the Lord says:

Go and attack Kedar; destroy the people of the east! Take their tents and their flocks! Carry off their tent curtains and all their possessions! Take their camels for yourselves. Shout out to them: “Terror is everywhere!”

Run! Get away as far as you can! Find somewhere to hide, people of Hazor, declares the Lord. For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has made plans to attack and destroy you.

Go and attack that self-satisfied nation that thinks it's safe, declares the Lord. They don't have any barred gates and have no allies. Their camels and large herds will be plunder for you. I will scatter them everywhere, these desert people who trim their hair on the sides of their heads. I will bring disaster down on them from all directions, declares the Lord. Hazor will become a place where jackals live, a place abandoned forever. No one will live there; it will become uninhabited.

This is the Lord's message that came to Jeremiah the prophet about Elam. This was at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the Lord Almighty says:

Look! I'm going to smash the bows of the Elamites, the weapon they rely on for their power. I will bring winds from all directions to attack Elam, and I will scatter them in all directions. There won't be a nation that doesn't have some of Elam's exiles.

I will smash the Elamites in front of their enemies, before those who want to kill them. In my furious anger I will bring disaster down on them, declares the Lord. I will chase them down with the sword until I have destroyed them. I will set up my throne in Elam, and destroy its king and officials, declares the Lord.

However, later on I will bring the Elamites back from exile, declares the Lord.

This is the Lord's message that he told Jeremiah the prophet to give about Babylon and the country of Babylonia.

Tell everyone the news! Hold up a sign and shout it out, don't hold back! Tell them, Babylon has fallen! Her god Bel is humiliated; the power of her god Marduk is broken; all Babylon's idols are humiliated and their power is broken.

A northern nation will come and attack her and turn the country into a wasteland. No one will live there—both people and animals will desert it. That's the time when the people of Israel and Judah will join together, weeping as they go to worship the Lord their God, declares the Lord. They will ask the way to Zion, and start going in that direction. They will arrive and commit themselves to the Lord in an everlasting agreement that won't ever be forgotten.

My people are sheep that are lost, led astray by their shepherds, making them wander aimlessly in the mountains. They go from place to place in the mountains and hills, forgetting where they used to rest. All those who came across them attacked them. Their enemies declared, “We're not to blame! They're the ones who sinned against the Lord, their true resting place; the Lord who was the hope of their forefathers.” Run away from the city of Babylon; get away from the country of Babylonia! Lead the way like the male goats that lead the flock.

Look! I'm assembling a coalition of strong northern nations who will come and attack Babylon. They will line up in battle against her; she will be conquered from the north. Their arrows will be like the best warriors —they don't miss! Babylonia will be plundered—everyone who plunders her will have plenty of loot, declares the Lord.

Though for now you Babylonians celebrate and sing triumphantly as you plunder my special people, though for now you jump around like a frisky young cow treading out the grain, and neigh like stallions, you are going to bring shame on your mother, you are going to disgrace the one who gave birth to you. Watch as she becomes the least important of all the nations, a wilderness, a dry desert land. Because of the Lord's angry punishment, she will be deserted, completely desolate. Everyone who passes by will be horrified at what has happened to Babylon, and sneer at all her wounds.

All you archers, line up ready for battle around Babylon. Shoot at her! Don't save your arrows, because she has sinned against the Lord. Shout war cries against her from every side! She holds up her hands in surrender. Her towers have collapsed; her walls are demolished. This is the Lord paying her back, so you too can pay her back—do the same to her as she did to others. Stop the sower from sowing in the country of Babylon, and stop the harvester swinging the sickle to reap the grain. Under the threat of the enemies' swords, everyone runs home to their own people, they go back to where they came from.

The Israelites are a flock that's been chased and scattered by lions. The first on the attack was the king of Assyria; then lastly Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon crushed their bones.

So this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I'm going to punish the king of Babylon and his country just like I punished the king of Assyria. I will lead the Israelites back to their pasturelands, to feed on Carmel and Bashan, to satisfy their appetites on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead. This will be when the guilt and the sins of Israel and Judah will be looked for, but none will be found, because I will forgive those people who remain that I'm looking after, declares the Lord.

Go and attack the land of Merathaim, and the people living in Pekod. Kill them with swords, set them apart for destruction, along with everything they leave behind. Make sure you do everything I have ordered you to do, declares the Lord.

The noise of battle is heard in the country, the noise of terrible destruction. See how the hammer of the whole earth is lying broken in pieces in the ground! The nations look with horror on what Babylon has become! Babylon, I set a trap for you, and you were caught before you realized it. You were hunted down and captured because you fought against the Lord. In his anger the Lord opened his armory to bring out his weapons, for this is what the Lord God Almighty is doing in the country of Babylonia.

Come and attack her from every side! Open her granaries; collect the loot you take from her like piles of grain. Set her apart for destruction; don't leave any survivors. Kill all her young bulls with the sword; let them be slaughtered. What a disaster for them, because their time has come when they're punished.

(Listen to the refugees and survivors who have returned from Babylonia, announcing in Zion, “The Lord our God is paying them back for what happened to his Temple.”)

Call up the archers to attack Babylon, yes, all of them! Completely surround her—don't let anyone escape. Pay her back for what she's done, because in her pride she defied the Lord, Israel's Holy One. As a result her young men will be killed in the streets; all her soldiers will die that day, declares the Lord. Watch out, because I'm against you, you arrogant people! declares the Lord God Almighty. Your time has come when I will punish you. You arrogant people will trip and fall. Nobody will be there to pick you up. I'm going to set fire to your towns and burn up everything around you.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: The people of Israel and Judah are being mistreated. All who captured them are holding onto them, refusing to let them go. But the one who rescues them is powerful; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will defend them and their

cause, so he may bring peace on earth, but trouble to the people of Babylon.

A sword is raised to attack the Babylonians, declares the Lord, ready to attack those who live in Babylon, and her officials and wise men. A sword is raised to attack her false prophets, and they will become fools. A sword is raised to attack her soldiers, and they will be terrified. A sword is raised to attack her horses and chariots, along with all the foreign soldiers with her, and they will become like frightened women. A sword is raised to attack her stores of treasure, and they will be plundered. A drought has hit her rivers, and they will dry up. For it's a country full of pagan images. These horrible idols drive their worshipers mad. Consequently desert animals and hyenas will live there, and it will be a home for owls. It will be uninhabited forever—it won't be lived in from one generation to the next. In the same way that God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring towns, declares the Lord, no one will live there, no one will stay there.

Look! An army is advancing from the north. A great nation and many kings are coming against you from the distant lands. They're carrying bows and javelins. They are cruel and merciless. When they shout it's like the sea roaring. They ride on horses and attack in formation against you, people of Babylon. The king of Babylon has heard the news and he's terrified. He's overcome with fear, in pain like a woman in labor.

Watch out! I'm going to come like a lion from the tangled undergrowth beside the Jordan to attack the animals grazing the green pasture. In fact I'm going to chase the Babylonians from their land very quickly.

Who will I choose to conquer them? Who is like me? Who can challenge me? Which leader could oppose me? So listen to what the Lord has planned to do to Babylon and the country of Babylonia: Their children will be dragged away like lambs from the flock, and because of them their pasture will become a wasteland. The sound of Babylon's capture will make the earth shake; their cries will be heard throughout the nations.

This is what the Lord says: Look! I'm going to stir up a destructive wind against Babylon and against the people of Babylonia. I will send foreign soldiers to attack Babylon to winnow her and turn her country into a wasteland—they will attack her from all directions when her time of trouble comes. The archer doesn't need to use his bow; the infantryman doesn't need to put on his armor. Don't spare her young soldiers; set apart her whole army for destruction! They will fall down wounded in her streets, killed in the country of Babylonia.

Israel and Judah have not been deserted by their God, the Lord Almighty, even though they sinned against the Holy One of Israel everywhere in their country.

Escape from Babylon! Run for your lives! Don't get caught up in her punishment and die, for this is the time when the Lord pays her back for her sins. Once Babylon was a golden cup the Lord held in his hand. She made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine which is why they went mad. Now, all of a sudden, Babylon has fallen. She has been smashed to pieces. Weep for her; get her some treatment for her pain. Maybe she can be healed.

"We tried to heal her, but she couldn't be helped. So give up on her! All of us should go home to where we came from. The news of her punishment has reached everywhere, all the way to heaven. The Lord has encouraged and supported us. Come on, let's tell people here in Jerusalem what the Lord has done for us!"

Sharpen the arrows! Pick up the shields! The Lord has encouraged the kings of the Medes, because his plan is directed at the destruction of Babylon. The Lord is paying them back for what happened to his Temple. Raise the signal flag to attack the walls of Babylon; strengthen the guard; have the watchmen take their places; get the ambush ready. The Lord planned and carried out his threats against the people of Babylon.

You people who live beside by many waters, and have so much wealth, this is the time of your end—your life will be cut short. The Lord Almighty vowed by his own life, saying, I'm going to make sure to fill you with so many enemy soldiers they'll be like locusts. They will shout as they celebrate their victory over you. It was God who made the earth by his power. He created the world by his wisdom and by his understanding he put the heavens in place. The waters of the heavens rain down with a roar at his command. He makes the clouds to rise all over the earth. He makes lightning to accompany rain, and sends the wind from his storehouses.

Everyone is stupid; they don't know anything. Every metalworker is embarrassed by the idols they make. For their images made of molten metal are fraudulent—they're not alive! They are useless, an object to be laughed at. They will be destroyed at the time of their punishment.

The God of Jacob is not like these idols, for he is the creator of everything, including his own people that are special to him. The Lord Almighty is his name.

You are my war club, the weapon I use in battle. I use you to destroy nations; I use you to destroy kingdoms. I use you to destroy horses and their riders; I use you to destroy chariots and their drivers. I use you to destroy men and women; I use you to destroy old men and youths; I use you to destroy young men and girls. I use you to destroy shepherds and their flocks; I use you to destroy farmers and their cattle; I use you to destroy rulers and state officials.

Right in front of you I'm going to pay back Babylon and everyone who lives in Babylonia for all the evil they did to Jerusalem, declares the Lord.

Watch out, because I am against you, you destructive monster who devastates the whole world, declares the Lord. I will reach out to attack you; I will roll you down the cliffs; I will turn you into a mountain of ash. Nobody will be even able to find themselves a cornerstone or a foundation stone among your ruins, because you will be so utterly destroyed, declares the Lord.

Raise a signal flag in the country! Blow the trumpet call to war among the nations! Get the nations ready to attack her; Summon the kingdoms to march against her: Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz. Choose a commander to lead the armies to attack her; send into battle cavalry like a swarm of locusts. Have the armies of the nations prepare for battle against her. This applies

to the kings of the Medes, their leaders and all their officers, and every country they rule.

The earth quakes and trembles because the Lord is determined to carry out what he threatened against Babylon—to turn Babylonia into a wasteland where no one lives. Babylon's defenders have given up fighting —they're just sitting in their fortresses. They're worn out; they've become like frightened women. Babylon's houses are burning; the bars securing her gates have been smashed. A runner hands his message over to another to carry; one messenger follows another messenger, all of them alerting the king of Babylon to the news that his city has been completely conquered, the river crossings have been captured, the marshlands set on fire and his soldiers are panicking.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: The people of Babylon are like a threshing floor when the grain is trampled out. Her time of harvest will come very soon.

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon chewed me up and sucked me dry, making me as empty as a jar with nothing in it. He swallowed me down as if he were some monster, filling himself with the tastiest parts of me and throwing the rest away.

"Babylon must bear the responsibility for the violent attacks on us," say the inhabitants of Zion. "The people of Babylonia must bear the responsibility for the blood shed in my city," says Jerusalem.

This is what the Lord says: Watch as I present your case for you and make your enemies pay for what they did to you. I'm going to dry up her river and her springs. Babylon will be turned into a pile of rubble, a home for jackals, a place that horrifies people, a place they jeer at, a place where no one lives.

The Babylonians will roar together like powerful lions and growl like lion cubs. But while their passions are aroused, I will serve them a banquet and get them drunk. They'll celebrate so much that they'll pass out and won't ever wake up, declares the Lord. I will take them down like lambs to be slaughtered, like rams and goats.

How could it be? Babylon has fallen! The most famous city in the world has been conquered! What a horrible sight Babylon has become to everyone watching! It's as if the sea has flooded over Babylon, covering her in crashing waves. The towns of Babylonia are in ruins, turned into a dry desert wasteland where no one lives—no one even passes by.

I will punish Bel in Babylon. I will force him to spit out what he swallowed. People of other nations won't run to worship him anymore. Even Babylon's wall has fallen.

My people, come out of her! Each one of you, save yourselves from the Lord's furious anger. Don't lose courage, and don't be afraid when you hear different rumors going around the country. There'll be one rumor one year, and another one the next, talking about violent revolution, of one ruler fighting against another.

Look, the time is coming when I will punish Babylon's idols. The whole country will be humiliated; it will be full of the dead bodies of those who have been killed. Then everyone in heaven and on earth will celebrate with shouts of joy at what's happened to Babylon, because the destroyers from the north will come and attack her, declares the Lord. Babylon has to fall because of the Israelites and people of other nations she killed. Those of you who have managed to escape being killed, leave now! Don't delay! Remember the Lord in this far away place; think about Jerusalem.

"We are embarrassed because we've been mocked, and we held our heads in shame because foreigners went into the holy places of the Lord's Temple,"

So keep watching, declares the Lord, because the time is coming when I will punish her for worshiping idols, and the sound of wounded people moaning will be heard throughout the country. Even if Babylon could climb up into the sky to strengthen her high fortresses, those I send to attack her will destroy her, declares the Lord.

A cry comes from Babylon; the noise of terrible destruction comes from the country of Babylonia. For the Lord is going to destroy Babylon; he will put an end to her boastful talk. The waves of attacking army will roar like the crashing sea; the noise of their shouts will echo all around.

A destroyer is coming to attack Babylon. Her soldiers will be taken prisoner, and their bows will be smashed, for the Lord is a God who punishes fairly; he will definitely pay them back. I will make her leaders and wise men drunk, along with her commanders, officers, and soldiers. Then they will pass out, and won't ever wake up, declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: Babylon's massive walls will be knocked down to the ground and her high gates burned. All that the people worked for will be for nothing; other nations who came to help will wear themselves out, only to see what they've done go up in flames.

This is the message that Jeremiah the prophet gave to Seraiah son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he accompanied King Zedekiah of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign. Seraiah was the king's personal assistant. Jeremiah had written on a scroll a description of all the disasters that would come to Babylon—all these words written here about Babylon.

Jeremiah told Seraiah, "When you arrive in Babylon, make sure you read out loud everything written here, and announce, 'Lord, you have promised to destroy this place so that none will be left—no people or animals. In fact it will be deserted forever.'

After you finish reading this scroll out loud, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates.

Then say, 'This is how Babylon will sink and won't ever rise again, because of the disaster I'm bringing down on her. Her people will grow tired.'" This is the end of Jeremiah's messages.

Zedekiah was twenty-one when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah. She came from Libnah. He did evil in the Lord's sight, just as Jehoiakim had done. All this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, because of the Lord's anger, until he eventually banished them from his presence. Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem with his entire army. He set up camp around the city and built siege ramps against the walls. The city remained under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

By the ninth day of the fourth month, the famine in the city was so bad that the people had nothing left to eat. Then the city wall was broken through, and all the soldiers ran away, escaping at night through the gate between the two walls by the king's garden, even though the Babylonians had the city surrounded. They went in the direction of the Arabah, but the Babylonian army chased after the king and caught up with him on the plains of Jericho. His whole army had scattered and left him.

They captured the king and took him to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where he sentenced him. The king of Babylon slaughtered Zedekiah's sons while he watched, and also killed the officials of Judah there at Riblah. Then he gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in bronze shackles. The king of Babylon took him to Babylon and imprisoned him there until the day he died.

On the tenth day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, an officer of the king of Babylon, entered Jerusalem. He burned down the Lord's Temple, the royal palace, and all the large buildings of Jerusalem. The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the guard knocked down all the walls around Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, deported some of the poor people and those who were left in the city, even those who had gone over to the side of the king of Babylon, as well as the rest of the craftsmen. But Nebuzaradan allowed others of the poor people who were left in the country to stay and take care of the vineyards and the fields.

The Babylonians broke into pieces the bronze pillars, the movable carts, and the bronze Sea that belonged to the Lord's Temple, and they took all the bronze to Babylon. They also took all the pots, shovels, lamp snuffers, sprinkling bowls, and all the other bronze items used in the Temple service. The commander of the guard removed the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, dishes and bowls, anything that was made of pure gold or silver.

The amount of bronze that came from the two columns, the Sea, the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable carts, which Solomon had made for the Lord's Temple, all of this weighed more than could be measured. Each column was eighteen cubits tall and twelve cubits around. They were hollow with walls four fingers thick. The bronze capital on top of one column was five cubits high, with a network of bronze pomegranates around it. The second column was the same, and also had a decorative network. There were ninety-six bronze pomegranates around each column. Above the network were a total of one hundred pomegranates.

The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah, the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest, second in rank, and the three Temple doorkeepers. From those left in the city he took the officer in charge of the soldiers, and seven of the king's advisors. He also took the secretary to the army commander who was in charge of calling up the people for military service, and sixty other men who were present in the city. Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, took them and brought them before the king of Babylon at Riblah. The king of Babylon had them executed at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So the people of Judah had to leave their land.

This is a record of the number of people Nebuchadnezzar took into exile. In the seventh year of his reign he took 3,023 Judeans. In his eighteenth year Nebuchadnezzar took another 832 from Jerusalem. In his twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuzaradan, the commander of the guard, took another 745 Judeans, making a total of 4,600.

In the year Evil-merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin, king of Judah, from prison. This happened on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month of the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin, king of Judah. The king of Babylon treated him well and gave him a position of honor higher than the other kings there with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin was able to remove his prison clothes, and he ate frequently at the king's table for the rest of his life. The king provided Jehoiachin with a daily allowance for the rest of his life until he died.

Lamentations

Book of Lamentations

How desolate sits the city of Jerusalem, once filled with people! She has become like a widow, she who was once great among the nations. The queen of all the world has become a slave-laborer.

She cries bitterly through the night, tears rolling down her cheeks. Despite all her many lovers, no one comes to comfort her. Betrayed by all her friends, they are now her enemies.

Judah has been dragged off into captivity, suffering miserably under brutal slavery; she lives among the nations but has no place of her own where she can rest. Those chasing her have brought her down and she cannot escape.

Even the roads to Zion are in mourning because no one travels on them to go to the religious festivals. All her gates are empty. Her priests groan in sadness. Her girls are suffering. She herself is in bitter distress.

Those who hated her now control her; her enemies enjoy life, because the Lord has made her suffer due to all her sins of rebellion. Her children have been taken away as prisoners of the enemy.

All the glory has left the Daughter of Zion. Her leaders are like deer that can't find any grass to eat. They don't even have the strength to run away when the hunter comes after them!

As she wanders around in her misery, Jerusalem thinks back to all the wonderful things she once had in the old days. When her enemies conquered her people, she didn't receive any help. Her enemies gloated over her, and laughed at her downfall.

Jerusalem sinned terribly which is why she is now treated as someone unclean. Everyone who used to honor her now despise her, because they've seen her naked and ashamed. She herself groans as she turns away.

Her uncleanness contaminates her skirts. She didn't think about what would happen. Her fall was a shock, and no one was there to comfort her. “Please, Lord, see how much I'm suffering, because the enemy has won!” she says.

The invader has stolen all her treasures. She even had to watch as heathen nations went into her sanctuary, people you had forbidden to enter.

All her people groan, looking for bread. They have spent what they value the most to buy food so they can stay alive.

“Please, Lord, look and see what's happening to me,” she says. “It's as if I'm worthless!

Don't you care anything about it, all you people passing by? Take a look and see! Is there any suffering as bad as mine, punished by the Lord when he became angry?

He sent down fire from heaven that destroyed my bones. He spread out a net to catch my feet, tripping me over. He abandoned me, leaving me sick all day long.

He took my rebellious sins and twisted them together into a yoke that he tied to my neck. He took away all my strength, and handed me over defenseless to my enemies.

The Lord brushed aside all my strong soldiers defending me. He called up an army to attack me, to crush my young men. The Lord has trampled down the virgin Daughter of Judah like grapes in a winepress.

This is why I'm weeping, tears flowing from my eyes, because there's is no one here to comfort me, no one to make me feel better. There's nothing left for my children because the enemy has conquered us.”

Zion holds out her hands in distress, but there's no one to comfort her. The Lord issued orders against Jacob, and his neighbors became his enemies. Jerusalem is to them something disgusting.

“The Lord has done what's right, because I rebelled against his instructions. Listen, everyone everywhere; look at what I'm suffering. My young women and young men have been taken off into captivity.

I called out for help to my lovers, but they betrayed me. My priests and elders starved to death in the city as they tried to find food to keep themselves alive.

Can't you see, Lord, how upset I am? Inside I am in turmoil; my heart is breaking because I've been so rebellious. Outside, the sword kills those I love; inside, it's like I'm living in the house of death.

People hear me groaning, but no one comes to comfort me. All my enemies have heard about the bad things that have happened to me, and they're delighted that it was you who did it. Please bring about the day of judgment that you promised so they can end up like me.

May you see all the evil things they've done! Treat them the same way as you've treated me as a result of all my rebellious sins, for I'm groaning all the time, and I'm sick at heart.”

How the Lord has spread a cloud of his anger over the Daughter of Zion! He has thrown down Israel's glory from heaven to earth. He has deserted his Temple from the time he became angry.

The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the places where the descendants of Jacob lived. In his anger he has torn down the fortresses of the Daughter of Judah. He has demolished and degraded the kingdom and its leaders.

In his fury he has destroyed all of Israel's power, refusing to help as the enemy attacked. He was like a fire blazing in the land of Jacob, burning everything up.

He has fired arrows from his bow as if he were their enemy; he has used his power against them like an attacker. He has killed all the beloved children; he has poured out his anger like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion.

The Lord has become like an enemy, completely destroying Israel and its palaces, demolishing its fortresses, making the Daughter of Judah cry and mourn more and more.

He has torn down his Temple as if it was a garden shed; he has destroyed his meeting place. The Lord has made Zion forget about her religious festivals and Sabbaths. In his fury he has disowned both king and priest.

The Lord has discarded his altar; he has abandoned his Temple. He has handed it over to the enemy. They

were shouting triumphantly in the Lord's Temple just as worshipers did on festival days.

The Lord was determined to destroy the defensive walls of the Daughter of Zion. He measured out what he would destroy, and didn't hesitate to do it. He made the battlements and walls weep; they both disintegrated.

Her gates have collapsed to the ground; he has destroyed their bars, breaking them apart. Her king and her princes have been exiled to other countries. No one follows the Law anymore, and even her prophets no longer receive visions from the Lord.

The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence. They have thrown dust over their heads and put on clothes made of sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed down, their heads to the ground.

My eyes are worn out from crying; inside I am in turmoil. I'm sick and exhausted over the destruction of Jerusalem, the daughter of my people, because children and infants are fainting in the city streets.

They cry out to their mothers, “We need food and drink!” fainting in the city streets as if they're wounded, their lives fading away in their mothers' arms.

What can I tell you? What shall I compare you to, Daughter of Jerusalem? What can I say you're like in order to comfort you, virgin Daughter of Zion? For your wound gapes as wide as the sea—who could ever heal you?

The visions of your prophets were false and worthless; they didn't point out your guilt to prevent you being taken into captivity. Instead they presented to you visions that were false and deceptive.

Everyone who passes by mock you, clapping their hands, hissing and shaking their heads in scorn at the Daughter of Jerusalem. “Is this really the city that people called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?” they ask.

All your enemies open their mouths at you, hissing and gnashing their teeth, “We've swallowed her up! This is the day we've been waiting for. Now it's here and we've seen it happen!”

The Lord has achieved what he decided; he has done what he warned he would. Just as he determined to do long ago, he has destroyed you, showing no mercy. He has allowed the enemy to gloat over your defeat, and he has given power to those who attack you.

The people cry out to the Lord from the bottom of their hearts. Daughter of Zion, let your walls stream down with tears like a river all day and night. Don't stop, go on crying!

Get up and cry out as the night begins. Pour out your sad thoughts like water before the Lord. Hold up your hands to him in prayer for the lives of your children who are fainting from hunger at every street corner.

Lord, please think about it! Who have you ever treated this way? Should women have to eat their children, the little ones they love? Should priests and prophets be killed in the Lord's Temple?

The dead, young and old, lie together in the dust of the streets. My young men and young women, have been killed by the sword. You killed them when you were angry; you have slaughtered them without mercy.

You invited enemies to attack me from every direction like you were inviting them to a religious festival. At the time when the Lord was angry nobody escaped, nobody survived. My enemy has destroyed the children I looked after and loved.

I am the man who has experienced suffering under the rod of God's anger.

He has driven me away, forcing me to walk in darkness instead of the light.

In fact he hits me again and again all day long.

He has worn me out; he has broken me in pieces.

He has besieged me, surrounding me with bitterness and misery.

He has forced me to live in darkness like those long dead.

He has built a wall around me so I can't escape; he has bound me with heavy chains.

Even when I keep on crying out for help, he refuses to listen to my prayer.

He has put stone blocks in my way and sends me down crooked paths.

He is a bear that lies in wait for me, a lion in hiding ready to attack,

He dragged me from my path and ripped me to pieces, leaving me helpless.

He loaded his bow with an arrow and used me as his target,

He shot me in my kidneys with his arrows.

Now everyone laughs at me, singing songs that mock me all day long.

He has filled me with bitterness; he has filled me up with bitter wormwood.

He has broken my teeth with grit; he has trampled me in the dust.

Peace has been torn away from me; I've forgotten all that's good in life.

That's why I say, “My expectation of a long life is gone, along with all that I hoped for from the Lord.

Don't forget everything I've suffered in my wandering, as bitter as wormwood and poison.

I certainly haven't forgotten. I remember it all too well, so I sink into depression.

But I still hope when I think about this:

The trustworthy love of the Lord never ends, and his compassion has no limit.

They're new every morning. Lord, you're completely faithful!”

“The Lord is all I need,” I tell myself, “so I will put my hope in him.”

The Lord is good to those who trust in him, to anyone who seeks to follow him.

It is good to wait quietly for the Lord's salvation.

It is good for people to learn to patiently bear discipline while they're still young.

They should sit by themselves in silence, because it's God who has disciplined them.

They should bow low with their faces to the ground, for there may still be hope.

They should turn a cheek to someone who wants to slap them; they should take the insults of others.

For the Lord won't abandon us forever.

Even though he may bring sadness, he shows us mercy because his trustworthy love is so great.

For he doesn't willingly hurt people, or cause them grief.

Whether it's mistreating all the prisoners of the land,

Or denying someone their rights as the Most High watches,

Or cheating someone in their legal case—these things the Lord doesn't approve of.

Who spoke and it came into existence? Wasn't it the Lord who commanded it?

When the Most High speaks it can be a disaster or a blessing.

Why should any human being complain about the results of their sins?

We should look at ourselves, examine what we're doing, and return to the Lord.

Let's not just hold up our hands to God in heaven, but our minds as well, saying,

"We are the ones who sinned; we are the ones who rebelled; and you haven't forgiven us!"

You have wrapped yourself in anger and chased us down, killing without mercy. You have killed without pity.

You have wrapped yourself with a cloud that no prayer can penetrate.

You have made us waste and refuse to the nations all around.

All our enemies open their mouths to criticize us.

We're terrified and trapped, devastated and destroyed.

Tears stream from my eyes over the death of my people.

My eyes overflow with tears all the time. They won't stop

Until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees what's going on.

What I've seen torments me because of what's happened to all the women in my city.

For no reason my enemies trapped me like a bird.

They tried to kill me by tossing me into a pit and throwing stones at me.

Water flooded over my head, and I thought I was going to die.

I called out for you, Lord, from deep inside the pit.

You heard me when I prayed, "Please don't ignore my cry for help."

You came to me when I called you, and you told me, "Don't be afraid!"

You have taken my case and defended me; you have saved my life!

Lord, you have seen the injustices done to me; please vindicate me!

You have observed how vengeful they are and how often they've plotted against me.

Lord, you have heard how they've insulted me, and what they've plotted against me,

How my enemies talk against me and complain about me all the time!

Just look! Whether they're sitting down and or standing up, they go on making fun of me in their songs.

Pay them back as they deserve, Lord, for all they've done!

Give them a covering for their minds! May your curse be on them!

Chase them down in your anger, Lord, and get rid of them from the earth!

How gold has tarnished! Even pure gold has lost its shine! Jewels from the Temple have been scattered on every street corner.

Look at how the precious people of Zion, worth their weight in gold, are now valued like cheap clay jars made by a potter!

Even jackals nurse their young at their breasts, but the women of my people have become cruel, like an ostrich in the desert.

The nursing babies are so thirsty that their tongues stick to the roof of their mouths. Little children beg for food, but nobody gives them anything.

Those who used to eat gourmet food now die starving in the streets. Those who dressed in fine clothes from their childhood now live in heaps of rubbish.

Jerusalem's punishment is worse than sinful Sodom's, which was destroyed in a brief moment, without the help of human hands.

Her leaders were purer than snow, whiter than milk; their bodies were a healthier red than coral, and they shone like lapis lazuli.

But now they look blacker than soot; no one recognizes them in the street. Their skin has shrunk to their bones and is as dry as wood.

Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of hunger, who slowly waste away in agony because the fields produce no crops.

The hands of loving women have cooked their own children to eat during the destruction of Jerusalem.

The Lord has given full expression to his anger. He has poured out his fury. He has started a fire in Zion, and it has burned down her very foundations.

No king on earth—in fact nobody in all the world—thought that an enemy or attacker could enter the gates of Jerusalem.

But this happened because of the sins of her prophets and the wickedness of her priests, who shed the blood of the innocent right there in the city.

They wandered like blind men through the streets, made unclean by this blood, so no one would touch their clothes.

"Go away! You're unclean!" people would shout at them, "Go away, go away! Don't touch us!" So they ran away and wandered from country to country, but the people there told them, "You can't stay here!"

The Lord himself has scattered them; he doesn't bother with them anymore. Nobody respects the priests, and nobody admires the leaders.

We wore out our eyes pointlessly looking for help the whole time; we watched from our towers for a nation to come that couldn't save us.

The enemy tracked our every movement so we couldn't walk through our streets. Our end approached. Our time was up because our end had come.

Our pursuers were faster than eagles in the sky. They chased us across the mountains and ambushed us in the desert.

The king, the Lord's anointed, our country's "life-breath," was trapped and captured by them. We had said about him, "Under his protection we will live among the nations."

Celebrate and be happy while you can, people of Edom, you who live in the land of Uz, because this cup will be passed to you too. You will get drunk and strip yourself naked.

People of Zion, your punishment is coming to an end—he won't continue your exile for long. But he is

going to punish your sins, people of Edom; he will reveal your sins.

Lord, please remember what's happened to us. Look at us and see how we've been humiliated!

The land we used to own has been handed over to strangers, our houses have been given to foreigners.

We have lost our fathers, and our mothers are widows.

The water we drink we have to pay for; our firewood comes at a price.

Like animals we're driven along with harnesses around our necks; we're worn out but don't find any rest.

We allied ourselves with Egypt and Assyria so we could have plenty of food.

Our forefathers sinned and they're gone, but we're being punished for their sins.

Servants of our conqueror rule over us; no one can save us from their power.

We take our lives in our hands when we look for food, because of the armed raiders in the desert.

Our skin is hot like an oven because of the fever caused by hunger.

They raped women in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah.

Princes have been hung up by their hands; they show elders no respect.

Young men are forced to work at hand-mills; boys stagger under bundles of wood.

The elders have abandoned their places at the city gate; the young men have given up playing their music.

There's no more happiness for us; our dancing has turned into mourning.

The crown has fallen from our head. What a disaster has come upon us because we have sinned!

Because of all this, we're sick at heart; because of all these things, we can hardly look;

Because of Mount Zion, which has been abandoned, and where only foxes roam.

But you, Lord, live forever! You rule for all generations!

So why have you forgotten us for such a long time? Why have you abandoned us for so many years?

Bring us back to you, Lord, so we can be with you again. Please remake our lives like they used to be.

Or have you completely rejected us? Are you still really furious with us?

Ezekiel

Book of Ezekiel

On the fifth day of the fourth month of the thirtieth year, I was with the other exiles by the River Kebar. The heavens opened and I saw visions of God. (On the fifth day of the month of the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, a message from Lord was given to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of Babylonia by the River Kebar. There the Lord's power came over him.) I looked up and saw a windstorm racing in from the north, a tremendous cloud with fire flashing like lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The middle of the fire looked like glowing metal and within it was the shape of four beings.

This was what they looked like: They had a human shape, but they each had four faces and four wings. They had straight legs, and the soles of their feet looked like the hooves of calves, and shone like polished bronze.

They had human hands under their wings on each of their four sides. The four of them all had faces and wings, and each of their wings touched the wings of the one next to it. As they moved they didn't turn—they all moved straight in one direction.

This what their faces looked like. They had a human face to the front, a lion's face to the right, a bull's face to the left, and lastly an eagle's face. These were their faces.

Their wings were spread out above them. They all had two wings that touched the wings of the one beside it, as well as two wings that covered its body. Each of them went together in whatever direction the Spirit wished them to go, moving without turning. These beings looked like bright burning coals or torches. Blazing fire moved to and fro between the beings, and lightning flashed out from the fire. The beings raced to and fro as fast as the lightning flashes.

As I was watching these beings, I noticed a wheel on the ground next to each of the beings with their four faces. The wheels looked like they were made of topaz, and all four wheels were the same. In the middle of each wheel was what looked like another wheel set crossways. They could move in any direction without turning as they did so. The wheel rims were impressively high, and all of the four rims were covered in eyes. As the beings moved so did the wheels next to them, and when the beings flew up, the wheels did too.

They would go wherever the Spirit went. The wheels would lift up beside them, because the Spirit of the beings was in the wheels to direct them. When the beings moved, the wheels moved; when they stopped, the wheels stopped; and when they flew up from the ground, the wheels flew up beside them, because the Spirit of the beings was in the wheels to direct them.

Extending above the heads of the being was something that looked like an amazing expanse that glittered like ice crystal. Under this expanse the wings of the beings spread out toward one another. Each of them also had two wings that covered its body.

When the beings moved, I heard the sound their wings made. It was like the roar of a thundering waterfall, like the voice of the Almighty, like the noise of an army on the march.

Whenever they stopped, they folded their wings. A voice spoke from beyond the expanse over their heads while they were standing still with their wings folded.

Above the expanse over their heads I saw what looked like a throne made of lapis lazuli. Sitting on the throne high above was a being who looked like a man. From what seemed to be his waist upwards, he looked like glowing metal with fire inside and everywhere around. From what seemed to be his waist downwards, I saw what looked like fire. He was surrounded by very bright light.

The bright light surrounding him was like a rainbow shining through the clouds on a rainy day. This was what the glory of the Lord looked like. When I saw it, I fell facedown on the ground, and then I heard someone speaking to me.

“Stand up, son of man, because I want to talk to you,” he said to me. As he spoke to me, the Spirit entered me and had me stand up. I listened to him speaking to me.

“Son of man,” he told me, “I'm sending you to the people of Israel, a disobedient nation that has rebelled against me. They and their forefathers have continued to rebel against me, even up to today. They are pigheaded; they are hard-hearted children. I am sending you to tell them that this is what the Lord God says.

Whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious people—they will realize that a prophet has come to them.

Son of man, don't be afraid of them or what they say. You don't need to be afraid even though you're surrounded by brambles and thorns, even though you live among scorpions. Don't be afraid of what they say or be discouraged by the way they look at you, even though they are a rebellious family. Just tell them what I say, whether they listen or not, because they're rebels.

As for you, son of man, pay attention to what I tell you. Don't be rebellious like those rebellious people. Open your mouth and eat what I'm about to give you.”

I looked up and saw a hand stretched out to me holding a scroll. He spread it out in front of me, and there written on both the front and back were words of grief, mourning, and tragedy.

“Son of man,” he told me, “eat what you find placed before you. Eat this scroll, then go and speak to the people of Israel.”

I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

“Son of man,” he said to me, “eat and fill yourself up with this scroll I'm giving you.”

So I ate the scroll, and it tasted as sweet as honey.

Then he told me, “Son of man, now you are to go to the people of Israel and give my message to them. I'm not sending you to those whose language is foreign to you, to people that you don't know—but to the people of Israel. As I say, I'm not sending you to those whose language is foreign to you, to people that you don't know, whose words you don't understand. On the other

hand, if I had sent you to foreigners, they would have listened to you.

But the people of Israel won't want to listen to you, because they don't want to listen to me. All the Israelites are strong-minded and hard-hearted.

Look! I'm going to make you as tough as them, and as strong-minded as them. I will make your mind like adamant, harder than flint. Don't be afraid of what they say or discouraged by the way they look at you, even though they are a rebellious people."

"Son of man," he added, "pay close attention to everything I tell you, and think deeply about it yourself. Go to your people who are in exile. Tell them this is what the Lord God says, whether they listen or not."

The Spirit lifted me up, and I heard a really loud noise behind me that sounded like an earthquake. (Praise to the Lord's glory where he lives!) It was the sound made by the wings of the beings as they brushed against each other and the noise made by the wheels next to them, a really loud noise that sounded like an earthquake.

As I said, the Spirit lifted me up and carried me away. As I went I was feeling upset and angry; however the Lord's power had taken full control of me. I arrived at the place where the exiles lived, Tel-abib by the River Kebar. I just sat with them, staying with them there for seven days. I was completely overcome with emotion. After the seven days had passed, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, I have chosen you as a watchman for the people of Israel. Whenever I give you a message, then you must warn them for me.

For example, if I give a warning to someone who's wicked, saying, 'You are going to die for sure,' but you don't warn them, if you don't speak out to warn them to stop their wicked ways so they can go on living, then that wicked person will die in their sins, and I will hold you responsible for their death. But if you warn them, and they don't stop their wicked ways, they will die in their sins, but you will have saved yourself—you won't die.

Again, if someone who lives right stops doing so and sins and disregards my attempts to correct them, then they will die. If you didn't warn them, they will die in their sins, and the good things they did won't be remembered. In addition, I will hold you responsible for their death. However, if you warn those who are living right not to sin, and they don't sin, they will live for sure, because they paid attention to your warning, and you will have saved yourself—you won't die."

The Lord's power took control of me there, and he told me, "Get up! Go to the valley, and I will talk to you there."

So I got up and went to the valley, and there I saw the Lord's glory. It was like the glory I had seen by the River Kebar. I fell facedown on the ground.

Then the Spirit came into me and made me stand upright. He told me, "Go into your house and shut the door. You will be tied up with ropes, son of man. You will be bound so that you won't be able to go out among the people. I'll make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth. You won't be able to speak and complain to them, even though they are a rebellious people.

However, when I talk with you, I will open your mouth so you can tell them that this is what the Lord God says. Those who want to listen will listen, and those who want to refuse will refuse, for they are a rebellious people."

"Son of man, you are to take a brick, put in front of you, and draw a picture of the city of Jerusalem on it. Show that it's under siege: establish a siege perimeter all around it, build a siege ramp against it, set up the enemy camps beside it, and put battering rams on all sides around it. Put an iron plate between yourself and the city so it's like an iron wall. Face the city and demonstrate that it's under siege, and that you are the one attacking it. This is a symbolic warning to the people of Israel.

Then lie on your left side and take the Israelites' sins on yourself. You will carry their sins for the number of days you lie on your side. I will make you stay there for 390 days, representing the number of years of their sins. You will bear the sins of the Israelites.

Once you have finished doing this for these days, then you are to lie down again, but this time on your right side, and carry the sins of the people of Judah. I will make you stay there for 40 days, one day for every year. Keep your face towards the siege of Jerusalem with your arm bared, and prophesy against it.

Be ready, because now I'm going to tie you up with ropes so you can't move from side to side until the days of your siege are over.

Get some wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, and mix them together in a storage jar. Use them to make bread for yourself. This is what you are to eat for the 390 days that you lie on your side. You are allowed to eat twenty shekels weight of food each day, and you are to eat it at regular times.

Measure out a sixth of a hin of water to drink, and you are to drink it at regular times. You are to eat the bread as you would a barley loaf. You are to bake it over a fire burning dried human excrement as everyone watches."

Then the Lord said, "This is the way the Israelites will eat their unclean bread among the nations where I'll exile them."

"Please no, Lord God!" I answered. "I have never made myself unclean. I haven't eaten anything found dead or killed by wild animals from the time I was young until now. I've never put unclean meat in my mouth."

"All right," he said. "I'll let you use cow manure instead of human excrement You can bake your bread over a fire using that."

Then he went on, "Son of man, watch! I am going to put a stop to Jerusalem's food supply. Worried sick, they will eat bread rationed by weight. Despairing at what's happening, they will drink water measured in small amounts. Running out of food and water, they will be horrified as they look at one another wasting away because of their sins."

"Son of man, go and shave your head and your beard using a sharp sword like a barber's razor. Then divide up the hair using a set of scales. Once the days of the siege have finished, burn up one third of the hair inside the city; slash at another third with a sword

around the city; and scatter another third in the wind. I will let loose a sword behind them to chase them.

Take just a few hairs and tuck them into the hem of your clothes. Take some of these and toss them into the fire to burn them. A fire will spread from there to burn everyone in Israel.

This is what the Lord God says: This represents Jerusalem. I placed her right in the middle of the nations, surrounded by other countries. But she rebelled against my rules, acting more wickedly than the nations, and she defied my regulations more than the countries surrounding her. Her people rejected my rules and refused to follow my regulations.

Consequently this is what the Lord God says: You have caused more trouble than the nations around you. You refused to follow my rules and keep my regulations. In fact you didn't even live up to the standards of the nations surrounding you.

So this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, because it's me who is condemning you, Jerusalem! I'm going to carry out my sentence against you while the other nations watch. Because of all the disgusting things you've done, I'm going to do to you what I've never done before—and I won't ever do again. In your city parents will eat their own children, and children will eat their parents. I'm going to punish you and scatter in every direction those who are left.

As I live, declares the Lord God, because you have made my sanctuary unclean with all your offensive idols and disgusting practices, I will stop treating you well. I won't be kind to you—I won't show you any pity.

A third of your people will die from disease or starvation inside the city; a third will be killed by the sword outside the city walls; and a third I will scatter in the wind in all directions, and let loose a sword behind them to chase them.

Once my anger is over and I've finished punishing them, then I'll be satisfied. When I've finished punishing them, then they'll know that I, the Lord, meant what I said when I spoke so strongly.

I'm going to ruin you and humiliate you in front of the nations surrounding you, in the sight of every passer-by. You will be criticized and mocked, you'll be a warning and something horrifying to the surrounding nations when I carry out my sentence against you in my rage and furious anger. I the Lord have spoken.

When I pour down on you deadly arrows of famine and destruction they're intended to kill you. I will make your famine worse by stopping your food supply. I will send famine and wild animals to attack you. You'll have no children left. Disease and killing will sweep over you, and I will bring armies to attack you. I the Lord have spoken."

A message from the Lord came to me that said, "Son of man, face towards Israel's mountains and prophesy against them.

Tell them: Mountains of Israel, listen to the message from the Lord God! This is what the Lord God says to the mountains and the hills, to the gorges and the valleys: I'm going to attack you and destroy your high places. Your pagan altars will be torn down, and your incense altars will be smashed to pieces. I will kill your idol worshipers right in front of their idols. I will put the dead bodies of you Israelites in front of your idols and scatter your bones around your altars.

Everywhere you live, the towns will be turned into rubble and the high places torn down. Your altars will be demolished and defiled. Your idols will be smashed and completely destroyed. Your incense altars will be knocked down, and all that you made will be ruined. People will be killed all throughout your country. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

However, I will let some of you survive and scatter you among the different nations and countries.

Once they are there as prisoners in the nations, then the survivors will remember me. They will realize how sad they made me by their spiritual adultery as they deserted me with their eyes full of lust as they worshiped idols. They will hate themselves for the evil things they did, for all their disgusting sins. Then they will know that I am the Lord, and that I was not pretending when I warned them about bringing this disaster upon them.

This is what the Lord God says: Hit yourself with your hands, stomp your feet, and shout out 'Oh no!' Do this because of all the terrible wickedness of the people of Israel. They are going to die by the sword and famine and disease. Those living far away will die from disease, those who are close by will be killed by the sword, and those who are left will die of starvation. This is how I will express my anger towards them.

Then you will know that I am the Lord—when the idol worshipers lie dead among their idols and altars on the top of every hill and mountain, and under every green tree and large oak. These were the pagan shrines where they offered sweet-smelling incense to all their idols. I'm going to lift up my hand to punish them. In every place they live I will make their country a wasteland, all the way from the desert in the south to Diblah in the north. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, this is what the Lord God says to the people living in Israel:

The end is here! The end has arrived throughout the country. Now is the end for you! I'm going to direct my anger against you. I'm judging you for your actions and will pay you back for the offensive things you've done. I won't have any pity for you, or show you any mercy. I'm going to punish you for what you've done, for your disgusting sins. Then you'll know that I am the Lord.

This is what the Lord God says: Watch out! Disaster after disaster is coming! The end is here! The end has come, and it's coming for you! Watch out! This is the end! You people living in the land, the consequences of your actions have come full circle. The time has come, the day is near— shouts of panic on the mountains and not shouts of joy. Very shortly I'm going to show you how angry I am with you. I will judge you by what you have done, and punish you for all your disgusting sins. I won't have any pity for you or show you any mercy. I'm going to punish you for what you've done, for your disgusting sins. Then you will know that it is I, the Lord, who is attacking you.

Can't you see? The day is here! It has arrived! The consequences of your actions have come full circle—

the walking stick has blossomed, pride has come into full bloom. Their way of violence has turned into a rod to punish them for their wickedness. None of them will survive—none of that whole crowd, and none of their wealth or honor.

The time has come; the day is here! Buyers, don't celebrate thinking you'll get a good deal; sellers, don't cry thinking you're going to make a loss—because punishment is coming to everyone. Sellers won't ever get back the purchase price while they're still alive. I'm not going to change the plan I have revealed that applies to everyone. People who go on sinning won't survive. Even though the trumpet call to arms has sounded, even though all the preparations have been made, no one is ready to fight, because I am angry with everyone.

Outside the city are armed attacks; inside are disease and starvation. Those in the countryside will be killed by the sword, and those in the city will be destroyed by starvation and disease. Those who do survive will escape and go to live in the mountains. They will sigh like the doves of the valley, each person thinking about their own sins. Every hand will go limp, and every knee will go weak. They will put on clothes made of sackcloth, and they will be totally terrified. They will all be ashamed and shave their heads in mourning. They will throw away their silver in the streets and treat their gold as if it's something unclean. Their silver and gold won't be able to save them when the day of the Lord's anger comes. Their money won't satisfy their hunger or fill their stomachs. In fact this was the problem that caused their sin in the first place. They were so proud of their beautiful jewelry that they used it to make their disgusting images and decorate their offensive idols.

So I'm going to turn these idols into unclean things for them. I'm going to hand these things over as plunder to foreigners and as loot to the wicked people of the earth, who will make them unclean. I will look away as they make my precious place unclean. Men of violence will enter and make it unclean. Get the chains ready, because the country is full of blood being spilled by violent crimes, and the city itself is full of violence. So I'm going to bring the most evil of all the nations to take over their houses. I will put an end to the pride of the powerful, and their holy places will be made unclean.

Absolutely terrified, the people will look for peace, but won't find it. Disaster after disaster will come down on them, and rumor after rumor. They will ask for a vision from a prophet, but there won't be any, and there won't be any instructions from the priests or advice from the elders either. The king will mourn, the prince will be devastated, and no one in the country will know what to do. I will do to them as they have done to others; I will judge them as they have judged others. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

On the fifth day of the sixth month of the sixth year, I was sitting in my house with the elders of Judah and the power of the Lord God came over me there.

I looked around and saw a being that looked like a man. From what seemed to be his waist downwards, he looked like fire. From what seemed to be his waist upwards, he looked like brightly glowing metal. He reached out what seemed to be a hand and picked me up by my hair. The Spirit took me up into the sky, and in the vision God was giving me he carried me to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the north gate of the Temple's inner courtyard, where the offensive idol that made God angry had been placed.

I saw the glory of the God of Israel there, just like I had in the vision I'd seen in the valley. "Son of man," he told me, "now look to the north."

So I looked to the north, and in the entrance to the north of the Altar Gate I saw this idol that angered God.

"Son of man," he said to me, "can you see what they are doing? Look at the disgusting sins the people of Israel are committing that are driving me far away from my sanctuary? But you're going to see even more disgusting sins than these!"

He took me to the entrance to the Temple courtyard. As I looked around, I saw a hole in the wall.

"Son of man," he told me, "pull the wall apart."

So I pulled the wall apart and found a doorway.

He told me, "Go through the wall and see the evil and disgusting things they are doing in here."

So I went through the wall and saw carved images covering the walls, representing all kinds of reptiles and disgusting animals, as well as all the idols worshiped by the people of Israel. Seventy elders of the house of Israel were standing in front of them, including Jaazaniah son of Shaphan. They all were holding censers, producing a sweet-smelling cloud of incense that rose above them.

"Son of man," he said to me, "can you see what the elders of the people of Israel are doing here in the dark, with each one worshiping in the shrine room of his own idol? This is what they're saying: 'The Lord can't see what we're doing; besides the Lord has abandoned our country!'"

The Lord went on to tell me, "You're going to see them doing even more disgusting things than these!"

Then he took me to the north entrance of the Lord's Temple. I saw women sitting there, weeping for the god Tammuz.

"Son of man," he said to me, "have you seen this? But you're going to see even more disgusting things than these!"

He took me to the inner courtyard of the Lord's Temple and right there at the entrance to the Temple, between the porch and the altar, were around twenty-five men. They had their backs to the Temple, and were facing towards the east. They were bowing in worship of the sun rising in the east.

"Son of man," he said to me, "have you seen this? The people of Judah aren't content just to do these disgusting things. They also commit violent crimes across the country and keep on making me angry. Look at how they're deliberately insulting me! As a result I will respond in anger. I won't treat them kindly; I won't be merciful to them. Even though they shout loudly for my help, I won't listen to them."

Then I heard him shout out with a loud voice, "Start the attack, you who are in charge of punishing Jerusalem! Pick up your weapons!"

I watched as six men approached from the upper gate that faces north. All of them were carrying battle axes. There was another man with them. He was

dressed in linen and had a scribe's writing kit at his side. They entered and stood next to the bronze altar.

The glory of the God of Israel rose from its usual place on the cherubim and went over to the Temple entrance. The Lord called out to the man dressed in linen with the writing kit, “Go through the whole of the city of Jerusalem and place a mark on the foreheads of those who are sighing and mourning at all the disgusting sins that are done there.”

Then I heard him tell the others, “Follow him all through the city and start killing people. Don't be kind or merciful to anyone! Kill the old men, the young men and girls, the women and children, but do not go anywhere near those who have the mark. Start at my sanctuary.”

So they started by killing the elders who were in front of the Temple.

Then he told them, “Make the Temple unclean and fill the courtyards with dead bodies. Go ahead and do it!”

So they went and started killing all through the city.

While they were busy killing people, I was left by myself. I fell facedown to the ground and cried out, “Lord God, when you pour out your anger on Jerusalem, are you going to destroy everyone who's left in Israel?”

“The sins of the people of Israel and Judah are really terrible,” he replied. “The whole country is full of murderers, and those living in the city are criminals. They're saying, ‘The Lord has given up on our country. He can't see what we're doing.’ But I certainly won't be kind to them or have mercy on them. I will make sure they suffer the consequences of what they've done.”

Then the man in linen with the writing kit returned and reported, “I've done what you told me to do.”

I looked up and saw what looked like a throne made of lapis lazuli beyond the expanse, way above the heads of the cherubim. Speaking from there the Lord told the man in linen, “Go in between the wheels underneath the cherubim. Collect as many burning coals as you can. Carry them from among the cherubim and scatter them all over the city.” I watched as he went in.

The cherubim were standing on the south side of the Temple when the man went in. A cloud filled the inner court. Then the Lord's glory rose up from above the cherubim and moved to the entrance of the Temple. The cloud filled the Temple, and the brightness of the Lord's glory filled the courtyard. The noise made by the cherubim's wings could even be heard in the outer courtyard, and sounded like the voice of God Almighty.

When the Lord ordered the man in linen, “Go and get some fire from in between the wheels, from among the cherubim,” the man went in and stood beside one of the wheels. Then one of the cherubim reached out and took some of the fire among them. He handed it to the man in linen, who took it and left. (All the cherubim had what looked like human hands under their wings.)

I saw four wheels next to the cherubim, one wheel beside each cherub. The wheels shone like topaz. All four wheels looked the same, and had a wheel within a wheel, set crossways. The cherubim could go in any direction they faced, moving without turning.

The whole of their bodies, including their backs, hands, and wings, were covered in eyes, as were all four wheels. I heard the wheels being referred to as “the chariot wheels.”

Each of them had four faces: the first face was a cherub's face, the second a man's face, the third a lion's face, and the fourth an eagle's face.

Then the cherubim rose up in the air. They were the beings I'd seen beside the River Kebar. When the cherubim moved, the wheels moved alongside them. Even when they opened their wings to take off, the wheels stayed beside them. When the cherubim stopped, the wheels stopped too. When they took off, the wheels did too, because the spirit of the living creatures was in them.

Then the glory of the Lord left the entrance to the Temple and stopped above the cherubim. As I watched, the cherubim lifted their wings and took off, with the wheels alongside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord's Temple, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.

These were the beings I had seen beneath the God of Israel by the River Kebar. I knew that they were cherubim. Each had four faces and four wings and had what looked like human hands under their wings. Their faces looked like the faces I had seen by the River Kebar. Each of them moved directly ahead.

Then the Spirit picked me up and took me to the eastern entrance of the Lord's Temple. Twenty-five men were gathered there at the entrance. I recognized among them Jaazaniah son of Azzur and Pelatiah son of Benaiah, leaders of the people. The Lord told me, “Son of man, it's these men who are making evil plans and giving bad advice to the people in this city. They're saying, ‘Is this the time for us to be building houses? The city is the cooking pot, and we are the meat inside it.’ So prophesy against them. Prophesy, son of man!”

The Spirit of the Lord came upon me and told me to say: This is what the Lord says: “People of Israel, that's what you're saying! I know what you're thinking inside! You murder more and more people in this city. You've filled its streets with the dead!

So this is what the Lord God says: Those you've killed in this city are the meat, and the city is the pot; but I'm going to take you out of it. You're afraid of being killed by the sword, so I will bring invaders with swords to attack you, declares the Lord God. I'm going to take you out of the city and hand you over to foreigners, and I'm going to carry out my sentence against you. You will be killed by the sword, and I will punish you right up to the borders of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

The city won't be like a pot for you, and you won't be the meat inside it either. I will punish you right up to the borders of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord. For you didn't follow my rules and you didn't keep my laws. Instead you kept the laws of the nations around you.”

While I was prophesying, Pelatiah son of Benaiah died. I fell facedown on the ground and shouted loudly, “Lord God, are you going to completely destroy what's left of the people of Israel?”

A message from Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, your brothers, including your relatives, your fellow exiles, and all the other Israelites, are those the

people of Jerusalem were referring to when they said, 'They are far away from the Lord. This country was given to us and we are to own it.'

So tell them that this is what the Lord God says: Even though I sent them far away to live among the foreign nations, scattering them among the different countries, I have been taking care of them for a while in the countries where they went.

Tell them that this is what the Lord God says: I'm going to gather you from the other nations and bring you back from the countries where you've been scattered, and I will return the country of Israel to you.

When they come back, they are going to get rid of all its offensive idols and disgusting practices from the country. I will give them single-minded commitment and a whole new spirit. I will take away their hard-hearted attitude and replace it with one that is loving. This way they can follow my rules, keep my regulations, and do what I say. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

But for those who still choose to worship offensive idols and engage in disgusting practices, I will let them experience the consequences of their own actions, declares the Lord God."

Then the cherubim opened their wings and took off, with the wheels alongside them, and with the glory of the God of Israel above them. The glory of the Lord rose from inside the city and went over to the mountain to the east of the city.

In the vision given to me by the Spirit of God, the Spirit picked me up and carried me back to Babylonia to where the exiles were. After the vision left me, I explained to the exiles everything the Lord had shown me.

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, you are living among rebellious people. They have eyes to see but they don't see, and ears to hear but they don't hear, because they are rebellious people.

So, son of man, go and pack your bags as if you're going into exile. As people watch, get everything ready during the day so you can leave where you are and go somewhere else. Maybe they will realize what this means, even though they are rebellious people. Take your bags out for traveling into exile during the day while they watch. But you yourself are to leave in the evening as they watch, just like someone going into exile.

While they go on watching, knock down part of the wall of your house and take your belongings out through the hole. When it gets dark, as they continue to watch, put your bags on your shoulder and carry them as you leave. Cover your face so that you can't see the country you're leaving behind, because I'm providing you as a sign to warn the people of Israel."

So I did as I was told. I took my bags out to go into exile during the day, and in the evening I knocked down part of the wall of my house with my bare hands. I took my belongings out when it got dark, carrying them on my shoulder while they watched.

In the morning a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, haven't those rebellious Israelites asked you, 'What are you doing?' Tell them that this is what the Lord God says: 'This prophetic sign concerns the prince who is ruling in Jerusalem and all the people of Israel who are living there.'

You are to say to them, 'I'm a sign to you.' Just as it was demonstrated here, so it will happen to them—they will go into exile as prisoners. When it gets dark, their prince will also put his bags on his shoulder and leave. They will knock down the wall to take him away. He will cover his face so he can't see the country he's leaving behind. But I will catch him in my net; I will trap him in my snare. I will take him to Babylon in the country of Babylonia. However, he won't see it, and he'll die there.

I'm going to scatter all his attendants and all his troops in every direction, and I will chase after them with a drawn sword. They will know that I am the Lord when I scatter them among the different nations and countries.

But I will let a few of them survive war, famine, and disease so that they can tell the nations where they're exiled about all their disgusting sins. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, tremble as you eat your bread; shake with worry as you drink your water. Then explain to the people of this country that this is what the Lord God says to those living in Jerusalem and in the country of Israel: They will be worried as they eat their bread and they will be in despair as they drink their water, for their land will be stripped bare because of the violent crimes committed by everyone who lives there. The towns will be destroyed, and the countryside turned into a wasteland. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, what's this proverb you people have in the land of Israel: 'Time goes by, and no vision comes true'? So tell them that this is what the Lord God says: 'I will put a stop to this proverb. No one in Israel will quote it anymore.'

Instead tell them: The time is soon coming when every vision will come true. There won't be any more false visions or fake prophecies among the Israelites, because I, the Lord, will say whatever I choose to say, and it will happen immediately. Right now, you rebellious people, I will say something and make sure it happens, declares the Lord God."

An additional message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, notice what the people of Israel are saying, 'The vision that he's describing won't happen for a long time. He's prophesying about a time in the distant future.'

So tell them that this is what the Lord God says: Everything I've said is about to happen. There won't be any more delay, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, you are to prophesy against the prophets of Israel who right now are busy prophesying. Tell those who make up their own prophecies: Listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord God says: Disaster is coming to these foolish prophets who follow their own ideas. They haven't seen anything. Israel, your prophets are like foxes that live in the ruins. They didn't go and help repair the gaps in the wall that defends the people

of Israel so that it would stand secure during the battle on the Day of the Lord.

The visions they see are false, and the prophecies they give are lies. They claim, 'This is what the Lord says,' when the Lord didn't send them. Even so they still expect their message to be fulfilled! Isn't it a false vision that you people saw? Isn't it a prophecy of lies when you announce, 'This is what the Lord says,' even though I haven't said anything?

So this is what the Lord God says: Since you've spoken lies and claimed to see false visions, then watch out, because I'm against you, declares the Lord God. I will punish the prophets who see false visions and give prophecies that are lies. They will not belong to the assembly of my people or be listed in the register of Israelites, and they won't be allowed to enter the country of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord God.

They have deceived my people by saying, 'We shall have peace,' when there won't be any peace. It's like they're putting a coat of whitewash on an unstable wall of loose stones that the people have built. So tell those people whitewashing the wall that it's going to collapse. Rain will come pouring down. I will send hailstones crashing down on it. A windstorm will blow hard against it. Don't you think that when the wall collapses people are going to ask you, 'What happened to the whitewash you painted it with?'

So this is what the Lord God says: In my furious anger I'm going to send a windstorm, pouring rain, and hailstones to destroy the wall. I will demolish the wall you whitewashed, knocking it to the ground to reveal its foundations. The city is going to fall, and you're going to be destroyed with it. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Once the wall and those who whitewashed it have experienced my anger, I will tell you: The wall is no more, and those who whitewashed it are no more, those 'prophets' of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and claimed to have seen a vision of peace for her when there wasn't going to be any peace, declares the Lord God.

Now, son of man, you are to oppose those Israelite women who make up prophecies in their own minds. Prophesy against them and tell them that this is what the Lord God says: Disaster is coming to the women who sew bracelets of magic charms for their wrists and make veils for all kinds of people to wear as ways to trap and exploit them. Do you think you can trap the lives of my people yet still keep your own? You have disgraced me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people who believe in you, you have killed those who shouldn't have died and let others live who shouldn't.

So this is what the Lord God says: Watch out! I condemn the magic charms you use to trap people like birds, and I will rip them off your arms. I will set free those you have trapped. I will also rip off your veils and rescue my people from your power, so that they will no longer be your victims. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Because you have discouraged good people with your lies, even though I didn't have anything against them, and because you have encouraged the wicked that they shouldn't give up from their evil ways to save their lives, from now on you won't claim these false visions or practice magic. I will rescue my people from your power. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

Some elders of Israel arrived and sat down with me. A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, these men are worshiping idols in their minds even though they know this will lead them to sin. Why should I respond to their requests?

So tell them that this is what the Lord God says: When the people of Israel worship idols in their minds that will lead them to sin, and then come to consult the prophet, I the Lord will give them an answer appropriate to their many idols. Like this I might have the people of Israel decide to recommit themselves to me. Right now, because of their idols, all of them treat me as their enemy.

So tell the people of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: Repent! Give up worshiping your idols Stop all your disgusting practices. When the people of Israel or foreigners living with them worship idols in their minds that will lead them to sin and then come to consult the prophet, I the Lord will answer them myself. I will oppose anyone who does this and make any example of them that others will talk about. I will remove them from among my people. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

But if the prophet is deceived into giving a message, it was I the Lord who deceived him to do this. I will still reach out and destroy that prophet from my people Israel. They will be responsible for the punishment they receive, along with those who consult such prophets. They will receive the same punishment. This is so that the people of Israel won't abandon me anymore and won't make themselves unclean with all their sins. Then they will be my people and I will be their God, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me again, saying, "Son of man, if a people in a country sin against me by being unfaithful to me, then I will act against them by cutting off their food supply, so they experience famine, with no food for people or animals. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three men, were present their good lives would only save themselves, declares the Lord God.

I could send wild animals rampaging through the country, so they would leave it uninhabited and desolate, a place no one would travel through for fear of such animals. As I live, declares the Lord God, even if these three men were present, they couldn't save their own sons or daughters. They would only save themselves, but the land would be left desolate.

I could bring war to that country and say, 'Have a sword cut through it,' so that I destroy both people and animals. As I live, declares the Lord God, even if these three men were present, they couldn't save their own sons or daughters. They would only save themselves.

I could send a disease on that country and because of my anger I would kill many, both people and animals. As I live, declares the Lord God, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were present, they couldn't save their sons or daughters. Their good lives would only save themselves.

This is what the Lord God says: It will be so much worse when I send my four severe judgments against Jerusalem—war, famine, wild animals, and disease, so that both people and animals are killed!

Even so a few of them will survive, some sons and daughters who will be taken captive. They will be brought to you in Babylon, and when you realize what they did and how they acted, you will understand why I had to bring such a disaster down on Jerusalem—everything I did to it. Realizing what they did and how they acted will help you to see that I had good reasons to do everything I did to Jerusalem, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, is wood from a vine better than the wood from any other tree in the forest? Can you make anything useful from vine wood? Can you use it to make even just a peg to hang up pots and pans?

No, you just throw it on the fire to keep the fire burning. Even then the fire burns both ends, but only chars the middle part. Can you use it for anything? Even before you burned it you couldn't make it into anything useful. It's even less useful once the fire has burned and charred it!

So this is what the Lord God says: In the same way that I have taken the wood of a vine from the forest and thrown it on the fire to be burned, so I'm going to throw away the people of Jerusalem. I will turn against them. While they might have escaped this fire, another fire is going to burn them up. When I turn against them, then you will know that I am the Lord.

I'm going to turn the country into a wasteland, because they were unfaithful to me, declares the Lord God."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, challenge Jerusalem over her disgusting practices. Tell Jerusalem that this is what the Lord God says to her: You really are a Canaanite, both by your birth and parentage. Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite. On the day you were born your cord was not cut, and you weren't washed to clean you up, you weren't rubbed with salt, and you weren't wrapped in cloths. No one looked on you with love to do anything like this for you; no one showed any kind of care for you. No, you were thrown away in a field, abandoned and despised from the day you were born.

But I passed by and saw you kicking, covered in your own blood. As you were lying there in your blood I told you, 'I want you to live!' I said to you right there, 'I want you to live!' I helped you to grow like a plant in the field. You grew up into a beautiful young woman. Your breasts developed and your body hair grew, and you were completely naked.

When I passed by again, I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for lovemaking. So I spread my robe over you and covered up your naked body. I committed myself to you and made a solemn agreement with you, and made you mine, declares the Lord God. Then I washed you with water, cleaned off your blood, and anointed you with oil. I put a beautifully embroidered dress on you and gave you fine leather sandals. I clothed you in fine linen and covered you with silk. I gave you jewelry—I put bracelets on your wrists and a necklace around your neck. I put a ring in your nose and earrings on your ears, and placed a beautiful crown on your head.

You wore gold and silver jewelry, and your clothes were made of the finest linen, expensive fabric, and embroidered cloth. You ate bread made with the best flour, and honey and olive oil. You grew even more beautiful and became a queen. You were famous around the world because of your beauty, for I used my majestic power to make you so wonderful, declares the Lord God.

You were so proud of your beauty that you were unfaithful to me. You thought that because you were so famous you could prostitute yourself and sleep with anyone who passed by. They took your beautiful body for themselves. You made yourself colorful pagan shrines out of the clothes I'd given you, and there you acted as a prostitute. Things like this have never happened before, and they should never happen in the future!

You also used the beautiful gold and silver jewelry I gave you to make male idols and you prostituted yourself with them. You used your embroidered clothes to dress them, and you placed before them my olive oil and incense. You presented the food I had given you as an offering for them to accept —bread made from the best flour, olive oil, and honey that I had provided for you to eat. That's exactly what you did, declares the Lord God.

You sacrificed your sons and daughters—the children you had for me—offering them as food for idols to eat. Wasn't your prostitution evil enough? You slaughtered my children, sacrificing them to idols.

While you were busy with all your disgusting practices and your prostitution, you forgot about the time when you were young, completely naked and lying there kicking in your own blood.

Disaster is coming! Disaster is coming on you, declares the Lord God. As well as all the other evil things you did, you built yourself a pagan shrine, a high place of idol worship on every public square in the city. You made yourselves high places of idol worship at the top of every street; you degraded yourself, offering your beautiful body to anyone who passed by, opening your legs for them, becoming more and more promiscuous. You gave yourself as a prostitute to your Egyptian neighbors with their large sexual organs, making me angry as you became even more promiscuous.

So I acted to reduce my blessings to you. I let your enemies the Philistines do what they wanted to you. Even they were embarrassed at your immorality. Because you weren't satisfied you prostituted yourself with the Assyrians. But even then you weren't satisfied. So you took your promiscuous behavior to Babylonia, the country of merchants, but even then you weren't satisfied!

You're really sick-minded to do all this, acting like a prostitute with no shame, declares the Lord God. Actually you weren't even a normal prostitute when you built yourselves pagan shrines at the top of every street and high places of idol worship on every public square —because you refused to be paid for your services!

You're a wife that loves adultery! You sleep with strangers instead of your husband! Normally all prostitutes are paid, but you were the one giving gifts to all your lovers. You even bribed them to come from all around and have sex with you. So you're the opposite of other prostitutes. No one comes to you asking for sex, and you pay the prostitute's fee instead of receiving it. You're the exact opposite!

So, you prostitute, listen to the message from the Lord! This is what the Lord God says: Because you were so crazy with desire you stripped yourself naked and committed adultery with your lovers and with all your disgusting idols, and because you killed your children as sacrifices to those idols, I'm going to bring together all the lovers you went to bed with, whether you loved them or hated them, and I will have them gather from everywhere around and I will strip you as they watch so they will see you totally naked. I will impose on you the punishment for women who commit adultery and those who murder; you will be punished in passionate anger.

Then I will hand you over to your lovers, and they will demolish your pagan shrines and destroy your high places of idol worship.

They will strip you of your clothes, remove your beautiful jewelry, and leave you stark naked. They will come with a mob to attack you. They will stone you and chop you into pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and punish you while many women watch.

I will stop your prostitution, and you won't ever pay your lovers again. Then I will finish being jealous and furious with you. I will calm down and won't be angry any more.

Since you didn't remember how I looked after you when you were young, but made me angry with all the things that you did, I will make sure you experience the results of what you've done, declares the Lord God. For this immorality was in addition to all the other disgusting things you did, wasn't it?

Everyone who likes to use proverbs will quote this one about you:

'Like mother, like daughter.'

You are the daughter of your mother who detested her husband and children. You are just like her! You are the sister of your sisters, just like them who detested their husbands and children. In fact your mother was a Hittite and your father was an Amorite. Your older sister was Samaria, who lived north of you with her daughters. Your younger sister was Sodom, who lived south of you with her daughters. You didn't just follow their ways and do the same disgusting things they did, you very quickly became even worse than them.

As I live, declares the Lord God, your sister Sodom and her daughters didn't ever do what you and your daughters have done. The sins of your sister Sodom were these: She and her daughters were proud, greedy, and lazy. They didn't help the poor and those in need. They became arrogant and did disgusting things in my presence. So I got rid of them when I saw this.

Samaria didn't sin half as badly as you did. You have done far more disgusting things than they did. In fact, all the revolting things you've done make your sisters look good! Now you're going to have to put up with your shame, since by your disgraceful sins you made them seem far better. Compared to you they look good! Now you too have to put up with your shame and disgrace because you've made your sisters look as if they were good.

Even so I'm going to bring Sodom and her daughters back from exile, and Samaria and her daughters too. I will bring you back together with them. In this way you will have to put up with your disgrace and be ashamed of all the bad things you did that made them feel better about themselves.

Your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will be restored to what they were before. You and your daughters will also be restored to what you were before. Didn't you mock your sister Sodom when you were feeling proud, before you were shown to be so wicked yourselves? Of course now you are mocked by the Edomites and the surrounding nations, as well as by the Philistines. Everyone around you looks down on you. You will have to experience the consequences of your immorality and your disgusting practices, declares the Lord.

This is what the Lord God says: I'm going to punish you according to your sins, because you treated the promise you made with contempt by breaking the agreement. But I won't forget the agreement I made with you when you were young, and I will make an everlasting agreement with you. Then you will remember the way you are meant to live and be ashamed when you meet your older and younger sisters when they return to you. I will give them to you as daughters, even though this was not part of our original agreement.

This is how I will endorse my agreement with you, and you will know that I am the Lord, so that you will remember and be ashamed, and won't ever defend your disgraceful behavior when I forgive you for everything you've done, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, present this riddle—share it as a parable with the people of Israel. Tell them that this is what the Lord God says:

There was a great eagle that had large wings, long feathers, and multi-colored plumage. It came to Lebanon and took off the top of the cedar. He broke off its highest branch and took it to a country of merchants, and planted it in a city of traders. He took some of the seed of the land and planted it in good soil beside a large river where he could grow it like a willow. The seed sprouted and grew into a low, spreading vine, with its branches facing toward him, and its roots went down into the ground beneath. So the vine developed, growing leaves and branches.

But there was another great eagle that had large wings and many feathers. This vine sent out its roots toward him. It stretched out its branches to him from where it had been planted, wanting him to water it. Yet it had been planted in good soil beside a large river so it could grow strong, produce fruit, and become a superb vine.

So you tell them this is what the Lord God says: 'Will it grow well? Won't it be uprooted and its fruit

ripped off so that it withers? All its leaves will dry up. You wouldn't need strong arms or lots of people to pull it up by its roots. Even if it's transplanted, is it going to survive? Won't it wither up completely when the east wind blows? In fact, it will wither right where it was planted.'"

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Tell these rebellious people: 'Don't you know what this riddle means?'

Explain to them, 'Look, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, made its king and officials his prisoners, and took them back with him to Babylon. He made an agreement with one of the royal family and made him take an oath that he would be a loyal subject as king. Then he took into exile the country's leaders, so that the kingdom would be kept in subjection and wouldn't be strong enough to rebel—it would only survive by keeping its agreement with him.

However, this king did rebel against Babylon, and sent ambassadors to Egypt to ask for help by supplying horses and many soldiers. Will he do well? Would someone who acts like this succeed? Could he break an agreement and not be punished?'

As I live, declares the Lord God, 'He is going to die in Babylon, in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he disregarded and whose agreement he broke. Pharaoh with his powerful army of many soldiers won't help him in battle, when attack ramps are piled up and siege walls built and many people end up being killed. He disregarded his oath by breaking the agreement. Because he shook hands as a sign of the promise he made, yet rebelled in this way, he won't go unpunished!'

So this is what the Lord God says: As I live, I will punish him for disregarding my oath and for breaking my agreement. I will throw my net over him and catch him; I will trap him in my snare. I will take him to Babylon and sentence him to punishment there for his treason towards me. All his best soldiers will be killed in battle, and those who do survive will be scattered in all directions. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken.

This is what the Lord God says: I'm going to break off a branch from the high top of the cedar, and I will plant it on the top of a high mountain. I will plant it on Israel's high mountain so that it can grow branches, produce fruit and become a magnificent cedar. All kinds of birds will live in it, nesting in the shade of its branches. All the trees in the countryside will know that I am the Lord. I can bring down the tall and have the low tree grow tall. I can make the green tree dry up, and make the withered tree become green again. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will do it."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "What's this proverb you people are quoting about the country of Israel:

'The fathers ate the unripe grapes, but their children got the sour taste'?

As I live, declares the Lord God, you won't quote this proverb in Israel any more. Can't you see that everyone belongs to me? Whether parents or children, they are all mine. It's the person who sins who will die.

Take the example of a man who is a good person, doing what is fair and right.

He doesn't go to the pagan shrines in the mountains to eat a religious meal, or worship Israel's idols. He doesn't have sex with someone else's wife or with a woman during her period. He doesn't exploit anyone. He gives back what a debtor has given him as security. He doesn't rob others. He feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. He doesn't lend with interest or make a profit from loans. He refuses to do wrong and makes sure he's truly fair in his decisions between people. He follows my rules and keeps my regulations faithfully. Such a man lives by what's right and he will certainly live, declares the Lord God.

What if that man has a son who is a violent criminal, who kills and does do such evil things just listed even though the father doesn't act like that at all. The son goes to the pagan shrines in the mountains to eat a religious meal. He has sex with someone else's wife. He exploits the poor and those in need. He robs others, and he doesn't give back what a debtor has given him as security. He worships idols. He commits disgusting sins. He lends with interest and makes a profit from loans. Is someone like this going to live? No, he won't! Because he has done all these offensive things, he will die for certain, and he will be responsible for his own death.

Now what if this man has a son who sees all the sins his father has committed. He sees them but doesn't do the same. He doesn't go to the pagan shrines in the mountains to eat a religious meal, or worship Israel's idols. He doesn't have sex with someone else's wife. He doesn't exploit anyone. He doesn't demand security for a loan. He doesn't rob others. He feeds the hungry and clothes the naked. He refuses to do wrong and does not charge interest or make a profit on loans. He keeps my regulations and follows my laws. A man like that won't die because of his father's sins, he will certainly live! But his father will die for his own sins, because he exploited others, robbed his relatives, and did wrong to his own people. You ask, 'Why shouldn't the son pay for his father's sins?' If the son has done what is fair and right, keeping all my laws, then he'll live, he won't be punished.

It's the person who sins who will die. A son won't pay for his father's sins, and a father won't pay for his son's sins. The good consequences of living right will come to those who are good; the evil consequences of wickedness will come to those who are evil.

However, if someone who is wicked stops sinning and keeps my laws, doing what is fair and right, they will certainly live—they won't die. None of their sins will be held against them. Because they are now doing what's right, they will live. Do I like it when wicked people die? declares the Lord God. Of course not—I would be delighted if they stopped sinning and lived!

But if someone who is living according to what's right stops and does wrong, doing the same offensive things as the wicked, will that person live? Of course not! In fact, all the good things they did previously will be forgotten. That person will die because of their betrayal of me and the sins they've committed.

Even so you say, 'What the Lord does isn't right.'

People of Israel, listen to me! Is it what I'm doing that isn't right? Isn't it what you're doing that isn't right?

If someone who lives according to what's right stops doing right and does wrong, they will die. They will die because of wrong things they've done.

But if someone wicked stops doing wrong and does what is fair and right, they will save their life. Because they thought about it and gave up their wicked ways, they will certainly live—they won't die.

But the people of Israel say, 'The Lord's way isn't right.'

Are my ways unfair, people of Israel? Isn't it your ways that aren't fair?

Consequently I'm going to judge you, people of Israel! I will judge each of you depending on what you've done, declares the Lord God. Repent and stop rebelling so that your sins won't bring you down. Get rid of all your rebellious sins! Change your way of thinking and have a new spirit. Why do you want to die, people of Israel?

I don't like it when anybody dies, declares the Lord God. So repent so you can live!"

Sing this funeral song for the princes of Israel with these words: "What was your mother? She was a lioness among the lions! She lay down in her place among the young lions and reared her cubs. She raised one of her cubs, and he grew up to be a young lion. Once he had learned how to tear up his prey, he started eating people. But when the nations heard about him, he was caught in their trap. They used hooks to drag him away to Egypt.

When she realized that the hope she had been waiting for was gone, she made another of her cubs into a young lion. He went around with the other lions, and became strong. Once he had learned how to tear up his prey, he started eating people. He tore down their fortresses and destroyed their towns. All the people living in the country were appalled when they heard him roaring. Then the people of the countries all around attacked him. They threw their net over him; he was caught in their trap. They used hooks to put him in a cage and took him to the king of Babylon. They led him away and imprisoned him so his roar wasn't heard any more in Israel's mountains.

Your mother was like a vine planted in your vineyard at the waterside. It produced a lot of fruit and had many branches because it had plenty of water. Its branches were strong like rulers' scepters. It grew high above the tree canopy. People could see how tall and full of leaves it was. But it was uprooted in anger and thrown down on the ground. The east wind blew and dried up its fruit. Its strong branches were stripped of leaves and they withered. Then they were burned up in the fire. Now the vine has been replanted in the desert, in a dry and waterless land. A fire blazed out from its main trunk and burned up its fruit. None of its branches that were once like a ruler's scepter are strong any more." This is a funeral song and is to be used for mourning.

On the tenth day of the fifth month of the seventh year, some of the elders of Israel came to ask advice from the Lord, and they sat down with me.

Then a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, tell these elders of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: Have you come to ask my advice? As I live, I'm not going to answer you, declares the Lord God.

Are you going to condemn them—will you do that, son of man? Remind them about the disgusting things their forefathers did, and then tell them that this is what the Lord God says: At the time I chose Israel, I held up my hand and made a solemn promise to Jacob's descendants and revealed myself to them when they were in Egypt. I held up my hand and told them, 'I am the Lord your God.'

I promised them on that day to lead them out of Egypt and take them to a country that I had chosen for them, a land flowing with milk and honey—better than any other country. I told them: 'All of you have to get rid of your disgusting pagan images. Don't make yourselves unclean by worshiping the idols of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.'

But they rebelled against me and wouldn't do what I told them. None of them got rid of their disgusting pagan images, and they didn't give up worshiping the idols of Egypt. So I warned them that I would punish them in my anger there in Egypt. But I did act so I would not be misrepresented, so that I wouldn't lose respect in the eyes of the other nations living near them who had seen me reveal myself to Israel by leading them out of Egypt.

So I led them out of Egypt and took them into the wilderness. There I gave them my laws and explained to them my regulations so that those who kept them would live. I also gave them my Sabbaths to be a sign between me and them, so that they would acknowledge that I am the Lord who makes them holy.

But the people of Israel rebelled against me in the desert, refusing to observe my laws and rejecting my regulations, even though they would have given them life. They violated my Sabbaths. So I warned them that I would punish them and wipe them out there in the desert. But I still acted for them so I would not be misrepresented, so that I wouldn't lose respect in the eyes of the other nations who had seen me lead Israel out of Egypt.

So I held up my hand and vowed to them in the desert that I wouldn't take them into the land that I had given them, a land flowing with milk and honey—better than any other country— because they repeatedly rejected my regulations, refused to observe my laws, and violated my Sabbaths, and because they chose to continue worshiping idols. Even so I was sorry for them and I didn't destroy them; I didn't wipe them out in the desert.

I told their children in the desert: 'Don't do what your fathers told you to do. Don't follow their practices. Don't make yourselves unclean by worshiping their idols. I am the Lord your God. Do what I tell you to do. Follow my regulations and make sure to practice them. Keep my Sabbaths holy so they may be a sign between me and you, so that you may acknowledge that I am the Lord your God.'

But their children also rebelled against me. They didn't follow my laws and didn't keep my regulations,

even though they would have given them life. They violated my Sabbaths. So I warned them that I would punish them in my anger there in the desert. But I held back and did what I did so I would not be misrepresented, so that I wouldn't lose respect in the eyes of the other nations who had seen me lead Israel out of Egypt.

However, I held up my hand and vowed to them in the desert that I was going to scatter them among the various countries of different nations. For they didn't keep my regulations, instead they rejected my laws and violated my Sabbaths, always looking to worship their fathers' idols.

I also let them follow the regulations they wanted that weren't good; laws that wouldn't help them live. I let them make themselves unclean by their offerings to idols, including their firstborn sons. I allowed this to happen so that they would be so appalled that they would acknowledge that I am the Lord.

So, son of man, tell the people of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: You're acting in exactly the same way your forefathers insulted me by being unfaithful to me. After I led them into the land that I had promised to give them, on any high hill or under any leafy tree they saw there they offered their pagan sacrifices and presented offerings to idols that made me angry, burning their sweet-smelling incense and pouring out their drink offerings. So I asked them: 'What's this high place you're going to?' (Even today it's still called Bamah.)

Therefore tell the people of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: Are you going to make yourselves unclean like your forefathers, turning yourselves into prostitutes, acting the way they did with the same disgusting practices? When you present your offerings to idols and sacrifice your children in the fire, you continue to make yourselves unclean with all your idols right up until now. So should I give you advice when you ask me, people of Israel? As I live, declares the Lord God, I'm not going to answer you!

When you say to yourselves, 'Let's be like the other nations, like people in other countries who worship idols made of wood and stone,' what you're thinking is never going to happen.

As I live, declares the Lord God, I will rule you with all my strength and power, and in my anger. With all my strength and power, and in my anger, I will lead you out from among the nations and gather you from the countries where you were scattered. I will bring you before me for judgment face to face in the desert of the nations.

In the same way I judged your forefathers in the Egyptian desert after I'd led them out of Egypt, so I will judge you, declares the Lord God. I will decide about you as you pass under the rod and see if you kept our solemn agreement. I will get rid of those of you who rebel against me, those who sin against me. I will lead them out of the country where they're currently living, but they won't enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

This is what the Lord God says to you, you people of Israel: All of you, go ahead and worship your idols. But after that if you don't listen to me you won't continue to disgrace me with your pagan offerings and idols.

For there on my holy mountain, Israel's high mountain, declares the Lord God, every single person in the whole country of Israel will worship me. That's where I'll accept them and will ask for your offerings and your best gifts, together with all your holy sacrifices.

When I bring you back from the nations and gather you from countries where you were scattered, I will accept you as a suitable offering to me. I will reveal my holiness through you so the nations can see. Then you will acknowledge that I am the Lord when I bring you back to the country of Israel, the land that I promised to give your forefathers.

That's where you will remember your bad ways and everything you've done to make yourselves unclean, and you will hate yourselves for the evil things you did. Then you people of Israel will acknowledge that I am the Lord, because I have treated you well because of who I am, and not because of your evil ways and terrible things you've done, declares the Lord God."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards the south and preach against it. Prophesy against the forest of the Negev. Tell the forest of the Negev: Listen to the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord God says: I am going to set you on fire, and it will burn up all your trees, both those that are living and those that are dead. The blaze won't be put out, and everything from the north to the south will be burned. Then everyone will recognize that it was me, the Lord, who started the fire, and it won't be put out."

But then I said, "Oh no, Lord God! People already say, 'He's just telling stories!'"

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards Jerusalem and condemn their places of worship. Prophesy against the people living in Israel and tell them that this is what the Lord says: Watch out, because I'm going to attack you! I'm going to take out my sword and destroy you, both the good and the bad. Because I'm going to destroy both the good and the bad, I will attack everyone from the north to the south. Then the whole world will know that I, the Lord, have taken out my sword, and won't put it back again.

You, son of man, you are to groan. Groan as if you're broken up inside, showing terrible sadness while they watch you. When they ask, 'What are you groaning for?' you are to tell them, 'Because of the news that's coming. All of you will lose your courage and you'll be paralyzed with fear. All of you will be weak with worry —you won't be able to stand up!' Watch out, because it's coming! It's going to happen! declares the Lord God."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy! Tell them this is what the Lord says: There's a sword, a sword that's being sharpened and polished. It's sharpened for killing and polished so it will flash like lightning! (Are we to be happy, saying, 'The scepter of my son despises every other *stick*'?) The sword is being polished right now, ready to be used. It's sharp and polished, ready to be handed over to the killer. Weep and wail, son of man, and slap your thigh in grief, for the sword is going to be used to attack my people, to attack all the leaders of Israel! They will be thrown away, killed by the sword along with my people. They will be tested. What if the

scepter that despises others doesn't continue? declares the Lord God.

So son of man, prophesy and clap your hands. The sword will attack twice, and then a third time. It is a sword of death, killing many people by coming at them from every direction. I have placed a sword at all the gates of their city so that they may lose their courage, and many may fall. Oh no! It's made to flash like lightning and used to kill. Slash right and left, whichever way you're facing. I will also clap my hands, and then my anger will be over. I, the Lord, have spoken."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, mark the two roads that the king of Babylon's army could take, beginning from the same country. Make a signpost where the road forks, leading to two different cities. Have one sign point down the road for an attack on the Ammonite city of Rabbah, and another to attack Judah and the fortified city of Jerusalem.

The king of Babylon is standing at the fork in the road where the two roads meet looking for a prophetic sign: he casts lots using arrows, he asks advice from idols, and he examines the liver of sacrificial animals.

He holds the sign for Jerusalem in his right hand. This is where he is going to set up battering rams, to give the command to attack, to shout the war-cry. There he will order the battering rams to smash the gates, set up an attack ramp, and build a siege wall. To those who have sworn to be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar this will look like a false sign, but it will reveal their guilt and they will be taken prisoner.

So this is what the Lord God says: Because you have revealed your guilt and demonstrated your rebellion, showing your sins in everything you've done, now that you've made all this clear, you will be taken prisoner.

As for you, you unclean, wicked prince of Israel, the time has come to complete your punishment. This is what the Lord God says: Take off your turban, and your crown. Things won't continue as they were. Give power to the common people and bring down the powerful! I'm going to destroy everything, make it all a ruin! It won't be restored until its owner arrives, the one I've given the authority to judge.

Prophesy, son of man, and announce that this is what the Lord God says about the Ammonites and their insults: A sword! A sword is ready for killing, polished to destroy, to flash like lightning, even as your prophets give you false visions and prophecies that are lies. This sword will cut the necks of the wicked, killing them—those whose day has come for their punishment to be completed. Sword, go back to where you came from! I'm going to judge you right where you were created, in your homeland. I will deal with you in my anger; I will breathe my fire of anger on you; I will hand you over to cruel men who are experts in destruction. You will be burned up like firewood. Your blood will be shed where you live. You will be forgotten, for I, the Lord, have spoken."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "So, son of man, are you ready to judge them? Are you ready to judge the people of this city that have caused so much bloodshed? Make them face all the disgusting things they've done, and tell them that this is what the Lord God says: You are a city who has caused your own doom by murdering people within your walls, and by making idols to worship that made you unclean. You are guilty of murder, and you have made yourself unclean by the idols you've made. You have shortened your lives—your time is up! That's why other people taunt you—everyone mocks you. People far and near will laugh at you, you corrupt city full of confusion!

Look at how all of your leaders in Israel use their power to murder. You despise your parents. You exploit the foreigners who live with you, and you mistreat orphans and widows.

You detest my holy things and violate my Sabbaths. Living among you are people who falsely accuse others in order to put them to death. You also have those who eat religious meals at pagan shrines in the mountains, and commit immoral acts within the city.

Some of those living in the city have sex with their father's wives or with women during their period. You're home to evil men. One does disgusting things with someone else's wife. Another seduces his daughter-in-law, while another rapes his sister, the daughter of his own father.

Your people take money to murder others. You charge interest and make a profit on loans, and use extortion to get money from your neighbors. You have forgotten all about me, declares the Lord God.

So watch out! I clap my hands in condemnation at your dishonest profiteering and at all your murders. Are you going to be so brave, and will you be strong enough to defend yourselves when it comes time for me to deal with you? I, the Lord, have spoken, and I'm going to act. I'm going to scatter you among the nations and the different countries. I will put a stop to your unclean acts. For when everyone else sees how you've made yourselves unclean, then you will acknowledge that I am the Lord."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, the people of Israel have ended up like the impurities left over from refining metal. They're all like copper, tin, iron, and lead in the furnace—they are just the impurities left from refining silver.

So this is what the Lord God says: Because all of you have ended up like impurities, watch as I collect you together in Jerusalem. In the same way a refiner collects silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin and puts them in the blast furnace to melt them with fire, I'm going to collect you in my burning anger, and keep you there until I melt you.

I'm going to collect you all together and blast you with the fire of my anger, and you'll be melted there in the city. Just as silver is melted in a furnace, so you'll be melted in the city. Then you will realize that I, the Lord, have made you experience my anger."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, tell the city of Jerusalem, at the time of punishment, you are a country that has not been made clean, a place where no rain has fallen,

Her leaders conspire together and it's like watching a roaring lion ripping up its prey. They destroy the people, grab everything that's valuable, and make many more widows in the city.

Her priests pervert my law and make my holy things unclean. They don't distinguish between what is holy and what is ordinary, and they don't separate the clean from the unclean. They forget about my Sabbaths, and they lead people to treat me with no respect.

Her city officials are like wolves ripping up their prey, killing people, destroying lives so they can profit through fraud.

Her prophets cover up what they do, using false visions as whitewash and prophecies that are lies, saying, 'This is what the Lord God says,' when the Lord hasn't said anything.

The people of this country are extortioners and robbers. They mistreat the poor and those in need and exploit the foreigners, treating them totally unfairly.

I tried to find one of them to repair the wall and to defend the gap so when I came I wouldn't destroy it—but I couldn't find anyone. So I have let them experience my hostility, burning them up with the fire of my anger. I have made sure they suffer the consequences of what they've done, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, there were once two women. They were daughters of the same mother. They became prostitutes in Egypt. In fact, they were prostitutes from the time they were young. They allowed their virgin breasts to be fondled and their nipples squeezed. The older girl was called Oholah, and her sister Oholibah. I married them both and they had sons and daughters. Oholah represents Samaria, and Oholibah represents Jerusalem.

Oholah prostituted herself while she was still married to me. She wanted to have sex with her lovers, the Assyrians. They were soldiers dressed in blue, leaders and commanders, all of them handsome young men in the cavalry. She gave away herself sexually to all the important men of Assyria. She made herself unclean by her worship of all the idols of those men she wanted to have sex with.

She didn't stop her prostitution that she started in Egypt—men sleeping with her when she was young, squeezing her virgin breasts and using her to satisfy their sexual appetite. So I handed her over to her lovers, the Assyrians she wanted to have sex with. They stripped her naked, took away her sons and daughters, and killed her with the sword. She became infamous among women, and they punished her.

Oholibah saw what happened to her sister, but she became even worse than her in her wanting sex and practicing prostitution. She also wanted to have sex with the Assyrians: their leaders and commanders, their splendidly-dressed soldiers—all of them handsome young men in the cavalry. I saw that she had also made herself unclean—both sisters were doing the same thing.

However, Oholibah's prostitution was even worse. She saw pictures of Babylonian soldiers wearing bright red uniforms painted on the wall. They were wearing belts on their waists and large turbans on their heads. They all looked like Babylonian officers in Chaldea, the country where they were born. When she saw the paintings of them, she wanted to have sex with them and sent messengers to them in Chaldea. The Babylonians came to her and her love bed, and made her unclean with their sexual desire. However, after she had been dishonored by them, she rejected them in disgust.

When Oholibah so blatantly prostituted herself, exposing herself naked, I turned away from her in disgust, just as I had done to her sister. But she practiced even more prostitution, remembering how she'd been a prostitute in Egypt when she was young. She wanted to have sex with her lovers who had genitals like donkeys and who ejaculated like stallions.

You went back to the indecent acts from when you were young, when the Egyptians squeezed your nipples and fondled your young breasts. So Oholibah, this is what the Lord God says: I'm going to encourage your lovers to attack you, those you rejected in disgust. I will bring them to attack you from every direction: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, the men of Pekod, Shoa, and Koa, and all the Assyrians along with them—all handsome young men, leaders and commanders, chariot captains and important officers, all riding horses.

They will attack you from the north, invading with a great army, chariots, and wagons. They will come with their shields and helmets and surround you. I will hand you over to them for punishment, and they will judge and punish you following their own laws. I feel so strongly about what you've done that I will oppose you, and they will treat you very badly. They will cut off your noses and ears, and they will kill those of you who are left. They will take away your sons and daughters as prisoners, and those of you who are left will be destroyed by fire. They will tear off your clothes and take your beautiful jewelry. I'm going to put a stop to your immorality and prostitution, which started in Egypt. You won't think longingly about those times, and you'll forget all about Egypt.

For this is what the Lord God says: Believe it when I say that I'm going to hand you over to the people you hate, the ones you rejected in disgust. They will treat you with hatred. They will take away everything you've worked for, leaving you stark naked with nothing, so that the indecent acts of your prostitution will be exposed. Your immorality and prostitution is why all this has happened to you, because you acted as a prostitute with the nations and made yourself unclean by worshiping their idols. Because you did what your sister did, I will give you her cup to drink.

This is what the Lord God says: You will drink from your sister's cup—a large, deep cup. You will be laughed at and insulted. You'll have to endure much of this. It will make you drunk and full of grief because it's a cup that brings horror and destruction, the cup your sister Samaria drank from. You will drink it all down, smash it to pieces on the ground, and tear at your breasts. This is what I have spoken, declares the Lord God. In summary this is what the Lord God says: Because you have forgotten about me and have ignored me, you will have to experience the consequences of your immorality and prostitution."

Then the Lord said to me: "Son of man, are you going to condemn Oholah and Oholibah? Expose the disgusting things they've done! For they have committed adultery, and they are guilty of murder. They have

committed adultery with their idols, and have even offered their children, whom they had for me, as sacrifices to their idols.

They also did this to me: On the very same day they both made my sanctuary unclean and violated my Sabbaths. On the very day that they killed their children for their idols, they went into my sanctuary and made it unclean. Look at what they did right inside my Temple!

They even kept on sending messengers for men to come from far away. When the men arrived, you would get yourselves ready for them by bathing, doing your eye makeup, and putting on your jewelry. You sat on an expensive couch, with my incense and my oil on a table placed in front of it. The room was full of the noise of people partying. Drunk men were brought in from the desert along with some common people and they put bracelets on your wrists and beautiful crowns on your head.

Then I said about the old worn-out woman, 'Now they can have her as a prostitute because that's what she is!'

So they had sex with her like a prostitute. They had sex with Oholah and Oholibah, those immoral women. But men who believe in doing what's right will judge them and impose the punishment for committing adultery and murder, because they are adulterers and murderers.

This is what the Lord God says: Have a mob attack them! Make them terrified and rob them. The mob will stone them and kill them with their swords, slaughtering their sons and daughters and burning down their houses. This is how I will put an end to immorality in the country, and all the women will be warned not to do what you have done. They will punish you for your immorality, and you will have to experience the consequences of your idol worship. Then you will know that I am the Lord God."

On the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, write down today's date, because this is the day that the king of Babylon started his siege of Jerusalem. Then repeat the following parable to these rebellious people. Tell them that this is what the Lord God says:

Get a pot and set it on the fire. Pour in some water. Fill it with some good cuts of meat from the thigh and the shoulder. Put in the best bones. Choose the best animal from the flock. Pile up the fuel underneath it. Get it boiling and cook the bones in it.

So this is what the Lord God says: Disaster is coming to the city that has shed so much blood! It is symbolized by the rusted pot, whose rust can't be cleaned off. Take out the meat bit by bit as it comes—don't choose which piece. For the blood she shed is still inside the city. She shed it openly on bare rock—she didn't even spill it on the ground and cover it up with dirt. In my anger and to punish, I have spilled her blood openly on bare rock, so it wouldn't be covered up.

So this is what the Lord God says: Disaster is coming to the city that has shed so much blood! I will also pile up a large heap of firewood. Put on plenty of wood and light the fire. Make sure the meat is well cooked and add spices. Burn the bones. Then put the empty pot back on the burning coals until it's hot and the copper metal glows. This will melt the dirt inside it and get rid of the rust. So far it's been impossible to clean it — even fire couldn't burn out all its rust. Because of your immorality you had made yourself unclean and I tried to clean you, but you refused to let me clean away your filth. So now you won't be pure again until I've finished being angry with you. I, the Lord, have spoken. The time is soon coming when I will do what I say. I won't change my mind or show pity, I won't stop. I will judge you by your attitude and actions, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, look, I'm about to take away the one you love the most. She will die. But you must not mourn or weep. Don't cry any tears. Mourn in silence. Don't have any rituals for the dead. Dress normally—have your turban on and put your sandals on your feet. Don't veil your face and don't eat the bread used by mourners."

I talked to the people in the morning, and my wife died in the evening. The next morning I did as I'd been told.

The people asked me, "What are you doing? Aren't you going to explain to us what this means?"

So I told them, "A message from the Lord came to me, saying: Tell the people of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: I am about to make my sanctuary unclean, this place you're so proud of that you think gives you power, the place you love so much, the place that makes you happy. Your sons and daughters that you left behind will be killed by the sword.

Then you'll do what I did. You won't veil your face or eat the bread used by mourners. You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You won't mourn or weep, but you will die inside because of your sins, and you will groan to one another.

In this way Ezekiel will be a sign for you; you will do everything that he did. When this happens, then you will know that I am the Lord God.

You, son of man, should know that when I destroy their fortress that is their pride and joy, the place they looked to for comfort and happiness —and their sons and daughters too— when that happens someone who managed to get away will come and give you the news. On that day you will be able to speak; you won't be mute any longer. This is how you will be a sign to them, and they will know that I am the Lord."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards the Ammonites and prophesy against them. Tell the Ammonites to listen to the message from the Lord God, for this is what the Lord God says: Because you said, 'Oh good!' when my sanctuary was made unclean, when the country of Israel was turned into a wasteland, and when the people of Judah were taken into exile, this is why I will make you subject to the people of the East. They will make camp and set up their tents right where you live. They will eat your fruit and drink your milk. I will make Rabbah a camel pasture, and Ammon a sheep-pen. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

For this is what the Lord God says: Because you clapped your hands and stamped your feet in a celebration of hate over what happened to Israel, this is why I will reach out and attack you, and hand you over to be looted by other nations. I will wipe you out so com-

pletely that you will no longer exist as a nation. I will destroy you, and then you will know that I am the Lord.

This is what the Lord God says: Because the people of Moab and Seir said, 'Look, the people of Judah are just like everybody else,' that's why I will open Moab's border to attack, including Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim, the country's famous cities. I will hand Moab over to the people of the East for them to rule so that they will no longer exist as a nation just like the Ammonites. This is how I'm going to punish the Moabites, and they will know that I am the Lord.

This is what the Lord God says: Because Edom committed serious sins by taking vicious revenge on the people of Judah, this is why the Lord God says: I will reach out to attack Edom and destroy all its people and animals. I will turn it into a wasteland. All the way from Teman in the north to Dedan in the south they will die by the sword. I will take revenge on the Edomites through my people Israel. They will deal with the Edomites so that they experience my anger. Then they will know what my vengeance is like, declares the Lord God.

This is what the Lord God says: Because the Philistines in their hatred repeatedly took revenge on Judah, trying to destroy the people, this is why the Lord God says: Watch out! I'm going to reach out to attack the Philistines, and I will wipe out the Kerethites and destroy those who are left along the coast. My revenge against them will be severe as I punish them in my anger. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when they experience my anger."

On the first day of the month of the eleventh year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, because Tyre said about Jerusalem, 'Oh good! The trade gateway to the nations has been broken—it's swung wide open for me. Now that Jerusalem has been destroyed, I will be rich!' this is why the Lord God says: Watch out, Tyre! I'm condemning you, and I will have many nations come and attack you, just like the sea that sends its waves crashing against the shore. They will destroy the walls of Tyre and tear down her towers. I will scrape off the soil that's on her and turn her into a bare rock. Out there in the sea she will be just a place for fishermen to spread their nets. I have spoken, declares the Lord God. Other nations will come and loot her, and the people living in her villages on the mainland will die by the sword. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

For this is what the Lord God says: Watch as I bring Nebuchadnezzar, king of kings, to attack Tyre from the north. He will come with horses, chariots, cavalry, and a huge army. He will kill the people living in your villages of the mainland with the sword. He will construct siege works to attack you. He will build a ramp against your walls, and his soldiers will hold their shields above them as they advance on you. He will have his battering rams smash your walls and use his tools to demolish your towers. He will have so many horses you will be covered by the dust they throw up.

When he comes in through your gates it will sound like an army charging into a defeated city. Your walls will shake from all the noise made by the cavalry, wagons, and chariots. His horses will race through your city streets. He will kill all your people with the sword. Your massive pillars will come tumbling to the ground. They will steal your wealth and loot your goods. They will knock down your walls, demolish the houses you love so much, and dump the debris and rubble into the sea.

This is how I'm going to put a stop to your singing. The music of your harps won't be heard any longer. I will turn you into a bare rock, and you will be just a place for fishermen to spread their nets. Tyre won't ever be rebuilt. I, the Lord, have spoken, declares the Lord God.

This is what the Lord God says to the inhabitants of Tyre: Aren't the people of the coastlands going to shake in terror when they hear your city collapse, when the wounded groan at the killing inside your city?

All the rulers of the coastlands will come down from their thrones, remove their royal robes, and take off their embroidered clothes. Instead they will be clothed with terror and sit on the ground, trembling the whole time, shocked at what's happened to you. Then they will sing a funeral song for you, saying,

'You've been destroyed so completely, famous city! You once ruled the sea—you and your people terrified everyone else! Now the people of the coastlands tremble at your defeat, while those in the islands of the sea are horrified at your downfall.'

For this is what the Lord God says: I will turn you into a ruin just like other uninhabited cities. I will have the sea rise up to cover you with deep water. I will bring you down with those who are headed to the grave to join people from long ago. I will make you live under the earth like the ruins of the past together with those who have gone down into the grave, so that no one will live in you and you won't have any place in the land of the living. I will turn you into something horrific, and you won't exist any longer. People will look for you, but won't ever find you, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, sing a funeral song for Tyre. Tell Tyre, the city that stands at the gateway to the sea, supplying goods to many overseas nations, that this is what the Lord God says:

Tyre, you say to yourself, 'I'm so beautiful!' Your borders extend far across the sea. Your builders put you together perfectly like a beautiful ship. They built you with pine timber from Mount Hermon. They used a cedar from Lebanon to make your mast. They made your oars with oaks from Bashan. They had wood from the island of Cyprus brought to make your deck and inlaid it with ivory. They made your sail with the best linen from Egypt—this was your flag that everyone recognized. They used cloth dyed blue and purple from the coastlands of Elishah to make your awnings.

Men from Sidon and Arvad did the rowing in your ship. You had your own skilled sailors from Tyre. Expert craftsmen from Gebal were onboard to repair any leaks. All the other ships at sea came to trade with you and their sailors bartered for your goods. Men from Persia, Lydia, and Put were soldiers in your army. They lived among you, hanging up their shields and helmets with you, making you famous. Men of Arvad and Helech defended all your city walls, while those from Gammad protected your towers. They hung

their shields all around your walls. They made you so successful. Tarshish traded with you because you had so much of everything. They paid for your goods with silver, iron, tin, and lead. Greece, Tubal, and Meshech traded with you. They bought your goods, paying with slaves and objects made of bronze. People from Beth-togarmah traded horses, war horses, and mules for your goods. People from Dedan traded with you. You had marketplaces in many coastal areas where the people bartered with you using ivory tusks and ebony wood. The Arameans traded with you because you had so much merchandise. They provided turquoise, purple cloth, embroidery, fine linen, coral, and red jasper in exchange for your goods. Judah and the country of Israel traded with you, paying you with wheat from Minnith, pastries and honey, olive oil and balm in return for your goods. Because you had many different products, in fact so much of everything, Damascus traded with you using wine from Helbon, wool from Zahar. Vedan and Javan from Izal bought your goods using wrought iron, cassia, and sweet calamus. Dedan traded with you, providing riding blankets. Arabia and all the leaders of Kedar traded with you, supplying lambs, rams, and goats. The merchants of Sheba and Raamah traded with you, exchanging gold, the very best spices, and precious stones for your goods. Haran, Canneh, and Eden traded with you, as did Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad. In your marketplaces they traded with you, providing the finest blue clothing, embroidery, carpets made with different colored threads, and strong ropes of twisted strands.

Trade ships from Tarshish transported your goods. You were like a ship sailing the sea, filled with heavy cargo. Your rowers took you a long way out on the water, but the east wind broke you apart out there in the open ocean. You've lost everything! Your wealth, your goods, your cargo, your crew of sailors, officers, and repairmen, your traders and all the soldiers you had, along with everyone else on board, fall into the depths of the sea on the day of your shipwreck. The land around shakes when your sailors scream. All the rowers abandon their ships. The sailors and all the ships' officers stand on the shore. They shout out for you and burst out crying. They mourn for you by throwing dust on their heads and rolling in ashes. They shave their heads for you and clothe themselves in sackcloth. They weep for you, crying out in agony and heartfelt mourning As they weep and wail over you, they sing a funeral song for you: 'Who could compare to Tyre, now destroyed out in the sea? You made many people happy when they received your goods from far across the sea. You made the kings of the earth rich with all your valuable goods and products. Now you have been shipwrecked by the sea, sunk in deep water, and your cargo and your people have gone down with you. Everyone living on the coastlands is shocked at what happened to you. Their kings are horrified; their faces twisted with fear. The traders of the nations hiss at you in derision; disaster has brought you down and you're finished forever.'"

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, tell the ruler of Tyre this is what the Lord God says: You're so proud of yourself, saying, 'I'm a god! I sit on my throne like a god in the middle of the sea.' But you're only a man. You're not a god, even though you think you are one. You even think you're wiser than Daniel and there's no secret that's hidden from you! Yes, you have used your wisdom and cleverness to make yourself rich, collecting plenty of gold and silver for your treasury. You became wealthy through your superb trading skills, but your wealth only made you proud.

So this is what the Lord God says: Because you think that you're a god, watch as I bring foreigners to attack you. They are more cruel than any other nation. They will use their swords to destroy you and your wonderful wisdom; they will humble your proud glory. They will drag you down into the grave. You will die horribly out there in the sea. Are you still going to claim, 'I'm a god,' to those who are killing you? You'll just be another human victim, not a god, in the eyes of your attackers. You will be killed like some vile person by these foreigners. I myself have spoken, declares the Lord God."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, sing a funeral song for the king of Tyre and tell him this is what the Lord God says: Once you were complete and perfect, full of wisdom and flawless in beauty. You were there in Eden, God's garden. You wore all kinds of precious stones: carnelian, topaz, and amethyst; beryl, onyx, and jasper; lapis lazuli, turquoise, and emerald. They were placed in gold mountings and settings using skilled craftsmanship, and were made on the day when you were created. I gave you the position of guardian cherub, and I anointed you. You lived on God's holy mountain and you walked among the stones of fire. You were innocent in everything you did from the day you were created until you were found to be doing evil. You were so busy with all your trading schemes that they destroyed you inside, leading you to sin and filling you with violence. So I sent you away in disgrace from God's mountain, and I removed you from your position as guardian cherub from your place among the stones of fire. You became proud because of your beauty, you ruined your wisdom because you thought you were so wonderful. So I threw you down to the ground and I made sure kings saw what happened to you. By all your sins and your dishonest trading you have made your sanctuaries unclean. So I had fire come from inside you, and it burned you up. I turned you into ashes on the ground as everybody there watched. All who know you among the nations are horrified at what happened to you. Disaster has brought you down and you're finished forever."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards Sidon and prophesy against her. Tell her this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, Sidon, for I'm condemning you, and I will be vindicated by what happens to you. People will know that I am the Lord when I punish her and show my holy character through her experience. I'm going to send a disease to plague her, and have people killed in her streets. Those who are killed will fall inside the city as the enemy attacks with swords from every side. Then they will know that I am the Lord. The people of Israel will no longer have to put up with these people who are thorns in their side, painful brambles and sharp thorns who

treat Israel with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord God.

This is what the Lord God says: When I bring back the people of Israel from the nations where they've been scattered. I will show my holy character through them as everyone watches.

Then they will live in their own country, which I gave to my servant Jacob. They will live there in safety, building houses and planting vineyards. They will live there in safety when I punish all those around them who treat them with contempt. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God."

On the twelfth day of the tenth month of the tenth year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and the whole of Egypt. Tell him that this is what the Lord God says:

Watch out, because I'm condemning you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, you great monster lying in your rivers, who says, 'The Nile belongs to me; I made it myself.' I'm going to put hooks in your jaws and make the fish in your river stick to your scales. I will pull you up out of your river, and all the fish will stick to your scales. I will throw you and the fish away, leaving you in the desert. Your body will fall on the ground and be left in the open. It won't be collected or taken to be buried. I'll leave you as food for wild animals and birds of prey. Then everyone in Egypt will know that I am the Lord. When you had to deal with the people of Israel you were like a flimsy walking stick made from a reed. When Israel grabbed hold of you, you split apart, damaging their shoulder. When they leaned on you, you broke, putting their backs out. So this is what the Lord God says: I will attack you with a sword and kill both people and animals. Egypt will become an empty wasteland. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Because you said, 'The Nile belongs to me; I made it,' that's why I'm condemning you and your river. I will ruin Egypt, making it into an empty wasteland all the way from Migdol in the north to Syene in the south, and up to the border with Cush. No one, human or animal, will travel that way or live there for forty years.

I will make Egypt more of a wasteland than any other country, and its towns will lie in ruins for forty years among all the other ruined towns. I will scatter the Egyptians among the different nations and countries.

However, this is what the Lord God says: After forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the different countries where they were scattered. I will bring Egypt out of captivity and take them back to the land of Pathros, where they originally came from. Their kingdom will be insignificant.

Egypt will be the lowest of kingdoms and won't ever be more important than other nations again. I will bring Egypt down so that it won't ever be able to rule over the nations again. The people of Israel won't ever trust in Egypt again; instead they will be reminded of their sin when they turned to the Egyptians for help. Then they will know that I am the Lord God."

On the first day of the first month of the twenty-seventh year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army work really hard in the siege against Tyre. The soldiers had their hair worn off their heads, and their shoulders rubbed raw. However, he and his army didn't gain any benefit from Tyre for all the work they did in attacking it.

So this is what the Lord God says: I'm going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon who will seize everything valuable. He will loot the country, robbing it to pay his army. I'm rewarding him for all his work by giving him Egypt because the work they did was for me, declares the Lord God.

At that time I will give power back to the people of Israel and I will help you speak to them. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy and announce that this is what the Lord God says: Weep! This is a terrible day! The day is soon coming—the Day of the Lord is near. It will be a gloomy, cloudy day, a time of judgment for the nations. A sword will come to attack Egypt, and there will be anguish in Cush when people are killed in Egypt, when it's robbed of its wealth and the country ruined. Cush, Put, and Lud, and many other peoples, as well as Arabia, Kub, and the people of the promised land, they all, like Egypt, will be killed by the sword. This is what the Lord says: Egypt's allies will fall, and the country will lose its prestigious position. From Migdol in the north to Syene in the south, they will be killed by the sword, declares the Lord God. Egypt will become more of a wasteland than any other country, and its towns will be left in ruins. Then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord when I set fire to Egypt and all its allies are crushed.

At that time I will send messengers in ships to shock Cush out of its sense of security. They will tremble in fear when disasters hit Egypt. Watch out! It's definitely coming! This is what the Lord God says: I will use Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to take away Egypt's wealth. He and his army from the cruelest nation in the world will be brought to destroy the country. They will use their swords to attack Egypt, and they will fill the land with dead bodies. I will dry up the rivers and sell the land to wicked people. Using these foreigners I will ruin the land and everything in it. I the Lord have spoken.

This is what the Lord God says: I'm going to destroy the idols and get rid of the images in Memphis. There won't be a prince in Egypt any longer, and I will make everyone in the country terrified. I will destroy Pathros, set Zoan on fire, and punish Thebes. I will pour out my wrath on Pelusium, Egypt's fortress town, and wipe out the army at Thebes. I will set fire to Egypt, Pelusium will suffer, Thebes will be ripped apart, and Memphis will face trouble every day. The young soldiers of Heliopolis and Bubastis will fall by the sword, and the people from those towns will be taken captive. It will be a dark day in Tahpanhes when I break Egypt's power and bring to an end their proud strength. It will be under a cloud as the people go into captivity. This is how I'm going to punish Egypt, and they will acknowledge that I am the Lord."

On the seventh day of the first month of the eleventh year, a message from the Lord came to me,

saying, “Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt. You can see that it hasn't been bandaged up to heal it, or put in a splint to provide enough strength to hold a sword.

So this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, because I'm condemning Pharaoh king of Egypt! I will break his arms, both the one that's still good and the one already broken, and I will make him drop his sword. I will scatter the Egyptians among the different nations and countries.

I will make the arms of the king of Babylon strong, and put my sword in his hand, but I will break Pharaoh's arms, and he will moan in pain like someone who's about to die. I will make the arms of Babylon's king strong, but Pharaoh's arms will drop to his sides, weak and useless.

Then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord, when I put my sword in the hand of the king of Babylon and he uses it to attack Egypt. When I scatter the Egyptians among the different nations and countries, they will acknowledge that I am the Lord.”

On the first day of the third month of the eleventh year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt and all his many people:

Who is as great as you? Look at Assyria. It was like a cedar in Lebanon, with its beautiful branches providing shade in the forest. It was so high that its top reached the clouds. Deep springs of water made it grow tall and sent streams all around it to water all the other trees. It became really tall, higher than any other tree in the forest. Its branches grew thick and long because it was so well-watered. All kinds of birds nested in its branches, while underneath it different wild animals had their young, and all the powerful nations lived in its shade. It was beautiful and majestic with its long branches, because its roots reached down to the plentiful water. The cedars in God's garden were no match for it. No pine tree had such great branches, nor did any plane tree. No tree in God's garden was as beautiful. I made it beautiful with its many branches. All the trees of Eden in God's garden envied it.

So this is what the Lord God says: Since it became so tall, reaching up into the clouds, it grew proud because of its height. So I handed it over to the leader of a foreign nation who will punish it for its wickedness. I have thrown it out.

Foreigners from the cruelest of all the nations chopped it down and left it lying there. Its branches lie fallen and broken in the mountains and valleys of the countryside. Everybody in earth came out of its shadow and abandoned it. Birds came to live on its fallen trunk, and wild animals hid among its fallen branches.

This was in order that no other trees growing by the water would grow up so high and have their tops reach the clouds. This was so that no other trees, however much water they had, would be as tall as them, For they all will die and go down into earth, just like human beings who go down into the grave.

This is what the Lord God says: On the day it was brought down to Sheol, I had the deep waters mourn for it; I stopped its rivers flowing; I held back all its waters. I covered Lebanon in darkness, and all the trees in the forest withered. I made the nations tremble when they heard it fall, when I threw it down into Sheol with those who die.

Then all the trees of Eden, the finest and best in Lebanon, all the trees that had plenty of water, were happy that this tree joined them in the earth below. They also went down with it into Sheol, to those who had been killed by the sword. They had been part of its army living in its shade among the nations.

Who is as great and glorious as you among the trees of Eden? But you too will be brought down to the earth below to be with the trees of Eden. You will lie there with the heathen, with those killed by the sword. This is what will happen to Pharaoh and all his many people, declares the Lord God.”

On the first day of the twelfth month of the twelfth year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, sing a funeral song for Pharaoh king of Egypt and tell him:

You think you're like a lion among the nations but in reality you're like a sea monster. You roll around in your rivers, stirring up the waters with your feet, making the water muddy. This is what the Lord God says: In the presence of many nations I'm going to spread my net over you, and they will pull you up in my net. I will expel you into the open land; I will throw you down on the bare earth. I will make all the birds of prey come and land you; I will have all the wild animals eat you until they're satisfied. I will dump your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. I will fill the land with your flowing blood, pouring it out on the mountains, filling the valleys. When I put out the light of your life, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars. I will use a cloud to cover the sun, and the moon will stop shining. I will darken all the bright lights in the heavens above you, and I will make your land go dark, declares the Lord God. When I destroy you I will make many people frightened, even in countries you don't know anything about. Many will be shocked at what I do to you, and their kings will be horrified at what has happened to you, trembling when I wave my sword in front of them. On the day that you fall all of them will shake in fear for their lives.

For this is what the Lord God says: The sword of the king of Babylon will attack you! I will allow your army to be defeated—your soldiers killed by the swords of a powerful enemy army from the cruelest of all nations. They will ruin the glories of Egypt and destroy all your people. I will slaughter all your livestock living beside the wide rivers. Nobody will be there to stir rivers up with their feet; no livestock hooves will make them muddy. I will allow their waters to settle and I will make her rivers flow smoothly like oil, declares the Lord God. When I turn Egypt into a wasteland, completely emptying it out, when I kill everyone who lives there, then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord. This is the funeral song that foreign women will sing. They will sing it in mourning over Egypt and all its many people, declares the Lord God.”

On the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of the twelfth year, a message from the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, weep for all the many Egyptians. Send them along with the people of powerful nations down

into the depths of the earth with those who go down into the grave. Do you think you're more beautiful than anyone else? Go down and take your place in the grave with the heathen! They will lie among those killed by the sword. A sword is ready to kill all the many people of Egypt. Powerful chiefs will speak from Sheol about Egypt and its allies: 'They have come down here and lie with the heathen, with those killed by the sword.'

Assyria is there with all its people—it's surrounded by graves. All of them died violent deaths, killed by the sword. Its graves are set in the deepest parts of the place of the dead, and the graves of all its people surround Assyria's grave. All of them died violent deaths, killed by the sword, these people who once terrorized others when they were alive.

Elam is there with all its people around its grave. All of them died violent deaths, killed by the sword. They went down into the grave, these heathen people who once terrorized others when they were alive. They are disgraced, along with all others who go down into the grave. A resting place is made ready among those who have been killed for Elam and all its many people—their graves surround Elam's grave. They are all heathen and were killed by the sword, though they once terrorized others when they were alive. They are disgraced, along with all others who go down into the grave. They are laid to rest among those who have been killed.

Meshech and Tubal are there with all their many people, surrounded by all their graves. They are all heathen and were killed by the sword, though they once terrorized others when they were alive. But they're not laid to rest with the fallen warriors of long ago who went down into Sheol with their weapons of war. Their swords were placed underneath their heads and their shields over their bones, although these powerful warriors once terrorized others when they were alive. However, you will also be cut down and laid to rest with the heathen, with those killed by the sword.

Edom is there with all its kings and princes. Once they were powerful, but now they too are laid to rest with those killed by the sword. They lie with the heathen, with those who go down into the grave. All the leaders from the north, and all the people of Sidon are there too. They also are disgraced, going down with those who were killed, in spite of their formidable power. They are heathen, lying there with those killed by the sword, and have the disgrace of those who go down into the grave.

Pharaoh will see them and be pleased that he and all his many people are not the only ones killed by the sword, declares the Lord God. For I will terrorize those who are alive so that Pharaoh and all his many people will be laid to rest with the heathen, with those killed by the sword, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, tell your people: If I brought an army to attack a country, the people there would choose one of them to be their watchman. When he saw the army advancing to attack the country, he would blow the trumpet to warn everyone.

So if you hear the trumpet but don't pay attention to the warning, and you're killed in the attack, you will be responsible for your own death. Since you heard the trumpet but didn't pay attention to the warning, then you will be responsible for your own death. If you had paid attention to the warning, you could have saved your life.

But if the watchman saw the attack coming and didn't blow the trumpet to warn everyone, and someone is killed, then that person will die in their sins, but I will hold the watchman responsible for their death.

Son of man, I have appointed you as a watchman for the people of Israel. Listen to what I tell you and warn them for me. If I tell the wicked 'You're wicked; you're going to die'; but you don't warn them to change what they're doing, then they'll die in their sins and I will hold you responsible for their deaths. But if you warn the wicked to change what they're doing, and they don't, they will die in their sins, but you will save your own life.

Son of man, tell the people of Israel that this is what they've been saying, 'We recognize our sins and wrongs, and they weigh on us, wearing us out. How can we go on living?'

Tell them: As I live, declares the Lord God, it brings me no pleasure when wicked people die. I wish they would stop sinning and live! Stop! Stop sinning! Why should you die, people of Israel?

So, son of man, tell your people: All the good things a good person has done won't save them when they sin; while the bad things a bad person has done won't be a problem for them if they stop sinning. But good people won't live if they start sinning.

If I tell a good person that they will live and then they rely on their goodness and start sinning, then none of the good things they did will be remembered; he will die because of the sins.

But if I tell a bad person, 'You're going to die' and they stop sinning and do what is good and right, if they return security given for a loan, pay back what they've stolen, and follow my laws about how to live, not doing wrong—then they will live; they won't die. None of their sins will be remembered; they have done what is good and right and so they will live.

However, your people are complaining, 'What the Lord does isn't right.' But it's what they're doing that isn't right. If a good person stops doing good and sins, they will die because of it. On the other hand, if a bad person turns from their sins and they do what is good and right, they will live as a result.

So how can you say, 'What the Lord does isn't right'? Well, I'm going to judge each of you depending on what you've done, people of Israel."

On the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of our exile, a refugee who'd escaped from Jerusalem arrived and told me, "The city has been captured!"

The previous evening before the messenger arrived the Lord had touched me so I could speak again. This was before the man came to see me in the morning. I wasn't mute any longer—I could speak again.

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, people living among the ruins in Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, but the country

was given to him to own. There's plenty of us, so the country should belong to us.'

So tell them that this is what the Lord God says: You eat meat with the blood still in it. You go and worship your idols. You commit murder. Do you really think the country should belong to you? You rely on your swords to get your way. You have done some disgusting things. You're all having sex with each other's wives. Should the country belong to you?

Tell them that this is what the Lord God says: As I live, the people living among the ruins will be killed by the sword. Those living in the countryside will be eaten by wild animals. Those living in the fortresses and caves will die from disease. I will turn the country into a wasteland, and power you are so proud of will be ended. The mountains of Israel will become wild places that no one will want to travel through. Then the people will acknowledge that I am the Lord, when I have turned the country into a wasteland because of all the disgusting things they have done.

Son of man, your people are talking about you out in the streets and in the doorways of their houses. They encourage one another, saying, 'Come on! Let's go and hear a message from the Lord!'

So my people come and visit you like they usually do. They sit and listen to the message you share, but they don't do anything about it. Even though they talk about love, all they're thinking about is how to cheat others. In fact, to them you're just someone who sings love songs with a lovely voice and who is a fine musician. They listen to the message you share, but they don't do anything about it. So when what you say does happen (and it will), then they will realize that they did have a prophet among them."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds who lead Israel. Prophesy and tell them that this is what the Lord God says: Disaster is coming to the shepherds of Israel, who only look after themselves, and not the sheep! Shouldn't shepherds make sure their flock is fed? You eat the cream, you use the wool for clothes, and you slaughter the fattened sheep, but you don't feed the flock.

You haven't taken care of the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought home the strays, or looked for the lost. On the contrary, you ruled them using violence and cruelty. They were scattered because they didn't have a shepherd. When they scattered they were preyed on by all the wild animals for food. My sheep strayed, going to all the mountains and high hills. They were scattered everywhere, and there was no one to go and look for them.

So, you shepherds, listen to what the Lord has to say: As I live, declares the Lord God, because my sheep didn't have a shepherd and were preyed on by all the wild animals for food, and because my shepherds didn't look after my sheep but instead only fed themselves, so, you shepherds, you listen to what the Lord has to say!

This is what the Lord God says: Watch out, because I'm condemning the shepherds, and I will take my sheep back and stop them from looking after the sheep so they won't be able to feed themselves anymore. I will take away my sheep from them, and I won't let them eat the sheep anymore.

For this is what the Lord God says: Watch as I myself will go looking for my sheep, searching to find them. Just like a shepherd goes looking for his lost sheep when he is with the flock, so I will look for my sheep.

I will rescue them from everywhere they were scattered on a dark and dismal day. I will take them out from among the other nations. I will gather them from the different countries, and bring them back to their own country. Like a shepherd I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and everywhere that people live in the country. I will provide them with good pasture and places to graze in the high mountains of Israel. They will also be able to rest there in the good pasture and in the places to graze in mountains of Israel.

I myself will look after my sheep and give them a place to rest, declares the Lord God. I will go looking for the lost, bring home the strays, bandage the injured, and strengthen the weak. However, I will destroy those who are fat and strong. Because I do what's right, I will be sure to take care of them.

My flock, this is what the Lord God says to you: Watch, because I will judge between one sheep and the next, between the rams and the goats. Aren't you satisfied with feeding in good pasture? Do you have to trample down the rest of the pasture with your feet? Aren't you satisfied to drink the clear water? Do you have to muddy the rest of it with your feet? Why does my flock have to feed on what your feet have trampled down, and drink the water that your feet have muddied?

That's why the Lord God says to them: Watch, because I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the skinny sheep. Since you push others around with your sides and your shoulders, and use your horns to attack all the weak ones until you have chased them away, I will rescue my flock, and they will no longer be your victims. I will judge between one sheep and the next. I will put one shepherd in charge of them, my servant David, and he will take care of them. He will take care of them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be their leader. I the Lord have spoken.

I will make an agreement of peace with them, and get rid of the wild animals from the country, so that they can live safely in the wilderness and sleep securely in the forest. I will bless them everywhere around my hill. I will send rain at the right time. They will be showers of blessing. The trees in the orchards will produce their fruit; the earth will grow its crops; and my flock will live in safety in their country. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I break their yokes of slavery, and set them free from those who made them slaves.

They won't be the victims of other nations anymore, and wild animals won't eat them. They will live in safety, and no one will terrorize them.

I will make their fields produce remarkable harvests, and they won't suffer famine in their country again or be mocked by others. Then they will know

that I am with them as the Lord their God, and that the people of Israel belong to me, declares the Lord God.

You are my sheep, the sheep that I feed. You are my people, and I am your God, declares the Lord God."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, face towards Mount Seir and prophesy against it Announce that this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, because I'm condemning you, Mount Seir. I'm going to attack you and turn you into a wasteland. I will ruin your towns; you will be completely devastated. Then you will acknowledge that I am the Lord.

Because of your lasting hatred for the Israelites you let them be attacked with swords as they went through terrible disasters when the time of their punishment was coming to an end. So as I live, declares the Lord God, I will let you be violently attacked and chased down. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will come after you.

I will turn Mount Seir into a ruined wasteland. I will wipe out anyone who leaves or who tries to return. I will fill its mountains with the dead. Those killed by the sword will fall in your hills, valleys, and all your ravines. I will ruin you forever. Your towns will not be inhabited again. Then you will acknowledge that I am the Lord.

Because you said, 'These two nations and their lands belong to us, and we will take them over, even though the Lord was there with them,' then as I live, declares the Lord God, I will deal with you in the same way that you showed anger and jealousy to them in your hatred of them. They will realize that I'm punishing you because of the way you treated them.

You will also realize that I, the Lord, heard all the nasty things you said about the mountainous land of Israel when you announced, 'The mountains have been left empty; they're ours to take!' You made a lot of boasts attacking me—you had much to say against me. I heard it for myself!

This is what the Lord God says: I will destroy you as everyone else in the world celebrates. Just as you celebrated when Israel was destroyed, I will do the same to you. Mount Seir, you will become a wasteland, and so will the rest of Edom. Then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord."

"And you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say: Mountains of Israel, listen to this message from the Lord. This is what the Lord God says: The enemy said about you, 'Aha! These old high places now belong to us,' so you must prophesy and announce that this is what the Lord God says: They have turned you into a wasteland, attacking you from every direction, so that you became the property of other nations and people gossiped about you and slandered you. So now, mountains of Israel, listen to the message from the Lord God.

This is what the Lord God says to the mountains and hills, to the ravines and valleys, to the deserted ruins and abandoned towns, that the other nations around you have looted and mocked. Yes, this is what the Lord God says: I have spoken passionately against these other nations, and against all the Edomites, who took over my country and made it theirs, happily celebrating as they looted the land and treated me with complete contempt.

So prophesy concerning the country of Israel and tell the mountains and hills, the ravines and valleys, that this is what the Lord God says: Just watch, for I have spoken passionately about this because you have had to put up with this mockery from other nations.

This is what the Lord God says: I hold up my hand and swear that the other nations around you will suffer their own shame. But you, mountains of Israel, will grow trees that will produce fruit for my people Israel, for soon they'll be coming home.

Look, I am for you and I will help you. Your land will be plowed, and crops will be sown. You will support the people of Israel as they return and grow in number. People will live in the towns again and rebuild the ruins. The number of your people will grow— they will have many children. The animals too will have many young. You mountains, I will make sure that you are inhabited just as you used to be, and I will make you more prosperous than you were before. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

You mountains, I will have my people Israel walk on you again. You will be theirs; you will belong to them, and you will no longer rob your nation of their children.

This is what the Lord God says: Because people say to you, 'You eat people, and rob your nation of their children,' from now on you won't eat people or rob your nation of their children, declares the Lord God. I'm going to stop these nations insulting you, and you won't have to put up with their taunts any more, or make the nation fall, declares the Lord God."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their country, they made it unclean by the way they behaved, by what they did. The way they were behaving in my presence was like the ceremonial uncleanness of a woman's period. So I became angry with them because of murders they committed in the country, and because they made it unclean by worshiping idols. I scattered them among the different nations and countries. I judged them according to the way they had behaved and what they did. But wherever they went among the nations, they ruined my reputation, because people said about them, 'These are the Lord's people, but they had to leave his country.' So I had to take care of my reputation for holiness which the people of Israel had ruined among the nations where they'd gone.

Tell the people of Israel that this is what the Lord God says: I'm not doing this for you, people of Israel, but for my reputation for holiness, which you ruined among the nations where you went. I will reveal the holy nature and importance of my reputation, which has been ruined among the nations, the reputation you have ruined among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when I reveal my holiness through you as they watch.

For I will bring you back from among the nations, gathering you from all the different countries, and I will lead you back into your own country. I will also pour pure water over you, and you will be clean. I will wash you clean from all your uncleanness and from all your

idols. I will give you a new mind and I will put a new spirit inside you. I will take away your stubborn mind and I will give you a loving mind. I will put my Spirit inside you so you will follow my laws and remember to do what I tell you.

Then you will live in the country I gave to your forefathers. You will be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from everything that makes you unclean. I will make sure you have plenty of grain. I won't send you any famines. I will also make sure you have good harvests from your orchards and fields, so that you won't be mocked by other nations anymore because of famine.

Then you will remember your evil ways and terrible things you've done, and you'll hate yourselves for your sins and disgusting actions. You need to realize that I'm not doing this for your sake, declares the Lord God. You should be ashamed and embarrassed for what you've done, people of Israel!

This is what the Lord God says: On the day I make you clean from all your sins, I will have you live in your towns again and make sure the ruins are rebuilt. The land that was deserted will be cultivated again instead of looking abandoned to everyone passing by. Then they will say, 'This deserted land is now like the garden of Eden. The towns that were demolished, abandoned, and destroyed have been restored and strengthened, and people are living in them.'

Then those nations around you that are left will acknowledge that I, the Lord, have rebuilt what was demolished, and that I have replanted what was destroyed. I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will carry it out.

This is what the Lord God says: I will once again answer the prayers of the people of Israel. This is what I will do for them: I will have them increase in number like a flock. Just like all the many flocks that are brought to Jerusalem to be sacrificed during the religious festivals, so the towns that were once demolished will be full of flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the Lord."

The Lord picked me up and carried me away by his Spirit. He set me down in the middle of a valley that was full of bones. He led me around them, and in all directions I saw many, many bones on the valley floor. They were really dry.

Then he asked me, "Son of man, can these bones come back to life?"

"Lord God, only you know the answer," I replied.

He told me, "Prophesy to these bones and tell them, Dry bones, listen to this message from the Lord! This is what the Lord God says to these bones: I will breathe into you, and you will come back to life. I will give you tendons and have flesh grow over you and cover you with skin. I will breathe into you so that you will come back to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied just as I had been ordered. When I started prophesying, suddenly I heard a rattling noise. The bones joined together, bone attached to bone. As I watched, I saw tendons and flesh grow on them, and skin covered them; but the bodies didn't breathe.

Then he told me, "Prophesy to the breath! Prophesy, son of man, and tell the breath that this is what the Lord God says: Breath, come from the four winds, and breathe into these bodies, so that they can come back to life!"

So I prophesied just as he had ordered me, and the breath went into the bodies, and they came back to life and stood up, a huge army!

He told me, "Son of man, these bones represent all the people of Israel. Listen to what the people are saying, 'Our bones have dried up, and our hope has been crushed. We have been wiped out!'

So prophesy and tell them that this is what the Lord God says: My people, I'm going to open your graves and lift you out of them, and I will take you back to the country of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and lift you out of them, my people. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live again, and I will take you back to your own country. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will carry it out, declares the Lord."

Another message from the Lord came to me, saying, "Son of man, get one piece of wood and write on it: 'This belongs to Judah and the Israelite tribes allied to them.' Then get another piece of wood and write on it: 'This belongs to Joseph. This is Ephraim's piece of wood, and to the Israelite tribes allied to them.' Then join the two pieces of wood into one, so that you hold them as one in your hand.

When your people come and ask you, 'Are you going to explain what this is all about?' tell them that this is what the Lord God says: I'm going to take Joseph's piece of wood, which Ephraim is holding, along with the Israelite tribes allied with them, and I'll join them with Judah's piece of wood. I will make them into a single piece of wood, and they will be as one in my hand.

When you're holding the pieces of wood you've written on, and while everyone is watching, tell them that this is what the Lord God says: I'm going to bring the Israelites back from the nations where they've gone. I will gather them from everywhere and take them back to their own country. I will make them one nation in the country, living in the mountains of Israel, and one king will rule them all. They won't be two nations any longer; never again will they be divided into two kingdoms.

They won't make themselves unclean anymore with their idols or disgusting images, or with any of their rebellious sins. I will save them from all their sins when they abandoned me, and I will make them clean. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be their king. They will be united under one ruler. They will follow my laws, and they will observe and practice my regulations.

They will live in the country I gave to my servant Jacob where your forefathers lived. They will live there with their children and grandchildren forever, and my servant David will be their prince forever. I will make an agreement of peace with them. This will be an everlasting agreement. I will make them secure and increase their numbers, and I will keep my sanctuary there with them forever. My Tabernacle will be with them. I will be their God, and they will be my people. The nations will acknowledge that I am the Lord who blesses Israel, when my sanctuary is with them forever."

A message from the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, face towards Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him and declare that this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, I am condemning you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will send you in a different direction, put hooks in your jaws, and drag you out with your whole army, including your horses, your horsemen in uniform, and a host of men with large and small shields and bucklers, all waving their swords. Soldiers from Persia, Cush, and Put will join them, all equipped with shields and helmets, together with Gomer and all its armies, as well as Beth-togarmah from the distant places of the north with all its armies—and many other nations that join with you.

Get ready! Make sure you and your whole army with you is prepared. You're the one in charge of them. A long time later you will be called to battle. In the final years you will invade a country that has recovered from war. Its people will have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had been abandoned for a long time. They had been brought back from the nations, and were all living in safety. You and your whole army, and the armies of many nations with you, will advance like an incoming storm, like a cloud that covers the land.

This is what the Lord God says: On that day you will start thinking about things in your mind, and you will come up with an evil plan. You tell yourself, ‘I'm going to attack a country of undefended villages, a peaceful people who don't suspect an attack. They all live in towns without defensive walls or barred gates. I'll be able to loot them—I'll rob them of their possessions. I'll attack those places that were once ruined but now are inhabited again. I'll attack a people brought back from the other nations, who now own livestock and possessions, living in the center of the country.’

Sheba and Dedan and the traders from Tarshish with all its strong leaders will ask, ‘Are you going to loot the place? Have you gathered your armies to rob them, to carry away silver and gold, to take cattle and possessions—to grab a great deal of plunder?’

So prophesy, son of man, and tell Gog that this is what the Lord God says: On the day you attack aren't you going to notice that my people Israel are unsuspecting? You'll advance from your place in the distant north, you and your many allies, everyone riding horses, a huge number of men, a massive army. You will attack my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. Gog, in the last days I will send you to attack my land, so that the nations may acknowledge me as holy when I reveal myself to them by what I do through you.

This is what the Lord God says: Aren't you the one of whom I spoke about long ago through my servants, the prophets of Israel? During that time didn't they prophesy for years that I would have you come and attack them? Now on that day, the day when Gog comes to attack the country of Israel, I will become very angry, declares the Lord God.

In my passionate and furious anger I announce that at that time a violent earthquake will hit the country of Israel. Everything that lives on the earth will tremble at my presence—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the wild animals, every creature that runs upon the ground, and every human being. The mountains will be torn down, the cliffs will collapse, and every wall will be knocked to the ground.

I will call for an attack on Gog from all my mountains, declares the Lord God. Everyone will attack his brother with sword. I will punish him with disease and bloodshed. I will send rainstorms, hailstones, fire, and sulfur down on him and his army, and on the armies of his many allies. I will demonstrate my true power and holiness, revealing myself to many nations. Then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord.”

“Son of man, prophesy against Gog and announce that this is what the Lord God says: Watch out, because I'm condemning you Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will send you in a different direction, drag you along, bring you from the distant places of the north, and send you to attack the mountains of Israel. Then I will knock the bow out of your left hand and make you drop the arrows from your right hand.

You will be killed on the mountains of Israel, you and your whole army and armies of your allies. I will provide you as food to all kinds of flesh-eating birds and animals. You will fall and die out in the open, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God.

I will set Magog on fire, as well as the coastlands where people think it's safe to live, and then they will acknowledge that I am the Lord. In this way I will make my reputation for holiness known among my people Israel and won't allow it to be ruined anymore. Then the nations will acknowledge that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. Yes, it's coming! It will definitely happen, declares the Lord God. This is the day that I have spoken about.

Then those living in the towns of Israel will go out to light fires and burn the weapons—the large and small shields, the bows and arrows, the clubs and spears. They will use the weapons to make fires for seven years. They won't need to go and gather firewood from the countryside or cut it from the forests, because they'll use the weapons to make fires. They will loot and plunder those who looted and plundered them, declares the Lord God.

At that time I will give Gog a place to be buried in Israel, the Travelers' Valley, east of the Sea. People won't be able to travel through because all his army will be buried there. So it will be called the Valley of Gog's Army. It will take the people of Israel seven months to bury them in order to make the country clean. Everyone in the country will be involved in burying them, and this will give them a good reputation when I reveal my glory, declares the Lord God.

Men will be chosen to go repeatedly through the country to make it clean by burying the bodies of the invaders that are still left lying on the ground. They will start doing this at the end of the seven months. As they search the country, if they find a human bone they will place a marker next to it so that those in charge of burials can have it buried in the Valley of Gog's Army. Even the town there will be named Hamonah. In this way they will make the country clean.

Son of man, this is what the Lord God says: Call out to every kind of flesh-eating bird and wild animal:

Come from everywhere around and gather for the sacrifice I'm going to prepare for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel where you'll have flesh to eat and blood to drink. You will eat the flesh of the powerful and drink the blood of the world's leaders just as if they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls—all the fattened animals that come from Bashan. You will eat fat until you are totally full and drink blood until you are drunk at the sacrifice I'm going to prepare. You will eat at my table until you're full, consuming horses and riders, powerful men and all kinds of warriors, declares the Lord God.

I will reveal my glory to the other nations, and all of them will see the punishment I hand out to them. From that time on the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God. The nations will realize that the people of Israel were taken prisoner because of their sins, because they were unfaithful to me. So I gave up on them and handed them over to their enemies, so that they were all killed by the sword. I dealt with them because of their uncleanness and sins, and I gave up on them.

So this is what the Lord God says: Now I will bring back the descendants of Jacob from exile and I will show mercy to all the people of Israel, and I will demonstrate my reputation for holiness. They will forget their shameful actions and all the ways they were unfaithful to me once they live in safety in their country, with no one to threaten them. When I bring them home from the nations, gathering them from the countries of their enemies, I will reveal my holiness as many nations watch. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God, when I bring them home to their own country again, not leaving any of them behind. I won't give up on them anymore, for I will fill the people of Israel with my Spirit, declares the Lord God."

At the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month of the twenty-fifth year of our exile (fourteen years after Jerusalem had been captured), was the exact day that the Lord's power came over me and he took me there to the city. God took me to the country of Israel in vision and set me down on a very high mountain. On the south side of the mountain there were buildings that seemed to be a city. When he took me there I saw a man who looked like shining bronze. He was holding a linen cord and a measuring rod as he stood in the entrance way.

"Son of man," he told me, "watch with your eyes, listen with your ears. Concentrate on everything I'm about to show you, because that's the reason you were brought here. You are to explain to the people of Israel what you've been shown, everything you see."

I could see a wall that surrounded the Temple. The measuring rod the man was holding was six long cubits in length (a long cubit is a cubit plus a handbreadth). He measured the wall as six cubits thick and six cubits high.

Then he went up the steps of the east-facing gate. He measured the gate's threshold as six cubits deep. Beyond that were alcoves that measured six cubits by six cubits, with five cubits between the alcoves. The threshold of the inside entrance facing the porch measured six cubits. Then he measured the entrance porch. It was eight cubits deep, and its posts were two cubits thick. The entrance porch faced the Temple.

There were three alcoves on each side of the east gate entrance that all measured the same. The posts on each side also measured the same. He measured the width of the entrance gateway as ten cubits. It was thirteen cubits long.

A wall one cubit high was in front of each alcove, and the alcoves measured six cubits by six cubits. Then he measured the entrance gateway from the roof of one alcove to the roof of the one opposite. It was twenty-five cubits from one doorway to the opposite doorway.

Then he measured the distance between the posts as sixty cubits. The gateway led all the way around to the courtyard. It was fifty cubits from the gateway entrance to the far side of the inside porch.

The alcoves and their pillars had narrow windows on all of the inside of the gateway. The porches also had windows on all of the inside. All the posts were decorated with palm tree designs.

He took me into the outer courtyard. I saw rooms and a pavement had been constructed around the courtyard. There were thirty rooms facing the pavement. This was termed the lower pavement and it extended along the sides of the gateways and was the same length as them.

He measured the distance from the front of the lower gateway to the far side of the inner courtyard as one hundred cubits, both to the east side and the north.

He also measured the length and width of the gateway of the outer courtyard that faced north. Its three alcoves on both sides, its posts, and its porch all measured the same as the first gateway and was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. Its windows, porch, and palm tree decorations were the same as those of the east-facing gate. It had seven steps leading up to it, with its porch facing them.

There was an entrance to the inner courtyard facing the north gate, just like the east gate. He measured the distance from the entrance to the gate as a hundred cubits.

He took me to the south side, and I saw a gateway that faced south. He measured its posts and its porch, and they measured the same as those previously. Both the gateway and its porch had windows all around it that were like the other windows. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. It had seven steps leading up to it, and its porch faced them. It had one post on each side with palm tree designs on them.

The inner courtyard also had an entrance facing south, and he measured the distance from the entrance to the south gate as a hundred cubits.

He took me into the inner courtyard through the south gate, and he measured the south gate. It measured the same as those previously. Its alcoves, posts, and porch had the same measurements as those previously. The gateway and its porch had windows all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. (The other surrounding porches measured twenty-five cubits long and five cubits deep.) Its porch faced the outer courtyard, and its pillars were decorated with palm tree designs. It had eight steps leading up to it.

He took me to the inner courtyard on the east side. He measured the gateway and it measured the same as those previously. Its alcoves, posts, and porch measured the same as those previously. The gateway and its porch had windows all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. Its porch faced the outer courtyard, and its posts were decorated with palm tree designs. It had eight steps leading up to it.

He took me to the north gate and measured it. It measured the same as those previously, including its alcoves, posts, and porch. The gateway and its porch had windows all around. It was fifty cubits long and twenty-five cubits wide. Its porch faced the outer courtyard, and its posts were decorated with palm tree designs on all sides. It had eight steps leading up to it.

A room with a doorway stood beside by the porch of the inner gateways. This was where the burnt offering was washed. Inside the gateway porch were two tables on both sides, where the sacrificial animals were slaughtered for burnt offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings.

Outside, on the way up to the entrance of the north gateway, were two tables on one side of the gate's porch and two tables on the other side. So there were four tables on the inside the of gateway and another four outside, making a total of eight tables. This is where the sacrifices were slaughtered.

There were also four tables of cut stone for the burnt offering. They each measured one and a half cubits long, one and a half cubits wide, and a cubit high. The tools used to slaughter the burnt offerings and the other sacrifices were placed on these tables.

Hooks measuring the width of a hand were attached to the walls inside the room. The meat of the offering was to be placed on the tables.

Outside the inner gate but inside the inner courtyard were two rooms. One was beside the north gate and faced south; the other beside the south gate and faced north.

The man told me: “The room that faces south is for the priests in charge of the Temple, and the room that faces north is for the priests in charge of the altar. These priests are the descendants of Zadok and are the only Levites who are allowed to come near to the Lord and minister before him.”

He measured the square courtyard: a hundred cubits long and a hundred cubits wide. The altar stood in the courtyard in front of the Temple.

He took me to the Temple porch and measured the pillars of the porch as five cubits on each side. The gateway was fourteen cubits wide and its sides measured three cubits. The porch was twenty cubits wide and twelve cubits deep, and had ten steps leading up to it. There were columns by the posts, one on both sides.

He took me to the Temple and measured the posts as six cubits wide on both sides. The entrance was ten cubits wide, and the sides of the entrance were five cubits long on both sides. He measured the outer sanctuary as forty cubits long and twenty cubits wide.

He went into the inner sanctuary and measured the entrance posts as two cubits wide. The entrance was six cubits wide, and the walls on both sides were seven cubits wide. He measured the room beside the inner sanctuary as twenty cubits long and twenty cubits wide. He told me, “This is the Most Holy Place.”

He measured Temple wall as six cubits thick, and each side room around the Temple was four cubits wide. There were three levels of side rooms above one another, each having thirty rooms.

The wall of the Temple had external supports for the side rooms, so that they would not be fixed into the wall of the Temple itself. The side rooms around the Temple became wider at each higher level, because as the structure around the Temple went up the Temple wall grew narrower A stairway provided access from the bottom story to the top, going through the middle level.

I saw that the Temple was on a raised platform that surrounded it. This was the foundation for the side rooms. Its height was the complete length of a measuring rod, six long cubits. The thickness of the outer wall of the side rooms was five cubits, and there was open space between the side rooms of the Temple and the outer chambers that measured twenty cubits wide all round the Temple. The doors of the side rooms opened into this area, with one entrance to the north and another one to the south. The open space was five cubits wide on each side.

Another building faced the Temple courtyard on the west side. It measured seventy cubits wide and ninety cubits long, with walls all the way round that were five cubits thick.

He measured the Temple as one hundred cubits long. The Temple courtyard and the building including its walls were also one hundred cubits long. The Temple courtyard on the east side (including the front of the Temple), was one hundred cubits wide.

He measured the length of the building that faced the Temple courtyard towards the rear of the Temple, including its open halls on each side. It was one hundred cubits long. The outer sanctuary, the inner sanctuary, and the porches facing the courtyard, as well as the thresholds and the narrow windows and the surrounding open halls with their three levels up to and including the threshold, were covered with wood on every side. This extended from the ground up to and including the windows.

On the outside of all the walls by the entrance to the inner sanctuary, spaced at regular intervals around the inner and outer sanctuary, were carved designs of cherubim and palm trees. Every cherub had two faces: a man's face looked in the direction of a palm tree on one side, and the face of a young lion looked in the direction of the palm tree on the other side. These carvings extended the whole way round the Temple. Designs of cherubim and palm trees were carved on the Temple wall from the floor up to the space above the doorway.

The Temple's doorframe was rectangular, as was the doorframe of the sanctuary.

An altar made of wood stood there, three cubits high and two cubits long. All of it—its corners, base, and sides—were made of wood. The man told me, “This is the table that stands before the Lord.”

The Temple and the sanctuary both had hinged double doors. Each door had two panels that opened.

There were two panels for one door, and two panels for the other door. There were carvings of cherubim and palm trees on the Temple doors like those on the walls, and there was a wooden roof that covered the outside part of the porch at the front. There were narrow windows and palm tree designs on the walls of the porch. The side rooms of the Temple also had roofs.

The man took me out through the north gate to the outer courtyard into the rooms on the far side of the Temple courtyard by the northern external wall. The building with the north-facing door was a hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide. It had three floors of open halls on both sides, one facing the twenty-cubit area of the inner courtyard and one facing the pavement of the outer courtyard.

In front of the rooms was an inside walkway ten cubits wide and a hundred cubits long. Their doors opened to the north.

The upper rooms were smaller because of the space taken up by the open halls on the lower and middle levels of the building. Since they didn't have pillars like the courtyards, the upper rooms were set farther back than the lower and middle levels. An external wall ran in front of the rooms for fifty cubits long parallel to the outer courtyard. The rooms on the outer courtyard extended for fifty cubits, but those that faced the Temple were a hundred cubits long. Below these rooms was an entrance on the east side coming from the outer courtyard.

Along the wall on the south side of the outer courtyard were rooms next to the courtyard and opposite the building. There was a walkway in front of them, just like the rooms on the north side. These rooms had the same length and width, the same doors, floor plan, and exits. Similarly there was an entrance under the rooms on the south side of the building, coming from the east side.

The man told me, “The north and south rooms that face the Temple courtyard are holy rooms where the priests who go before the Lord will eat the most holy offerings. They will place the most holy offerings there because the place is holy, and include the grain offerings, the sin offerings, and the guilt offerings. Once the priests have entered these rooms, they are not to go to the outer courtyard before leaving their priestly clothes, because these are holy. They must change into other clothes before they go where the ordinary people are.”

After the man finished measuring inside of the Temple area, he took me out through the east gate, and he measured the surrounding area as well. Using the measuring rod he measured the east side. It was five hundred cubits long.

He measured the north side. It was five hundred cubits long.

He measured the south side. It was five hundred cubits long.

And he came around and measured the west side. It was five hundred cubits long.

So he measured all four sides. There was a wall surrounding it, five hundred cubits long and five hundred cubits wide, separating the holy from the common.

The man took me back to the east gate. There I saw the glory of Israel's God coming from the east. His voice sounded like a thundering waterfall, and the earth blazed bright with his glory.

The vision I saw was just like the vision I'd seen when he came to destroy the city of Jerusalem and like the visions I'd seen beside the River Kebar. I fell facedown on the ground. The glory of the Lord entered the Temple through the east gate. Then the Spirit picked me up and took me into the inner courtyard, and the glory of the Lord filled the Temple.

I heard someone speaking to me from inside the Temple while the man was standing beside me. He told me, “Son of man, this is where I have my throne. It's my home where I will live among the Israelites forever. The people of Israel and their kings won't ever again disgrace me and my holiness by their acts of prostitution and by their honoring their dead kings in their pagan high places. When they built their homes right next to mine—their threshold beside my threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall separating us—they disgraced me and my holiness by the disgusting sins they committed. That's why I destroyed them in my anger. Now if they get rid of their prostitution and their pagan honoring of their dead kings, and I will live with them forever.

Son of man, tell the people of Israel about the Temple and they'll be ashamed of their sins. Have them carefully consider its plan, and if they're ashamed of everything they've done, then explain to them the Temple's design, its layout, exits, and entrances—the complete plan—as well as all its regulations, specifications, and laws. Write them down as they watch, so that they can remember its complete plan and follow all its regulations.

This is the Temple law: the whole area around the Temple on the mountain top is very holy. Pay attention: this is the Temple law.

These are the measurements of the altar in cubits (a cubit and the width of a hand): The gutter is to be one cubit deep and one cubit wide, with a rim one hand span wide along its edge. The back of the altar measured from the gutter on the ground to the lower ledge is to be two cubits. The ledge will measure one cubit wide. The distance from the smaller ledge to the larger ledge is to be four cubits, and the ledge one cubit wide.

The altar hearth is to be four cubits high, with four horns pointing upwards from it. The altar hearth shall be square, its four sides each measuring twelve cubits. The ledge is also to be square, measuring fourteen cubits by fourteen cubits, with a half-cubit rim and a one-cubit gutter all around it. The altar steps are to face the east.”

Then he told me: “Son of man, this is what the Lord God says: These are the regulations regarding the altar once it's built, so that it can be used to sacrifice burnt offerings and to sprinkle blood on it: You shall give a young bull as a sin offering to the Leviticus priests from the family of Zadok, who come and minister before me, declares the Lord God. Take some of its blood and put it on the four horns of the altar, on the four corners of the ledge, and all the way round the rim. This is how you

shall purify the altar and set it right. Then remove the bull for the sin offering and burn it in the designated place of the Temple area outside the sanctuary.

On the second day you are to bring a male goat without defects as a sin offering, and the altar shall be purified as it was purified with the bull. After you've finished the purifying process, you are to present a young bull and a ram, both free from defects. You are to offer them to the Lord. The priests shall sprinkle salt on them and sacrifice them to the Lord as a burnt offering.

For seven days you are to supply a male goat daily for a sin offering. You are also to supply a young bull and a ram, they are both to have no defects. For seven days the priests are to set the altar right and purify it. This is how they will dedicate it. Once these days are over, then from the eighth day the priests are to present the burnt offerings and peace offerings of your people on the altar. Then I will accept all of you, declares the Lord God."

The man took me back to the outside gate of the sanctuary that faced to the east, but it was shut. The Lord told me, "This gate will stay shut. It is not to be opened. No one is allowed to come in through it, because the Lord, the God of Israel, has passed through it. So it will stay shut. The prince himself is permitted to come and sit inside the gateway to eat in the presence of the Lord. He is to come in through the gateway's porch and leave the same way."

The man took me to the front of the Temple through the north gate. As I looked, I saw the glory of the Lord filling his Temple, and I fell with my face to the ground.

The Lord told me, "Son of man, concentrate! Keep your eyes open! Listen carefully to everything I tell you about all the regulations and laws of the Lord's Temple. Pay close attention to the Temple entrance and all the exits of the sanctuary.

Tell those rebels, the people of Israel, that this is what the Lord God says: I've had more than enough of all your disgusting sins, people of Israel! As well as all your other offensive practices, you invited unconverted, pagan foreigners to come into my sanctuary. You made my Temple unclean even while you offered food to me, the fat and the blood. You broke my agreement. In addition you have not taken care of my sanctuary as you were required to, but instead you employed others to look after my sanctuary for you.

This is what the Lord God says: No unconverted, pagan foreigners are allowed to enter my sanctuary—not even a foreigner who lives with the Israelites.

The Levites who abandoned me when Israel turned from worshiping me and went off to follow their idols will experience the consequences of their sins. However, they will serve in my sanctuary, supervising the Temple gates and working in the Temple. They will slaughter the burnt offerings and sacrifices brought by the people and be there to serve them.

But because they served the people in front of their idols and encouraged the people of Israel to sin, I held up my hand to promise on oath that they would experience the consequences of their sin, declares the Lord God. They are not allowed to come near me to serve me as priests, and they are not to touch anything I regard as holy or most holy. They will have to experience the shame of the disgusting sins they committed. However, I will put them in charge of all Temple work and everything that needs to be done there.

It is the Levitical priests, descended from Zadok and who took care of my sanctuary when the Israelites abandoned me, who are the ones to come near to me and minister before me. They will stand in my presence to offer me fat and blood, declares the Lord God. Only they are allowed to enter my sanctuary and approach my table to minister before me. They will do what I say.

When they come in through the entrances of the inner courtyard, they shall wear linen garments. They must not wear any woolen clothes when they serve at the entrances of the inner courtyard or inside the Temple. They shall wear linen turbans on their heads and linen underwear. They are not to wear anything that makes them sweat.

When they go to the outer court where the people are, they must take off their priestly clothes they wore when they were serving, and leave them in the holy rooms. They are to put on other clothes so that they don't carry holiness to the people with their clothing.

They are not permitted to shave their heads or let their hair grow long; they must have a proper haircut. No priest shall drink wine before he enters the inner courtyard. They are not to marry a woman who is a widow or divorced; they can only marry a virgin of Israelite descent, or a widow of a priest. They are to teach my people the difference between what is holy and what is common, and explain to them how to distinguish between what is clean and what is unclean.

They are to serve as judges in legal cases, and base their decisions on my laws. They are to follow my instructions and regulations regarding all my regular religious festivals, and they are to keep my Sabbaths holy.

A priest must not make himself unclean by going near a dead body. However, if it's his father, mother, son, daughter, brother, or a sister that's not married, then he may do so. Afterwards, once he is purified, he must wait for seven days. Then when he enters the sanctuary, going into the inner courtyard and ministering there in the sanctuary, he has to present his sin offering, declares the Lord God.

Regarding their share of the land, I will take care of them. You are not to give them any property in Israel, because I will provide for them.

They are to eat the grain offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. Everything brought by the people of Israel and dedicated to the Lord will be theirs. The best of all the firstfruits and all your offerings are for the priests. You shall give the first loaf you bake to the priest, so that your home may be blessed. The priests are not permitted to eat any bird or animal found dead or killed by wild beasts."

When you allocate the land ownership by lot, you are to make a provision for the Lord, a holy allocation of the land that measures 25,000 cubits long and 20,000 cubits wide. This whole area is holy.

Inside this there is the section for the sanctuary that measures 500 cubits square, with an open area around it 50 cubits wide.

From this holy allocation, measure out a section that is 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits. This will contain the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. This area is a holy allocation of the land which will be used by the priests who serve in the sanctuary, who come before the Lord to minister. It will be where they can live, and a holy place for the sanctuary.

The other section measuring 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits will be assigned the Levites who work in the Temple where they can live.

Allocate to the city an area 5,000 cubits wide and 25,000 cubits long beside the sanctuary section. It is for the all the people of Israel.

The prince will be assigned the territory on both sides of the area that includes the holy section and that of the city. It will extend to the western border of the country from the west side and to the eastern border from the east side, in the same way as the allocation to the tribes. This territory will be his to own in the country of Israel. My princes won't exploit my people anymore, and will make sure the people of Israel occupy the country according to their tribal allocations.

This is what the Lord God says: You've done enough damage, princes of Israel! Stop using violence and mistreating people! Do what is good and right. Stop evicting people and stealing their property, declares the Lord God.

You must use correct methods of measurement—whether it's weights on scales, or ephah for measuring solids, and a bath for measuring liquids. The ephah and the bath shall be the same quantity of volume. The bath will be equivalent to a tenth of a homer, and the ephah will also be equivalent to a tenth of a homer. The homer is to be the fundamental measurement. Twenty gerahs make one shekel. Sixty shekels make one mina.

These are the taxes you are to contribute: one sixth of an ephah from every homer of wheat or barley. In the case of olive oil, one tenth of a bath from every cor. (The measurement is based on baths, and a cor consists of ten baths or one homer, since ten baths equal one homer.) In addition one sheep is to be supplied from every flock of two hundred from the green pastures of Israel. These are to provide for the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings, to set the people right, declares the Lord God.

Everyone in the country has to make these contributions to the prince in Israel. The prince's role is to provide the burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings for the religious festivals, New Moons, and Sabbaths—in fact for all the regular religious festivals of the people of Israel. He is to provide the sin offerings, grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings to set the people of Israel right.

This is what the Lord God says: On the first day of the first month you are to sacrifice a young bull that has no defects to purify the sanctuary. The priest shall take some of the blood from the sin offering and put it on the doorposts of the Temple, on the four corners of the upper ledge of the altar, and on the gateposts of the inner courtyard. You are also to do this on the seventh day of the month on behalf of anyone who does wrong unintentionally or in ignorance. By doing this you purify the Temple.

You are to keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. This is a religious festival that lasts seven days, during which time bread made without yeast is to be eaten. On that day the prince will provide a bull as a sin offering for himself and for everyone in the country. Every day for the seven days of the festival, he will provide seven bulls and seven rams without defects as a burnt offering to the Lord, together with a male goat for a sin offering. He will also provide an ephah of grain and a hin of olive oil as an offering to accompany each bull and each ram. For the seven days of the festival that begins on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, he is to provide the same number of sin offerings, burnt offerings, grain offerings, and olive oil.

This is what the Lord God says: “The east gate of the inner court is to be kept shut during the six working days, but it shall be opened on the Sabbath and on the day of the New Moon The prince must come through the gateway porch from outside and he will stand by the gatepost, and the priests will sacrifice his burnt offerings and peace offerings. He is to bow in respect at the gate's threshold of the gate and leave, but the gate is not to be shut until evening. The people of Israel will also bow before the Lord at the gateway entrance on Sabbaths and New Moons.

The burnt offering that the prince is to offer to the Lord on the Sabbath day shall be six male lambs and a ram, all without defects. The grain offering to accompany the ram shall be one ephah, and the grain offering with the lambs shall be as much as he chooses, together with a hin of olive oil for every ephah of grain. On the day of the New Moon he is to offer a young bull, six lambs, and a ram. They are all to be without defects. He is also to provide a grain offering of an ephah with the bull, an ephah with the ram, and as much as he chooses with the lambs, together with a hin of olive oil for every ephah of grain. When the prince enters, he is to come in through the gateway porch, and leave the same way.

When the people of Israel gather before the Lord at the regular religious festivals, anyone who enters through the north gate to worship has to leave through the south gate, and anyone who enters through the south gate leave through the north gate. No one is allowed to go back through the same gate through which they entered. Everyone must leave by the opposite gate.

The prince is to enter when the people do; and leave when they leave. At the religious festivals and regular meetings, the grain offering will be an ephah with a bull, an ephah with a ram, and as much as people choose with the lambs, together with a hin of olive oil for every ephah of grain.

When the prince decides to make a freewill offering to the Lord, whether it's a burnt offering or a peace offering, the east gate is to be opened for him. He shall offer his burnt offering or peace offering in the same way he does on the Sabbath. When he leaves, the gate must be closed after him.

Every morning a year-old lamb without defects is to be sacrificed as a daily burnt offering to the Lord. Every morning a grain offering of a sixth of an ephah with a third of a hin of olive oil to moisten the best flour is to be provided as a grain offering to the Lord. This regulation is to be followed forever. Make sure the

lamb, the grain offering, and the olive oil is presented every morning as a regular burnt offering.

This is what the Lord God says: If the prince gives a gift of property to any of his sons to own, it will belong to his descendants. They will be able to inherit the property. However, if he gives a gift of his property to one of his servants, that servant will only own it until the Jubilee Year. Then ownership will return to the prince. His property that he passes on through inheritance belongs only to his sons—it is theirs.

The prince is not to take people's land, driving them off their property. He is to give land to his sons from his own property, so that none of my people shall be evicted from their property."

The man took me through the entrance beside the gate into the north-facing holy rooms that belonged to the priests. He showed me a place at the far western end and told me, "This is where the priests cook guilt offerings and sin offerings, and where they bake the grain offering. This is so that they don't take them to the outer courtyard and carry holiness to the people."

He took me into the outer courtyard and led me to each of its four corners. I saw a separate courtyard in each corner. There were separate walled courtyards in the four corners of the outer courtyard. They each measured forty cubits by thirty cubits—they were all the same size. Each of the four courts had a stone ledge with ovens built into the base of the walls on every side.

He told me, "These are the kitchens where those who serve in the Temple will cook the people's sacrificial offerings."

The man took me back to the Temple entrance. I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the Temple and flowing east (because the Temple faced east). The water was coming from under the south side of the Temple and ran south of the altar.

Then he took me out through the north gate and led me around the outside to the outer gate that faced east. I saw water was trickling out from the south side of the gate.

The man walked east holding a measuring line He measured a thousand cubits and led me through the water which came up to my ankles.

He measured another thousand cubits and led me through water which came up to my knees.

He measured another thousand cubits and led me through water that came up to my waist.

He measured another thousand cubits, but this was a river I couldn't cross. The water had risen so high you could swim in it. It was a river that couldn't be crossed on foot.

"Son of man, have you observed all this?" he asked. Then he took me back to the riverbank.

When I got there, I saw a large number of trees on both sides of the river. He told me, "This water flows out into the land to the east and into the Arabah. When it arrives at the Dead Sea, it turns the saltwater fresh. There will be many animals and fish wherever the river flows. Because the river turns the saltwater fresh wherever it flows, everything will be able to live there.

Fishermen will stand on the shore of the Dead Sea. They will be able to spread their nets from En-gedi to En-eglaim and catch many kinds of fish. There will be plenty of fish just like the Mediterranean Sea. However, the marshes and swampy areas won't become fresh; they will remain salty.

All types of fruit trees will grow on both sides of the river. Their leaves won't wither, and they won't fail to produce fruit. They will produce fruit every month, because the river flowing from the sanctuary comes to water them. Their fruit will be eaten as food and their leaves will be used for healing."

This is what the Lord God says: "These are the boundaries you are to use when allocating ownership of the land to the twelve tribes of Israel (Joseph is to receive two allocations.) You are to allocate the land to them equally. I held up my hand and made a solemn promise to give it to your forefathers, so this land will come to you to own and to pass on as an inheritance.

These shall be the country's boundaries:

On the northern side it runs from the Mediterranean Sea along the Hethlon road and through Lebo-hamath to Zedad; then on to Berothah, and Sibraim on the border between Damascus and Hamath, and all the way to Hazer-hatticon, on the border of Hauran. So the border is from the Mediterranean Sea to Hazar-enan, along the northern border with Damascus, with the border of Hamath to the north. This is the northern boundary.

The eastern boundary runs from Hauran and Damascus, down along the Jordan between Gilead and the land of Israel, to the Dead Sea and on to Tamar. This is the eastern boundary.

The southern boundary runs from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, then along the Wadi of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This is the southern boundary.

The Mediterranean Sea is the western boundary all the way up to a location opposite Lebo-hamath. This is the western boundary.

You are to allocate this land for you to own according to the tribes of Israel. You are to allocate land to own and to pass on as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the foreigners who live among you who have children. You shall treat them in the same way as Israelites born in the country. They are to be given a land allocation to own among the Israelite tribes in the same way as you. Foreigners are to be allocated land to own among the tribe where they live, declares the Lord God."

This is a list of the allocations according to the names of the tribes. At the northern frontier, Dan's allocation borders the Hethlon road to Lebo-hamath and to Hazar-enan on the border of Damascus with Hamath to the north, and extends from the eastern boundary of the country to that on the west.

Asher's allocation borders that of Dan from east to west.

Naphtali's allocation borders that of Asher from east to west.

Manasseh's allocation borders that of Naphtali from east to west.

Ephraim's allocation borders that of Manasseh from east to west.

Reuben's allocation borders that of Ephraim from east to west.

Judah's allocation borders that of Reuben from east to west.

Adjacent to Judah's allocation, from east to west, is the special area you are to make provision for. It is to be 25,000 cubits wide, and extend the same length as a tribal allocation from east to west. The sanctuary will be in the middle of it.

The special allocation you make is for the Lord and shall be 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits.

This is to be the holy allocation for the priests. It will be 25,000 cubits long on the north and south sides, and 10,000 cubits wide on the west and east sides. The sanctuary will be in the middle of it. It is for the holy priests, descendants of Zadok, who stayed faithful and did not abandon me when the Israelites abandoned me. It will be a special part of the land provided for them, a most holy allocation next to that of the Levites.

The Levites shall have an area 25,000 cubits by 10,000 cubits adjacent to the allocation of the priests. Its entire length will be 25,000 cubits, and its width 10,000 cubits. They are not permitted to sell, exchange, or transfer any of it, for it is the best part of the land, and is holy to the Lord.

The remainder, 5,000 cubits by 25,000 cubits, is for ordinary use by the city for houses and pastureland. The city will be in the middle of it, and this will be its measurements: 4,500 cubits on all sides, north, south, east, and west. The city's pastureland will surround it for 250 cubits on all sides, north, south, east, and west.

What remains of the land bordering the holy allocation and running beside it will be 10,000 cubits on both the east side and the west side. The crops it produces will provide food for those who work in the city. These workers who farm the land will be from all the Israelite tribes.

The whole allocation will be a square, 25,000 cubits by 25,000 cubits. You are to make provision for the holy allocation, together with the area for the city.

The land that remains on both sides of the holy allocation and of the area for the city will belong to the prince. This land will be next to the tribal allocations and extend east from the 25,000 cubits of the holy section to the eastern border, on the other side west from the 25,000 cubits to the western border. In the middle of them will be the holy section and the Temple sanctuary.

The Levites area and the city's area will lie in the middle of the prince's allocation, and will lie between the borders of the allocations of Judah and Benjamin.

These are the allocations for the rest of the tribes:

Benjamin's allocation extends from the eastern boundary of the country to that on the west.

Simeon's allocation borders that of Benjamin from east to west.

Issachar's allocation borders that of Simeon from east to west.

Zebulun's allocation borders that of Issachar from east to west.

Gad's allocation borders that of Zebulun from east to west.

The southern border of Gad's allocation will be from Tamar to the waters of Meribath-kadesh, then along the Wadi of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This is the land you are to allocate for the tribes of Israel to own and pass on as an inheritance. These are their assigned allocations, declares the Lord God.

These are to be the city exits, starting on the north side, which is 4,500 cubits long. The city gates are to be named after the tribes of Israel.

There will be three gates on the north side: the gates of Reuben, Judah, and Levi.

There will be three gates on the east side (also 4,500 cubits long): the gates of Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan.

There will be three gates on the south side (also 4,500 cubits long): the gates of Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun.

There will be three gates on the west side (also 4,500 cubits long): the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali.

The distance around the outside of the city will be 18,000 cubits. From that day on the name of the city will be “The Lord Is There.”

Daniel

Book of Daniel

During the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem and surrounded it. The Lord allowed him to defeat King Jehoiakim, and also to remove some of the objects used in the Temple of God. He took them back to Babylon, to the house of his god, placing them in the treasury of his god.

Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to take charge of some of the captured Israelites from the royal and noble families. “They are to be young men without any physical defect who are good-looking,” he said. “They must be well-educated, quick to learn, have good insight, and be well able to serve in the king's palace and be taught the literature and language of Babylon.” The king also provided them with a daily allowance of the same kind of rich food and wine he was served. At the end of their three years of education they would enter the king's service.

Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, from the tribe of Judah. The chief eunuch gave them new names: Daniel he called Belteshazzar, Hananiah he called Shadrach, Mishael he called Meshach, and Azariah he called Abednego.

However, Daniel made up his mind not to make himself impure by eating the king's rich food and wine. He asked the chief eunuch to allow him not to make himself impure. God had helped Daniel to be viewed with kindness and sympathy by the chief eunuch.

But the chief eunuch told Daniel, “I'm afraid of what my lord the king would do to me. He's the one who decided what you should eat and drink. What if he were to see you looking pale and sickly compared to the other young men of your age. Because of you the king would have my head!”

Daniel then spoke with the guard that the chief eunuch had put in charge of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. “Please put us, your servants, to the test and just give us vegetables to eat and water to drink for ten days,” Daniel told him. “After that, compare us with those young men who ate the king's rich food. Then decide on the basis of what you see.” The guard agreed to the proposal they made and tested them for ten days.

When the ten days were up they looked healthier and better fed than all the young men who had eaten the king's rich food. After that the guard didn't give them the rich food and wine, just vegetables.

God gave these four young men the ability to learn and understand in all areas of literature and knowledge, while Daniel was also given the gift of interpreting all kinds of visions and dreams.

When their time of education ordered by the king was over, the chief eunuch brought all the young men before King Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them and none could compare with Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. So they entered the king's service. Whatever subject the king asked them about, everything that required wisdom of understanding, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom. Daniel remained in this position until the first year of King Cyrus' reign.

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign the king had dreams that upset him so much that he found it difficult to sleep. So the king summoned the magicians, enchanters, sorcerers, and astrologers to tell him what he had dreamed. They came in and stood before him. “I've had a dream that has really upset me,” he told them. “I need to know what it means.”

The astrologers answered the king in Aramaic, “May Your Majesty the king live forever! Tell us your dream and we your servants will interpret it for you.”

“I can't recall it,” the king told the astrologers. “If you can't reveal the dream to me, and its meaning, you will be cut into pieces and your houses will be totally destroyed! But if you can tell me the dream and its meaning you will receive from me gifts, rewards, and great honor. So tell me the dream and what it means!”

Again they said the same thing: “If Your Majesty the king would tell us his servants the dream, we will explain what it means.”

“It's obvious to me that you're just trying to buy time!” said the king. “You can see that I can't remember the dream. If you can't reveal the dream to me, you will all receive the same punishment! You have conspired against me, telling me lies, hoping things will change. So tell me what my dream was and then I'll know that you can explain what it means.”

The astrologers answered the king, “No one on earth could tell the king what he dreamed! Never before has a king, however great and powerful, demanded this of any magician, enchanter, or astrologer! What Your Majesty is asking is impossible! No one can tell Your Majesty what you dreamed, except the gods, and they do not live among us mortals.”

This made the king extremely angry, and he ordered all the wise men of Babylon executed. The decree was issued. The wise men were about to be executed, and the king's men went looking for Daniel and his friends.

Daniel approached Arioch, the commander of the imperial guard, whom the king had put in charge of the order to execute all the wise men of Babylon. Wisely and tactfully Daniel asked him, “Why would the king issue such a harsh decree?” So Arioch explained to Daniel what had happened. Daniel immediately went to see the king and asked for more time to explain the dream and its meaning to him.

Then Daniel went home and shared with Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah what was going on. He told them to pray to the God of heaven, asking for help regarding this mystery, so that he and his friends would not be killed along with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.

That night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven:

“Praise the wonderful nature of God forever and ever, for he is wise and powerful. He is in charge of time and history. He removes kings, and he sets kings in place. He gives wisdom to make people wise; he

gives knowledge to people so they can understand. He reveals deep, mysterious things. He knows what lies in darkness, and light lives in his presence. I give thanks and praise to you, God of my fathers, for you have given me wisdom and power. Now you have revealed to me what we asked you; you have revealed to us the king's dream."

So Daniel went to Arioch whom the king had ordered to execute the wise men of Babylon and told him, "Don't execute the wise men of Babylon! Take me to see the king and I will explain to him his dream."

Arioch immediately took Daniel to the king and told him, "I've found one of the captives from Judah who can tell Your Majesty what your dream means."

The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you really able to tell me what my dream was, and what it means?"

"No wise men or enchanters or magicians or diviners can explain the mystery Your Majesty wants to know," Daniel replied. "But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has revealed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the last days. Your dream and the visions that came to your mind as you were lying in bed were these. As Your Majesty lay there, your thoughts turned to the future, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what would take place. It's not because I have any more wisdom than anyone else that this mystery has been revealed to me, but to explain to Your Majesty what you were thinking about so you could understand.

Your Majesty, as you looked, there before you stood a great statue. The statue standing in front of you was huge, and blazingly bright. It looked terrifying! The head of the statue was gold, the chest and arms were silver, its middle and thighs were bronze, its legs were iron, and its feet were iron and baked clay. While you were watching, a stone was quarried, but not by human hands. It struck the iron and clay feet of the statue and smashed them to pieces. Then the rest of the statue—the bronze, the silver, and the gold—broke into pieces like the iron and clay. The wind blew them all away like chaff from the summer threshing floor, so that no trace of them could be found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

This was the dream, and now we will explain what it means to the king. Your Majesty, you are the king of kings to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, and power, strength, and glory. He gave you control over all peoples, as well as the wild animals and birds. He made you ruler of all of them. You are the head of gold.

But after you another kingdom will rise that is inferior to your kingdom and will replace yours. After that a third kingdom that is bronze will rise and rule over the whole world. The fourth kingdom will be strong as iron and in the same way that iron crushes and smashes everything—it will crush and smash all others. You saw the feet and toes made from iron and baked clay, and this indicates it will be a divided kingdom. It will have some of the strength of iron but mixed with clay. As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, the kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. In the same way that you saw the iron mixed with ordinary clay, so the people will mix but they will not stick together just as iron and clay do not mix.

During the time of these kings the God of heaven will set up an eternal kingdom that will never be destroyed or taken over by others. It will crush all these kingdoms, bringing them to an end, and it will last forever. In the same way that you saw the stone quarried from the mountain, but not by human hands, it will crush the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold. The great God has revealed to Your Majesty what is to come. The dream is true, and the explanation is trustworthy."

Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell down before Daniel and worshiped him, and ordered offerings of grain and incense to be made to him. The king said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is the God of gods, the Lord of kings, the revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery."

Then the king promoted Daniel to a high position and gave him many expensive gifts, making him governor over the whole province of Babylon and head of all the wise men of Babylon. At Daniel's request, the king placed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in charge of the province of Babylon, and Daniel remained at the king's court.

King Nebuchadnezzar had a gold statue made that was sixty cubits tall and six cubits wide. He had it set up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Then he summoned the provincial governors, prefects, local governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the statue he had set up. They all came to the dedication of the statue Nebuchadnezzar had set up and stood in front of it.

Then a herald announced in a loud voice, "People of all nations and languages, pay attention to the king's command! As soon as you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, trigon, harp, pipes, and all kinds of musical instruments, you must fall to the ground and worship the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. Anyone who doesn't immediately fall down and worship will be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire."

So when all the people heard the sound of the musical instruments they all fell down—the people of all nations and languages worshiped the gold statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Right then some of the astrologers came forward and made accusations against the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "May Your Majesty the king live forever! Your Majesty has decreed that everyone who hears the sound of the musical instruments shall fall down and worship the gold statue, and that anyone who does not shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. But there are some Jews that you placed in charge of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—who pay no attention to Your Majesty's decree. They do not serve your gods and will not worship the gold statue you set up."

This made Nebuchadnezzar absolutely furious. "Bring me Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego!" he demanded. So they were brought before the king. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are you deliberately refusing to serve my gods and worship the gold

statue I set up?" asked the king. "Are you ready now to fall down and worship the statue I had made when you hear the sound of the musical instruments? If you don't, you will be immediately thrown into the furnace of blazing fire, and there's no god who can save you from my power!"

"King Nebuchadnezzar, we don't need to defend ourselves before you over this," Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied. "If our God whom we serve so wishes, he is able to rescue us from the furnace of blazing fire. He will save us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he does not, Your Majesty needs to know that we would never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

This made Nebuchadnezzar so angry with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face twisted in rage. "Make the furnace seven times hotter than normal!" he ordered.

Then he commanded some of his strongest soldiers, "Tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them into the furnace of blazing fire!"

So they were tied up, fully dressed in their coats, trousers, turbans, and other clothes, and thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Because the king's command was so harsh in making the furnace so extremely hot, the flames killed the soldiers who threw them in. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, still tied up, fell into the furnace of blazing fire.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar suddenly jumped up in amazement. "Didn't we throw three men tied up into the furnace?" he asked his advisors. "Yes, that's right, Your Majesty," they replied. "Look!" he cried out. "How is it that I can see four men, not tied up, walking around in the fire and not being burned? And the fourth one looks like a god!"

Nebuchadnezzar went towards the door of the furnace of blazing fire. "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" he shouted. So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fire.

The provincial governors, prefects, local governors, and the king's advisors gathered around them and saw that the fire had not harmed them. Their hair wasn't singed, their clothes weren't scorched—there wasn't even the smell of smoke!

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel and he rescued his servants who trusted in him! They disobeyed my royal command, putting their lives on the line, and refused to worship any other gods except their God. Consequently I am issuing a decree that if anyone of any nation or language speaks disrespectfully about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego they will be torn to pieces and their houses will be destroyed. There is no other God who is able to save like this!" Then Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, giving them even greater responsibilities in the province of Babylon.

King Nebuchadnezzar, to people of every nation and language in the whole world: I wish you well! It is my pleasure to share with you an account of the signs and wonders the Most High God has done for me.

His signs are incredible. His wonders are amazing! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom, and his rule will last for all generations!

I, Nebuchadnezzar, was doing well at home, living happily in my palace. But then one night I had a dream that really scared me—I saw visions that terrified me while I lay in my bed. So I ordered all the wise men of Babylon brought before me to explain the dream to me. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners came in I told them the dream, but they couldn't explain to me what it meant. In the end Daniel came before me and I told him the dream. (He is also called Belteshazzar after my god, and he has the spirit of the holy gods in him.)

"Belteshazzar, chief of magicians," I said, "I certainly know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you and that no mystery is difficult for you to explain. So tell me about what I saw in my dream and explain what it means.

As I lay in bed dreaming, I saw a tree in the middle of the earth—a really large tree. It grew strong and tall, reaching high into the sky so it could be seen by everyone in the whole world. Its leaves were beautiful, and it was full of fruit for all to eat. Wild animals rested in its shade, and birds nested in its branches. It fed all living creatures.

As I went on dreaming, lying on my bed, I saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven. He cried out in a loud voice, 'Cut down the tree and chop off its branches! Shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit! Drive the animals away from its shade, and scare off the birds from its branches. But leave the stump and its roots in the ground, and bind it with iron and bronze, surrounded by the new grass of the field. Let him become soaked with the dew of heaven, and let him live with the animals outside in the undergrowth. Let his mind become like that of an animal. Let him be like this for seven times. This is the decree conveyed by the watchers, the verdict declared by the holy ones in order that everyone alive may know that the Most High rules over human kingdoms. He gives them to anyone he chooses—he puts the most humble individuals in charge.'

This is what I, King Nebuchadnezzar, saw in my dream. Now it's up to you, Belteshazzar, to give me the explanation as you have before. None of the wise men in my kingdom could explain it to me. But you can, because the spirit of the holy gods is in you."

When Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) heard this, he was upset for a while, disturbed as he thought about it. The king told him, "Belteshazzar, don't be worried about the dream and what it means."

"My lord, I only wish this dream was for those who hate you and the explanation for your enemies," Daniel replied. "The tree you saw was growing strong and tall, reaching high into the sky so it could be seen by everyone in the whole world. Its leaves were beautiful, and it was full of fruit for all to eat. Wild animals lived under its shade, and birds nested in its branches. This is you, Your Majesty. You have grown strong, your power has become so great that it has reached high into the sky, and your rule extends to the ends of the earth.

Then Your Majesty saw a watcher, a holy one, coming down from heaven who said, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump and its roots in the ground, and bind it with iron and bronze, surrounded by the new grass of the field. Let him become soaked with the dew of heaven and let him live with the animals outside in the undergrowth. Let his mind become like that of an animal. Let him be like this for seven times.’

This is what it means, Your Majesty, and what the Most High has decreed will happen to my lord the king. You will be driven away from human society and you will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the cattle, and you will be soaked with the dew of heaven. You will be like this for seven times until you acknowledge that the Most High rules over human kingdoms, and that he gives them to those he chooses. However, as it was decreed, the stump and its roots were to be left in the ground. Your kingdom will be restored to you when you acknowledge that Heaven rules.

So, Your Majesty, please take my advice. Stop sinning and do what's right. End your iniquities and be merciful to the oppressed. Maybe then things will continue to go well for you.”

(However, all this did happen to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later he was walking on the roof of the royal palace in Babylon. He said, “I was the one who built this great city of Babylon! By my own great power I built it as my royal residence for my majestic glory!”

The words were still on the king's lips when a voice came from heaven, “King Nebuchadnezzar, this is what is decreed concerning you: the kingdom has been taken away from you. You will be driven away from human society and you will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the cattle, and you will become soaked with the dew of heaven. You will be like this for seven times until you acknowledge that the Most High rules over human kingdoms, and that he gives them to whoever he chooses.”

Immediately the decree was fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar was driven away from human society. He ate grass like the cattle, and his body was soaked with the dew of heaven. His hair grew matted like a vulture, and his nails like bird claws.)

Once the time had passed, I, Nebuchadnezzar, looked up to heaven and my sanity returned to me. I blessed and praised the Most High and worshiped the One who lives forever. His rule is an eternal rule, and his kingdom lasts for all generations. Everyone who lives on earth is as nothing compared to him. He does whatever he chooses among the heavenly host and among those who live on earth. No one can hold him back from what he does, or ask him, “What are you doing?”

When my sanity returned, then my kingdom, majesty, and splendor also returned to me. My advisors and nobles came looking for me, and I was restored as ruler over my kingdom, even greater than before.

So now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, honor, and glorify the King of Heaven, for everything he does is right, and his ways are true. He is able to humble those who are proud.

King Belshazzar held a great feast for one thousand of his nobles, and he was drinking wine with them. Under the wine's influence Belshazzar ordered his servants to bring in the cups and bowls of gold and silver his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the Temple in Jerusalem so that he and his nobles, his wives and concubines, could drink from them. So they brought in the gold cups and bowls that had been taken from the Temple of God in Jerusalem. The king and his nobles, his wives and concubines, drank from them. As they drank wine they praised their gods—idols made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

Immediately the fingers of a human hand appeared, writing on the plaster wall of the king's palace, opposite the lampstand. The king watched the hand as it wrote. His face turned pale, and he became very frightened. His legs gave way and his knees knocked together.

The king shouted, “Bring in the enchanters and astrologers and diviners!” He told these wise men of Babylon, “Anyone who can read this writing and explain it to me will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

However, after all the king's wise men had come in, they could not read the writing or explain to him what it meant. This made King Belshazzar even more frightened and his face grew even paler. His nobles also were in panic.

When the queen mother heard the noise the king and the nobles were making she went to the banquet hall. She said to Belshazzar, “May Your Majesty the king live forever! Don't be frightened! Don't look so pale! There's a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In your father's time he was found to have understanding and insight, and wisdom like that of the gods. Your Majesty's father, King Nebuchadnezzar put him in charge of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners. Your father did this because Daniel (called Belteshazzar by the king) was found to have an excellent mind, full of understanding and insight, and also able to interpret dreams, explain mysteries, and solve difficult problems. Call Daniel in and let him explain what this means to you.”

So Daniel was brought in before the king. The king asked him, “Are you Daniel, one of the prisoners my father the king brought from Judah? I have heard about you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you were found to have understanding, insight, and great wisdom. Just now the wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and explain it to me, but they weren't able to do so—they couldn't tell me what it meant. However, I'm told that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and explain it to me, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will become the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”

Daniel answered the king, “Keep your gifts and give your rewards to another. Even so I will read the writing to Your Majesty and explain to you what it means.

Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar this kingdom, and power, glory, and majesty. Because of the power he gave him, people of every nation and language trembled with fear before him. Those he wished to kill were killed, and those he wished to live were allowed to live. Those he wanted to honor were honored, and those he wanted to humble were humbled. But when he became arrogant and hard-hearted, acting proudly, he was removed from his royal throne and his glory was taken away from him. He was driven away from human society and his mind became like that of an animal. He lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like cattle, and he was soaked with the dew of heaven until he acknowledged that the Most High rules over human kingdoms, and that he gives them to anyone he chooses.

But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, even though you knew all this. You have arrogantly defied the Lord of heaven and you had the cups and bowls of his Temple brought to you. You and your nobles, your wives and concubines, drank wine from them as you praised gods made of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone that can't see or hear or know anything. But you have not honored God who holds in his hand your very breath and everything you do. That's why he sent the hand to write this message.

What was written on the wall was this: 'Number, number, weigh, divide.' Here is the meaning: Number—God has numbered your reign and brought it to an end. Weighed—you have been weighed on the balances and you were found lacking. Divided—your kingdom has been divided and given to the Medes and the Persians."

Then Belshazzar gave the order and Daniel was clothed in purple and had a gold chain placed around his neck. He was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom. On that very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was killed and Darius the Mede was given the kingdom at the age of sixty-two.

Darius decided it would be good to place the kingdom under the control of one hundred and twenty provincial governors. Three chief ministers were placed over them to look after the king's interests. Daniel was one of the three. Soon Daniel was shown to be a far better administrator than the other chief ministers and provincial governors. Because of his exceptional ability, the king planned to put him in charge of the whole kingdom.

As a result the other chief ministers and provincial governors tried to find a pretext against Daniel as to the way he ran the kingdom. But they couldn't find any cause for complaint or any corruption, for he was trustworthy. They could not discover any evidence that Daniel was negligent or corrupt. So they said to themselves, "We won't find any pretext to attack Daniel unless we use his observance of his God's laws against him."

So these chief ministers and provincial governors went together to see the king. "May Your Majesty King Darius live forever!" they said. "We have all agreed —chief ministers, prefects, provincial governors, counselors, and local governors—that Your Majesty should issue a decree, legally enforced, that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den. Now, Your Majesty, if you will sign the decree and have it issued so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians that cannot be revoked." So Darius signed the decree into law.

When Daniel found out that the decree had been signed he went home to his upstairs room where he would pray three times a day, with the windows open facing Jerusalem. There he kneeled down, praying and thanking his God as he always did. Then the men who had plotted against Daniel went together and found him praying to his God and asking for help. They went to the king right away and asked him about the decree. "Didn't Your Majesty sign a decree that for the next thirty days anyone who prays to any god or human being except you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den?"

"I certainly did!" the king replied. "The decree stands. According to the law of the Medes and the Persians it cannot be revoked."

Then they told the king, "Daniel, one of those captives from Judah, pays no attention to Your Majesty or to the decree you signed and prays three times a day."

When the king heard this, he was very upset and tried to think of how to save Daniel. He worked hard until sundown trying to rescue him. Then the men returned together and said to the king, "You know, Your Majesty, that according to the law of the Medes and the Persians no decree or statute can be changed."

Eventually the king gave the order and Daniel was taken and thrown into the lions' den. The king told him, "May the God you so loyally serve save you!"

A stone was brought and placed over the entrance to the den and the king sealed it with his own personal seal and those of his nobles so that no one could interfere with what was happening to Daniel. Then the king went back to his palace. He ate nothing at all that night and refused any kind of entertainment. He couldn't sleep a wink.

At dawn, as soon as it was light, the king got up and rushed to the lions' den. As he approached the den, he called out anxiously to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God whom you honor so faithfully, was your God able to save you from the lions?"

Daniel replied, "May Your Majesty the king live forever! My God sent his angel to shut the lions' mouths. They have not hurt me because I was found innocent in his sight. In addition, I have never done you any wrong, Your Majesty."

The king was extremely pleased and ordered Daniel brought up from the den. Daniel was lifted up from the den and he was found to have no injuries at all because he had trusted in his God.

Then the king ordered the men who had accused Daniel to be brought and they were thrown into the lions' den along with their wives and children. Before they even reached the floor of the den the lions attacked them, ripping them to pieces.

Then Darius wrote to all the people of the world, the different nations and languages, saying, "I wish you well! I decree that throughout my entire kingdom everyone should respect and honor the God of Daniel, for he is the living God. He is everlasting and his king-

dom will never be destroyed. His reign will never end. He is the one who rescues and saves; he does miracles and wonders in the heavens and on earth. He saved Daniel from death in the lions' den."

Daniel experienced good success during the reigns of Darius and Cyrus the Persian.

In the first year of Belshazzar's reign as king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream in which visions passed through his mind as he lay in bed. Afterwards he wrote down the dream, describing it in summary form.

In my vision that I had that night I saw a tremendous storm, blowing from every direction, stirring up a great sea. Four very large beasts were coming up from the sea, every one of them different.

The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. As I watched, its wings were torn off and it was pulled upright so it was standing with its hind legs on the ground and it was given the mind of a human being.

A second beast appeared, looking like a bear, hunched up on one side and holding three ribs in its mouth with its teeth. It was told, "Get up and eat all the flesh you can."

After this I saw a third beast. It looked like a leopard with four wings like those of a bird on its back, and it had four heads. It was given power to impose its rule.

Then in my vision that I had that night a fourth beast appeared. It was terrifying, frightening, and extremely powerful, with great iron teeth. It tore apart and ate up its victims, and then trampled on what was left. This beast was different from those that came before it, and it had ten horns.

As I was wondering about the horns, another horn, a little one, came up between them and three of the earlier horns were pulled out before it. It had human-looking eyes and a mouth that made arrogant boasts.

While I was watching, thrones were set up and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothes were white as snow and his hair looked like the purest wool. His throne blazed like flames; its wheels like burning fire. A stream of fire poured out, flowing from before him. A thousand thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court sat to begin its judgment, and the books were opened.

I was watching because of the boasts the little horn was making. I went on watching until that beast was killed and its body destroyed by burning. The rest of the beasts were allowed to go on living for a season and a time, but their power to rule had been taken away.

As I continued watching in my vision that I had that night I saw one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory, and the power to rule over all people, the different nations and languages, so they would all worship him. His rule is everlasting—it will never cease, and his kingdom will never be destroyed.

I, Daniel, was deeply disturbed—the visions that had passed through my mind frightened me. I went up to one of the attendants and asked him to explain what all this meant. He said he would explain it so I could understand. "These four large beasts symbolize four kingdoms that will rise to power on the earth. But those dedicated to the Most High will eventually receive the kingdom. They will possess the kingdom forever, for ever and ever."

Then I wanted to know what the fourth beast stood for—the one that was different from the rest and so terrifying. It had iron teeth and bronze claws, and it tore apart and ate up its victims, trampling on what was left. I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head, and the other one that came up later, causing three of the other horns to fall. This horn looked more impressive than the others and had eyes and a mouth that made arrogant boasts. I watched as this horn attacked God's dedicated people and was conquering them, until the Ancient of Days came and gave judgment in favor of the dedicated people of the Most High, and at that time they took possession of the kingdom.

Then he told me, "The fourth beast stands for the fourth kingdom to rule the earth. It will be different from all the rest of the kingdoms. The beast will eat up the whole world, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings that will come to power from this kingdom. The one who comes later is different from them, and will defeat three of them. He will speak words of defiance against the Most High and oppress the dedicated people of the Most High, and attempt to change times and laws, and they will be placed under his power for a time, two times, and half a time.

Then the court will execute judgment and take away his power, destroying it forever. Then the right to rule, the power, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be given to those dedicated to the Most High. His kingdom will last forever, and all who rule will serve and obey him."

This is the end of the summary. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts really disturbed me and my face turned pale, but I kept it all to myself.

In the third year of King Belshazzar's reign I, Daniel, saw another vision after the one I had seen previously. In my vision I looked around and saw I was in the castle at Susa in the province of Elam. In the vision I was beside the River Ulai. I looked around and saw a ram standing beside the river. It had two long horns, one longer than the other, even though the longer one had grown last. I watched the ram charging west, north, and south. No animal could stand up to it—nor was there any chance of rescue from its power. It did whatever it wanted and grew powerful.

As I was thinking about what I'd seen, a male goat came in from the west, racing in across the surface of the earth so fast it didn't touch the ground. It had a large, prominent horn between its eyes. It approached the ram with the two horns which I had seen standing beside the river, rushing in to attack in a furious rage. I watched as the goat charged furiously at the ram, hitting it and breaking off its two horns. The ram did not have the strength to resist the goat's attack. The goat threw the ram to the ground, trampling on it, and there was no possibility of rescuing it from the goat's power.

The goat grew very powerful, but at the height of its power its large horn was broken off. In its place four large horns came up, pointing to the four winds of heaven. A little horn came up from one of them, and grew extremely powerful to the south and to the east and to the Beautiful Land. It grew in power until

it reached the heavenly army, throwing some of them and some of the stars down to the earth and trampled on them. It even tried to make itself as great as the Prince of the heavenly army—it removed the continual service, and the place of his sanctuary was destroyed. An army of people and the continual service were handed over to it because of rebellion, and it overthrew truth, and it was successful in everything it did.

Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one asked the one who was speaking, “How long is this vision for—the removal of the continual service, the rebellion that causes devastation, the handing over of the sanctuary and the army of people to be trampled down?” He replied, “For two thousand three hundred evenings and mornings, then the sanctuary will be cleansed.”

As I, Daniel, tried to work out what this vision meant suddenly I saw someone who looked like a man standing in front of me. I also heard a human voice calling from the River Ulai, “Gabriel, explain to this man the meaning of the vision.” As he approached me, I was terrified and fell facedown before him. “Son of man,” he told me, “You need to understand that this vision refers to the time of the end.”

As he spoke to me I lost consciousness as I laid facedown on the ground. But he took hold of me and helped me to my feet. He told me, “Pay attention! I'm going to explain to you what's going to happen during the time of anger, which refers to the appointed time of the end. The ram with two horns that you saw symbolizes the kings of Media and Persia. The male goat is the kingdom of Greece, and the large horn between its eyes is its first king. The four horns that came up in place of the large horn that was broken represent the four kingdoms that arose from that nation, but not as powerful as the first.

When those kingdoms come to an end, when their sins have reached their fullest extent, a ferocious and treacherous kingdom will rise to power. It will become very powerful but not by its own power. It will be terribly destructive, and will succeed in everything it does. It will destroy great leaders and God's dedicated people. Through its deviousness, its lies will be convincing and successful. It shows its arrogance both in thought and action, destroying those who thought they were perfectly safe. It even fights in opposition against the Prince of princes, but it will be defeated, though not by any human power.

The vision about the evenings and mornings that has been explained to you is true, but for now seal up this vision because it refers to the distant future.”

After this, I, Daniel, became exhausted, and I was sick for days. Then I got up and went back to working for the king, but I was devastated at what I'd seen in vision and I couldn't understand it.

It was the first year of Darius the Mede, son of Ahasuerus, after he had become king of the Babylonians. During the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures as given to the prophet Jeremiah that the time of seventy years for Jerusalem to lie desolate would soon be fulfilled. So I turned to the Lord God in prayer. I fasted and wore sackcloth and ashes, and I pleaded with him in prayer to act.

I prayed to the Lord my God, and confessed, saying, “Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always keep your promises and show your trustworthy love to those who love you and keep your commandments. But we have sinned, we have done wrong. We have acted wickedly, we have rebelled against you. We have turned away from your commandments and your laws. We have not paid attention to your servants the prophets who spoke in your name to our kings and leaders and forefathers, and to everybody in the country.

Lord, you always do what is right, but we continue to be ashamed to this very day—we the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those nearby and those far away, those of every country where you have driven them because of their unfaithfulness to you. Public shame is ours Lord, and on our kings and princes and forefathers, because we have sinned against you. Yet you, the Lord our God, are compassionate and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against you. We have not obeyed what you, the Lord God, have told us. We have not followed your law that you gave us through your servants the prophets. The whole of Israel has broken your law and turned away from you, not listening to what you had to say. That's why the condemnation that comes from our broken promise has been poured out on us—because of our sin, as made clear in the Law of Moses, the servant of the Lord.

You have carried out what you warned us about, against us and against our rulers—such a terrible punishment brought upon Jerusalem, the worst that has ever happened in the whole world. Just as the Law of Moses said, all this punishment has fallen on us, but we still have not asked you, the Lord our God, to be favorable to us, turning away from our sins and paying attention to your truth. You were ready to punish us, and you were right to do everything you have done, for we didn't listen to you.

You, our Lord God, by your great power brought us out of Egypt, making a name for yourself that lasts even until now. But we have sinned, we have done wicked things. So Lord, because you are so good, please turn away from your anger and fury against Jerusalem, your holy mountain. Because of our sins and those of our forefathers, Jerusalem and your people are mocked by all our neighbors. Now, our Lord, please listen to the prayer and pleading of your servant, and for your own sake look kindly on your abandoned sanctuary. Please listen carefully and open your eyes and see the terrible state we are in, and the city that bears your name. We're not making these requests to you for this because of our goodness, but because of your great mercy. Lord, please listen! Lord, please forgive! Please pay attention and do something! For your own sake, my God, don't delay, for your city and your people are identified by your name.”

I continued speaking, praying and confessing my sins and those of my people Israel, pleading before the Lord my God on behalf of Jerusalem, his holy mountain. While I was still praying, Gabriel, whom I'd seen previously when I'd had the vision, came flying rapidly towards me at the time of the evening sacrifice. He gave me the following explanation, saying, “Daniel,

I've come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you started praying, the answer was given, and I have come to explain it to you because God loves you very much. So please listen to the explanation and understand the meaning of the vision.

Seventy weeks have been allotted to your people and your holy city to deal with the rebellion, to put an end to sin, to forgive wrongdoing, to bring in everlasting goodness, to confirm the vision and the prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. You need to know and understand that from the time the command is given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, until the Messiah, seven weeks plus sixty-two weeks will elapse. It will be built with streets and defenses, in spite of the difficult times.

After sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be put to death, and will be brought to nothing. A ruler will come to power whose army will destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end will come like a flood. War and devastation will continue until that period of time is completed. He will confirm the agreement with many people for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put an end to sacrifices and offerings. The idolatry that causes devastation will be supported until the end when the same fate is poured out on the one who devastates."

In the third year of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia, a message was revealed to Daniel (also called Belteshazzar). The message was certain and concerned a great conflict. He understood the message and gained understanding of the vision.

When this happened, I, Daniel, had been in mourning for three full weeks. I ate no fine food. No meat or wine passed my lips. I used no perfumed oils until those three weeks were over.

On the twenty-fourth day of the first month I was standing on the bank of the great River Tigris. I looked around and saw a man dressed in linen, and around his waist was a belt of pure gold. His body shone like a jewel; his face was as bright as lightning; his eyes were like blazing torches; his arms and legs gleamed like polished bronze; and his voice sounded like the roar of a crowd.

I, Daniel, was the only one to see this vision—the others with me did not see the vision, but they suddenly felt very frightened and ran away to hide themselves. I was left alone to see this wonderful vision. My strength drained away, and my face turned pale as death. I didn't have an ounce of strength left. I heard him speaking, and when I heard his voice I lost consciousness and I lay facedown on the ground. Then a hand touched me and lifted me onto my hands and knees. He said to me, "Daniel, God loves you very much. Pay attention to what I'm telling you. Stand up, because I have been sent to you." When he told me this I stood up, trembling.

"Don't be afraid, Daniel," he said. "From the first day you concentrated on trying to understand this, and to humble yourself before God, your prayer was heard, and I have come to answer you. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia opposed me for twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was being detained there by the kings of Persia. Now I've come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the last days, for the vision is about a time in the future."

As he told me this I remained there with my face to the ground and couldn't say a word. Then the one who looked like a human being touched my lips and I was able to speak. I told the one standing in front of me, "My lord, since I saw the vision I've been in agony and I feel really weak. How can I, your servant, speak to you, my lord? I have no strength, and I can hardly breathe."

Once again the one who looked like a human being touched me and restored my strength. "Don't be afraid; God loves you very much. May you have peace! Be strong! Have courage!" As he spoke to me, I became stronger and I said, "My lord, speak to me, for you have strengthened me."

"Do you know why I've come to you?" he asked. "Shortly I will have to go back and fight the prince of Persia, and after that the prince of Greece will come. But before that I will tell you what is written down in the Book of Truth. No one helps me fight against these princes except Michael your prince."

And I myself, in the first year of Darius the Mede, took my stand to support and defend him.

So now let me reveal the truth to you. There are still three kings to come to power in Persia, and then a fourth who will be far richer than all the others. When he becomes strong through his wealth, he will rally the whole kingdom against Greece.

Then a mighty king will come to power. He will rule with great authority and do whatever he wants. But as he extends his power his kingdom will be broken up, divided towards the four winds of heaven. It will not go to his descendants, and it will not be ruled as he ruled. It will be pulled up and given to others. The king of the south will grow strong, but one of his officers will grow even stronger and will rule his kingdom with great authority.

Some years later they will form an alliance, and the daughter of the king of the south will be married to the king of the north to guarantee the peace treaty. However, she will not be able to keep her hold on power, nor will his power continue. She and her attendants will be betrayed, along with her child and husband. Later on, however, a new king of the south from her family will take over. He will come to attack the army of the king of the north and enter his fortress. He will fight against them and will win. In addition he will take back with him to Egypt the idols of their gods, along with their expensive vessels of silver and gold. For some years he will leave the king of the north alone.

Then the king of the north will march into the kingdom of the king of the south but will have to retreat to his own land. However, his sons will prepare for war, assembling a huge number of troops. One of them will lead an advance that rushes forward like a river bursting its banks, crossing over and pressing forward to attack the enemy fortress.

This will infuriate the king of the south, who will go out into battle against the large army assembled by the king of the north and will defeat it. After capturing such a large army, he will become very proud, and will kill thousands. But this triumph will not last long.

Years later the king of the north will once again raise an army, even larger than before, and will invade with this huge army, accompanied by plenty of supplies. At the same time many will rebel against the king of the south. Violent men from your own people will rebel in order to fulfill this vision, but they shall fail.

Then the king of the north will come and build siege ramps and he will capture a city with strong defenses. The forces of the south will not be able to prevent it—even his best troops won't be able to resist the attack. The invader will do whatever he wants; no one will be able to oppose him. He will stand in the Beautiful Land with the power to destroy it. He will be determined to come with all the power of his kingdom and will make a peace treaty with the king of the south. To secure this he will give him a daughter of women to marry in order to destroy the kingdom. But she will not be successful and will not support him. Then he will turn to attack the coastlands and will conquer many, but a commander will put a stop to his arrogant behavior, paying him back for it. He will return to the fortresses of his own land, but he will stumble and fall, and will be gone. His successor will send out a tax collector to maintain royal wealth. However, in a short time he will die, but not violently or in battle.

A contemptible person will follow him who will not be given royal majesty. He will take over peacably and assume control of the kingdom through deception. Great armies will be swept away before him. They will be broken, as well as the prince of the agreement. After making an alliance with him, he will act deceptively. He will come to power peacably, becoming strong though only having a few supporters. He will invade the richest parts of the land and do what his fathers and forefathers never did—he will distribute plunder, spoil, and possessions. He will make plans to attack fortresses, but only for a time.

Then he will draw on his strength and courage to gather a large army against the king of the south. The king of the south will prepare for war, fighting back with a large and powerful army, but he will not be successful because of plots made against him. Those closest to him will destroy him. His army will be wiped out—many will fall in battle. The two kings, with evil intentions, will tell each other lies even as they sit together at the same table. But their scheming is pointless—the end will come at the time predicted.

The king of the north will return to his own country with all the wealth he has looted. He will be determined to attack the people of the holy agreement, and do all he can to destroy it before returning to his own country.

At the time predicted he will return to invade the south again, but this time it won't be like before. Ships from Cyprus will come to attack him, frightening him off so that he retreats. But this will make him mad, and he will attack the people of the holy agreement, recognizing those who abandon their commitment to the holy agreement.

His forces will occupy and defile the Temple fortress. They will put a stop to the continual service, and set up a form of idolatry that causes devastation. The king will use flattery to corrupt those who break the solemn agreement, but the people who know their God will stand firm in their resistance. Wise leaders of the people will teach many, though for a time they will be killed by sword and fire, or they will be imprisoned and robbed. During this time of persecution they will receive a little help, and many who join them won't be sincere. Some of the wise will be killed, so that they may be refined and purified and cleansed until the time of the end, for the predicted time is still to come.

The king will do whatever he wants, praising himself and considering himself greater than any god, even saying outrageous things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of anger has finished, for what has been decided will be accomplished. He will have no time for the gods of his forefathers, nor for the one loved by women, nor for any other god, for he considers himself greater than any of these. Instead he will honor the god of fortresses—a god unknown to his forefathers—giving him offerings of gold and silver and precious stones and expensive gifts. He will deal with strong fortresses with the help of this foreign god. He will give riches to those who acknowledge him, making them rulers over the people, and distributing the land at a price.

At the time of the end the king of the south will attack him. But the king of the north will retaliate with force like a storm, with chariots and horsemen and many ships. He will advance, sweeping through many lands. He will invade the Beautiful Land and kill many people there. However, Moab, Edom, and most of the Ammonites will escape his power. He will extend his attacks against different countries—even the land of Egypt will not be able to escape. He will acquire the gold and silver and riches of Egypt, ruling over them and also the Libyans and Ethiopians.

But news from the east and the north will alarm him, and in a furious rage he will set out to destroy and exterminate many people. He will set up his royal camp between the sea and the beautiful holy mountain. But he will die with no one to help him.

“At that time Michael the great prince, the protector of your people, will stand up and there will be a time of trouble like never before, since nations first existed. But at that time your people will be saved, all whose names are written in the book. Millions sleeping in the ground in death will awake, some to eternal life, and some to eternal shame and disgrace. Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky; those who have shown many the right way to live will shine as bright as the stars forever and ever.

But as for you, Daniel, keep this message secret, and seal the book closed until the time of the end. Many will search this way and that way, and knowledge will grow greater and greater.”

Then I, Daniel, noticed two others, each standing on opposite sides of the river. One of them asked the man dressed in linen who was above the river's waters, “How long before these outrageous things come to an end?” The man dressed in linen, who was above the river's waters, lifted both hands to heaven and made a solemn promise by the One who lives eternally. I heard him say, “It will last for a time, times, and half a time. When the scattering of the power of the holy people has

come to an end, then all these things will also come to an end."

I heard the answer, but I didn't understand it. So I asked, "My lord, what's the final result of all this?"

"Daniel, you can go on your way now," he replied, "for this message is secret and kept sealed until the time of the end.

Many will be purified and cleansed and refined, but the wicked will go on being wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but the wise will understand. From the time the continual ministry is stopped in order to set up the idolatry that causes devastation will be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed are those who patiently wait for and reach the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days.

But as for you, go your way until your life ends, and then rest. You will rise to receive your reward at the end of time."

Hosea

Book of Hosea

The Lord sent a message to Hosea son of Beeri at the time when Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz were the kings of Judah, and Jeroboam son of Jehoash was the king of Israel. The Lord began speaking through Hosea by telling him, “Go and take a wife who is a prostitute and have children born to a prostitute, because those living in this land have committed terrible prostitution by turning away from the Lord.”

So Hosea went and married Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. She became pregnant and bore Hosea a son. The Lord told Hosea, “Call him Jezreel, because I am going to punish the house of Jehu for the blood he shed at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. On that day I will break Israel's military power in the valley of Jezreel.”

Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. The Lord told Hosea, “Call her Lo-ruhamah, because I will no longer love the house of Israel and certainly not forgive them. But I will have pity on the house of Judah, and I will save them—but I will not save them by bow or sword or war or horses and riders.”

After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. The Lord told Hosea, “Call him Lo-ammi, because you are not my people and I am not your God. Even so the number of the people of Israel will be like the sand on the seashore that cannot be measured or counted. Then right there at the place where they were told ‘you are not my people’ they will be called ‘the children of the living God.’ The people of Israel and the people of Judah will be gathered together and they will choose one leader for themselves and they will take possession of the land, and the day of Jezreel will be great.”

“On that day you will call your brothers Ammi, and you will call your sisters Ruhamah. Condemn your mother, condemn her because she is not my wife and I am not her husband. Tell her to stop looking like a prostitute—get rid of the makeup and the provocative clothing.

Otherwise I will strip her naked as the day she was born, and make her like a desert, a barren land, and let her die of thirst. I will have no pity on her children, because they are children of prostitution. For their mother was a prostitute who conceived them in a shameful way. She said, ‘I'll run after my lovers who give me my food and water, my wool and flax and olive oil, and my drink.’

That is why I am going to block her path with thorn bushes, and build a stone wall to stop her so she won't find her way. When she runs after her lovers she won't catch up with them; she'll look for them but she won't find them. Then she'll say, ‘Let me go back to my former husband, because it was better for me then than now.’

She doesn't consider that it was me who gave her grain, new wine, and olive oil, nor the silver and the gold which I gave her abundantly that they made into an idol of Baal. So I will take back my ripened grain and my new wine I gave at harvest-time. I will take back my wool and my flax I provided to cover her nakedness. I will strip her naked while her lovers watch; no one will be able to rescue her from me. I will put a stop to all her festivities: her feasts, new moon celebrations, special Sabbaths—all her festivals. I will destroy her vines and fig trees that she said were given to her as payment for being a prostitute. I will turn them into scrub-land; only wild animals will eat the remaining fruit. I will punish her for all the times she offered incense to Baal, dressing herself up, putting on rings and jewelry, going after her lovers, but forgetting about me, declares the Lord.

See what I'm going to do! I will win her back, taking her into the desert where I will speak to her heart-to-heart. There I will return her vineyards to her and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond to me as she did when she was young, as in the time when she left the land of Egypt. Then on that day, says the Lord, you will call me ‘my husband’ and not ‘my Baal.’ I will stop her appealing to the Baals—their names won't be mentioned ever again.

At that time I will make a solemn agreement with the wild animals and the birds of the sky and the creeping things of the ground. I will do away with the bow and the sword; I will abolish war from the land so you can lie down in safety. I will make you my wife forever; I will make you my wife in goodness and justice and love and mercy. I will be faithful to you, my wife, and you will know me as the Lord. On that day, declares the Lord, I will answer the heavens and they will answer the earth. The earth will answer the grain, and the new wine, and the olive oil, and they shall answer, ‘Jezreel’ (God sows). I will ‘sow’ her for myself in the earth. I will love Lo-ruhamah (unloved) and I will say ‘You are my people’ to Lo-ammi (not my people), and they will say, ‘You are my God.’”

The Lord told me, “Go again and love a woman who is loved by another and who is committing adultery, just as the Lord loves the children of Israel, even though they turn to other gods and love their sensual worship.” So I bought her back for fifteen shekels of silver and one and half homers of barley. I told her, “You must remain with me for many days and you shall stop your prostitution. You shall not be intimate with any man, and then I shall be yours.” For the people of Israel shall be without a king or a prince, without a sacrifice or a stone pillar or a pagan image or an idolatrous shrine for a long time. After this, the people of Israel will return and dedicate themselves to the Lord their God and to the line of David their king. In the last days they will come with awe and reverence for the Lord and his goodness.

Hear the word of the Lord, people of Israel, for the Lord has an accusation against the inhabitants of the land! “There is no faithfulness, no loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Instead there is only cursing, lying, murdering, stealing, and adultery. They commit violence, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. As a result the land dries up, and everyone who lives there is wasting away, along with the wild animals and the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea—they are all dying. But no one should accuse or blame anyone else.

My quarrel is with you the priests—you are the ones responsible. Consequently you will stumble in daylight, and the prophet will stumble together with you in the night, and I will destroy your mother.

My people are dying because they don't know me. Because you have refused to know me, I refuse to accept you as my priests. You have forgotten my teachings, so I will forget your children. The more there were of them, the more they sinned against me, so I will change their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of my people, greedy for their iniquity. So it will be for the people like the priests: I will punish them for what they have done, repaying them for their actions. They will eat, but they will not be satisfied; they will engage in prostitution, but they will not prosper because they have given up on the Lord to go and prostitute themselves to other gods. They destroy their minds with old wine and new wine.

My people consult their wooden idols and their divining rods give them answers, for a spirit of prostitution makes them go astray. Prostituting themselves, they have deserted their God. They offer sacrifices on the tops of mountains; they burn incense in the hills under the oak, poplar, and terebinth trees where the shade is pleasant. That's the reason why your daughters practice prostitution and your daughters-in-law commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they practice prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because you men visit whores and sacrifice with temple prostitutes. A people who lack understanding end up in disaster.

Though you, Israel, have become a prostitute, may Judah not offend in the same way and not enter Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, nor swear saying, 'The Lord lives.' For Israel is as stubborn as a stubborn cow. Should the Lord then take care of them like a lamb in a wide pasture? Ephraim is bewitched by idols, so leave him alone! Once the leaders finish drinking, they go off and find prostitutes to sleep with. They love their shameful acts more than honor. A wind will carry them away; they will be ashamed of their pagan worship."

"Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, house of Israel! Listen, members of the royal family! Judgment belongs with you because you have been a snare set at Mizpah and a net spread out on Tabor. You dug a deep trap in Shittim, but I will punish you for all these things you have done. I know Ephraim very well, and Israel cannot hide from me, for now Ephraim is a prostitute and Israel is defiled. Your actions stop you from coming back to your God for a spirit of prostitution is within you and you do not know the Lord. Israel's pride speaks against them, right in the face. Israel and Ephraim will stumble because of their guilt, and Judah will stumble along with them. They will go to seek the Lord with their herds and flocks, but they will not find him, for he has given up on them. They have been unfaithful to the Lord and have had children that are not his. Now the New Moon will destroy them along with their fields.

Blow the horn in Gibeah! Sound the trumpet in Ramah! Shout an alarm in Beth-aven! Lead the way, Benjamin! Ephraim will be left desolate on the day of punishment. Among the tribes of Israel I will reveal what is the real truth. The rulers of Judah have become thieves like those who illegally move boundaries. I will pour out my anger like water upon them. The people of Ephraim are crushed, smashed to pieces in judgment because they were determined to follow human commands. I am like a maggot to Ephraim, and like something rotten to the people of Judah.

When Ephraim saw how sick they were, and Judah saw how wounded they were, Ephraim turned to the great king of Assyria for help, but he could not heal them or cure their wounds. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a fierce lion to the people of Judah. I will come and tear them to pieces, and carry them off, and no one will be able to rescue them. Then I will leave and return to where I came from until they acknowledge their wrongs, and in their distress they will seek my face and beg for my help."

"Come on! Let's go back to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but now he will heal us. He has struck us down, but now he will bind up our wounds. In two days he will heal us; after three days he will raise us up so we can live in his presence. Let's get to know the Lord, really strive to know him, and he will appear to us as surely as the sun will rise; he will come to us as certainly as the spring rains fall on the earth."

Ephraim, what shall I do with you? Judah, what shall I do with you? Your love disappears like mist at dawn; it vanishes like dew in the morning. So I cut you down through the prophets; I killed you with my words. My judgment shines out like a light. I want your true love, not your sacrifices; I want you to know me, not your burnt offerings.

But you, just like Adam, broke our agreement; there you were unfaithful to me. Gilead is a city of evil people where footprints are tracked in blood. Priests are like a gang of bandits, lying in wait to ambush travelers on the road. They commit murder in Shechem, carrying out wicked crimes. I have seen in the house of Israel something totally disgusting: Ephraim engages in prostitution and Israel is sexually corrupt. And as for you, Judah, your harvest-time has been set! When I restore the fortunes of my people,

when I heal Israel, Ephraim's sins will be exposed, together with the evil actions of Samaria. They deal in lies; they are thieves who break in to homes and who rob people on the outside. But they don't realize that I remember all of their wickedness. Their sins surround them and are always before me. They make their king happy with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies. All of them are adulterers, burning with lust like an oven whose fire stays hot, even though it is not tended by the baker, having left the dough to rise after kneading. On the king's birthday the princes drink so much they are sick, while he joins in with those who mock. Their minds are fired up like an oven; they go to him with their plots. All through the night their anger burns; in the morning it blazes out uncontrollably. All of them are as hot as a burning oven, and they exhaust their leaders. All of their kings have fallen, and not one of them calls on me.

Ephraim mixes with the foreign nations; he is as useless as half-baked bread! Foreigners drain his strength, and he doesn't even realize it. His hair is turning grey and he doesn't even notice. Israel's pride

testifies against him, but for all of this he still does not return to the Lord their God or look for him. Ephraim is like a dove, foolish and without sense—calling to Egypt, then going to Assyria. When they go I will throw my net over them; I will bring them down like wild birds. When I hear them flocking together I will punish them.

What disaster is coming to them because they have strayed from me! Destruction is coming to them because they have rebelled against me! I wish I could redeem them, but they tell lies about me. They do not cry out to me with sincere minds; instead they lie on their beds howling. They assemble together and gash themselves to gain grain and new wine, but they turn away from me. I myself trained them and made them strong, but now they plot evil against me. They turn, but not to the Most High; they are like a useless bow. Their leaders will be killed by the sword because of their cursing. Because of this they will be ridiculed in Egypt.

Put a trumpet to your lips! An eagle swoops over the house of the Lord because they have broken my agreement and rebelled against my law. Israel calls out to me, “Our God, we know you!” But Israel has rejected what is good. An enemy will chase after them. They appointed kings without my consent and chose princes without my knowledge. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction. Samaria, I reject this calf idol you have made! My anger burns against them! How long will you be incapable of being good? This idol is from Israel! A craftsman made it—it's not God! The calf of Samaria will be broken in pieces!

Those who sow the wind will reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head of grain; it will produce no flour. Even if it did produce grain, foreigners would swallow it all up. Israel is swallowed up; among the nations they are like something nobody wants. They have gone up to Assyria like a donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers. Even though they have hired allies among the nations, I will gather them together. Then they will writhe under the burden of the great king. Though Ephraim built many altars to make sin offerings, they instead became altars of sin! I wrote down for them the many aspects of my law, but they looked on them as foreign. They present me with their sacrifices, and they eat the meat, but I, the Lord, do not accept them. Now he will remember their wickedness, and punish them for their sins. They will return to Egypt. Israel has forgotten his maker, and built palaces; Judah has built many fortified cities. But I will rain fire down on their cities and burn up their fortresses.

Israel, don't rejoice! Don't celebrate like other nations! For you have practiced prostitution; you have loved receiving a prostitute's wages on every threshing floor of grain. Your threshing floors and winepresses will not feed you; the land will fail to produce your new wine. You will not stay in the Lord's land, instead Ephraim will return to Egypt, and will eat unclean food in Assyria. You won't pour out any drink offerings to the Lord. None of your sacrifices will please him. Your sacrifices will be like food eaten by a person in mourning—all who eat will be unclean. You will eat this food yourselves, but it will not enter the house of the Lord. What are you going to do on the days of your appointed religious feasts, on the days of the festivals of the Lord? Look, they have left because of the destruction: Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. They gain a “valued possession” for their silver. Weeds will possess them, and thorns will grow over their tents.

The time of punishment has come; the day of retribution has arrived. Let Israel know! You say the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad, because your sin and hostility is so great. The watchman over Ephraim is my God, and a prophet is a birdcatcher's snare placed on all his paths. Hatred is in the house of his God for they have corrupted themselves so deeply, as in the time of Gibeah. He will remember their sin; he will punish their wickedness.

When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert. When I saw your forefathers it was like seeing early fruit on the fig tree. But when they came to Baal Peor, they gave themselves over to that shameful idol, becoming as filthy as the filthy thing they loved. Ephraim! Like a bird that flies away so shall your glory be—no births, no pregnancies, no conceptions. Even if they bring up children, I will make sure they do not survive. What a disaster for you when I turn away from you! Ephraim! Just as I saw Tyre planted in a meadow, so too Ephraim will lead out his children to the murderer. Give them—well, Lord, what should you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and dry breasts. All of their evil began at Gilgal, and that's where I began to hate them. I will drive them out of my house because of their wickedness. I will love them no longer; all their leaders are rebels. Ephraim, you are blighted, dried up from the roots. You shall bear no fruit. Even if you have children, I will slaughter your beloved offspring. My God will reject you because you have not listened to him, and you will become homeless wanderers among the nations.

Israel is like a spreading vine that produces fruit for itself. The more fruit they produced, the more altars they built. The more productive the land, the more beautiful they made the sacred pillars. The people have minds that are deceptive, and now they must take responsibility for their guilt. The Lord will break apart their altars and destroy their sacred pillars. Then they will say, “We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord, and yet what would a king do for us?” They speak empty words, swearing false promises to make a covenant. Their “justice” flourishes like poisonous weeds in the furrows of a field. Those who live in Samaria tremble in awe at the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it in their pagan rituals, while its idolatrous priests celebrate its glory. But it will certainly be taken away from them. It will be brought to Assyria as tribute for the great king. Ephraim will be disgraced, and Israel will be ashamed at its own decisions. Samaria and its king will be destroyed, swept away like a twig on the surface of the water. The high places of Aven, where Israel sinned, will be demolished, and thorns and thistles will grow over their altars. Then they will call to the mountains, “Bury us!” and to the hills, “Fall on us!”

Since the days of Gibeah you have been sinning, Israel, and you haven't changed. Do the people of Gibeah think that war will not come to them? When I choose I will punish the wicked. The nations will be gathered

together against them when they are punished for their double crime.

Ephraim is like a trained heifer that loved to thresh the grain, but now I will place a yoke on her strong neck. I will harness Ephraim; Judah will have to pull the plow; and Jacob must break up the ground for himself. Sow for yourselves what is right and you will reap unfailing love. Break up the unplowed ground. It's time to go to the Lord until he comes and rains down goodness on you. But instead you have planted wickedness and reaped an evil harvest. You have eaten the fruit of lies, because you trusted in your own strength and in your many warriors. The terrifying noise of battle will rise against your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, just as Shalman devastated Beth Arbel in the time of war. Even mothers and children were dashed to pieces. This is what will happen to you, Bethel, because of your great wickedness. At dawn, the king of Israel will be utterly destroyed.

I loved Israel when he was a child. He's my son I called out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed to the Baals and offered incense to idols. I myself taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the hand, but they didn't realize I was the one who healed them. I led them along with cords of kindness, with ropes of love. I was the one who eased their burden and bent down to feed them. However, because my people refuse to return to me, they will not return to the land of Egypt but Assyria shall be their king. War will sweep through their cities, putting an end to their boasting and destroying their plans. My people are hanging on to their apostasy from me. They call him “god on high” but he will not raise them up at all.

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I let you go, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is breaking; I am full of compassion. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God, not a human being. I am the Holy One living among you. I will not enter your cities.

The people will follow me, the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When he roars like a lion then his children will come trembling from the west. Like a flock of frightened birds they will come from Egypt, like doves they will come from Assyria, and I will bring them back home, declares the Lord.

Ephraim surrounds me with lies and Israel with deceit, and Judah still wanders with some deity, faithful to some “Holy One.”

Ephraim tries to herd the wind, chasing after the east wind all day long. Their lies and violence keep on increasing. They make a treaty with Assyria, and send olive oil to Egypt. The Lord also has an accusation against Judah, and will punish Jacob for the way the people act; he will repay them for what they have done. Even in the womb he fought with his brother; when he became a man he fought with God. He fought with the angel, and he won. He wept, and begged him for a blessing. Jacob found God at Bethel, and spoke with him there— the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his memorable name! You must return to your God. Act lovingly and do what is right, and always wait for your God.

A merchant who holds in his hands dishonest scales loves to swindle. Ephraim says, “I'm rich! I've made myself wealthy! I've made so much from my work, and nobody can prove me guilty of doing wrong.”

But I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. I will make you live again in tents like you do at the time of that particular festival.

I spoke through the prophets. I myself gave many visions and parables through the prophets.

If Gilead is idolatrous, they will surely come to nothing. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls. Even their altars are like heaps of rocks in the furrows of the field.

Jacob fled to the land of Aram; Israel worked there to gain a wife, earning a wife by looking after sheep. Through a prophet the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt, and by a prophet they were cared for.

Ephraim has really upset the Lord, and the Lord will let them have the consequences of their bloodshed and pay them back for their contempt.

When Ephraim spoke, they were feared, for they were the leading tribe in Israel. But when they were guilty of Baal worship, they died. Now they constantly sin, making for themselves idols from molten metal. All of these idols are skillfully made from silver by their craftsmen. “Offer sacrifices to these idols,” say the people. “Kiss the bull calf idols.” Consequently they will be like the morning mist, like early morning dew, like chaff blowing away from the threshing floor, like smoke from a chimney.

Yet I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt. You shall know no other gods but me. None can save you except me. I looked after you in the wilderness; in that dry desert land it was like pasture to them and they were satisfied. But when they were satisfied they became arrogant, and they forgot me. So I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lie in wait beside the path. I will be like a mother bear whose cubs have been taken, I will rip out their hearts. I shall devour them like a lion, like a wild beast I will tear them apart. You have destroyed yourselves, Israel, for your only help is in me. Where then is your king? Let him save you in all your cities! Where are your leaders who demanded a king and princes from me? In my anger I give you a king, and in my fury I take one.

Ephraim's guilt is packed up; their sin will be eradicated. The pain of childbirth has come to them, trying to give birth to a son who is not “wise” because he is not in the right position when the time comes.

I shall redeem them from the power of Sheol; I shall deliver them from death. Where, death, are your plagues? Where, Sheol, is your destruction? Compassion is hidden from my sight.

Even though they flourish among the reeds, an east wind will come, a wind from the Lord that rises in the desert will dry up their springs and their wells will fail. It will rob from their treasury everything of value.

The people of Samaria will have to bear the consequences of their guilt, because they rebelled against their God. They will be slaughtered by the sword; their children will be dashed to the ground; their pregnant women will be ripped open.

Return, Israel, to the Lord your God, because your sins have brought you down. Take words like these with

you and come back to the Lord, saying to him, “Please take away all our guilt, accept what is good, and we will repay you with praise from our lips. Assyria can't save us; we will not ride our warhorses; we will never again say, ‘You are our gods’ to the idols we have made. For in you orphans find mercy.”

I will heal their unfaithfulness; I will love them freely, for I'm not angry with them any longer. I will be like the dew to Israel, they will blossom like lilies, they will send down roots like the cedars of Lebanon. They will send out new shoots, their splendor will be like the olive tree, and their scent will be like the cedars of Lebanon. Those who live under their shade will return, they will flourish like grain, they will blossom like the vine, and they will be as famous as the wine of Lebanon.

Ephraim, how much more do I have to warn you about idols? I have answered and now I am watching. I am like a tree that is evergreen; your fruit is found in me.

Who is wise to understand these things? Who has discernment in understanding them? The Lord's paths are right—the good follow them, but rebels trip and fall along the way.

Joel

Book of Joel

The Lord sent a message through Joel, son of Pethuel.

Listen to this, elders; pay attention, everyone who lives in the land. Has anything ever happened like this before in your experience, or that of your forefathers? Tell your children about it, and have your children tell it to their children, and their children tell the next generation.

What the cutting locusts left, the swarming locusts have eaten; what the swarming locusts left, the hopping locusts have eaten; what the hopping locusts left, the destroying locusts have eaten.

Wake up, you drunks, and weep! Howl you wine drinkers, because the new wine has been suddenly taken away from your mouth! A nation has invaded my land: powerful and too many to count. Their teeth are like lion's teeth, their fangs like those of a lioness. It has ruined my grapevines and destroyed my fig trees, stripping them completely and reducing them to stumps, white and bare. Mourn like a bride dressed in sackcloth, mourning the death of her husband-to-be. Grain and wine offerings have stopped in the Temple. The priests who minister before the Lord are in mourning. The fields are devastated, the earth mourns; for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, the olive oil fails.

Be ashamed, farmers, and wail in sorrow, keepers of vineyards, over the wheat and the barley, for the crops from the fields are ruined. The vines are shriveled, the fig trees are withered; the pomegranate, the palm, and the apricot trees—all the fruit trees have dried up, and at the same time the people's happiness has also dried up.

Dress in sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; weep, you who minister before the altar! Go and spend the night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the grain and wine offerings have stopped in the Temple. Proclaim a fast; call a sacred assembly. Have the elders and all people of the land gather in the Temple, and cry out to your God, to the Lord. What a terrible day! For the day of the Lord is near, it will come as destruction from the Almighty. Haven't we seen our food taken away from us, right before our eyes? There is no joy and happiness in God's Temple. Seeds planted in the ground shrivel up; the storehouses are empty, the barns are torn down because the grain has dried up. The farm animals moan with hunger. The herds of cattle wander everywhere because they can't find grass to eat; the flocks of sheep are suffering. To you, Lord, I cry out! For fire has destroyed the pastures in the wilderness; flames have burned up all the orchards. Even the wild animals long for you because the streams have dried up, and fire has destroyed the pastures in the wilderness.

Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all who live in the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming—it's definitely near! It's a gloomy day of darkness, a day of thick clouds and heavy shadows. Like the dawn spreading over the mountains, an army appears, so large and powerful that there has never ever been anything like it before, nor will there ever be anything like it again. Fire blazes in front of them, behind them flames are burning. In front of them the land looks like the Garden of Eden, behind them is a desert of total desolation: not a single survivor remains. They have the appearance of horses; they charge like cavalry. Listen to the sound: they are like rumbling chariots leaping over the mountain tops, they are like crackling flames burning stubble, they are like a mighty army marching in formation into battle. Terror seizes all those in their path; all the people's faces grow pale. They attack like mighty warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march as one, never breaking ranks. They do not jostle one another, they stay on track; and even if some are cut down, they are not stopped. They rush to and fro in the city; they run along the walls; they climb into houses, entering through the windows like thieves.

The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, the stars stop shining. The Lord shouts his commands at the head of his army. His camp is immense, and those who carry out his orders are powerful. The day of the Lord is totally terrifying—who can stand it?

"Yet even now," says the Lord, "Come back to me while there is still time. Come to me with all your heart, with fasting and prayer. Repent in your minds, and not by tearing your clothes." Come back to the Lord your God for he is gracious and kind. He is slow to get angry and full of faithful love, and changes his mind about sending punishment. Who knows? Maybe he will change his mind, leaving behind a blessing so that you will be able to make grain and wine offerings to the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the people together: the elders, the children, even the babies. Let the bridegroom leave his room; let the bride leave her room. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar of the Temple. Let them say, "Lord, please take pity on your people, and do not let your inheritance be disgraced, ruled over by foreign nations, so that the people of these nations could ask, 'Where is their God?'"

Now the Lord is very protective of his land and takes pity on his people. The Lord will reply, saying to his people, "Look! I am sending you grain and new wine and olive oil, and you will be satisfied. You will no longer be a disgrace among the foreign nations.

I will remove from you the army from the north; I will drive them into the desolate wilderness—the front into the eastern sea, and the rear into the western sea. The stench of the dead army will rise up—a real stink—for it has done terrible things."

Don't be afraid, people of the land! Be happy and celebrate, for the Lord has done incredible things! Don't be afraid, wild animals! For the pastures of the wilderness are turning green. The trees are fruiting again

—the fig trees and the grapevines are producing a good crop.

People of Jerusalem! Celebrate and be happy in the Lord your God because he has given you rain to show his goodness. As before he sends the autumn and the spring rains. The threshing floors will be full of grain, the vats will overflow with new wine and olive oil. “I will give back to you what you lost over the years to the swarming, hopping, destroying, and cutting locusts, this great army that I sent against you. You will have plenty to eat, and you will be satisfied, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God who has done miracles for you. My people will never again be ashamed. You will know that I am in the midst of my people Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other. My people will never again be ashamed.

After this I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will be my prophets, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days I will also pour out my Spirit on male slaves and female slaves. I will place wonders in the heavens and on earth: blood, and fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will turn dark, and the moon will turn red like blood at the coming of the great and fearful day of the Lord.” Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, rescued from Mount Zion and Jerusalem, as the Lord has said—these are among the survivors the Lord has called.

At that time when this happens, when I bring back the exiles to Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather together all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will judge them there over my people Israel, my inheritance, whom they have scattered among the nations, and have divided up my land. They cast lots for my people; they traded boys in payment for prostitutes and girls to buy wine to drink.

Also, what have you got to do with me, Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you trying to get back at me? If you are trying to pay me back, I will quickly pay you back what you deserve for what you've done. You stole my silver and my gold and my best treasures, and you put them in your temples. You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks so they could be sent far away from their land. But watch out! I will get them moving from the places you sold them to, and bring them back, and I will pay you back what you deserve for what you've done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a distant nation. I the Lord have spoken.

Proclaim this among the nations: “Prepare for war! Call up the mighty warriors! Let all the soldiers get ready and advance! Hammer your plow blades and turn them into swords. Turn your pruning hooks into spears. Even the weak should say ‘I am a strong fighter!’ Hurry up and come, all nations from everywhere, and gather there. Bring down your warriors, Lord! Let the nations get ready, let them come to the valley of Jehoshaphat for there I will sit in judgment on all the nations.

Start swinging the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come and tread the grapes for the winepress is full and the vats are overflowing because their wickedness has become so great. Huge mobs are in the valley of the Lord's verdict. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of his verdict. The sun and moon will become dark, and the stars will stop shining. The Lord will roar from Zion, shouting in a loud voice from Jerusalem, shaking the heavens and the earth. But the Lord will shelter his people, protecting the people of Israel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain, and Jerusalem will be a holy place forever, and no foreigners will ever march through her again.

At that time new wine will pour down the mountains, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the riverbeds of Judah will run with water. A spring will flow out of the Temple and will water the valley of Shittim. But Egypt will become desolate, and Edom a desert wasteland, because of the violence they did against Judah, for in their land they shed innocent blood. Judah will be lived in forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. Will I pardon and leave unpunished the shedding of innocent blood? The Lord lives in Zion!”

Amos

Book of Amos

Here is the message that was given to Amos, a shepherd from Tekoa in Judah. This is what he saw concerning Israel when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam, son of Jehoash, was king of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said, The Lord roars from Zion, he shouts from Jerusalem. The shepherds' pastures wither, the top of Mount Carmel dries up.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Damascus have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, for they beat the people of Gilead with sharp iron threshing tools. So I will send fire down on the house of Hazael and burn up Ben-Hadad's fortresses. I will smash the gates of Damascus, I will cut down those who live in the Valley of Aven, and the ruler from Beth Eden. The people of Aram will be deported as prisoners to the land of Kir, says the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Gaza have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, for they sent into exile whole communities, handing them over to Edom. So I will send down fire on the walls of Gaza and burn up its fortresses. I will cut down those who live in Ashdod and the ruler of Ashkelon. I will turn to punish Ekron and the Philistines who remain will die, says the Lord God.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Tyre have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, for they exiled whole communities, handing them over to Edom, and did not keep their agreement to help each other as members of the same family. So I will send down fire on the walls of Tyre and burn up its fortresses.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Edom have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, for they hunted down the Israelites to whom they were related, killing them with swords. They attacked without mercy, tearing the Israelites to pieces in an angry rage that never stopped. So I will send down fire on Teman, and I will burn up the fortresses of Bozrah.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Ammon have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, because they ripped open pregnant women in Gilead as part of their war to enlarge their territory. I will set fire to the walls of Rabbah and burn up its fortresses. There will be shouts on the day of battle which will whirl with rage like a windstorm. Their king will be sent into exile together with his princes, says the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Moab have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, because they desecrated the bones of the king of Edom by burning them, turning them into lime. So I will send down fire on Moab, and I will burn up the fortresses of Kerioth, and the people of Moab will die in the midst of uproar, battle cries, and the sound of the trumpet. I will cut down their king and all their princes with him, says the Lord.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Judah have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, because they rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept his commands. Their lies have led them astray, the same lies that their forefathers followed. So I will send down fire on Judah, and I will burn up the fortresses of Jerusalem.

This is what the Lord says: The people of Israel have repeatedly sinned and so I will not hesitate to punish them, because they sell good people for silver, and poor people for a pair of sandals. They trample the heads of the poor into the dust, and push the needy out of the way. A man and his father have sex with the same servant girl so that my holy name is profaned. At every altar they stretch themselves out in clothes taken from debtors as collateral, in the temple of their god they drink wine taken from the people they fined.

Yet it was I who was the one who destroyed the Amorites before you, even though they were as tall as cedars and as strong as oaks. I destroyed them root and branch.

It was I who brought you out of the land of Egypt and led you through the desert for forty years so that you could take the Amorites' land.

I appointed some of your sons to be prophets, and some of your young men to be Nazirites. Isn't this true, people of Israel? But you made the Nazirites sin by drinking wine, and you told the prophets, “Don't tell us what God says.”

Now see what I am going to do. I will crush you where you are, as if crushed by a heavy cart loaded down with sheaves of grain. Not even your fastest runners will escape; strong men will lose their strength. Even the greatest warrior will not be able to save his life. The archer will not stand his ground. The quickest on his feet will not be able to get away, and even those on horseback will not save themselves. On that day even the bravest of the mighty warriors will run away naked, says the Lord.

People of Israel, listen to this message that the Lord has spoken against you—all of you, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I chose a special relationship with you alone out of all the families of the earth, and so I will punish you for your wrongdoing. Can two people walk together unless they have arranged to meet? Does a lion roar in the forest before finding its prey? Does a young lion growl from its den if it has caught nothing? Does a bird fall into a trap and get caught unless the spring is set? Does a trap spring shut if there's nothing there to catch? When the trumpet sounds in the city, shouldn't the people be alarmed? When a disaster comes to a city, isn't it the Lord who does it? For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his intentions to his servants the prophets. The lion has roared—so who isn't scared? The Lord God has spoken—so who can refuse to speak for him?

Announce this to the fortresses of Ashdod and to the fortresses in the land of Egypt: Assemble yourselves on Samaria's mountains and see all the turmoil and oppression happening in the country. They don't know how to do what is right, declares the Lord. They have

stored up in their fortresses what they've taken by violence and robbery.

As a result, says the Lord, an enemy will surround you, break down your strongholds, and plunder your fortresses.

This is what the Lord says: Just as a shepherd tries to rescue a sheep from a lion's mouth, but only saves a couple of legs or a piece of an ear, so it will be for the people of Israel living in Samaria—all that will be "saved" will be the corner of a couch and a piece of a leg from a bed.

Listen! Warn the house of Jacob, declares the Lord God of power. For on that day I will punish Israel for their sins. I will destroy the altars of Bethel: the corners of the altar will be cut off and fall to the ground. I will tear down their winter houses and their summer houses as well, their houses filled with ivory will be ruined—their many houses will be destroyed.

Listen to this message, you well-fed cows of Bashan who live on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor and crush the needy, and who order your husbands, "Bring us drinks!" The Lord God has sworn by his holiness: Watch out! For the time is coming when they will drag you away with hooks, each one of you will be like a fish on a hook. You will leave through breaches in the city walls, thrown out in the direction of Mount Hermon.

Why don't you go to Bethel and sin? Go to Gilgal and add to your sins even more? Offer your sacrifices in the morning, bring your tithes after three days. Burn a thank offering of bread made with yeast, and announce what you're giving as freewill offerings so everyone will know. This is what you love to do! declares the Lord God.

It was I who made sure you had nothing to eat in all your cities, and a lack of food wherever you lived, but still you wouldn't return to me, says the Lord. It was I who kept the rain from falling when there were still three months before harvest. One city would have rain, while another would not. One field would have rain, another would dry up from lack of rain. People wandered from town to town looking for water, yet were still thirsty. But still you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I struck your many farms and vineyards with blight and mildew; locusts devoured your fig trees and olive trees. But still you did not return to me, declares the Lord. I sent a plague on you like I did in Egypt. I killed your young men in battle; I took away your horses; I made you smell the stench of dead bodies in your camps. But still you did not return to me, declares the Lord. Some of you I destroyed as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick pulled out of a fire. But still you did not return to me, declares the Lord.

Therefore, this is what I am going to do to you, Israel. Because I am going to do this, Israel, prepare to meet your God! Watch! The One who made the mountains, who created the winds, who reveals his thoughts to humankind, who turns the sunlight into darkness, who walks on the high places of the earth—the Lord God of power is his name!

Listen, people of Israel, to this funeral lament that I sing about you! Virgin Israel has fallen, and will never rise again! She lies abandoned on the ground, and there is no one to help her up. This is what the Lord says: From a city that sends out a thousand soldiers, only a hundred will return; from a city that sends out a hundred soldiers, only ten will return.

This is what the Lord says to the people of Israel: Look to me so you may live! Do not look to the false gods of Bethel, do not go to the pagan shrines of Gilgal or travel to those of Beersheba. For Gilgal will go into exile, and Bethel will come to nothing. Look to the Lord so you may live! Otherwise he will explode like fire against the descendants of Joseph and no one from Bethel will be able to quench it. You twist justice and make it bitter, you throw integrity to the ground.

The One who made the Pleiades and Orion, who turns the darkness into morning, and daytime into night, who calls for the water of the seas, and pours it down as rain upon the earth—the Lord is his name! In a flash he cuts down the strong and destroys the fortresses.

You hate anyone who confronts injustice and loathe anyone who speaks honestly. Because you trample down the poor and impose a tax on their grain, building for yourselves impressive houses, you will not live in them, and you will not drink wine from the fine vineyards you have planted. For I know the extent of your wrongdoing and your numerous sins. You oppress good people by taking bribes, and you prevent the poor from getting justice in the courts. So smart people keep quiet in such evil times. Do what is right, and not evil, so you may live. Then the Lord God of power will be with you, as you claim he is. Hate evil and love good—and make sure justice wins out in your courts. Maybe the Lord God of power will have mercy on those who are left of Jacob's people.

For this is what the Lord, the Lord God of power says: There will be weeping in the city squares and wailing in the streets. They will call even the farmers to grieve, as well as the professional mourners. There will be wailing in every vineyard, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord.

How disastrous it will be for those of you who long for the day of the Lord. Why would you want the day of the Lord to come? It will bring darkness, not light. It will be like a man running away from a lion only to meet a bear; or a man who goes home and leans his hand on a wall, only to be bitten by a snake. Isn't the day of the Lord darkness without light? Yes, pitch dark without a glimmer of light. I hate, I despise your festivals and take no delight in your religious assemblies. Even though you present me with burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. As for your peace offerings of fattened cattle—I will not even look at them. Stop your noisy worship songs. I will not listen to the melody of your harps. Rather let justice flow like a river, and doing right like an ever-flowing stream.

Did you bring me sacrifices during those forty years in the desert, people of Israel? But now you carry idols of Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god that you made for yourselves. So I will send you into exile in a land beyond Damascus, says the Lord, whose name is the God of power.

How disastrous it will be for you who have an easy life in Zion, and you who feel secure living on Mount

Samaria—you who are the most famous men in all of Israel to whom people come for help! But go to Calneh, and see what took place there. Then go on to the great city of Hamath, and down to the Philistine city of Gath. Were they better kingdoms than yours? Did they have more territory than you? You put out of your minds any thought of coming disaster, yet you are bringing closer the time when violence reigns.

How disastrous it will be for you people who lie on beds decorated with ivory and lounge on couches, eating lamb from your flocks and fattened calves from the stall. You make up songs accompanied by the harp, thinking you're great composers like David. You drink wine by the bowlful, and anoint yourselves with the finest oils, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph's descendants. So you will be at the head of those led away into exile; the feasting and lazing around will be over.

The Lord God has sworn an oath on his own life. This is what the Lord God of power declares: I detest Jacob's arrogance and I hate his fortresses; I will hand over this city and all in it to the enemy. If there are ten people in a house, they will die. And when a relative comes to take away the bodies from the house, he will ask someone inside, “Is there anyone else with you?” The person will reply, “No...” Then the other will say, “Quiet! Don't even mention the Lord's name.”

Watch out! When the Lord gives the command, large houses will be reduced to rubble, and small houses smashed to pieces. Can horses gallop over rocks? Can oxen plow the sea? But you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of doing good into bitterness! You joyfully celebrate your conquest of Lodebar, and say “Didn't we in our own strength capture Karnaim?”

Watch out, people of Israel! I am going to send an enemy nation to attack you, says the Lord God of power, and they will oppress you from the Pass of Hamath to the Arabah Valley.

This is what the Lord God showed me. I saw that he was preparing a swarm of locusts just when the spring crops began to grow. (Spring crops begin to grow right after the time when the king's hay is cut.) And so when the locusts finished eating every green plant in the fields, I pleaded with the Lord God, “Please forgive your people! How can the descendants of Jacob survive? They are so weak.” So the Lord changed his mind. “It won't happen,” said the Lord.

This is what the Lord God showed me. I saw that the Lord God was calling for a judgment of fire. The fire burned up the depths of the sea and destroyed the farmland. I pleaded with the Lord God, “Please stop! How can the descendants of Jacob survive? They are so weak.” So the Lord changed his mind. “This too won't happen,” said the Lord.

This is what he showed me. I saw the Lord was standing beside a wall that had been built with a plumb line. He was holding a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord asked me, “Amos, what do you see?” I replied, “A plumb line.” And the Lord God said, “I am placing a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel. I won't ignore their sins anymore. The high places of the descendants of Isaac will be torn down, and the holy places of Israel will be destroyed. Sword in hand, I will rise up against the house of Jeroboam.”

Then Amaziah, priest of Bethel, sent a message to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, “Amos is plotting against you among the people of Israel. What he's saying is unbearable! For he's saying Jeroboam will be killed by the sword, and the people will be taken away from their land into exile.”

Amaziah said to Amos, “Go away prophet! Run away to the land of Judah. Go and prophesy there to earn your bread. But don't ever prophesy again at Bethel, for this is where the king worships, the national Temple.”

But Amos replied, “I'm not a trained prophet, or the son of a prophet. I was just a shepherd, and also took care of fig trees. The Lord took me from following my flock, and the Lord told me, ‘Go, and give my message to my people of Israel.’”

So now hear what the Lord is telling you: You say, “Don't prophesy against Israel, and don't preach against the descendants of Isaac.”

But this is what the Lord says: Your wife will become a prostitute in the city; your sons and daughters will be killed by the sword. Your land will be measured and divided up, and you yourself will die in a foreign land. The people of Israel will definitely be taken from the land and go into exile.

This is what the Lord God showed me. I saw a basket of fruit. He asked me, “What do you see, Amos?” I said, “A basket of fruit.” Then the Lord told me, “This is the end of my people Israel! I won't ignore their sins anymore. On that day the Temple songs will become sorrowful wailing. There will be dead bodies scattered everywhere. Silence!” declares the Lord.

Listen to this, you who trample down the needy, and wipe out the poor of the land. You who ask, “When will the holy day be over so we can get back to selling grain? When will the Sabbath be over so we can open our storehouses, and cheat people with short measures and unfair scales?” You buy the poor for silver, the needy for a pair of sandals, and you sell grain mixed with chaff. The Lord God, of whom the descendants of Jacob are so proud, has sworn an oath: I will never forget the evil you have done. Shall not the land tremble because of this, and everyone who lives there mourn? The earth will rise up like the Nile River in flood, be tossed around, and then fall again.

On that day, declares the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the land during the daytime. I will turn your festivals into times of mourning, your happy songs into laments. I will make you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make your mourning like that for an only son. At the end of it all it will be a bitter day.

The time is coming, declares the Lord, when I will send a famine on the land—not a famine of bread, or a lack of water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will wander from sea to sea, from north to east, running to and fro searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. On that day, even the beautiful girls and healthy young men will collapse from thirst. Those who swear by the disgraceful idols of Samaria, who take oaths like, “By the life of your god,

Dan," or "A pilgrimage to the god of Beersheba"—they will fall, and never rise again.

Then I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and he said: Strike the tops of the Temple pillars so that the foundations shake, and shatter them on the heads of all the people below. Those who survive I will kill by the sword. None of them will escape, not a single one. Even if they dig down into Sheol, I will catch them and pull them up. Even if they climb up to heaven, I will bring them down. Even if they hide themselves at the top of Mount Carmel, I will search for them and catch them. Even if they hide from me at the bottom of the sea, I will command the sea serpent to bite them. Even if they are driven into exile by their enemies, I will order them put to death by the sword. I will watch them carefully—and for evil, not for good. The Lord God of power touches the earth and it melts, and all who live there mourn. The earth rises up like the Nile River in flood, and then falls again.

The Lord builds his upper rooms in heaven, and places the foundations on the earth. He calls for the water of the seas, and pours it down as rain upon the earth—the Lord is his name! Aren't the Ethiopians as important to me as you, people of Israel? asks the Lord. Yes, I brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir.

Watch out! I'm watching this sinful kingdom. I will eradicate it from the face of the earth. Yet I will not completely destroy the descendants of Jacob. See what I'm doing! I will give the command, and the people of Israel will be shaken among the nations like flour through a sieve, and nothing will fall to the ground. All the sinners of my people will be killed by the sword—all those who say, "Nothing bad is going to happen; no disaster will fall on us."

On that day I will restore the fallen kingdom of David; I will repair the broken walls, I will rebuild the ruins, and I will make it as it was in days of old. And they will possess what is left of Edom and all the nations that were once mine, declares the Lord. He will make this happen. Look! The time is coming, says the Lord, when the reaper will overtake the plowman, and the one who treads the grapes will overtake the one who sows the seed. The mountains will drip with sweet wine, and flow from all the hills. I will bring my people back from captivity, and they will rebuild the ruined cities, and they shall live in them. They shall plant vineyards and drink their wine; they will plant gardens and eat the fruit they produce. I will plant them in their own land, and they shall never be uprooted again from the land I have given them, declares the Lord your God.

Obadiah

Book of Obadiah

Obadiah's vision. This is what the Lord says about the land of Edom. We have heard from the Lord that a messenger was sent to tell the nations: Get ready! Let's go to war against Edom!

I will make you insignificant among the nations. You will be totally despised. Your heart's pride has deceived you—you who live in a secure fortress of rock in the high mountains, saying to yourselves, “Who can ever bring us down?” But even though you soar like an eagle, even though you make your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there, declares the Lord.

You will be completely destroyed! If thieves came to you, if robbers came at night, wouldn't they steal only what they wanted? If those who harvest grapes came to you, wouldn't they leave some behind? But how Esau will be plundered and their hidden treasures looted! All your allies will drive you out, past the borders of your land. Those who were at peace with you will deceive you, and conquer you. Those who ate with you have ambushed you. You don't understand a thing!

On that day, declares the Lord, I will destroy the wise men of Edom—there will be no more wisdom in the mountains of Esau. Teman, your fighting men will be terrified, so that everyone of the mountains of Esau will be cut down in the massacre. Because of the violence you committed against your brothers, the descendants of Jacob, you will be totally ashamed of yourselves, and destroyed forever. On that day you stood aside, on that day strangers plundered their wealth and foreigners entered their gates, and divided up Jerusalem by casting lots—and you were like one of them.

You should not have gloated over your brother's day of disaster. You should not have rejoiced over the day of destruction of the sons of Judah. You should not have boasted over the day of their distress. You should not have marched through the city gates of my people on their day of disaster. You should not have gloated over them on the day of their disaster. You should not have looted their wealth on the day of their disaster. You should not have stood at the crossroads, cutting down those trying to escape. You should not have handed over those who survived on the day of their distress.

For the day of the Lord is near for all nations. What you have done will be done to you; your actions will fall back on your own heads. For as you drank on my holy mountain, so will all the nations continually drink, and swallow, and they shall be as if they never existed.

But on Mount Zion there will be a place of escape, a holy place, and the descendants of Jacob will reclaim their inheritance. The descendants of Jacob will become a fire, and the descendants of Joseph a flame, and they shall burn up the descendants of Esau like stubble, consuming them completely, so that there will be not a single survivor of the descendants of Esau. For the Lord has spoken.

Those living in the Negev will occupy the mountains of Esau; those from the foothills of Judah will occupy the land of the Philistines, and possess the fields of Ephraim and Samaria; those from the tribe of Benjamin will occupy Gilead. The army of exiles of the people of Israel shall possess the land of the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, and the exiles of Jerusalem from Sepharad shall possess the cities of the Negev. Those who have been saved will go up Mount Zion and rule the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom shall be the Lord's.

Jonah

Book of Jonah

The Lord spoke to Jonah the son of Amittai, telling him, “Go immediately to the great city of Nineveh and condemn it because I have seen the wickedness of its people.” But Jonah left and ran away to Tarshish to get away from the Lord. He went to Joppa where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He paid the fare and went on board to sail to Tarshish in order to get away from the Lord.

But the Lord sent a terrible wind across the sea, creating a violent storm that threatened to break up the ship. The sailors were terrified and each of them prayed to their own god to save them. They threw the cargo overboard to make the ship lighter. Meanwhile, Jonah had gone down into the hold where he had laid down and fallen fast asleep.

The ship's captain went to Jonah and asked him, “How can you be sleeping? Get up and pray to your God. Maybe he will take notice of what's happening to us and we won't drown.” Then the sailors said to each other, “Let's draw lots so we can find out who's to blame for this disaster that's fallen on us.” They drew lots and Jonah's name came up. So they asked him, “Tell us who is responsible for this trouble that we're in. What do you do for a living? Where are you from? What is your country? What is your nationality?”

“I am a Hebrew,” Jonah replied, “and I worship the Lord, the God of the heavens, the sea, and the land.” The sailors became even more terrified and said to Jonah, “What have you done?” because Jonah had explained to them that he was running away from the Lord.

“What shall we do to you to calm the storm?” they asked him, since the storm was getting worse. “Pick me up and throw me into the sea,” Jonah replied. “Then the sea will become calm, because I know it's because of me that you're in this terrible storm.”

Instead the sailors tried to row to get back to the shore, but they couldn't because the sea had become so wild from the worsening storm. Then they called out to the Lord, “Lord! Please don't kill us for sacrificing this man's life or for spilling innocent blood, for you, Lord, made it happen.”

So they picked Jonah up and threw him into the sea, and it became calm. The sailors were overcome with fear. They offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made many promises to him. The Lord sent a huge fish to swallow Jonah. Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the belly of the fish. He began, “In my agony I cried out to the Lord and he answered me; from the depths of Sheol I pleaded for help and you answered me. You threw me into the deep, all the way down to the bottom of the sea. Water flooded all around me; your crashing waves rolled over me. I said to myself, ‘The Lord has banished me from his sight. Will I ever see your holy Temple again?’ The water swirled over me so I couldn't breathe; the deep sucked me down; seaweed wrapped itself around my head. I sank down to the base of the mountains; the earth barred me in forever. But you, my Lord, my God, brought me back up from the abyss.

As my life ebbed away, I remembered the Lord; my prayer came to you in your holy Temple. Those who worship worthless idols give up their trust in God's goodness. But I will offer you sacrifices, shouting out my thanks. I will keep my promises to you, for salvation comes from the Lord.”

Then the Lord told the fish to spit out Jonah onto the shore.

Then the Lord spoke to Jonah for a second time. “Go immediately to the great city of Nineveh and announce the message I'm giving you.” Jonah did what God told him. He set out and went to Nineveh, a city that was so big it took three days to walk through it. Jonah went into the city, walking for one day, shouting out, “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed!” The people of Nineveh believed in God. They announced a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.

When the news of what was happening reached the king of Nineveh he came down from his throne, took off his robe, put on sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then the king and the nobles issued a proclamation throughout Nineveh: “No person, no animal, no herd, and no flock, shall eat or drink anything. Every person and every animal is to wear sackcloth. Everyone is to pray sincerely to God, give up the evil things they do, and stop using violence. Who knows? God may change his mind and relent. He may decide not to destroy us in his fierce anger.”

God saw what they had done—that they had given up their evil ways—so he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

But this really upset Jonah, and he became very angry. He prayed to the Lord and told him, “Lord, wasn't this what I said when I was back home? That's why I ran away to Tarshish in the first place! For I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, very patient and full of kindhearted love, who relents from sending disaster. So just kill me now, Lord, because I'd prefer to die than to live!”

The Lord responded, “Do you have a good reason to be so angry?”

Jonah left the city and sat down to the east of it. There he made himself a shelter so he could sit in the shade and watch what would happen to the city. The Lord God had a plant grow up and provide shade over Jonah's head to ease his discomfort. Jonah was very happy with the plant. The next day at dawn the Lord had a maggot attack the plant and it withered. Then as the sun came up the Lord arranged for a scorching east wind to blow, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and wanted to die. “I'd rather die than live!” he said.

But the Lord asked Jonah, “Do you have a good reason to be so angry about the plant?”

“Yes I do!” Jonah replied. “I'm angry enough to die!”

Then the Lord told Jonah, “You're concerned about a plant which you did nothing about, and you didn't make it grow. It came up overnight and died overnight.

Shouldn't I be concerned about the great city of Nineveh where one hundred and twenty thousand people live who don't know their right hand from their left, not to mention all the animals?”

Micah

Book of Micah

Here is the message that the Lord gave to Micah of Moresheth at the time when Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah. This is what he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.

Listen, all the nations! Pay attention, everyone on earth! The Lord God testifies against you from the Lord's holy Temple. Look! The Lord is coming, leaving his place and coming down, and is walking on the high places of the earth. The mountains melt beneath him, the valleys burst apart, like wax in front of a fire, like water rushing down a slope. All this is happening because of the rebellion of the descendants of Jacob, the sins of the people of Israel.

What is the rebellion of the descendants of Jacob? Isn't it what is happening in Samaria? Where are the idolatrous high places of Judah? Aren't they right in Jerusalem?

Therefore I will make Samaria a pile of rubble in a field, a place for planting vineyards. I will roll its stones down into the valley; I will lay bare its foundations. All their carved idols will be smashed to pieces. All that was earned by their temple prostitutes will be burned. All of their idols will be destroyed, for what she collected through the earnings of temple prostitutes will be taken away and used to pay other temple prostitutes. Because of this I will weep and wail, I will walk barefoot and naked, and will howl like jackals and mourn like owls.

Their wound cannot be healed, it has extended to Judah, and reached right to the gates of Jerusalem. Don't mention it in Gath; don't weep at all. People of Beth-le-aphrah, roll in the dust. Leave, people of Shaphir, naked and ashamed. People of Zanaan don't come out. People of Beth Ezel mourn, for you have lost your support. The people of Maroth wait anxiously for relief, but disaster has come down from the Lord on the gate of Jerusalem. Harness the team of horses to the chariot, you people of Lachish, because the sins of the people of Jerusalem began with you, for the sins of Israel were first found in you.

Send your goodbye gifts to Moresheth. The town of Achzib is a deception to the kings of Israel. I will bring a conqueror to attack you, people of Moresheth. The leaders of Israel will go to Adullam.

Shave your heads, for the children you love will be taken away; make yourselves as bald as a vulture, for they will be exiled far away from you.

How disastrous it will be for those who devise evil plans as they lie awake at night. They get up in the morning to carry them out, because they have the power to do just that. They seize any fields they want. They take any houses they want. They cheat people of their houses, and steal their inheritance.

So this is what the Lord says. Watch out! I am planning to bring disaster on such families. They won't be able to escape. You will no longer walk around arrogantly, for this will be a time of disaster. On that day they will make up a saying to taunt you. With a mocking lament they will say, "We are totally ruined! Our possessions are being sold off. They've taken everything away, and given our fields to your conquerors." Consequently at that time there will be none of you in the assembly of the Lord responsible for the division of the land.

But you preach at me, saying, "Don't preach such things. Don't prophesy like this. Such a humiliation won't happen to us!"

Should you talk like that, descendants of Jacob? You ask, "Can the Lord run out of patience? Is this what he does?" Are not my words good to those who do what is right? asks the Lord. Lately my people have risen up against me like an enemy. You steal the coats off the backs of those passing by, men returning from war who expect to be safe in their homeland. You drive the women of my people from their comfortable homes; you have robbed their children of my blessings forever. Get up! Leave! For this is not a place for you to stay. It is defiled and totally ruined. If a false prophet should come to you and lie, saying, "I'll preach to you about the virtues of wine and alcohol," he would be the perfect prophet for your kind of people.

I will certainly gather all of you, descendants of Jacob, I will certainly bring back together those who are left, Israel. I will place them like sheep in the fold, like a flock in its pasture. The land will be filled with people celebrating. The One who opens the way for them will lead them, breaking through the gate and going out. Their King will lead them; the Lord himself will be at their head.

Then I said, "Please listen, leaders of the descendants of Jacob, people of Israel. You are meant to know the difference between right and wrong, you who hate good and love evil! You tear off their skin, and rip the flesh from their bones. You eat the flesh of my people, you strip off their skin, you break their bones. You chop them up like meat for the saucepan, like flesh for the cooking pot."

Then they'll cry out to the Lord, but he won't answer them. He will turn away from them at that time because of the evil things they have done.

This is what the Lord says about the prophets who deceive my people. To those who feed them they prophesy peace to them, while to those who do not they prophesy war against them. Therefore it will be like night for you, with no visions; dark, with no predictions. The sun will set on these prophets; their day will end in darkness. The seers will be disgraced, the fortune-tellers put to shame, and they will cover their faces because none of them receive any answer from God.

But as for me, I am filled with power, with the spirit of the Lord. I am filled with justice and strength to make clear to the descendants of Jacob their rebellion, and to the people of Israel their sin.

Listen to me, leaders of the descendants of Jacob and the people of Israel, you who hate justice and distort all that is right. You are building Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with evil. Your leaders judge for a bribe, and your priests teach for a price, and your prophets only prophesy for pay. Yet they all lean on the

Lord saying, “Isn't the Lord here with us? Nothing bad can happen to us!” Therefore because of you Zion will become a plowed field and Jerusalem a heap of rubble, and the Temple mount will be overgrown.

In the last days, the mountain where the Lord's Temple stands will be recognized as the highest of all mountains, rising above other hills. Crowds of people from many places will travel to it. Many nations will come and say, “Let's go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the Temple of the God of Jacob. There God will teach us his ways and we will follow his directions.” God's teachings will spread out from Zion, his word from Jerusalem. The Lord will decide the cases of the nations, he will settle arguments between distant powerful nations. They will hammer their swords and turn them into plow blades, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will not fight against each other anymore; they will no longer learn methods of warfare. Everyone will be able to sit under their own vine and their own fig tree, for there will be no one to make them afraid. I, the Lord Almighty, have spoken! Even though all the other nations follow their gods, we will follow the Lord our God forever and ever.

On that day, declares the Lord, I will gather those who are lame, I will bring together those who have been scattered in exile, those whom I punished. I will make those who remain, crippled and driven far away, into a strong nation, and the Lord will rule them from Mount Zion forever and ever. And as for you, Jerusalem, watchtower of the flock, your former royal rule and power will be returned to you: the kingdom will be given back to Jerusalem.

So why are you screaming aloud? Don't you have a king? Has the king who advises you died so that pain has gripped you like a woman in childbirth? Thrash around in agony like a woman giving birth, people of Zion—for you will be expelled from the city, forced to camp out in the open, and exiled to Babylon. But the Lord will bring you back, and rescue you from the power of your enemies.

Right now many enemies are gathered against you, saying, “Let us attack and violate her, so we can look with gloating over Zion!” But they don't know what the Lord is thinking, and don't understand what he is planning. He has brought them together like bundles of grain to the threshing floor. People of Zion, get up and start threshing, for I will make for you iron horns and bronze hooves so you can break many nations into pieces. You will present their stolen plunder to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of all the earth.

Gather your troops together, Jerusalem! An enemy is besieging us. They will strike Israel's leader on the cheek with a rod. But from you, Bethlehem Ephrathah (though you are only a small place in Judah), will come a ruler of Israel to do my will. His existence is from the ages of eternity past. So the Lord will give up on them until the woman in labor has given birth. Then the rest of his brothers will return to the people of Israel. He will stand up and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. They will live in safety because his greatness is recognized all over the world. He will be our source of peace when the Assyrians invade our land and destroy our fortresses. Then we will appoint many strong leaders, and they will rule Assyria with their swords, the land of Nimrod with drawn swords. He shall rescue us from the Assyrians when they invade our land, marching across our borders.

Then those who are left of the people of Jacob shall be in the center of many nations, like dew from the Lord, like showers on the grass, which wait for no one, and which no one can delay. Those who are left of the people of Jacob shall be among many nations, in the center of many peoples. They will be like a lion among the wild animals of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, clawing and tearing as it passes through, with no one to come to the rescue. Lift your hand in triumph against your enemies; all of them will be destroyed.

On that day, says the Lord, I will kill your horses and break your chariots. I will tear down your city walls and demolish your fortresses. I will stop the witchcraft you practice; there will be no more fortune-tellers for you. I will smash down the idols and stone pillars that stand among you: you shall not bow down and worship idols that you make with your own hands any more. I will pull up the Asherah poles that you have and destroy your pagan places. In anger and fury I will execute vengeance on those nations that do not obey me.

Listen to what the Lord is saying. Stand up and plead your case. Let the mountains and the hills hear your voice.

And now, mountains, hear the Lord's argument. Listen, everlasting foundations of the earth, for the Lord has a case against his people. He will bring charges against Israel.

My people, what have I done to you? What is it that I have done to make you tired of me? For I brought you out of the land of Egypt and rescued you from slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you. My people, remember what Balak, king of Moab, planned to do, and what Balaam, son of Beor, told him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, so you could know all the good things the Lord does.

What should I take with me when I approach the Lord, when I bow down before the God of heaven? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I sacrifice my firstborn child for my rebellion, my own flesh and blood for the sins I have committed?

The Lord has told you what is good, and what the Lord asks from you: to do what is right, to love kindness, and to walk in humility with your God.

The voice of the Lord calls to the city—to respect your name is to be wise—pay attention to the rod and who summoned it. Are there still ill-gotten gains in the houses of the wicked? Are they still using dishonest measures in selling grain? How can I accept those who use unfair scales and dishonest weights? Your rich people make money by using violence; they tell lies and practice deceit. So I will strike you to make you ill; I will ruin you because of your sins. You will eat, but never be satisfied; inside you will still feel hungry. Even though you try to save money, what you save won't be worth

anything because I will give it to the sword. You will sow, but you won't reap; you will press your olives, but not use the oil; you will make your wine, but drink none of it.

You have kept the laws of Omri, and adopted all the practices of the house of Ahab, you have followed their ways. So I will make your country desolate and the people who live there an object of scorn; you will bear the shame of my people.

I'm totally miserable! I've become like someone trying to glean summer fruit after the grape harvest is over. I can't find any grapes to eat, and there are no early figs that I love. All the good people in the country are gone, there's no one who does right left anywhere. Everyone is looking to murder others; they try to trap even their own brothers. They are experts at evil; both officials and judges ask for bribes; the powerful demand their evil desires; and they scheme together to get what they want. Even the best of them is like a thorny bush, the most honest like a thorn hedge. Your day of judgment that was announced by the prophets, your time of punishment, has arrived. You're thrown into complete confusion. Don't trust a neighbor, don't rely on a friend. Watch what you say even to the one who lies in your arms. For a son treats his father with contempt; a daughter opposes her mother, and a daughter-in-law her mother-in-law. Your enemies are members of your own family.

But as for me, I look to the Lord. I will wait for the God who saves me. My God will hear me. Don't gloat over me, my enemies! Even though I fall, I will rise again. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord is my light.

I will endure the Lord's anger because I have sinned against him. But after that he will argue my case and give me justice. He will bring me into the light and I will see his integrity. Then my enemies will see it and cover their faces in shame for taunting me, asking, “Where is the Lord your God?” With my own eyes I will see what happens to them; they will be trodden down like mud in the streets.

On that day it will be time to build your walls. On that day your boundaries will be extended. On that day people will come from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, from Egypt to the Euphrates River, from sea to sea, from mountain to mountain. But the rest of the earth will become desolate because of what those who live there have done.

Protect your people with your shepherd's rod. Take care of your flock, your special people, who live alone in the wilderness and in cultivated land. Let them feed in Basham and Gilead as they did long ago.

Like the time when you left the land of Egypt, I will do miracles for you. The nations will see, and they will be humiliated despite their strength. They will cover their mouths with their hands, and their ears shall become deaf. They will lick the dust like snakes; they will be like the creepy-crawlies of the earth. They will come trembling from their fortresses to meet the Lord our God, fearful and afraid before him.

Who is a God like you who forgives sin and passes over the rebellion of those who are left of his special people? You do not remain angry forever because you delight in showing faithful love. You will have compassion on us again. You will tread our sins under your feet, and you will throw our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give your trustworthy truth to the people of Jacob, your faithful love to the people of Abraham, as you promised our forefathers long ago.

Nahum

Book of Nahum

A prophecy about Nineveh: the scroll of the vision that came to Nahum the Elkoshite. The Lord is a jealous and avenging God—the Lord God is avenging and angry. The Lord takes vengeance on his enemies, he is angry with those who are hostile to him. The Lord is slow to become angry, has great power, and will not leave the guilty unpunished. He walks among the whirlwind and the storm; the clouds are like dust beneath his feet. He commands the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither; the blossom of Lebanon fades. Mountains quake in his presence; hills melt away. The earth trembles before him—the whole world and everyone who lives there. Who can withstand his fury? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His rage pours out like molten fire; he shatters rocks to pieces.

The Lord is good, a place of safety in a time of trouble. He takes care of those who place their trust in him, but those who oppose him will be swept away by a tremendous flood to their destruction. He pursues his enemies into the darkness of death. Why are you plotting against the Lord? He will end it completely; misery won't arise twice. They entangle themselves like people caught in thorn bushes; they are like drunks full of drink. They will be completely burned up like dry straw. One of you is plotting evil against the Lord, someone who is planning wickedness.

This is what the Lord says: Even though they are strong and numerous, they will be cut down and they will pass away. Though I have caused you trouble, I will not do so anymore. Now I will break their yoke from your necks and tear away the chains which bind you.

This is what the Lord has ordered concerning you. You will have no descendants to carry on your name. I will destroy the gods in your temples, all the wooden and metal idols. I am digging your grave, for you are depraved.

Look! A messenger is coming over the mountains, bringing good news and proclaiming peace. Judah, celebrate your religious festivals and keep your vows, for never again will wicked enemies invade your land—they will be completely destroyed.

The one who scatters has come to attack you! Guard the fortresses! Watch the roads! Get yourselves ready! Call every soldier out!

(For the Lord will restore the splendor of the people of Jacob as he will restore the splendor of Israel, for invaders have plundered them, and destroyed their land.)

The shields of his chief soldiers are red; the warriors wear scarlet. His chariots flash like fire in the sunlight as he prepares for battle. Spears with their wooden shafts are held up and shaken. Chariots race madly through the streets, rushing back and forth across the town squares. Bright as torches, they dash like lightning flashes. He shouts orders to his officers. They stumble as they rush to attack the wall. The battering ram is set up. The river gates are opened; the palace washes away. “Queen” Nineveh is stripped, and led away into exile, with her servant girls mourning like doves, and beating their breasts. Nineveh is a leaky pool—its population is like water running away. “Stop! Stop” people shout, but nobody turns back. Loot the silver! Loot the gold! There's an endless supply—an abundance of everything you could ever want. Deserted, destroyed, devastated! Hearts faint, knees tremble, stomachs ache. Everyone's faces turn pale.

Where now is the lion's den? Where is the place where the young lions used to feed? Where is the lion, and the lioness, and the lion cub that were afraid of no one? The lion tears apart meat for his cubs, and strangles prey for his lionesses. He fills his den with prey, his lair with carcasses.

Watch out! For I am against you, declares the Lord Almighty. I will set fire to your chariots and they will go up in smoke. Your strong young men will be killed by the sword. I will stop you plundering other peoples. The demands of your ambassadors will no longer be heard.

What a disaster is coming upon this murderous city with all its treachery! It is full of wealth it has robbed, and always has plenty of victims. Listen to the noise: whips crack, wheels clatter, horses gallop, chariots rattle! Horsemen charge, swords flash, spears glitter! Many dead, piles of corpses, countless bodies—so many that people stumble over them.

All this happens because the repeated prostitution of Nineveh the prostitute, the beautiful mistress with her deadly charms who seduces nations into slavery by her prostitution and her witchcraft. Watch out! For I am against you, declares the Lord Almighty. I will lift your skirts over your face and let the nations see your nakedness, and kingdoms see your shame. I will throw filth at you. I will treat you with contempt, and make a spectacle of you. Then everyone who sees you will shun you saying, “Nineveh is ruined! But who is going to mourn your loss?” Where should I look to find anyone to comfort you? Are you any better than the city of Thebes on the River Nile, surrounded by water? Water was its defense, water was its wall. The city ruled Egypt and Ethiopia. Put and Libya were its allies. Yet its people were also taken away into exile, into captivity. Their babies were dashed to pieces in every street. Their nobles were bound in chains and taken away as servants, chosen by lot.

You too will behave like a drunk. You will hide in fear, trying to find a place safe from the enemy. All your fortresses are like fig trees ripe with fruit—they fall when they are shaken into the mouth of the one eating. Look! Your soldiers are women among you. The gates of your land are wide open to your enemies; the bars of the gates will be set on fire. Store water to prepare for a siege! Strengthen your fortresses! Go to the clay pits to tread it well, mix the cement, get your brick molds ready! But even so, there the fire will consume you, you will be cut down by the sword. You will be destroyed as if you were devoured by a swarm of locusts. So multiply yourselves like locusts, like a swarm of locusts. You increased your merchants so that there are more

of them than the stars of heaven. But like locusts they strip everything and then fly away. Your leaders are like locusts, your officials like a swarm of locusts. They rest on walls on a cold day, but when the sun rises they fly away, and no one knows where they've gone. King of Assyria, your shepherds are asleep, your princes are slumbering. Your people are scattered across the mountains and no one can gather them. There is no way to heal your injuries, you are too badly wounded. Everyone who hears this news will applaud what has happened to you, for was there anyone who escaped your continuous cruelty?

Habakkuk

Book of Habakkuk

This is the message that Habakkuk saw in vision.

Lord, how long do I have to cry out for help and you don't listen? I cry out, “Violence!” but you don't save us from it.

Why do you force me to see this wickedness and suffering? Why do you just observe such destruction and violence? Arguments and fighting happen right in front of me!

As a result the law is paralyzed, and justice never wins. The wicked crowd out those who do right so that the course of justice is perverted.

Look around at the nations, watch and be surprised and amazed. Something is going to happen in your time that you wouldn't believe even if you were told.

Watch! I am raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and brutal people who will march across the world to seize other lands.

They are fearsome and terrifying, and so proud of themselves that they set their own rules.

Their horses are faster than leopards and fiercer than hungry wolves. Their cavalry charges, racing in from far away. Like eagles, they swoop down to eat their prey.

Here they come, all intent on violence. Their armies advance in frontal assault as rapidly as the desert wind, capturing so many prisoners they are like sand.

They mock kings and scoff at rulers. They laugh in scorn at fortresses—they pile up earth ramps and capture them.

Then they sweep on by like the wind and are gone. They are guilty because their own strength is their god.

Haven't you existed from eternity past? You are Lord my God, my Holy One, you do not die. Lord, you appointed them to execute judgment; God our Rock, you sent them to punish us.

Your eyes are too pure to look upon evil; you cannot stand the sight of wrong. So why do you put up with untrustworthy people? Why are you silent when the wicked destroy those who do less evil than they do?

You make people become like fish in the sea, or like crawling insects, that have no ruler.

They drag everyone up with hooks, they pull them out with nets, catching them in dragnets. Then they happily celebrate.

They worship their nets as if they were gods, making sacrifices and burning incense to them, because by their nets they live in luxury, eating rich food.

Will they keep on unsheathing their swords forever, killing nations without mercy?

I will climb my watchtower; I will take my place on the city wall. I will keep watch and see what he will say to me, how he will answer my grievances.

Then the Lord told me, Write down the vision, inscribe it on tablets, so it can be easily read.

For the vision is for a future time, it is about the end and it does not lie. If it seems slow in being fulfilled, wait for it, for it will definitely come—it will not be delayed!

Look at those who are proud! They do not live right. But those who live right do so through their trust in God.

In addition wealth provides no security. Those who are arrogant never have any peace; their greedy mouths are as wide open as the grave, and like death they are never satisfied. They gather nations like possessions, swallowing up many peoples.

Won't all these peoples taunt them? They will ridicule them, saying, “What disaster is coming to you who pile up things that don't belong to you! You make yourselves rich by forcing debtors to pay! How long can you go on doing this?”

Won't your debtors suddenly act? Won't they wake up to the situation and make you tremble? You will be plunder for them!

Because you have plundered many nations, those who are left will plunder you—for the human blood you have shed and the destruction you brought on lands and cities, and those who lived there.

What disaster is coming to you who build houses through dishonest gain! You think you can place your “nest” so high it will be safe from disaster.

Your evil schemes have brought shame upon your families, by destroying many nations you have forfeited your own lives.

Even the stones in the wall cry out in condemnation, and the wooden rafters join in too.

What disaster is coming to you who build cities with bloodshed, who found cities built on wickedness!

Hasn't the Lord Almighty decided that all the hard work of such nations is going to be burned up—that they wear themselves out for nothing?

For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord's glory as the waters fill the sea.

What disaster is coming to you who make your neighbors drunk! You force your cup of anger on them and make them drink so you may see them naked.

In turn you will be filled with shame instead of glory. Drink and expose your nakedness! The cup the Lord holds in his right hand will be passed round to you and your glory will turn to shame.

As you destroyed the forests of Lebanon you will also be destroyed; you hunted the animals there, and now they will hunt you. For you shed human blood and you destroyed lands and cities, along with those who lived there.

What use is a wooden idol carved by human hands, or a metal image that teaches lies? What is the point of their makers trusting in their own handiwork, creating idols that can't speak?

What disaster is coming to you who say to something made of wood, “Wake up!” or to lifeless stone, “Get up!” Can it teach you anything? Look at it! It's covered with gold and silver, but there is no life inside it.

But the Lord is in his holy Temple; let all the earth be silent in his presence.

This is a prayer sung by the prophet Habakkuk. On Shigonoth.

I have heard what is said about you, Lord. I stand in awe of your work. Lord, revive it in our times; make it known in our times. In your anger, please remember your mercy.

God came from Teman; the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens; the earth was full of his praise.

His brightness is like lightning; rays flash from his hand from where his power is hidden.

Plague goes before him, disease follows at his feet.

Where he stands, the earth shakes. When he looks the nations tremble. The ancient mountains shatter, the age-old hills collapse, but his ways are eternal.

I saw the tents of Cushan suffering, the tent curtains of the land of Midian tremble.

Did you burn with rage against the rivers, Lord? Were you angry with the rivers? Were you furious with the sea when you rode your horses and chariots of salvation?

You took out your bow; you filled your quiver with arrows. Selah. You split the earth open with rivers.

Mountains saw you and shook. Water poured down and swept by. The deep called out, lifting high its waves.

The sun and moon stood still in the sky as your sparkling arrows flew and your spears flashed bright.

Indignant, you marched across the earth, trampling the nations in your anger.

You came out to save your people, to save your chosen people. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, stripping him from thick to neck.

With his own arrows you pierced the heads of his warriors, those who came like a whirlwind to scatter me, gloating like those who secretly abuse the poor.

You trod upon the sea with your horses, churning up the mighty waters.

I shook inside when I heard this; my lips quivered at the sound; my bones turned to jelly; I trembled where I stood. I wait quietly for the day of trouble that will come upon those who attacked us.

Even though there are no blossoms on the fig trees and there are no grapes on the vines; even though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no harvest; even though there are no animals in the pen and no cattle in the stalls;

still I will be happy in the Lord, joyful in the God of my salvation.

The Lord God is my strength. He makes me able to walk in the highest mountains, as sure-footed as a deer.

(To the music director: with my stringed instruments.)

Zephaniah

Book of Zephaniah

This is the message that the Lord gave to Zephaniah. He was the son of Cushti, son of Gedaliah, son of Amariah, son of Hezekiah. This happened when Josiah, son of Amon, was king of Judah.

I will completely sweep away everything from the face of the earth, declares the Lord. I will sweep away people and animals, I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will destroy human beings from the face of the earth. I will strike Judah and everyone who lives in Jerusalem. I will destroy all that remains of their Baal worship along with their pagan priests so that even their names will be forgotten. I will destroy those who go up to the rooftops to bow down before the sun, moon, and stars. They also bow down and swear allegiance to the Lord, but then they do the same to Milcom. I will destroy those who once worshiped the Lord but don't anymore. They don't seek the Lord or ask for my help.

Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is near: the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. Then on the day of the Lord's sacrifice I will punish the officials and the king's sons, and those who follow pagan ways. I will also punish those who jump over the threshold. On that day I will punish those who fill up their masters' houses using violence and deception. On that day, declares the Lord, a cry of grief will come from the Fish Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crash from the hills. Those who live in the Market District will wail in sorrow, for all the merchants are destroyed, along with those who trade in silver. At that time I will search through Jerusalem with lamps and I will punish those self-satisfied people, who are like wine left on its dregs, who say to themselves, “The Lord will not do good, nor will he do evil.” Their possessions will be looted; their houses will be demolished. They will build houses, but not live in them; they will plant vineyards, but not drink the wine.

The great day of the Lord is near and approaching rapidly. It will be a bitter day—even warriors will cry out loud. It will be a day of anger, a day of trouble and distress, a day of disaster and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet calls and battle cries against fortified cities and watchtowers. I will bring trouble on humanity, making them walk like blind people because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be spilled like so much dust; their intestines like dung. Their silver and their gold won't help to save them on the day of the Lord's anger. The whole earth will be burned up by the fire of his jealous anger. He will make sure the end of the people of the world is sudden and complete.

Come together, yes, gather together, you worthless nation— before the decree is issued, before you wither and die like a flower, before the burning anger of the Lord falls on you, before the day of the Lord's anger comes on you. Look to the Lord, all you people of the land who are humble and who follow his commands. Look to do what is right; look to live in humility. Perhaps you will be protected on the day of the Lord's anger. Gaza will be abandoned, Ashkelon will become desolate, Ashdod will be emptied by noon, Ekron will be ripped up. What disaster is coming to you Philistines, you sea-people who live along the coast and in the land of Canaan! The Lord has passed judgment on you. I will destroy you—there will be no survivors. Your seacoast will become pastures, with meadows for shepherds and sheep pens for flocks. It will belong to those who remain of the people of Judah. They will graze their flocks there, and the shepherds will sleep in the abandoned houses of Ashkelon. For the Lord their God will be with them and make them prosperous again.

I have heard the mocking taunts of the Moabites and the scornful derision of the Ammonites who have insulted my people and made threats against their territory. Consequently, as I live, declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, the Moabites will become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah. Their land will become a place of weeds and salt pits and ruins forever. Those who remain of my people will plunder them and occupy their land. This is what they will receive for their pride because they mocked and threatened the people of the Lord Almighty. The Lord will make them terribly afraid as he starves to death all the gods of the land. Every nation will worship the Lord wherever they are—all around the world.

You Ethiopians will be killed by the sword. The Lord will strike the Assyrians in the north and destroy them. He will make Nineveh desolate, a dry wasteland like the desert. Herds will lie down in the middle of the city. It will become the home for every kind of wild animal. Eagle owls and screech owls will roost on its columns. Their calls will echo through the windows. Rubble will block the doors, and the cedar woodwork will be exposed. This is what will happen to this triumphant city that thought it was so secure. “Look at me!” it said proudly to itself. “There is no city as great as me!” But it has become a desolate place—just a home for wild animals. Everyone who passes by will point their finger and laugh in derision.

What disaster is coming to corrupted, rebellious Jerusalem, you who oppress people! You don't listen to anybody, you don't accept correction, you don't trust in the Lord, you don't ask for God's help. Your leaders are as greedy as roaring lions; your judges are ravenous wolves that leave nothing behind by morning. Your prophets are arrogant, deceitful men who defile what is sacred and who openly break the law.

But the Lord who does right is still among you, he does no wrong. Every morning he gives his judgment, every day without fail. But those who act unjustly have no shame. I have destroyed nations. Their fortresses are deserted; their streets are empty; their cities are destroyed—there are no survivors, not one.

I told myself, “Surely they will respect me now and accept my correction. Then their homes would not be destroyed to teach them a lesson.” But instead you're just as eager to go on doing evil.

You just wait, declares the Lord. The day is coming when I will rise to give evidence. For I have decided to gather together all the nations and kingdoms and to pour out on them my anger, my fury and my rage. The whole earth will be burned up by the fire of my jealous anger. For then I will give the nations pure speech so they can all pray and worship the Lord together. From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my scattered people, my worshipers, will come to bring their offerings to me.

On that day you won't be ashamed because of what you did in rebelling against me, for I will remove from among you those who are proud and boastful. Never again will you be conceited on my holy mountain. I will leave among you those who are meek and humble, those who trust in the name of the Lord. The people of Israel who remain will not act wickedly nor will they tell lies. They will not deceive one another. They will be able to eat in peace and sleep in safety for there will be nothing to frighten them.

Sing out, Jerusalem! Shout aloud, Israel! Jerusalem, be happy and celebrate with all your heart! For the Lord has turned aside from punishing you, and he has turned back your enemies. The Lord, the king of Israel, is with you, and you will never again have to fear disaster. On that day the message to the people of Jerusalem will be, “Don't be afraid; don't be discouraged!” The Lord your God is among you as a mighty warrior who saves. He will be so happy with you. He will renew his love for you. He will celebrate over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the religious festivals—you will no longer have to bear the disgrace.

Look at what I am going to do! At that time I am going to deal with all those who have oppressed you. I will save those who are helpless and bring back those who were scattered, and I will turn their shame into praise, and all the world will respect them. At that time I will bring you home, gathering you together. I will give you a good reputation, and you will be praised by all the peoples of the earth when I restore your status before your very eyes, says the Lord.

Haggai

Book of Haggai

In the second year of the reign of king Darius, on the first day of the sixth month, the Lord sent a message through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

The Lord Almighty says this: the people say, “This isn't the proper time to rebuild the Lord's house.”

Then the Lord sent a message through the prophet Haggai, saying, Is it the proper time for you to live in your paneled houses while this house remains a ruin? So the Lord Almighty says this: Think about what you're doing! You have sown much but harvested little. You eat but you're still hungry. You drink but you're still thirsty. You put on clothes but you're still cold. You work hard to earn money but put it in a bag full of holes. The Lord Almighty says this: Think about what you're doing! Go into the hills and bring wood to build the house. This will please me and honor me, says the Lord. You were hoping for so much, but look, it turned out to be so little. Everything you brought home I blew away. And why was that? Because my house remains a ruin while you are preoccupied with building your own houses, declares the Lord Almighty. That's why the clouds of heaven refused to send rain, and the earth refused to produce crops. I called for a drought on the land, on the hills, on the grain fields, on the vineyards, and on the olive groves—on whatever the earth produces—and on people and livestock, on everything you do!

Then Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, together with all the remaining people, paid attention to what the Lord said, and to the words of Haggai the prophet that the Lord their God had sent. The people showed reverence before the Lord.

Then Haggai, the Lord's messenger, delivered this message from the Lord telling the people, I am with you! says the Lord.

The Lord inspired Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remaining people. They came and began work on the house of the Lord Almighty. This happened on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth month in the second year of the reign of king Darius.

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month, the Lord sent a message through the prophet Haggai.

Say to Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and all the remaining people, Is there anyone left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it seem like nothing to you? So then be strong, Zerubbabel! Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, high priest! Be strong, all you people who remain in the land! Work, for I am with you, says the Lord Almighty. Just as I promised you when you left Egypt, my Spirit continues to be among you. Don't be afraid! This is what the Lord Almighty says: Soon I will shake the heavens and the earth once more, and the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the one desired by all of the nations will come and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, declares the Lord Almighty. The glory of this second house will be greater than the first, says the Lord Almighty, and I will bring peace in this place. So declares the Lord Almighty.

On the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of the reign of king Darius, the Lord sent a message through the prophet Haggai. “This is what the Lord Almighty says: Ask the priests about the law. If someone carries some meat from a holy sacrifice in a fold of their clothes and that fold touches some bread or stew or wine or olive oil or any other kind of food, does that food become holy?” And the priests answered, “No.” Then Haggai asked, “If someone becomes unclean by touching a dead body and then touches any of these foods, do they become unclean?” The priests answered, “Yes, it does become unclean.” Then Haggai responded, “This is how it is with these people, and with the nation before me, says the Lord. All that they do, every offering they bring, is unclean.”

Now think about what you're doing from this day on. Before a stone was laid on another stone in the house of the Lord, how was it for you? You expected a store of grain with twenty measures but only found ten. You thought you could empty out fifty measures from the winepress but there was only twenty. I struck with blight and mildew and hail everything you were working so hard for, but even so you refused to come back to me, says the Lord. Think about what you're doing from this day on, today the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month when a foundation was laid for the house of the Lord. Think about it: the seed is still in the barn. The vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate tree, and the olive tree have not yet given fruit. But from this day on I will bless you.

The Lord sent another message through the prophet Haggai on the twenty-fourth day of the month: Tell Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms and destroy the power of the nations' kingdoms. I will overthrow the chariots and their riders. The horses and riders will fall, and the men will kill each other by the sword. On that day, says the Lord, I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, my servant, and make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you. So declares the Lord Almighty.

Zechariah

Book of Zechariah

The Lord sent a message to Zechariah the prophet, son of Berekiah, son of Iddo, in the eighth month of the second year of king Darius' reign, saying:

The Lord was very angry with your forefathers. So tell the people this: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. You must not be like your forefathers. They were told by previous prophets: Give up your evil ways, and the evil things you do. But they would not listen or pay any attention to me, says the Lord. Where are your forefathers now? And the prophets, did they live forever? But didn't all my instructions and warnings that I ordered my servants the prophets to communicate, didn't all that I said happen to your forefathers? So they repented and said, “What the Lord Almighty planned to do to us was what we deserved because of our ways and our actions. He did what he said he would.”

The Lord sent a message to Zechariah the prophet, son of Berekiah, son of Iddo, on the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month (the month of Shebat) of the second year of king Darius' reign:

During the night I saw a man sitting on a red horse that stood among some myrtle trees in a narrow valley. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses with their riders. I asked him, “My lord, what are these?” The angel I was talking to replied, “I will show you.” The man who was there among the myrtle trees said, “These are the ones the Lord has sent out to patrol the earth.” The riders reported to the angel of the Lord who was among the myrtle trees, “We have been patrolling the earth and saw that the whole earth has been pacified.”

Then the angel of the Lord said, “Lord Almighty, how long will it be before you have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah which you have been angry with for the past seventy years?”

So the Lord replied to the angel I was talking to with kind and comforting words.

Then the angel I was talking with told me, “This is what you are to announce. The Lord Almighty says this: I am jealously protective of Jerusalem and Mount Zion, and I am extremely angry with the arrogant nations who think they are secure. I was only a little angry with my people, but they made the punishment far worse.

Therefore this is what the Lord says: I have returned to be merciful to Jerusalem. My Temple shall be rebuilt there, as well as the city, declares the Lord Almighty.

Announce this as well, says the Lord Almighty: Prosperity will flood out of my cities. I the Lord will comfort Zion, and Jerusalem will be my chosen city.”

Then I looked and saw four animal horns. “What are these?” I asked the angel I was talking to.

“These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem,” he replied.

Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. “What are these men coming to do?” I asked.

The angel replied, “The four horns—these nations—scattered Judah, humbling the people so that they could not lift up their heads. These craftsmen have to come to terrify these nations, and to destroy them—those who used their power against the land of Judah, scattering the people.”

Then I looked again and I saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. “Where are you going?” I asked him.

“I'm going to Jerusalem to measure its width and length,” he replied. The angel I was talking to came forward and another angel came to meet him and told him, “Run, and tell the young man that Jerusalem will have so many people and farm animals that it will be too big to have walls.” The Lord declares, I myself will be a wall of fire all around the city, and I will be the glory inside it.

Run! Run! Run away from the northern land, says the Lord, because I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven. Run away, people of Zion! All of you who live in Babylon must escape. For this is what the Lord Almighty said: Afterwards the glorious Lord sent me against the nations that plundered you—for those who touch you touch the apple of his eye. I will raise my hand against them and their former slaves will plunder them. Then you will know the Lord Almighty has sent me.

Sing in celebration, people of Zion, for I am coming to live with you, declares the Lord. Many nations will become believers in the Lord on that day, and they shall be my people. I will live among you, and you will know the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. The people of Judah will be the Lord's special people in the holy land, and he will once again choose Jerusalem as his special city. Be silent before the Lord, everyone, for he has risen from the holy place where he lives.

Then the Lord showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing on his right accusing him. And the Lord said to Satan, “The Lord rebukes you Satan. I, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you. Isn't he like a half-burned stick snatched from the fire?” Joshua was wearing filthy clothes as he stood in front of the angel.

The angel said to those standing there, “Take off his filthy clothes.” Then he said to Joshua, “See how I have taken away your sins from you, and now I am dressing you with fine clothes.”

Then I said, “Wrap a clean turban around his head.” So they wrapped a clean turban around his head and put the clothes on him while the angel of the Lord stood there.

Then the angel of the Lord solemnly advised Joshua, saying, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: If you follow my ways and observe my commands, then you will govern my Temple and its courtyards. I will allow you to walk among those standing here. Pay attention, high priest Joshua and all your fellow-priests that you teach! You are a sign of good things to come. Look! I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. See that I have placed a precious stone in front of Joshua, a single stone with seven faces. Watch, for I myself am going to engrave seven eyes on it, declares the Lord Almighty, and I will wipe away the sins of this land

in a single day. On that day everyone will invite their friends to sit in peace under their vines and fig trees, says the Lord Almighty."

Then the angel I had been talking to returned and got my attention, like waking someone from sleep.

"What do you see?" he asked me.

"I see a lampstand made of solid gold with a bowl at its top having seven lamps on it, each with seven lips. I also see olive trees, one to the right and one to the left of the bowl."

Then I asked the angel I was talking to, "What are these, my lord?"

"Don't you know what these are?" the angel replied.

"No, my lord," I responded.

Then he told me, "This is the Lord's message to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, says the Lord Almighty. Even obstacles as big as mountains will be flattened before Zerubbabel. Finally he will bring out the capstone to shouts of 'Blessings on it!'"

Then the Lord gave me another message. Zerubbabel with his own hands laid the foundations for this Temple, and it will be completed the same way. Then you will know the Lord Almighty has sent me. For who dares look down on this time of small beginnings? They will be happy when they see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand.

"The seven lamps represent the eyes of the Lord which see all over the world."

Then I asked the angel, "What are the two olive trees that stand to the right and the left of the lampstand?" And I also asked him, "What are the two olive branches from which the golden oil pours out from through golden pipes?"

"Don't you know?" the angel replied.

"No, my lord," I responded.

"These are the two who have been anointed who stand by the Lord of all the earth," he replied.

I looked again and saw a flying scroll.

"What do you see?" asked the angel.

"I see a flying scroll," I replied. "It's thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide."

He told me, "This is the curse that is going out to all the world. Anyone who steals will be purged from society, according to one side of the scroll. Anyone who swears lies under oath will be purged from society, according to the other side of the scroll."

"I have sent the curse out and it will go into the house of the thief and into the house of the one who swears lies in my name, declares the Lord Almighty. The curse will remain in that house, and will destroy it, both the timbers and the stones."

Then the angel I had been talking to came over to me and said, "Look. What do you see moving away?"

"What is it?" I asked.

"What you see moving away is a barrel full of the sins of everyone in the country," he replied. Then the lead lid was lifted from the barrel and there was a woman sitting inside. "She represents wickedness," he said, and pushed her back inside, forcing the lead lid shut.

I looked once more and saw two women flying towards me. Their wings looked like those of a stork. They picked up the barrel and flew away, high into the sky.

"Where are they taking it?" I asked the angel I was talking to.

"They're taking it to the land of Babylon to build a house for it. When the house is ready, the barrel will be placed at its base."

Then I looked again and I saw four chariots coming out from between two mountains that looked like bronze. The first chariot was pulled by red horses, the second by black horses, the third by white horses, and the fourth by dappled grey horses—all of them strong horses.

"My lord, what are these?" I asked the angel I was talking to.

"They are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves to the Lord of all the earth," the angel explained. The chariot with the black horses went north, the one with the white horses went west, and the one with the dappled grey horses went south. When the strong horses came out they were eager to set off to patrol the earth. And he said, "Go and patrol the earth!" So they left and patrolled the earth.

Then the angel called to me, saying, "Look! Those who went north have achieved what the Lord wanted in the land of the north."

Then the Lord gave me another message: Take the gifts brought by Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, the exiles returning from Babylon, and go immediately to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Use the silver and the gold they brought to make a crown, and place it on the head of Josiah, son of Jehozadak, the high priest.

Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: Look! The man who is called the Branch will grow from where he is and will build the Lord's Temple. He is the one who will build the Lord's Temple, and he will be the one given the honor to rule from both the royal throne and the priestly throne and there will be peace and understanding between the two roles. The crown will be kept in the Temple of the Lord as a memorial to Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Joshua the son of Zephaniah. People who live in distant lands will come and build the Temple of the Lord, and you will know that the Lord Almighty sent me to you. This will happen if you listen attentively to what the Lord tells you.

The Lord sent a message to Zechariah on the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev. This was during the fourth year of king Darius' reign. Bethel-sharezer sent Regem-melech and his men to ask for the Lord's blessing. They were to ask the priests of the Temple of the Lord Almighty and the prophets, "Should I go on mourning and fasting in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

The Lord Almighty sent a message to me saying, Tell everyone in the land and the priests, when you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and the seventh month during these seventy years, was it really me you were fasting for? And when you eat and drink, don't you eat and drink for yourselves? Isn't this what the Lord told you to do through the former prophets, when Jerusalem was prosperous and inhabited, and when people were living in the Negev and the Shephelah?

The Lord Almighty sent another message to me. This is what the Lord says. Judge fairly and truthfully. Show mercy and kindness to one another. Don't exploit those who are widowed or fatherless, foreigners or the poor. Don't think up ways of mistreating one other.

But they refused to listen. They were obstinate, turning their backs and closing their ears. They made their minds unreceptive, as hard as stone. They refused to listen to the law or to what the Lord Almighty told them by his Spirit through the former prophets. That's why the Lord Almighty became very angry with them.

So since they didn't listen when I called out to them, I wouldn't listen when they called out to me, says the Lord Almighty. With the winds of a storm I scattered them among the nations where they lived as foreigners. The land they left became so desolate that no one even traveled through it. They turned the Promised Land into a desert.

Then the Lord Almighty sent another message to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says. I am jealously protective of the people of Zion; I am extremely passionate about them. This is what the Lord says. I have returned to Zion, and I will live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the "Faithful City," and the mountain of the Lord Almighty the "Holy Mountain."

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Old people will be able to sit again in the streets of Jerusalem, each with their walking sticks they need because of their age. The streets will be full of boys and girls playing happily.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. It may seem too good to be true now, to you who remain of my people in these days. But is it impossible for me to do? asks the Lord Almighty.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. I will save my people from the countries to the east and to the west. I will bring them back and they will live in Jerusalem, and they will be my people and I will be their God, trustworthy and true.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Be strong, so that the Temple may be completed. Everyone who is here today is listening to the same words from the prophets who were present on the day when the foundation of the Lord Almighty's Temple was laid.

Before that time there wasn't enough for people or for animals. No one could live normally because they were not safe from their enemies, and I set everyone against each other.

But now I won't treat those who remain of my people like I treated them before, declares the Lord Almighty. They will sow in peace; the vine will produce grapes; the soil will grow crops and the heavens will water them. I will make sure this happens to all those who remain of this people. People of Judah and Israel: just as you were considered a curse among the nations, so I will save you and you will become a blessing. Don't be afraid! Be strong! For this is what the Lord Almighty says: I decided to bring disaster on you when your forefathers angered me and I did not change my mind. But now I have made up my mind to do good to Jerusalem and the people of Judah. Don't be afraid! This is what you have to do: Tell each other the truth. In your courts judge honestly and truthfully, which makes for peace. Don't think up evil schemes against one another. Stop your love of lies. I hate all this, declares the Lord.

The Lord Almighty gave me another message. This is what the Lord Almighty says: The fasts you observe in the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth month will become times of joy and happiness for the people of Judah—they will be festivals of celebration. But love truth and peace.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: People from many nations and cities will yet come to Jerusalem, going from one city to another saying, "Let us be sure to go and seek the Lord and ask for the blessing of the Lord Almighty. I myself am going!" Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to ask for the blessing of the Lord Almighty and seek the Lord.

This is what the Lord Almighty says: At that time ten men from different nations and languages will grab hold of the hem of a Jewish man's robe and plead, "Please take us with you for we have heard that God is with you."

A prophecy: A message from the Lord to the land of Hadrach, and Damascus its main objective. For the eyes of human beings together with all the tribes of Israel are on the Lord, and Hamath too since it is close by. Also Tyre and Sidon for they are very wise.

The people of Tyre built a fortress, and piled up silver like dust and gold like the dirt of the street. But look at what will happen. The Lord will take away everything they have, and knock down their strong defenses into the sea. The city will be burned down. The people of Ashkelon will see this and be terrified; those in Gaza will thrash around in agony like a woman giving birth; and the people of Ekron too, because their hopes are shattered. The king of Gaza will be killed, and Ashkelon will be deserted. Mixed-race people will live in Ashdod, and I will wipe out the Philistine's pride. I will remove the blood-filled meat from their mouths; the unclean food from their jaws. Those who remain will belong to our God—they shall become like a family of Judah—and those from Ekron will become part of my people, just as the Jebusites did. I will make my camp in my Temple to guard it from invaders, and no oppressors will conquer them, for now I myself am keeping watch.

Be happy and celebrate, people of Zion! Shout loudly, people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He does what is right and has salvation; he is humble, riding on a donkey—on a colt, the foal of a donkey. (I will remove the chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy the bows used in battle.) He will proclaim peace to the nations, and he will rule from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. And as for you, because my agreement with you, sealed with blood, I will set you free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners who have hope! Today I promise I will repay you double what you lost. I will use Judah as my bow, and I will load it with Ephraim my arrow. I will call up you men of Zion to fight against you men of Greece, wielding you like a warrior's sword.

Then the Lord will appear over his people and his arrow will flash like lightning! The Lord God will blow the trumpet and march out like a windstorm from the south. The Lord Almighty will protect them. They

will destroy their enemies, conquering them with slingshots. They will drink and shout loudly like people who are drunk. They will be filled like a bowl, soaked liked the corners of an altar. On that day the Lord their God will save them—his people that are his flock—for they will glitter as crown jewels in his land. How lovely and beautiful they will be! Young men will grow strong on grain, and young women flourish on the new wine.

Ask the Lord for rain in springtime, for he makes the rainclouds and sends showers to grow crops for everyone. Household idols give worthless answers, fortune-tellers tell lies, while interpreters of dreams just make things up and offer only false hope. As a result, people wander aimlessly like sheep, suffering because there is no shepherd.

I am angry with the shepherds, I will punish the leaders. For the Lord Almighty cares for his flock, the people of Judah, and will make them like his splendid warhorse. From the people of Judah will come the cornerstone, from them the tent-peg, the bow used in battle—all their rulers together. They will be like warriors going into battle, trampling their enemies in the mud. Because the Lord is with them they will fight and defeat the enemy cavalry. I will strengthen the people of Judah; I will save the people of Joseph. I will bring them back home because I am concerned for them. It will be like I had never rejected them, for I am the Lord their God and I will answer their cries for help. The people of Ephraim will become like warriors, and they will become so happy—as if they had drunk wine. Their children will see what is happening and will be glad too, joyful in the Lord. I will whistle to them and they will run to me. I will rescue them, and there will be as many as there were before. I have scattered them like seed among the nations, and in distant places they will remember me. They will bring up their children, and together they will return. I will bring them back from the land of Egypt; I will gather them from Assyria. I will bring them to Gilead and Lebanon, and there won't be enough room for them! They will pass through the sea of trouble and strike the waves of the sea, and the waters of the Nile will dry up. Assyria's pride will be brought down, and Egypt's rule will pass away. I will make them strong in the Lord, and they will follow all he says, declares the Lord.

Open your doors, Lebanon, so that fire can burn up your cedars! Weep, juniper, because the cedar has fallen, the majestic trees are ruined! Weep, oaks of Bashan, for the thick forest has been cut down! Listen to the howls of the shepherds, for their pastureland is destroyed. Listen to the roars of the young lions, for their Jordan habitat is ruined.

This is what the Lord my God says: Become a shepherd of the flock marked for slaughter. Those who buy them kill them and don't feel guilty; those who sell them say, “Praise the Lord! Now I'm rich!” Even their shepherds don't care about them. For I will no longer care about the people of the Land, declares the Lord. I am going to make them victims of each other, and of the king. They will devastate the earth and I won't help anyone get away from them.

So I became a shepherd of the flock marked for slaughter by the sheep merchants. Then I took two staffs, one named Grace, the other named Union, and I shepherded the flock. In one month I dismissed three shepherds. I became impatient with them, and they also hated me. Then I said, “I will not be your shepherd. If the sheep die, they die. Let those that are to perish, perish. Let those who are left eat each other!”

Then I took my staff called Grace and broke it, breaking the agreement I had made with all the peoples. It was broken on that day, and the sheep merchants who were watching me knew that it was a message from the Lord. I told them, “If you want to pay me my wages, then do so. If not, then don't.” So they paid me my wages—thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, “Throw the money to the treasury,” this measly sum they thought I was worth! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw it into the treasury of the Lord's Temple.

Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the family union between Judah and Israel. The Lord told me, Get the things you use as a shepherd, a useless shepherd. For I am placing a shepherd in charge of the land who won't care for those who are dying, or look for the lost, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy. Instead he will eat the meat from the fattest sheep. He even tears their hooves off. What disaster is coming to this useless shepherd who abandons the flock! The sword will strike his arm and his right eye. His arm will wither away and his right eye will become completely blind.

A prophecy: This message came from the Lord concerning Israel, a declaration of the Lord who spread out the heavens, who laid the foundations of the earth, and who placed the breath of life within human beings.

Look! I am going to make Jerusalem like a cup containing alcoholic drink that will make all the surrounding nations stagger like drunks when they come to attack Judah and Jerusalem. On that day I will make Jerusalem like a heavy rock to all peoples. Anyone who tries to lift the rock will injure themselves badly. All the nations will join together to attack Jerusalem. On that day I will make every horse panic-stricken and every rider go mad, declares the Lord, but I will watch over the people of Judah while I blind all the horses of their enemies. Then the families of Judah will say to themselves, the people of Jerusalem are strong in their God, the Lord Almighty. On that day I will make the families of Judah like burning coals in a wood, like a flaming torch in a field of straw. They will burn up to the right and to the left all the surrounding peoples, while the people of Jerusalem will live safely in their city. The Lord will give the victory to the soldiers of Judah first so that the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem shall not be greater than that of Judah. On that day the Lord will place a shield around the people of Jerusalem so that even the clumsiest of them will be as skilled a warrior as David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of the Lord who leads them. On that day I will start destroying all those nations that attack Jerusalem. I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They will look at me whom they pierced, and they will wail in grief over him, mourning as for an only child, weeping bitterly as

for a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning in Hadad-Rimmon in the valley of Megiddo. The land will mourn, every family alone: the family house of David alone and their women by themselves, the families of Nathan, Levi, and Shimei— and all the surviving families and their women, each group mourning alone by themselves.

On that day a spring will be opened and continually flow for the house of David and for the people of Jerusalem to wash away their sin and impurity. On that day, declares the Lord Almighty, I will wipe out idol worship from the land—the idols will not be remembered any longer. I will remove the false prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. If anyone continues to prophesy, his father and mother to whom he was born will tell him, “You shall not live, because you have told lies in the Lord's name.” Then his parents shall kill him because he has prophesied.

On that day such prophets will be too humiliated to prophesy their supposed visions. In order to deceive they will not put on their prophet's clothes made of coarse hair. They will say, “I'm not a prophet, I'm a farmer. I've worked on the land since I was a child.” If somebody asks him, “What are those wounds on your back?” he will answer, “I was wounded in my friend's house.”

Wake up, my sword! Attack my shepherd, the man who stands beside me! declares the Lord. Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered, and I will raise my hand against the lambs. Two thirds of the people of the land will be cut down, only one third will remain, says the Lord. I will place this one third in the fire, and I will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They will call on me for help, and I will answer them. I will say, “These are my people,” and they will say, “The Lord is my God.”

Watch out! For the day of the Lord is coming when what has been plundered from you will be divided up right in front of you. I will bring together all the nations to attack Jerusalem. The city will be captured, the houses looted, and the women raped. Half the population will be taken into exile, but the rest of the people will not be removed from the city.

Then the Lord will go out to fight against the nations as he fights in times of war. On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives which faces Jerusalem to the east. The Mount of Olives will split apart, with half moving north and half moving south, creating a wide valley from east to west. You will run away through this mountain valley for it will reach as far as Azal. You will run away like people did at the time of the earthquake during the reign of Uzzah, king of Judah. Then the Lord will come, accompanied by all his holy ones. On that day there will be no longer cold and frost. It will be one continuous day (only the Lord knows how this could happen). It won't be day or night, because in the evening it will still be light.

On that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of it going east to the Dead Sea and half going west to the Mediterranean Sea, flowing in summer and winter alike. The Lord will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one true Lord, and his name the only one. The whole land will be transformed into a plain, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will be raised up to where it was, and people will live there from the Benjamin Gate to where the old gate was, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. It will be inhabited and never again condemned to destruction again—people will be able to live in safety in Jerusalem. This will be the plague that the Lord will use to strike all the nations that attacked Jerusalem. Their flesh shall rot while they are still standing on their feet; their eyes will rot in their sockets; their tongues will rot in their mouths.

On that day the Lord will strike them with a terrible panic, and they will seize one another, and fight hand-to-hand. Even Judah will fight in Jerusalem. The wealth of the surrounding nations shall be collected: lots of gold, silver, and clothes. A similar plague will strike the horses, mules, camels, donkeys, and all other animals that may be in their camps.

After this every one of the survivors from the nations that attacked Jerusalem will go there to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Shelters. If any of the peoples of the world refuse to go to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord Almighty, they will have no rain. If the Egyptian people refuse to go and attend, then the Lord will inflict on them the same plague as on the other nations who will not go celebrate the Festival of Shelters. This will be the punishment on Egypt and all the nations if they do not go to Jerusalem and celebrate.

On that day the bells worn by horses will be engraved with the words “Holy to the Lord.” The household cooking pots used in the Lord's Temple will be as holy as the bowls used on the altar in the presence of the Lord. Every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord Almighty, so that everyone who comes to sacrifice can take them and cook their sacrificial meat in them. On that day there will no longer be traders in the Lord's Temple.

Malachi

Book of Malachi

A prophecy: This message came from the Lord concerning Israel through Malachi.

I have loved you, says the Lord.

But you ask, “How have you loved us?”

Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? the Lord responds. But I loved Jacob and despised Esau. I have made Esau's mountain homeland into a wasteland, and turned his inheritance into a desert for jackals.

The people of Edom may be saying: “We have been beaten down, but we will rebuild the ruins.”

But this is what the Lord Almighty says, They may try and build, but I will tear down. They will be called a land of wickedness, and the people those who make the Lord angry forever. You will see this destruction with your own eyes, and you will say, “The Lord is great, even beyond the borders of Israel.”

A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. So if I am your father, where is my honor? If I am your master, where is my respect? says the Lord Almighty to you priests who show contempt for me.

But you ask, “How have we shown contempt for you?”

By making defiled offerings on my altar.

Then you ask, “How have we defiled you?”

By saying the Lord's table doesn't deserve respect.

When you offer a blind animal as a sacrifice, isn't that wrong? Or when you offer an animal that is crippled or sick, isn't that wrong? Would you give such gifts to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Would he be kind and show favor to you? asks the Lord Almighty.

So why don't you try being kind to God, begging him to be merciful to you? But when you bring such offerings, why should he show favor to you? asks the Lord Almighty. I really wish one of you would shut the Temple doors to stop you lighting pointless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you, says the Lord Almighty, and I will not accept offerings from you.

I am honored by nations from the farthest east to the distant west; everywhere people make offerings to me of incense and pure sacrifices. I am honored among the nations, says the Lord Almighty.

But you dishonor me when you say the Lord's table doesn't deserve respect, and that its food can be treated with contempt. You say, “All this is too much trouble!” and you sniff scornfully at it, says the Lord Almighty. But when you bring animals that are stolen or crippled or sick and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept what you're giving? asks the Lord. Cursed are those who cheat by vowing to bring a ram as a sacrifice and then offers an imperfect animal to the Lord. For I am a great King, says the Lord Almighty, and I am respected among the nations!

Now this command is for you priests! If you will not listen and if you will not take it to heart to honor me, says the Lord Almighty, then I will place a curse on you and I will curse your blessings—in fact I have already cursed them because you haven't taken what I said to heart. Watch out! I am going to penalize your descendants. I will spread manure on your faces from the animals you sacrifice, the manure from your religious festivals, and you will be thrown out with it. Then you will know that I sent you this command so that my agreement with Levi can continue, says the Lord Almighty. My agreement with him was one of life and peace, which I gave to him, and respect—he respected me. He stood in awe of me. He taught the people the truth; nothing in his teaching was false. He walked with me in peace and did what was right, and he helped many to turn away from sin. A priest should explain the truth about God, they should go to him to be taught, for he is the Lord Almighty's messenger.

But you have turned from my way. You have made many people to fall into sin. By your teaching you have broken the agreement with Levi, says the Lord Almighty. So I have destroyed any respect you had, and humiliated you before all the people. For you have not kept my ways, and have shown favoritism in what you teach.

Don't we all have one Father? Didn't one God create us? So why are we unfaithful to each other, violating the agreement made by our forefathers? The people of Judah have been unfaithful and have committed a disgusting sin in Israel and Jerusalem. For the men of Judah have defiled the Lord's Temple (which he loves) by marrying women who worship idols. May the Lord expel the family of any man who does this from the nation of Israel! May there be no one left to bring an offering to the Lord Almighty!

Something else you do is to pour out your tears on the Lord's altar weeping and moaning because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or doesn't want to accept them.

“Why not?” you ask. Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife exchanged when you were young. You were unfaithful to her, your wife and partner joined to you by marriage contract.

Did he not make you one, and give some of his Spirit to you? And what does he want? Children of God. So watch what you do, and don't be unfaithful to the wife you married when you were young. For I hate divorce, says the Lord God of Israel, for it's a violent attack on the wife, says the Lord Almighty. So watch what you do, and don't be unfaithful.

You have worn the Lord out with your words.

“How have we worn him out?” you ask.

By saying everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and he is happy with them, or by asking, where is the Lord's justice?

Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way for me. The Lord you are seeking will suddenly arrive at his Temple. The messenger of the agreement you say is so happy with you is coming, says the Lord Almighty. Who can survive the day when he comes? Who can stand before him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing furnace that refines metal, or like the strong alkali that cleanses stains. He will sit down like a refiner who purifies silver; he will purify Levi's descendants and refine them like gold and silver so they can present pure offerings to the Lord. Then the

offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord as they did in the old days, in the former years. I will come and put you on trial. I am ready to be a witness against those who:

practice witchcraft
commit adultery
tell lies
give false evidence
cheat employees
oppress widows and orphans
abuse foreigners

and do not respect me, says the Lord Almighty. For I am the Lord, I don't change, and you haven't stopped being descendants of Jacob. From the time of your forefathers onward, you have turned away from my laws and not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.

But you ask, “How should we return?”

Should people defraud God? Yet you are defrauding me!

But you ask, “How have we defrauded you?”

In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, for you and the whole nation are defrauding me. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there will be food in my Temple. Put me to the test in this, says the Lord Almighty, and I will open the windows of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you won't have enough room for it. I will prevent locusts from destroying your crops, and your vineyards will not fail to bear fruit, says the Lord Almighty. All nations will call you blessed because you live in such a wonderful land, says the Lord Almighty.

You have said harsh things about me, says the Lord.

But you say, “What have we said against you?” You have said, “What's the point of serving God? What benefit is there in keeping his commandments or going before the Lord Almighty with long faces? From now on we'll say that the proud are blessed. Evil people do well, and nothing happens when they dare God to punish them.”

Then those who truly respected the Lord spoke to each other, and the Lord heard what they said. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence of those who respected the Lord and paid attention to him. They shall be mine, says the Lord Almighty, my prized possession on the day when I take action. I will treat them kindly, as a father treats an obedient son. Then you will once again be able to distinguish those who do right from those who do wrong, between those who serve him and those who don't.

Watch out! The day is coming—it burns like an oven—when the proud and the wicked will be burned like straw. When that day comes they will be completely burned up, root and branch, says the Lord Almighty. But for those who have reverence for me, the sun of God's salvation will rise with healing in its wings, and you will be set free, leaping like calves released from their stalls. You will trample the wicked as ashes under your feet on the day when I take action, says the Lord Almighty. Remember the law of Moses my servant that I commanded him and all Israel to follow—all the instructions and ceremonies I gave on Mount Sinai. Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet before the day of the Lord arrives, the great and terrifying day. He will restore harmony between parents and children, and if that does not happen, I will come and strike the land with a curse.

Matthew

The Gospel According to Matthew

This book is the record of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham, beginning with the family line:

Abraham was the father of Isaac; and Isaac the father of Jacob; and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers; and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah (their mother was Tamar); and Perez the father of Hezron; and Hezron the father of Ram; and Ram the father of Amminadab; and Amminadab the father of Nahshon; and Nahshon the father of Salmon; and Salmon the father of Boaz (his mother was Rahab); and Boaz the father of Obed (his mother was Ruth); and Obed the father of Jesse; and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon (his mother had been Uriah's wife); and Solomon the father of Rehoboam; and Rehoboam the father of Abijah; and Abijah the father of Asa; and Asa the father of Jehoshaphat; and Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram; and Jehoram the father of Uzziah; and Uzziah the father of Jotham; and Jotham the father of Ahaz; and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah; and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh; and Manasseh the father of Amon; and Amon the father of Josiah; and Josiah the father of Jehoiachin and his brothers, at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon, Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel; and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel; and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud; and Abiud the father of Eliakim; and Eliakim the father of Azor; and Azor the father of Zadok; and Zadok the father of Akim; and Akim the father of Eliud; and Eliud the father of Eleazar; and Eleazar the father of Matthan; and Matthan the father of Jacob;

and Jacob was the father of Joseph, who was the husband of Mary, to whom Jesus was born, the one who is called the Messiah.

So all the generations from Abraham to David add up to fourteen; from David to the Babylonian exile, fourteen; and from the Babylonian exile to the Messiah, fourteen.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah happened. His mother, Mary, was engaged to Joseph, but before they slept together she became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and didn't want to shame her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement discreetly.

While he was thinking about all of this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and told him, “Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to marry Mary because she is pregnant by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Now this all happened to fulfill what the Lord said through the prophet: “A virgin will become pregnant, and will give birth to a son. They will call him Immanuel,” which means “God with us.”) Joseph woke up and did what the angel of the Lord told him to do. Joseph married Mary, but did not sleep with her until after she had given birth to a son, whom he named Jesus.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the reign of King Herod, wise men came from the east to Jerusalem.

“Where is the King of the Jews who has been born?” they asked. “We saw his star in the east and we've come to worship him.”

When King Herod heard about it, he was very disturbed, and the whole of Jerusalem with him. Herod summoned all the chief priests and religious teachers of the people, and asked them where the Messiah was supposed to be born.

“Bethlehem in Judea,” they told him, “for that's what the prophet wrote: ‘Bethlehem in the land of Judea, you are certainly not the least important of Judah's leading cities, for a leader will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.’”

Then Herod called the wise men and met with them in private and found out from them exactly when the star appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, telling them, “When you get there, search for the child. Once you find him let me know so that I can come and worship him too.”

After they had heard what the king had to say they went on their way, and the star which they had seen in the east led them until it stopped right above the place where the child was. When they saw the star they couldn't contain their happiness! They went into the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. They bowed and worshiped him. Then they opened their bags of treasure and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Warned by a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by a different route.

After they'd left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, and told him, “Get up, and take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt. Remain there until I tell you, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

So Joseph got up and took the boy and his mother, and left during the night for Egypt. They stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord said through the prophet, “I called my son out of Egypt.”

When Herod realized he'd been fooled by the wise men, he got very angry. He sent men to kill all the young boys in Bethlehem and the regions nearby who were two years old and under. This was based on the time frame he'd discovered from the wise men. In this way Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled: “The sound of terrible weeping and mourning was heard in Rama, Rachel crying for her children. They are dead, and she can't be comforted.”

After Herod died the angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and told him, “Get up! Take the child and his mother, and return to the land of Israel, because those who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

So Joseph got up and took the boy and his mother, and returned to the land of Israel. But Joseph was afraid to go there after he learned that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod as king of Judea. Warned

in a dream, Joseph went to the Galilee area and settled down in Nazareth. This fulfilled what the prophets had said, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

Some time later John the Baptist appeared on the scene, proclaiming in the Judean desert, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has arrived!” He was the one Isaiah spoke about when he said, “A voice is heard crying out in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord. Make the paths straight for him.’”

John had clothes made of camel hair, with a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People came to him from Jerusalem, all of Judea, and the entire Jordan region, and were baptized in the Jordan River, publicly admitting their sins.

But when John saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptized, he said to them, “You vipers' brood! Who warned you to run away from the coming judgment? Show by what you do that you have truly repented, and don't presume to say proudly to yourselves, ‘Abraham is our father.’ I tell you that God could make children of Abraham from these stones. In fact the ax is ready to chop down the trees. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.

Yes, I baptize you in water to show repentance, but after me is coming one who is greater than I am. I'm not worthy even to remove his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He has his winnowing tool ready in his hand. He will clean up the threshing floor and gather the wheat into the storehouse, but he will burn the chaff with fire that can't be put out.”

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to change his mind. He told Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me to baptize you?”

“Please do so, because it's good for us to do what God says is right,” Jesus told him. So John agreed to do it.

Immediately after he was baptized, Jesus came out of the water. The heavens were opened, and he saw God's Spirit like a dove descending, landing on him. A voice from heaven said, “This is my son whom I love, who pleases me.”

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and nights, he was hungry. The tempter came and said to him, “If you really are the Son of God, order these stones to turn into bread.”

Jesus answered, “As Scripture says, ‘Human beings do not live by only eating bread, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the top of the Temple.

“If you really are the son of God, then throw yourself off,” he told Jesus. “As Scripture says, ‘He will order his angels to save you from harm. They will catch you so that you won't fall by tripping over a stone.’”

Jesus answered, “As Scripture also says, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

Then the devil took Jesus to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in all their glory. He said to Jesus, “I will give you all these if you fall down on your knees and worship me.”

“Go away, Satan!” said Jesus. “As Scripture says, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve him, and him alone.’” Then the devil left him, and angels came to care for him.

When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he came to stay in Capernaum, on the shores of the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphthali. This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said, “In the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphthali, on the road to the sea, across the Jordan River, in Galilee where the foreigners live: The people living in darkness saw a great light; the light of dawn has shined on those living in the land of the shadow of death.” From that time on Jesus began declaring his message, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has arrived!”

As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee Jesus saw two brothers. Simon, also called Peter, and his brother Andrew, were casting a net in the sea. They made their living by catching fish.

“Come and follow me, and I will teach you how to catch people,” he told them. They left their nets immediately and followed him. Continuing on he saw two other brothers, James and John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets. He called them to follow him. They left the boat and their father immediately, and followed him.

Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, telling the good news of the kingdom, and healing all the diseases and illnesses the people had. News about him spread throughout the province of Syria. They brought everyone who was sick to him: people troubled by seizures, the demon-possessed, those who were mentally ill, people who were paralyzed, and he healed all of them. Large crowds followed him from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region beyond Jordan.

When Jesus saw the crowds following him he went up a mountain. There he sat down together with his disciples. He began teaching them, saying:

“Blessed are those who recognize they are spiritually poor, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who are kind for they will own the whole world. Blessed are those whose greatest desire is to do what is right, for they will be satisfied. Blessed are those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are those who have pure minds, for they will see God. Blessed are those who work to bring peace, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those persecuted for what is right, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and accuse you of all kinds of evil things because of me. Be glad, be really glad, for you will receive a great reward in heaven—for they persecuted the prophets who came before you in just the same way.

You are the salt of the earth, but if the salt becomes tasteless, how can you make it salty again? It's good for nothing, so it's thrown out and trodden down. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill can't be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a bucket. No, it's placed on a lamp-stand and it provides light to everyone in the house. In the same way you

should let your light shine before everyone so they can see the good things you do and praise your heavenly Father.

Don't think I came to abolish the law or the writings of the prophets. I didn't come to abolish them, but to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven and earth come to an end, not a single letter, not a single dot of the law will come to an end before everything is fulfilled. So whoever disregards the least important commandment, and teaches people to do so, will be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches the commandments will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. I tell you, unless your moral rightness is more than that of the religious teachers and the Pharisees, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You've heard that the law said to the people of long ago: 'You shall not murder, and anyone who commits murder will be condemned as guilty.' But I tell you, anyone who is angry with his brother will be condemned as guilty. Whoever calls his brother an idiot has to answer to the council, but whoever verbally abuses others is liable to the fire of Gehenna. If you're at the altar making an offering, and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering on the altar and go and make peace with him first, and afterwards come back and make your offering. While you're on the way to court with your opponent, make sure you settle things quickly. Otherwise your opponent might hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the court official, and you will be thrown into jail. I tell you the truth: you won't get out of there until you've paid every last penny.

You've heard that the law said, 'Don't commit adultery.' But I tell you that everyone who looks lustfully at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his mind. If your right eye leads you to sin, then tear it out and throw it away, because it's better to lose one part of your body than to have your whole body thrown into the fire of Gehenna. If your right hand leads you to sin, then cut it off and throw it away, for it's better for you to lose one of your limbs than for your whole body to go into the fire of Gehenna.

The law also said, 'If a man divorces his wife, he should give her a certificate of divorce.' But I tell you that any man who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

And again, you've heard that the law said to the people of long ago, 'You shall not perjure yourself. Instead make sure you keep the oaths you swear to the Lord.' But I tell you, don't swear at all. Don't swear by heaven, because it's the throne of God. Don't swear by the earth, because it's God's footstool. Don't swear by Jerusalem, because it's the city of the great King. Don't even swear by your head, because you're not able to make a single hair white or black. Simply say yes or no —more than this comes from the evil one.

You've heard that the law said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't resist someone who is evil. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek to them as well. If someone wants to sue you in court and takes your shirt, give them your coat too. If someone demands that you go one mile, go with them two. Give to those who ask you, and don't turn away those who want to borrow from you. You've heard that the law said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so you may become children of your heavenly Father. For his sun shines on both the good and the bad; and he makes the rain fall on both those who do right and those who do wrong. For if you only love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don't even the tax collectors do that? If you only speak kindly to your family, what more are you doing than anyone else? Even the heathen do that! Grow up and become completely trustworthy, just as your heavenly Father is trustworthy."

"Make sure not to do your good deeds in front of people, just so they can be seen. Otherwise you won't have any reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to the poor, don't be like the hypocrites who blow their own trumpets to announce what they're doing in the synagogues and in the streets so that people will praise them. I tell you the truth: they already have their reward. When you give to the poor, don't let your left hand know what your right hand's doing. That way what you give will be in secret, and your Father who sees what happens in secret will reward you.

When you pray, don't be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand up and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that people can see them. I promise you, they already have their reward. But you, when you pray, go indoors and close the door, and pray to your Father in private, and your Father who sees what happens in private will reward you. When you pray, don't babble on meaninglessly like the foreigners do, who think they will be heard because of all the words they repeat. Don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need even before you ask him. So pray like this:

Our heavenly Father, may your name be honored. May your kingdom come! May your will be carried out in earth as it is in heaven. Please give to us today the food we need. Forgive our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. Please don't let us give in to temptation, and save us from the evil one.

For if you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you don't forgive those who sin against you, then your heavenly Father won't forgive your sins.

When you fast, don't be like the hypocrites who put on sad faces and make themselves look terrible so that everyone can see they're fasting. I tell you the truth, they already have their reward. Instead, when you fast, wash your face and look smart, so that people won't see you're fasting, and your unseen Father who sees what happens in private will reward you.

Don't pile up wealth here on earth where moths and rust ruin it, and where thieves break in and steal it. Instead, you should store up your wealth in heaven, where moths and rust don't ruin it, and where thieves don't break in and steal it. For what you value the most shows who you really are.

The eye is like a lamp that lights the body. So if your eye is healthy, then your whole body will have light.

But if your eye is evil, then your whole body will be in the dark. If the 'light' you have is actually darkness, how dark is that! No one can serve two masters. Either you'll hate one and love the other, or you'll be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Money.

That's why I'm telling you not to worry about your life. Don't worry about what to eat, or what to drink, or what clothes to put on. Isn't life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds—they don't sow or reap or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren't you worth more than they are? Who of you by worrying can add a minute to your life? And why are you worried about clothes? Look at the beautiful flowers in the field. See how they grow: they don't work hard, they don't spin thread. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was dressed like one of these flowers. So if God decorates the fields like this, grass which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, won't he do much more for you, you people who trust so little? So don't worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' These are all the things that the heathen chase after, but your heavenly Father knows everything you need. Seek his kingdom first, and his way of living right, and everything will be given to you. So don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow can worry about itself. There's already enough evil in every day."

"Don't judge others, so that you won't be judged. For whatever standard you use to judge others will be used to judge you, and whatever measurement you use to measure others will be used to measure you. Why do you see the speck that's in your brother's eye? Don't you notice the plank that's in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take out that speck from your eye' when you have a plank in your own eye? You're being hypocritical! First get rid of the plank that's in your own eye. Then you'll be able to see clearly to take out the speck from your brother's eye.

Don't give dogs what's holy. Don't throw your pearls to pigs. That way the pigs won't trample them underfoot, and the dogs won't turn and attack you.

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks, receives; everyone who seeks, finds; and everyone who knocks has the door opened for them. Would any of you give your son a stone if he asked for bread? Or if he asked for fish, would you give him a snake? So if even you who are evil know to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to those who ask him.

Treat others the way you want them to treat you. This sums up the law and the prophets. Enter by the narrow entrance. For the entrance is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many travel that way. But the entrance is narrow, and the way is difficult that leads to life, and only a few find it.

Watch out for false prophets who come wearing sheep's clothing, but who on the inside are vicious wolves. You can recognize them by their fruits. Do people harvest grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So every good tree produces good fruit, while a bad tree produces bad fruit. A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. So you'll recognize them by their fruits.

Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven—only those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me at the Day of Judgment, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name, and perform many miracles in your name?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Leave me, you people who practice wickedness!'

Everyone that hears the words I say, and follows them, is like a wise man who built his house on solid rock. The rain poured down, and the floods rose, and the winds blew hard against the house, but it didn't fall down, because its foundations were on solid rock.

Everyone that hears the words I say, and doesn't follow them, is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain poured down, and the floods rose, and the winds blew hard against the house, and it fell down—it totally collapsed."

When Jesus finished explaining these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for he taught like someone with authority, and not like their religious teachers.

Large crowds followed Jesus once he'd come down from the mountain. A leper approached him and bowed down, worshiping him, and said, "Lord, if you're willing, please heal me." Jesus reached out and touched him with his hand. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" Immediately he was healed from his leprosy.

"Make sure you don't tell anyone," Jesus told him. "Go and show yourself to the priest and give the offering which Moses required as public proof."

When Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came up to him, begging for help, "Lord, my servant is at home, lying down, unable to move. He's in terrible agony."

"I will come and heal him," Jesus replied.

The centurion answered, "Lord, I don't merit a visit to my home. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I am myself under the authority of superiors, while I also have soldiers under my command. I command one, 'Go!' and he goes. I command another, 'Come!' and he comes. I tell my servant, 'Do this!' and he does it."

When Jesus heard what he said, he was astonished. He told those who were following him, "I tell you the truth, I haven't found this kind of trust anywhere in Israel. I tell you that many will come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown out into utter darkness where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

Then Jesus told the centurion, "Go home. Because you trusted that it would happen, what you asked for has been done." The servant was healed right away.

When Jesus arrived at Peter's house, he saw that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her. She got up and began making him a meal.

When evening came they brought many who were demon-possessed to Jesus. He made the spirits leave at

his command, and he healed all those who were sick. This fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah said: “He healed our diseases, and freed us from our illnesses.”

When Jesus saw the crowds around him, he gave instructions that they should go to the other side of the lake. One of the religious teachers approached him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go!”

“Foxes have their dens, and wild birds have their nests, but the Son of man has nowhere he can lie down and rest,” Jesus told him.

Another disciple said to Jesus, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

“Follow me! Leave the dead to bury their own dead,” Jesus replied.

Then Jesus got into a boat and his disciples went with him. A violent storm suddenly blew up, and waves crashed over the boat, but Jesus went on sleeping. The disciples went over to him and woke him up. “Save us, Lord! We're going to drown!” they shouted.

“Why are you so afraid? Why do you trust so little?” he asked them. Then he got up, and commanded the winds and the waves to stop. Everything became absolutely calm. The disciples were astonished, and said, “Who *is* this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

When he arrived on the other side, in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men came out of the graveyard to meet him. They were so dangerous that nobody dared to travel that way. They shouted out, “What have you got to do with us, you Son of God? Have you come to torture us before our time?”

In the distance a large herd of pigs was feeding. The demons pleaded with him, “If you're going to drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs.”

“Go!” said Jesus. The demons left the men and went into the pigs. The whole herd ran down the steep hillside into the sea and drowned. The pig herders ran away. They went to the town and told the people there everything that had taken place, and what had happened to the demon-possessed men. The whole town came out to meet Jesus. When they found him, they begged him to leave their district.

So Jesus took a boat back across the lake to the town where he lived. There they brought to him a paralyzed man lying on a mat. When Jesus saw how they trusted him, he told the paralyzed man, “My friend, cheer up! Your sins are forgiven.”

In response some of the religious teachers said to themselves, “He's speaking blasphemy!”

But Jesus knew what they were thinking. He asked them, “Why are you thinking evil thoughts in your minds? What is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Get up and walk’? But to convince you that the Son of man does have the authority to forgive sins…” he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, pick up your mat, and go home!” The man got up and went home. When the crowds saw what had happened, they were scared. Then they praised God that he had given human beings such power.

As Jesus moved on from there he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth. Jesus called to him, “Follow me!” He got up, and followed Jesus. While Jesus was eating at Matthew's home, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down at the table with Jesus and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this they asked Jesus' disciples, “Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

When Jesus heard the question, he replied, “Those who are well don't need a doctor, but sick people do. Go and discover what this means: ‘I want mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I didn't come to call those who do what's right—I came to call sinners.”

Then the disciples of John came and asked, “Why is it that we and the Pharisees fast frequently, but your disciples don't?”

“Do wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is with them?” Jesus responded. “But the time is coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they will fast. No one puts a new patch on old clothes, otherwise it will shrink and make the tear worse. No one puts new wine in old wineskins either, otherwise the wineskins will burst, spilling the wine and ruining the wineskins. No, new wine is put into new wineskins, and both last.”

While he was telling them this, one of the leading officials came and bowed before him. “My daughter has just died,” the man told Jesus. “But if you come and place your hand on her, I know she will come back to life.”

Jesus and his disciples got up and followed him. At that moment a woman who had been sick with bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the hem of his cloak. She had told herself, “If I can just touch his cloak, I'll be healed.”

Jesus turned and saw her. “Be happy, daughter, for your trust in me has healed you,” he told her. The woman was immediately healed.

Jesus arrived at the official's house. He saw the flute-players and the crowd that was weeping loudly. “Please leave,” he told them, “For the girl isn't dead, she's just asleep.” But they laughed and made fun of him. But once the crowd had been sent out, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of what happened spread throughout that region.

As Jesus continued on from there, two blind men followed him, shouting, “Son of David, please have mercy on us!” When Jesus arrived at the house where he was staying, the blind men came in too.

“Are you convinced that I'm able to do this?” he asked them.

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

Then Jesus touched their eyes, and said, “Because of your trust in me it will happen!” And they could see. Then Jesus warned them, “Make sure nobody knows about this.” But they went and spread the word about Jesus everywhere.

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving, a man was brought to him who was dumb and demon-possessed. Once the demon had been thrown out of him, the dumb man spoke, and the crowds were amazed. “Nothing ever happened like this before in Israel,” they said. But the Pharisees remarked, “He throws out demons using the power of the chief of demons.”

Jesus went all over, visiting the towns and villages. He taught in their synagogues, telling them about the good news of the kingdom, and he healed all kinds of sicknesses and diseases. When he saw the crowds, Jesus was deeply moved with compassion for them, because they were troubled and helpless, like sheep without a

shepherd. He told his disciples, "The harvest is large, but there are only a few workers. Pray to the Lord of the harvest, and ask him to send more workers for his harvest."

Jesus called his twelve disciples together and gave them power to throw out evil spirits, and to heal all kinds of diseases and sicknesses.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (also called Peter), Andrew his brother, James the son of Zebedee, John his brother, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the revolutionary, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

Jesus sent out these Twelve, telling them, "Don't go to the foreigners, or to any Samaritan city. You are to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Wherever you go, tell the people, 'The kingdom of heaven has arrived.' Heal those who are sick. Resurrect the dead. Cure the lepers. Drive out demons. You received freely, so give freely! Don't carry any gold, silver, or copper coins in your pockets, or a bag for your journey, or two cloaks, or sandals, or a walking stick, for a worker deserves to be supported. Wherever you go, whatever town or village, ask for someone who lives according to good principles, and remain there until you leave. When you enter the house, give it your blessing. If the home deserves it, let your peace rest on it, but if it doesn't deserve it, let your peace return to you.

If someone doesn't welcome you, and refuses to listen to what you have to say, then leave that house or that town, shaking its dust off your feet as you go. I tell you the truth, it will be better for Sodom and Gomorrah at the Day of Judgment than for that town!

Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. So be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Watch out for those who will hand you over to be tried by town councils and will whip you in their synagogues. You will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, to witness to them and to the foreigners. But when they put you on trial, don't worry about how you should speak or what you should say, because you'll be told what to say at the right time. For it isn't you who will speak but the Spirit of the Father will speak through you. Brother will betray brother and have him killed, and a father will do the same to his child. Children will rebel against their parents, and have them put to death. Everyone will hate you because you follow me, but those who endure until the end will be saved.

When you're persecuted in one town, run away to the next. I'm telling the truth: you won't finish going to the towns of Israel before the Son of man comes. Disciples are not more important than their teacher; servants are not more important than their master. Disciples should be satisfied to become like their teacher, and servants like their master. If the head of the house has been called the head demon Beelzebub, then the members of his household will be demonized even more! So don't be frightened of them, for there's nothing covered that won't be exposed, and nothing hidden that won't be made known. What I tell you here in the dark, declare when it's light, and what you hear whispered in your ear, shout from the rooftops. Don't be afraid of those who can kill you physically, but can't kill you spiritually. Instead, be afraid of the one who can destroy you physically and spiritually in Gehenna. Aren't two sparrows sold for just one penny? But not a single one of them falls to the ground without your Father knowing about it. Even the hairs on your head have all been counted. So don't worry—you're worth more than many sparrows!

Anyone who publicly declares their commitment to me, I will also declare my commitment to them before my Father in heaven. But anyone who publicly denies me, I will also deny before my Father in heaven. Don't think I've come to bring peace on earth. I haven't come to bring peace, but a sword. I've come 'to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Your enemies will be those of your own family!' If you love your father or mother more than me you don't deserve to be mine, and if you love your son or daughter more than me you don't deserve to be mine. If you don't pick up your cross and follow me you don't deserve to be mine. If you try to save your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life because of me you will save it.

Those who welcome you welcome me, and those who welcome me welcome the one that sent me. Those who welcome a prophet because that's what they are, will receive the same reward as a prophet. Those who welcome someone who does right will receive the same reward as someone who does right. I tell you the truth, those who give a drink of cool water to the least important of my disciples will definitely not miss out on their reward."

When Jesus had finished giving instructions to his twelve disciples, he left to go and teach and speak publicly in the nearby towns. While John was in prison he heard what the Messiah was doing, so he sent his disciples to ask on his behalf, "Are you the one we were expecting to come, or should we continue to look for someone else?"

Jesus answered them, "Go back and tell John what you hear and what you see. The blind can see, the crippled can walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf can hear, the dead are resurrected, and the poor hear the good news. Blessed are those who don't reject me!"

As they left, Jesus began to talk to the crowds about John. "What were you expecting to see when you went out into the desert? A reed tossed about by the wind? So what did you go to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? People dressed like that live in kings' palaces. So what did you go to see then? A prophet? Yes, and I tell you he is much more than a prophet! He's the one this Scripture was written about: 'I'm sending my messenger on ahead of you. He will prepare your way for you.' I tell you the truth, that among humanity there's no one greater than John the Baptist, but even the least important in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he is. From the time of John the Baptist up till now the kingdom of heaven continues to be under attack, and violent people are trying to seize it by force. For all the prophets and the law spoke for God until John came. If you're prepared to believe it, he is Elijah, the one who was expected to come. Anybody with ears should be listening!

What shall I compare this generation to? It's like children sitting in the marketplaces shouting to each other, 'We played the flute for you and you didn't dance; we sang sad songs and you didn't cry.' John didn't come feasting and drinking, so people say, 'He's devil-possessed!' On the other hand the Son of man came and did feast and drink, and people say, 'Look, he's greedy and drinks too much; he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is shown to be right by what it does..."

Then he began to reprimand the towns where he'd done most of his miracles because they had not repented. "Shame on you, Korazin! Shame on you, Bethsaida! If the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which happened among you, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes long ago. But I tell you that on the Day of Judgment it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than it will for you! And what about you, Capernaum? Will you be exalted to heaven? No, you'll go down to Hades! If the miracles had been performed in Sodom which happened among you, Sodom would still be here today. But I tell you that on the Day of Judgment it will be better for Sodom than it will for you!"

Then Jesus prayed, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you've hidden these things from the clever and sophisticated. Instead you've revealed them to ordinary people. Yes, Father, you were pleased to do this! Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father, and no one really understands the Son, except the Father, and no one really understands the Father, except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all of you who struggle and who are burdened down. I will give you rest. Accept my yoke, and learn from me. For I am kind and have a humble heart, and in me you will find the rest you need. For my yoke is gentle, and my burden is light."

Around that time Jesus was walking through fields of grain on the Sabbath day. His disciples were hungry so they started to pick ears of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this they said to Jesus, "Look at your disciples—they're doing what isn't allowed on the Sabbath!"

But Jesus told them, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his men were hungry? He went into the house of God, and he and his men ate the sacred bread that they weren't allowed to eat since it's only for the priests. Haven't you read in the law that on the Sabbath day the priests in the Temple break the Sabbath but are not considered guilty? However, I tell you that someone is here who is greater than the Temple! If you'd known the meaning of this Scripture, 'I want mercy, and not sacrifice,' you wouldn't have condemned those who are innocent. For the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Then Jesus left and went into their synagogue. A man was there with a crippled hand. "Does the law allow healing on the Sabbath?" they asked him, looking for a reason to accuse him.

"Suppose you have a sheep and it falls into a hole in the ground on the Sabbath. Don't you grab hold of it and pull it out?" Jesus asked them. "Don't you think a human being is worth much more than a sheep? So yes, you are allowed to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." The man held out his hand, and it was healed, just as healthy as the other hand.

But the Pharisees went out and plotted how to kill Jesus. Knowing this, Jesus left, with large crowds following him. He healed all of them, but instructed them not to tell people who he was. This fulfilled what Isaiah the prophet said:

This is my servant whom I've chosen,
The one I love, who pleases me.
I will put my Spirit on him,
And he will tell the foreigners what's right.
He won't argue, he won't shout out,
And nobody will hear his voice in the streets.
He won't break a damaged reed,
And he won't extinguish a smoking wick,
Until he has proved that his judgment is right,
And foreigners will put their hope in him.

Then a man was brought to Jesus who was demon-possessed and blind and dumb. Jesus healed him, so that the dumb man could speak and see. All the crowds were amazed, and asked, "This man couldn't really be the son of David, could he?"

But when the Pharisees heard this, they replied, "This man can only throw out demons through the power of Beelzebub, the chief of demons!"

Knowing what they were thinking, Jesus told them, "Any kingdom that is divided against itself will be destroyed. No town or household that is divided against itself can stand. If Satan drives out Satan, then he's divided against himself—so how could his kingdom stand? If I'm throwing out demons in the name of Beelzebub, in whose name are your people throwing out demons? Your own people prove you're wrong! But if I'm throwing out demons through the power of the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you!

Can you enter a strong man's house and take his belongings unless you tie him up first? If you do that then you can take everything in his house. Those who are not with me are against me, and those who do not gather together with me do the opposite: they are scattering. That's why I'm telling you that every sin and blasphemy you commit will be forgiven, except blasphemy against the Spirit which won't be forgiven. Those who say something against the Son of man will be forgiven, but those who say something against the Holy Spirit won't be forgiven, neither in this life nor the next. Either decide that the tree is good, and its fruit is good, or decide that the tree is bad and its fruit is bad—for the tree is known by its fruit. You viper's brood, how can you who are evil say anything good? For your mouth simply says what your mind is busy thinking about. A good person brings out good from their store of good things, and an evil person brings out evil from their store of evil things. I tell you, people will have to account for every careless thing they say on the Day of Judgment. For what you say will either vindicate you or condemn you."

Then some of the religious teachers and Pharisees came to him and said, "Teacher, we want you to show us a miraculous sign."

"An evil and adulterous generation are the ones who look for a miraculous sign. The only sign they will be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah," Jesus told

them. “In the same way Jonah was in the belly of a huge fish for three days and three nights, the Son of man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. The people of Nineveh will rise in the judgment together with this generation and they will condemn it because they repented in response to Jonah's message —and as you see, there's someone greater than Jonah here! The Queen of the South will be raised in the judgment together with this generation and will condemn it because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon—and as you see, there's someone greater than Solomon here!

When an evil spirit leaves someone, it wanders through deserted places looking for rest, and finds nowhere to stay. So it says, ‘I'll go back to the place I left,’ and when it returns it finds the place empty, all clean and tidy. Then it goes and brings back seven other spirits even more evil than it is, and it enters and lives there. So the person ends up worse than they were at the beginning. That's the way it will be with this evil generation.”

While he was speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers arrived and stood outside, wanting to talk to him. Someone came and told him, “Look, your mother and brothers are outside, wanting to talk to you.”

“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Jesus asked. He pointed at his disciples, and said, “Look, they are my mother and my brothers! For those who do the will of my heavenly Father, they are my brother, sister, and mother!”

Later that day Jesus left the house, and sat down to teach beside the sea. So many people gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat down there to teach, while all the crowds stood on the beach. He explained many things to them, using stories as illustrations.

“The sower went out to sow,” he began. “As he was sowing, some of the seeds fell on the path. The birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on stony ground where there wasn't much earth where they sprouted quickly. The sun rose and scorched them and they withered because they had no roots. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked them. Still other seeds fell on good soil. They produced a harvest —some one hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what had been planted. Anybody who has ears should be listening!”

The disciples came to Jesus and asked him, “Why do you use illustrations when you speak to the people?”

“You're privileged to have revealed to you the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but they're not given such insights,” Jesus replied. “Those who already have will have more given to them, more than enough. But those who don't have, whatever they have will be taken away from them. That's why I speak to them in illustrations. For even though they see, they don't see; and even though they hear, they don't hear; nor do they understand.

The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled in them: ‘Even though you hear, you won't understand, and even though you see, you won't perceive. They have a hard-hearted attitude, they don't want to listen, and they've closed their eyes. If they didn't they might be able to see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand in their minds. Then they could return to me and I would heal them.’

Your eyes are blessed, for they see. Your ears are blessed too, for they hear. I'm telling you, many prophets and good people longed to see what you're seeing, but didn't see it. They longed to hear what you're hearing, but didn't hear it.

So listen to the story of the sower. When people hear the message about the kingdom and don't understand it, the evil one comes along and rips out what was sown in them. This is what happens to the seeds sown on the path. The seeds sown on stony ground are people who hear the message and happily accept it straight away. They last for a while, but because they don't have roots, when problems and troubles come, they quickly fall away. The seeds sown among thorns are people who hear the message, but then life's worries and the temptation of money choke the message so that they become fruitless. The seeds sown on good soil are people who hear the message, and understand it, and who produce a good harvest—some one hundred, some sixty, and some thirty times what was sown.”

Then he told them another illustrated story: “The kingdom of heaven is like a farmer who sowed good seeds in his field. But while his workers were sleeping, an enemy came and sowed weed seeds on top of the wheat. Then they left. So when the wheat grew and produced ears of grain, the weeds also grew up. The farmer's workers came and asked him, ‘Sir, didn't you sow good seeds in your field? Where did the weeds come from?’

‘Some enemy has done this,’ he replied. ‘Do you want us to go and pull up the weeds?’ they asked him. ‘No,’ he answered, ‘as you pull up the weeds, you might uproot the wheat too. Let them both grow until harvest, and then at harvest-time I'll tell the reapers to first gather the weeds, tie them up into bundles and burn them, and then gather the wheat and store it in my barn.’”

He gave them another illustration: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a farmer sowed in his field. Even though it's the tiniest of seeds it grows much bigger than other plants. In fact it grows into a tree big enough for birds to roost in its branches.”

He told them another illustrated story: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman mixed with a large quantity of flour, until all the dough was raised.” Jesus explained all these things to the crowds using illustrated stories—in fact he didn't speak to them without using stories. This fulfilled the prophet's words: “I will speak using stories, and I will explain things hidden from the creation of the world.”

Then Jesus left the crowds and went into a house. His disciples came over to him, and asked him, “Please explain to us the story about the weeds in the field.”

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of man,” Jesus explained. “The field is the world. The good seeds are the children of the kingdom. The weed seeds are the children of the evil one. The enemy that sowed the weed seeds is the devil. The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are harvested and burned so it will be at the end of the

world. The Son of man will send out his angels, and they will gather up every sinful thing and everyone who does evil, and will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Then those who live right will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Anybody with ears should be listening!

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. A man found it, reburied it, and then full of joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. The kingdom of heaven is also like a trader looking for good pearls. When he found the most expensive pearl ever he went and sold all he had and bought it. Or again, the kingdom of heaven is like a fishing net thrown into the sea that caught all kinds of fish. When it was full it was dragged ashore. The good fish were put into baskets while the bad ones were thrown away.

That's the way it will be when the end of the world comes. The angels will go out and separate the evil people from the good, and throw them into the blazing furnace where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.

Now do you understand everything?"

"Yes," they replied.

"This is why every religious teacher who's learned about the kingdom of heaven is like a house-owner who brings out from his storeroom both new and old treasures," Jesus said.

After Jesus finished telling these stories, he left. He went back to his home town and taught in the synagogue there. People were amazed, and asked, "Where does he get his wisdom and miracles from? Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and his brothers James, and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? Don't his sisters live here among us? So where does he get all this from?" And so they refused to believe in him.

"A prophet is honored everywhere except in his homeland and in his family," Jesus told them. Since they failed to trust in him, he did not do many miracles there.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard what Jesus was doing and he told his servants, "He must be John the Baptist resurrected from the dead, and that's why he has such powers!" Herod had detained John, and had him put in chains and imprisoned on account of Herodias, the wife of Philip, his brother. For John had been telling him, "It's not legal for you to marry her." Herod wanted to kill John but he was afraid of the people's reaction for they considered John a prophet.

However, on Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the party, and Herod was delighted with her. So he promised with an oath to give her whatever she wanted. Prompted by her mother, she said, "Give me here on a plate the head of John the Baptist." Then the king regretted the promise he had made, but because of the oaths he'd made in front of his dinner guests, he gave the order to do it. The order was passed on and John was beheaded in prison. John's head was brought on a plate and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body, and buried him. Then they went and told Jesus.

When Jesus heard the news he went away by boat to a quiet place to be alone, but when the crowds learned where he was, they followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus got out of the boat and saw the huge crowds, he was full of sympathy for them, and healed their sick. As evening came the disciples went up to him and said, "This place is miles from anywhere and it's getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves."

But Jesus told them, "They don't need to leave. *You* give them something to eat!"

"All we have here are five loaves and a couple of fish," they replied.

"Bring them to me," said Jesus. He told the crowds to sit down on the grass. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven and blessed them. After that he broke the loaves into pieces and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples gave it to the crowds. Everybody ate until they were full. Then they collected up the leftovers which filled twelve baskets. Some five thousand men ate the food, not counting women and children.

Right after this he made the disciples get into the boat and go back to the other side of the lake while he sent the crowds on their way. After he'd sent the crowds away, he went up into the mountains to pray. Evening came and he was there all alone. By now the boat was a long way out from land, being pounded by the waves because the wind was blowing against it. About 3 a.m. Jesus caught up with them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified. They screamed out in fear, "It's a ghost!"

But immediately Jesus said to them, "Don't worry, it's me! Don't be afraid!"

"Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come over to you, walking on the water," Peter replied.

"Come on then," said Jesus. Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus. But when he saw how strong the wind was, he became scared, and started to sink. "Lord! Save me!" he cried out. Immediately Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him, and said, "You have such little trust in me. Why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind died down, and those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "You really are the Son of God!"

After crossing the lake they arrived at Gennesaret. When the people there realized Jesus was there, they let everyone in the whole area know. They brought all who were sick to him, and pleaded with him to let the sick just touch the edge of his cloak. Everyone that touched him was healed.

Then some Pharisees and religious teachers from Jerusalem came to Jesus and asked him, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of our forefathers by not washing their hands before they eat a meal?"

"Why do you break God's commandment because of your tradition?" Jesus replied. "For God said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Those who curse their father or mother should be put to death.' But you say that if someone tells their father or mother, 'Whatever you might have expected to get from me is now a gift to God,' then they don't have to honor their father. In this way you've annulled God's word for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! How well Isaiah described you when he prophesied: 'These people say they honor me but in their minds they don't care about me. Their

worship of me is pointless. What they teach are just man-made requirements.'"

He called the crowd over and told them, "Listen, and understand this: it's not what goes into you through your mouth that defiles you. It's what comes out of your mouth that defiles you."

Then Jesus' disciples came to him and said, "You do realize that the Pharisees were offended by what you said."

"Every plant my heavenly Father didn't plant will be uprooted," Jesus replied. "Forget about them—they are blind guides. If a blind man leads another blind man, then they'll both fall into a ditch."

Then Peter asked, "Please tell us what you mean by this illustration."

"Haven't you understood this yet?" replied Jesus. "Don't you see that whatever goes in through the mouth then passes through the stomach, and then leaves the body as waste? But what comes out through the mouth comes from the mind, and that's what defiles you. For what comes from the mind are evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and blasphemy and those are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands doesn't defile you."

Jesus left and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that area came, shouting out, "Lord, son of David! Please have mercy on me, because my daughter is suffering badly because she's possessed by a demon!" But Jesus didn't reply at all. His disciples came to him and told him, "Tell her to stop following us. All her shouting is really annoying!"

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," Jesus said to the woman. But the woman came and kneeled before him, and said, "Lord, please help me!"

"It's not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," Jesus told her.

"Yes, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat crumbs that fall from their master's table," she replied.

"You have great trust in me," Jesus answered. "Your wish is granted!" And her daughter was healed immediately.

Jesus returned, passing by the Sea of Galilee. He went into the mountains nearby where he sat down. Huge crowds came to him, bringing those who were lame, blind, crippled, dumb, and many others who were sick. They laid them on the ground at his feet, and he healed them. The crowd was astounded at what they saw happen: the deaf could speak, the crippled were healed, the lame could walk, and the blind could see. They praised the God of Israel.

Jesus called his disciples over and told them, "I feel really sorry for all these people, because they've been with me now for three days, and they have nothing to eat. I don't want to send them away hungry, in case they faint on their way home."

"Where could we find enough bread here in this desert to feed such a huge crowd?" the disciples responded.

"How many loaves of bread do you have?" Jesus asked.

"Seven, and a few small fish," they replied.

Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground. He took the seven loaves and the fish, and after blessing the food he broke it into pieces and gave it to the disciples, and the disciples gave it to the crowds. Everybody ate until they were full, and then they collected the leftovers, filling seven baskets. Four thousand men ate the food, not counting women and children. Then he sent the crowds away, got into a boat, and went to the Magadan region.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to test Jesus, demanding that he show them a sign from heaven.

Jesus replied, "In the evening you say, 'It'll be a fine day tomorrow, because the sky is red,' while in the morning you say, 'It'll be bad weather today, because the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to predict the weather by what the sky looks like, but you can't recognize the signs of the times! An evil and adulterous generation are the ones who look for a miraculous sign, and no sign will be given to them except the sign of Jonah." He left them and went away.

Having crossed to the other side of the lake, the disciples realized they'd forgotten to bring bread with them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees," Jesus told them.

The disciples started arguing among themselves. "He's saying that because we didn't bring any bread," they concluded. Jesus knew what they were saying and said, "You have so little trust in me! Why are you arguing among yourselves about not having any bread? Haven't you worked it out yet? Don't you remember the five loaves that fed five thousand? How many baskets of leftovers did you collect? And what about the seven loaves that fed the four thousand? How many baskets of leftovers did you collect? Haven't you worked it out yet that I wasn't talking to you about bread? Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" Then they realized that he wasn't warning them to watch out for bread yeast, but about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When Jesus arrived in the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of man is?"

"Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets," they replied.

"But what about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," Simon Peter replied.

"You are truly blessed, Simon son of John," Jesus told him. "For this wasn't revealed to you by human flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the powers of death won't overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you ban on earth will have been banned in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth will have been allowed in heaven." Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem, and that he would suffer terribly at the hands of the elders, chief priests, and religious teachers; and that he would be killed, but he would rise again on the third day.

Peter took Jesus aside and started to tell him he shouldn't talk like that. “God forbid, Lord, that this would ever happen to you!” he said.

Jesus turned to Peter, and told him, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a trap to trip me up, because you're thinking in a human way, and not as God thinks!”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If you want to be a follower of mine, you must deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me. For if you want to save your life you will lose it, and if you lose your life for my sake you will save it. What benefit is it for you to gain the whole world, yet lose your life? What would you give in exchange for your life? For the Son of man is going to come in his Father's glory, together with his angels. Then he will give everyone what they deserve according to what they've done. I tell you the truth, there are some standing here who won't die before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.”

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James and his brother John, with him and they went up a high mountain to be by themselves. He was transformed in front of them. His face was shining like the sun. His clothes turned white as light. Then suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared before them, talking together with Jesus.

Peter spoke up, saying to Jesus, “Lord, it's really good to be here. If you want I'll make three shelters—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them. A voice came from the cloud, saying, “This is my son whom I love, who pleases me. Listen to him.” When they heard this, the disciples fell down on their faces, absolutely terrified. Jesus went over to them and touched them. “Get up,” he told them. “Don't be afraid.” When they looked up they didn't see anybody there except Jesus.

As they descended the mountain Jesus gave them strict instructions. “Don't tell anybody what you saw until the Son of man has risen from the dead,” he told them.

“So why do the religious teachers say that Elijah has to come first?” his disciples asked.

“It's true that Elijah comes to put everything in place,” Jesus replied, “but I tell you that Elijah has already come and yet people didn't recognize who he was. They did whatever they felt like to him. In the same way the Son of man will also suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples realized that Jesus was referring to John the Baptist.

When they approached the crowd, a man came to Jesus, and kneeled before him. “Lord, please have mercy on my son,” he said. “He loses his mind and suffers such terrible fits that he often falls in the fire or into water. I brought him to your disciples but they couldn't heal him.”

“You people refuse to trust me, and are so corrupt!” Jesus responded. “How long do I have to remain here with you? How long do I have to put up with you? Bring him here to me!” Jesus confronted the demon and it left the boy, and he was healed straight away.

Later the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked him, “Why couldn't we drive it out?”

“Because you don't trust enough,” Jesus told them. “I tell you, even if your trust was as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it would move. Nothing would be impossible for you.”

As they were walking together through Galilee, Jesus told them, “The Son of man is going to be betrayed and people will have power over him. They will kill him, but on the third day he will rise again.” The disciples were filled with sadness.

When they arrived at Capernaum, those who were in charge of collecting the half-shekel Temple tax came to Peter and asked him, “Your teacher does pay the half-shekel tax, doesn't he?”

“Yes, of course,” Peter replied.

When he returned to where they were staying, Jesus anticipated the issue. “What do you think, Simon?” Jesus asked him. “Do the kings of this world collect their taxes and duties from their own sons or from others?”

“From others,” Peter replied. So Jesus told him, “In that case the sons are exempt. But to avoid giving offense to anyone, go to the lake, and throw out a fishing line with a hook. Pull in the first fish you catch, and when you open its mouth there you'll find a *stater* coin. Take the coin and give it to them for both me and you.”

Around that time the disciples came to Jesus, and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Jesus called over a small child. He had the child stand in front of them. “I tell you the truth, unless you change the way you think and become like little children, you won't ever enter the kingdom of heaven,” he told them. “But whoever humbles themselves and becomes like this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever accepts a little child like this in my name accepts me. But anyone who makes one of these little ones who trust in me sin, it would be better for them to have a large millstone tied around their neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea.

What a disaster is coming on the world for all its temptations to sin! Temptations will surely come, but it will be a disaster for the person through whom the temptation comes! If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It's better for you to enter eternal life crippled or lame rather than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into eternal fire. If your eye causes you to sin, pull it out and throw it away. It's better for you to enter eternal life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the fire of Gehenna.

Make sure you don't look down on these little ones. I tell you that in heaven their angels are always with my heavenly Father. What do you think about this? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off, won't he leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that's wandered away? And if he finds it, I tell you he really rejoices over that sheep more than the ninety-nine that didn't wander away. In the same way my heavenly Father does not want any of these little ones to be lost.

If a brother sins against you, go and point out the wrong to him, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you've won your brother over. But if he doesn't listen, then take one or two more people with you, so that by two or three witnesses the truth can be confirmed. If, however, he refuses to listen to them, then

tell the church. If he refuses to listen to the church as well, then treat him as a foreigner and a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you ban on earth will have been banned in heaven, and whatever you allow on earth will have been allowed in heaven.

I also tell you that if two of you agree here on earth about something you're praying for, then my heavenly Father will do it for you. For where two or three gather together in my name, I'm there with them."

Peter came to Jesus and asked him, "Lord, how many times should I forgive my brother for sinning against me? Seven times?"

"No, not seven times. I would say seventy times seven!" Jesus told him. "This is why the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with those servants who owed him money. As he began to settle accounts, one servant was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. Since he didn't have the money to pay, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all his possessions, so that the debt could be paid back. The servant fell down on his knees and said to his master, 'Please be patient with me! I will pay everything back!' The master took pity on the servant, released him, and canceled the debt. But when that same servant went out he found one of his fellow-servants who owed him just a hundred *denarii.* He grabbed him by the neck and choked him, saying, 'Pay me back what you owe me!' His fellow-servant threw himself down at the man's feet and begged him, 'Please be patient with me! I will pay you back!' But the man refused, and went and threw his fellow-servant into prison until he paid back what he owed.

When the other servants saw what took place they were shocked and upset. They went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the man back in and told him, 'You evil servant! I forgave you all your debt because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have been merciful to your fellow-servant as well, just as I was merciful to you?' His master became angry and handed him over to the jailors until he had repaid all the debt. This is what my heavenly Father will do to every one of you unless you sincerely forgive your brothers."

When Jesus finished speaking he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan River. Large crowds followed him, and he healed those who were sick there.

Some Pharisees came to test him. "Is a man allowed to divorce his wife for any reason?" they asked.

Jesus replied, "Haven't you read that God who created people in the beginning made them male and female? He said, 'This is the reason a man will leave his father and mother, and join with his wife, and the two shall become one.' Now they're no longer two, but one. What God has joined together no one should separate."

"Then why did Moses give the command that a man could divorce his wife by giving her a written certificate of divorce, and sending her away?" they asked.

"Because of your hard-hearted attitude Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but it wasn't like that in the beginning," Jesus replied. "I tell you, anyone who divorces his wife except on the grounds of sexual immorality and then marries another woman, commits adultery."

"If that's the situation between husband and wife, it's better not to marry!" his disciples told him.

"Not everyone can accept this instruction, only those it's given to," Jesus told them. "Some are born as eunuchs, some are made eunuchs by men, and some choose to be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Those who can accept this should accept it."

The people brought little children to him so he could bless them and pray for them. But the disciples told them not to.

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me. Don't stop them. The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like them!" He placed his hands on them to bless them, and then he left.

A man came to Jesus and asked him, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to gain eternal life?"

"Why do you ask me what is good?" Jesus replied. "There's only one who is good. But if you want to have eternal life, then keep the commandments."

"Which ones?" the man asked him.

"Don't murder, don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself," replied Jesus.

"I've kept all these commandments," the young man said. "What else do I need to do?"

Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, then go and sell your possessions, give the money to the poor, and you'll have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."

When the young man heard Jesus' answer he went away very sad, because he had many possessions.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus said to his disciples, "rich people find it hard to enter the kingdom of heaven. I also tell you this: It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were very surprised, and asked, "So who can be saved?"

Jesus looked at them and said, "From a human point of view it's impossible, but all things are possible with God."

Peter answered him, "Look, we've left everything and followed you. What reward will we have?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth: when everything is remade and the Son of man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. All those who because of me have left their homes, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, and fields, will receive back a hundred times more, and will receive eternal life. For many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay the workers one *denarius* for the day, and sent them to work in his vineyard.

Around 9 a.m. he went out and saw others without work standing in the marketplace.

'Go and work in the vineyard too, and I'll pay you what's right,' he told them. So they went to work. Around noon and 3 p.m. he went out and did the same

thing. At 5 p.m. he went out and found others standing there. 'Why are you standing around all day doing nothing?' he asked them. 'Because nobody has hired us,' they replied. 'Go and work in the vineyard too,' he told them.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard told his manager, 'Call the workers in, and pay them their wages. Begin with the workers hired last and then move on to those hired first.' When those who were hired at 5 p.m. came in, they each received one *denarius*. So when those who were hired first came in, they thought they would get more, but they also received one *denarius*. When they received their pay, they complained to the owner. 'Those who were hired last only worked for an hour, and you've paid them the same as us who worked the whole day in the burning heat,' they grumbled.

The owner answered one of them, 'My friend, I haven't treated you unfairly. Didn't you agree with me to work for one denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to pay those who were hired last the same as I paid you. Can't I choose to do what I want with my own money? Why should you give me evil looks because I want to do good?' In this way the last shall be first and the first shall be last."

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside as they walked along and told them, "Look, we're going to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and religious teachers. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the foreigners to mock him, whip him, and crucify him. But on the third day he will be raised from the dead."

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came with her two sons to Jesus. She kneeled down before him to make a request.

"What is it you are asking me for?" Jesus said to her.

"Please appoint my sons to sit beside you in your kingdom, one on your right and the other on your left," she asked.

"You don't know what you're asking," Jesus told them. "Are you able to drink the cup I'm about to drink?"

"Yes, we are able to do that," they told him.

"You will certainly drink from my cup," he said to them, "but the privilege to sit on my right or on my left isn't mine to give. My Father is the one who has decided who that will be."

When the other ten disciples heard what they had asked, they were annoyed with the two brothers. Jesus called them together and told them, "You know that foreign rulers lord it over their subjects, and powerful leaders oppress them. It shall not be like that for you. Whoever among you wants to be the most important will be your servant. Whoever among you wants to be first will be like a slave. In the same way, the Son of man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

As they left Jericho, a huge crowd followed Jesus. Two blind men were sitting at the side of the road. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they called out, "Have mercy on us, Lord, son of David!" The crowd told them to be quiet, but they shouted even louder, "Have mercy on us, Lord, son of David!"

Jesus stopped. He called them over, asking, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, please make us able to see," they replied.

Jesus had pity on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed him.

Jesus and his disciples went to Jerusalem. As they were getting close, they came to the village of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two disciples on ahead, telling them, "Go into the village. Right there you'll find a donkey tied up with a colt. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone asks you what you're doing, just tell them, 'The Lord needs them,' and they will send them right away."

This was to fulfill what the prophet said: "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Look, your King is coming to you. He is humble, and rides a donkey, and a colt, the offspring of a donkey.'"

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed. They brought back the donkey and the colt. They placed their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. Many people in the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and laid them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed were all shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

When Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, the whole city was in an uproar. "Who is this?" they were asking.

"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee," the crowds replied.

Jesus went into the Temple, and threw out all the people buying and selling. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of the dove-sellers. He told them, "Scripture says, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you've turned it into a den of thieves."

The blind and the lame came to Jesus in the Temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and religious teachers saw the wonderful miracles he did, and the children shouting in the Temple, "Hosanna to the son of David," they were offended.

"Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him.

"Yes," Jesus replied. "Haven't you ever read the Scripture that says, 'You arranged for children and infants to give you perfect praise'?" Jesus left them and went out of the city to stay at Bethany.

The next morning as he walked back into the city, he was hungry. He saw a fig tree at the side of the road, so he went over to it but didn't find any fruit, only leaves.

He told the fig tree, "May you never ever produce fruit again!" Immediately the fig tree withered.

The disciples were amazed to see this. "How did the fig tree wither so suddenly?" they asked.

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "If you really trust in God, and don't doubt him, you could not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even more. If you said to this mountain, 'Get up and throw yourself into the sea,' it would happen! You will receive everything you ask for in prayer, as long as you trust in God."

Jesus went into the Temple. The chief priests and the ruling elders of the people came to him while he

was teaching and asked, “By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority?”

“I too will ask you a question,” Jesus replied. “If you give me the answer, I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Where did the baptism of John come from? Was it from heaven, or was it from human beings?”

They argued with each other. “If we say ‘It was from heaven,’ then he'll ask us why we didn't believe him. But if we say, ‘It was from human beings,’ then the crowd will turn against us, because they all consider John to be a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.”

“Then I won't tell you by what authority I'm doing these things,” Jesus replied. “But what do you think about this illustration? Once there was a man who had two sons. He went to the first son, and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ The son answered, ‘I won't,’ but afterwards he was sorry for what he said and he did go. The man went to the second son, and told him the same thing. He replied, ‘I'll go,’ but he didn't. Which of the two sons did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

“I tell you the truth: tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you,” Jesus told them. “John came to show you the way to live right with God, and you didn't believe him, but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him. Later, when you saw what happened, you still didn't repent and believe him.

Here's another illustration. There once was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, made a winepress, and built a watchtower. He rented it to some tenant farmers, and then left to go to a different country. At harvest-time, he sent his servants to the farmers to collect the fruit that belonged to him. But the farmers attacked his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned another. So he sent more servants, but the farmers did the same things to them. So then he sent his son. ‘They will respect my son,’ he told himself. But the farmers, when they saw the son, said to each other, ‘Here's the heir! Come on! Let's kill him so we can take his inheritance!’ They grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When the vineyard owner returns, what will he do to those farmers?”

The chief priests and elders said to Jesus, “He will put to death those wicked men in the most awful way, and rent out the vineyard to other farmers who will be sure to give him his fruit at harvest-time.”

“So haven't you read this in the Scriptures?” Jesus asked them. “‘The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. The Lord has done this, and it is wonderful in our eyes.’ That's why I'm telling you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you. It will be given to a people who produce the right kind of fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken, but it will completely crush anyone it falls upon.”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his illustrations, they realized he was speaking about them. They wanted him arrested, but they were afraid of what the people would do because the people believed he was a prophet.

Jesus spoke to them using more illustrated stories. “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who organized a wedding celebration for his son,” Jesus explained. “He sent out his servants to everyone who was invited to the wedding to tell them to come, but they refused. So he sent out more servants, with the instructions, ‘Tell those who are invited that I've prepared the wedding banquet. The bulls and fattened calves have been killed —everything's ready. So come to the wedding!’

But they ignored the invitation and left. One went to his fields; another to take care of his business. The rest grabbed the king's servants, mistreated them, and killed them. The king became furious. He sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and burn down their town.

Then the king said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those who were invited didn't deserve to attend. Go into the streets and invite everyone you find to come to the wedding.’ So the servants went out into the streets and brought back everyone they could find, both the good and the bad. The wedding hall was full.

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he noticed a man who didn't have a wedding robe on. He asked him, ‘My friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ The man had nothing to say. Then the king told his servants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, and throw him out into the dark, where there'll be crying and grinding of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Then the Pharisees left and met together to plot how they could trap him by what he said. They sent their disciples to him, together with some of Herod's supporters.

“Teacher, we know you are a honest man, and that you teach God's way is the truth,” they began. “You don't allow yourself to be influenced by anyone, and you don't care about rank or status. So let us know your opinion. Is it right to pay Caesar's taxes, or not?”

Jesus knew their motives were evil. He asked them, “Why are you trying to trap me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin that is used to pay the tax.” They brought a *denarius* coin to him. “Whose image and whose title is inscribed here?” he asked them.

“Caesar's,” they replied.

“You should give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God,” he told them. When they heard Jesus' answer they were stunned. They went away and left him.

Later the same day some Sadducees came to see him. (They are the ones who say there's no resurrection.) They asked him, “Teacher, Moses said that if a married man dies without having children, his brother should marry his widow and have children on behalf of his brother. Well, once there were seven brothers here with us. The first married, and died, and since he had no children he left his widow to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third husband, right up to the seventh. In the end the woman died too. So when the resurrection takes place, whose wife of the seven brothers will she be, for she married all of them?”

Jesus replied, “Your mistake is you don't know Scripture or what God can do. For in the resurrection

people don't marry, and they aren't given in marriage either—they're like the angels in heaven. As for the resurrection of the dead—haven't you read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He's not the God of the dead, but of the living." When the crowds heard what he said, they were amazed at his teaching.

When the Pharisees heard that he'd left the Sadducees speechless, they got together and went to ask some more questions. One of them, who was a legal expert, asked him a question to try to trap him: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?"

Jesus told them, "'Love the Lord your God in all you think, in all you feel, and in all you do.' This is the greatest commandment, the first commandment. The second is just like it, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All biblical law and the writings of the prophets depend on these two commandments."

While the Pharisees were gathered there, Jesus asked them a question. "What do you think about the Messiah?" he asked. "Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied.

"But how can David under inspiration call him 'Lord'?" Jesus asked them. "He says, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit down at my right hand until I defeat all your enemies.' If David called him Lord, how can he be his son?" Nobody could answer him, and from then on nobody dared to ask him any more questions.

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and his disciples: "The religious teachers and the Pharisees are responsible as interpreters of the law of Moses, so obey them and do everything they tell you. But don't follow what they do, because they don't practice what they preach. They tie up heavy burdens, and place them on people's shoulders, but they themselves don't lift a finger to help them. Everything they do is to make sure they get noticed. They make themselves large prayer boxes to wear and long tassels on their clothes. They love to have the places of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues. They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and for people to call them, 'Rabbi.'

Don't let people call you 'Rabbi.' Only one is your Master Teacher, and you are all brothers. Don't call anyone by the title 'Father' here on earth. Only one is your Father, who is in heaven. Don't let people call you 'Teacher.' Only one is your Teacher, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. Those who make themselves great will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be made great.

But what a disaster is coming on you religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You slam shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves don't go in, yet you don't let anyone in who is trying to enter. What a disaster is coming on you, religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! For you travel over land and sea to make a single convert, and when you do, you make him twice a son of Gehenna as you are yourselves. What a disaster is coming on those of you who say, 'If you swear by the Temple that doesn't count, but if you swear by the gold of the Temple, then you have to keep your oath.' What blind guides you are! What is greater—the gold, or the Temple that makes the gold holy? You say, 'If you swear on the altar that doesn't count, but if you swear on the sacrifice that's on the altar, then you have to keep your oath.' How foolish and blind you are! What is greater—the sacrifice, or the altar that makes the sacrifice holy? If you swear by the altar, you swear by it and by everything that's on it. If you swear by the Temple you swear by it and by the one who lives there. If you swear by heaven you swear by the throne of God and the one who sits there.

What a disaster is coming on you religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You pay a tithe of mint, aniseed, and cumin, but you neglect the vital aspects of the law—doing good, showing mercy, exercising trust. Yes, you should pay your tithe, but don't forget these other things. You blind guides—you strain what you drink to keep out a fly but then you swallow a camel!

What a disaster is coming on you religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside you're full of greed and self-indulgence. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, so that the outside will also be clean.

What a disaster is coming on you religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, looking good on the outside, but on the inside full of skeletons and all kinds of rottenness. You're just the same. On the outside you look like good people to others, but on the inside you're full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

What a disaster is coming on you religious teachers and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs as memorials to the prophets, and decorate the tombs of the good, and you say, 'If we had lived in the times of our ancestors we would not have joined them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' But by saying this you testify against yourselves, proving that you belong to those who murdered the prophets! So get on with it—finish it all off using your forefathers' methods! You snakes, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the judgment of Gehenna?

That's why I'm sending you prophets, wise men, and teachers. Some of them you will kill, some of them you will crucify, and some of them you will flog in your synagogues, hunting them from town to town. As a result, you will be held accountable for the blood of all the good people that has been poured out on the land—from the blood of Abel, who did what was right, to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you killed between the Temple and the altar.

I'm telling you, the consequences of all this will fall on this generation. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! So often I wanted to gather your children as a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings—but you wouldn't let me. Now look—your house is left abandoned, totally empty. I tell you this: you won't see me from now on until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

As Jesus was leaving the Temple his disciples came to him, pointing proudly to the Temple buildings. But Jesus replied, "You see all these buildings? I tell you the truth: there won't be one stone left upon another. Every last one will come crashing down!"

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him in private, and asked, “Please tell us when this will happen. What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the world?”

“Make sure no one misleads you,” Jesus replied. “Many will come claiming to be me, saying, ‘I'm the Messiah,’ and they will deceive many people. You'll hear about wars, and rumors about wars, but don't be anxious. These things have to happen, but this isn't the end. Nations will attack other nations, and kingdoms will fight against other kingdoms. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places, but all these things are just the beginnings of birth pains.

Then they will arrest you, they will persecute you, and they will kill you. All people will hate you because of me. At that time many believers will give up believing. They will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will come and deceive many people. The increasing evil will lead the love of many to grow cold, but those who hold out to the end will be saved. The good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed around the whole world so everyone will be able to hear it, and then the end will come.

So when you see the ‘idolatry that causes devastation’ standing in the holy place that the prophet Daniel spoke about (those who read this please consider carefully), then the people living in Judea should run away to the mountains. Anyone who is on the housetop must not go down and fetch what's in the house. Anyone who is out in the fields must not go back to get a coat. How awful it will be for those who are pregnant, and those who are nursing babies at that time! Pray that you don't have to run away in winter, or on the Sabbath day. For at that time there will be terrible persecution —more terrible than anything that has happened from the beginning of the world up till now, and won't ever happen again. Unless those days are cut short, nobody will be saved, but for the sake of the chosen those days will be cut short.

So if anyone tells you, ‘Look, here's the Messiah,’ or, ‘There he is,’ don't believe it. For false messiahs will appear, and false prophets too, and they will perform incredible signs and miracles in order to deceive the chosen, if that were possible. Notice that I've told you this before it even happens. So if they tell you, ‘Look, he's out in the desert,’ don't go looking there; or if they say, ‘Look, he's secretly here,’ don't believe it. For the coming of the Son of man will be like the lightning that flashes brightly from east to west. ‘Vultures gather where the carcass is.’

But right after those days of persecution the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven, and all the peoples of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and in brilliant glory. With a blast from a trumpet he will send his angels to gather his chosen ones from every place, from one end of heaven and earth to the other.

Learn an illustration from the fig tree. When its shoots become tender and leaves begin to sprout, you know that summer is coming. In the same way when you see all these things happening, you know that his coming is near, in fact it's right at the door! I tell you the truth: this generation won't pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth may pass away, but my words won't pass away.

But no one knows the day or hour when this will take place, not the angels in heaven, nor the Son. Only the Father knows. When the Son of man comes it will be like it was during the time of Noah. It will be as in the days before the flood, when they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, right up until the day that Noah went into the ark. They didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That's how the coming of the Son of man will be.

Two men will be working in the fields. One will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding grain with a mill. One will be taken, the other left. So stay alert, because you don't know what day your Lord is coming. But consider this: if the house-owner knew what time a thief was coming, he would keep watch. He would not allow his house to be broken into and robbed. You also need to be ready, because the Son of man is coming at a time when you're not expecting him.

For who is the trustworthy and thoughtful servant? It's the one his master puts in charge of his household to provide them with food at the proper time. How good it will be for that servant to be found doing that when his master returns! I tell you the truth: the master will put that servant in charge over everything he has. But if he was evil, the servant would say to himself, ‘My master is taking a long time,’ and would start beating the other servants, feasting and drinking with the drunks. Then that servant's master will return when the man doesn't expect him, at a time he doesn't know. He'll cut him to pieces, and treat him in the same way as the hypocrites, sending him to a place where there's crying and gnashing of teeth.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like ten girls, who took their lamps with them to go and meet the bridegroom. Five were foolish, and five were wise. The foolish girls took their lamps but didn't take any oil with them, while the wise took jars of oil with them as well as their lamps. The bridegroom took a long time and all the girls became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight the shout came, ‘Look, the bridegroom's here! Come out and meet him!’ All the girls got up and trimmed the wicks of their lamps. The foolish girls said to the wise ones, ‘Give us some of your oil, because our lamps are going out.’ But the wise girls replied, ‘No, because otherwise there won't be enough for both you and for us. Go to the shopkeepers and buy some oil for yourselves.’ While they went to buy oil, the bridegroom arrived, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding, and the door was locked shut. The other girls came later. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they called, ‘Open the door for us!’ But he answered, ‘I tell you the truth: I don't know you.’ So stay alert, for you don't know the day, or the hour.

It's like a man who went away on a trip. He called in his servants and entrusted them with what he owned. To one of them he gave five talents, to another he gave two, and to another one, according to their different abilities. Then he left. Immediately the one with five

talents went and invested them in a business, and made another five talents. In the same way the one with two talents made another two. But the man who'd received the one talent went off and dug a hole and hid his master's money. A long time later the master of those servants returned, and settled accounts with them. The one with five talents came and presented the other five talents. 'Master,' he said, 'You gave me five talents. Look, I've made a profit of five talents.' His master said to him, 'You've done well—you are a good, faithful servant. You have proved yourself trustworthy over small things, so now I'm placing you in charge over many things. Be happy because I'm really pleased with you!' The one with two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'You gave me two talents. Look, I've made a profit of two talents.' His master said to him, 'You've done well—you are a good, faithful servant. You have proved trustworthy over small things, so now I'm placing you in charge over many things. Be happy because I'm really pleased with you!'

Then the man with one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I know that you're a hard man. You reap where you didn't sow, and you harvest crops that you didn't plant. So since I was afraid of you I went and buried your talent in the ground. Look, you can have back what belongs to you.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and lazy servant! If you think I reap where I don't sow, and harvest crops I didn't plant, then you should have deposited my silver in the bank so that when I returned I could have had my money with interest. Take the talent away from him, and give it to the one with ten talents. For everyone who has will be given even more; and everyone who doesn't have anything, even what they have will be taken away from them. Now throw this useless servant out into the darkness where there'll be crying and gnashing of teeth.'

But when the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his majestic throne. Everyone will be brought before him. He will separate them from one another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He'll place the sheep on his right hand, and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to the ones on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, and inherit the kingdom that's been prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you visited me.' Then those who are right will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and fed you, or thirsty and gave you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?' The king will tell them, 'I tell you the truth: whatever you did for one of these least important brothers of mine you did for me.'

He'll also say to those on his left, 'Go away from me, you who are doomed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you didn't give me anything to eat. I was thirsty and you didn't give me a drink. I was a stranger and you didn't invite me in. I was naked and you didn't clothe me. I was sick and in prison and you didn't visit me.' Then they will also answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't look after you?' Then he will tell them, 'I tell you the truth: whatever you didn't do for one of these least important brothers of mine you didn't do for me.' They will go away into eternal condemnation, but those who are good will enter eternal life."

After Jesus had said all this, he told his disciples, "You know that it's Passover in two days time, and the Son of man will be handed over to be crucified."

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the courtyard of Caiaphas, the high priest. There they plotted to arrest Jesus on some deceitful pretext and kill him. But they said, "Let's not do this during the festival so that the people don't riot."

While Jesus was staying at Simon the leper's house in Bethany, a woman came over to him carrying an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume. She poured it on Jesus' head while he was sitting eating.

But when the disciples saw what she did, they were upset."What a terrible waste!" they objected. "This perfume could've been sold for a lot of money and given to the poor!"

Jesus was aware of what was going on and told them, "Why are you upset with this woman? She's done something wonderful for me! You'll always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me. By pouring this perfume on my body she's prepared me for burial. I tell you the truth: wherever in the world this good news is spread, the story of what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests and asked them, "How much will you pay me for betraying Jesus to you?" They paid him thirty silver coins. From then on he looked for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare the Passover meal for you to eat?"

Jesus told them, "Go into the city and find this particular man, and tell him that the Teacher says, 'My time is approaching. I'm coming to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" The disciples did as Jesus told them, and prepared the Passover meal there.

When evening came he sat down to eat with the Twelve. While they were eating he told them, "I tell you the truth: one of you is going to betray me."

They were extremely upset. One after the other they asked him, "Lord, it's not me, is it?"

"The one who's dipped his hand into the dish with me will betray me," Jesus replied. "The Son of man will die just as it was prophesied about him, but what a disaster it will be for the man who betrays the Son of man! It would be better for that man if he'd never been born!"

Judas, the one who would betray Jesus, asked, "It's not me, is it, Rabbi?"

"You said it," Jesus replied.

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave pieces to the disciples. "Take and eat this for it is my body," said Jesus. Then he picked up the cup, blessed it, and gave it to

them. “Drink from it, all of you,” he told them. “For this is my blood of the agreement, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. However, I tell you, I won't drink this fruit of the vine until the day I drink it new with you in the kingdom of my Father.” After they'd sung a song, they left for the Mount of Olives.

“All of you will abandon me tonight,” Jesus told them. “As Scripture says, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the flock of sheep will be completely scattered.’ But after I have risen, I'll go ahead of you to Galilee.”

But Peter objected, “Even if everyone else abandons you, I'll never abandon you.”

“I'm telling you the truth,” Jesus told him, “This very night, before the cock crows, you'll deny me three times.”

“Even if I have to die with you, I'll never deny you!” Peter insisted. And all the disciples said the same thing.

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He told them, “Sit down here while I go over there and pray.” He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him, and he began to suffer agonizing sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, “I am so overwhelmed with sadness that it's killing me. Wait here and keep watch with me.” He went a little farther forward, fell facedown, and prayed.

“My Father, please, if it's possible, let this cup of suffering be taken from me,” Jesus asked. “Even so, may it not be what I want but what you want.”

He went back to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, “What, you couldn't stay awake with me for just one hour? Stay awake and pray, so that you don't fall into temptation. Yes, the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.” He went away a second time and prayed.

“My Father, if this cup cannot be taken from me without me drinking from it, then your will be done,” he said. He went back and found them sleeping, for they just couldn't stay awake. So he left them once more, and went off and prayed a third time, repeating the same things. Then he returned to the disciples, and told them, “How can you still be sleeping and resting? Look, the time has come. The Son of man is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners! Get up, let's go! Look, the one who's betraying me has arrived.”

As he said this, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived with a large mob armed with swords and clubs sent by the chief priests and elders of the people. The betrayer had arranged to give them a signal: “The one that I kiss, that's him—arrest him,” he'd told them.

Judas came up to Jesus immediately, and said, “Hello, Rabbi,” and kissed him.

“My friend, do what you came to do,” Jesus said to Judas. So they came and grabbed hold of Jesus, and arrested him.

One of those who was with Jesus reached for his sword and pulled it out. He struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear. But Jesus told him, “Put your sword away. Everyone who fights with the sword will die by the sword. Don't you think I could ask my Father, and he'd immediately send more than twelve legions of angels? But then how could the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must be like this?”

Then Jesus told the mob, “Have you come with swords and clubs to arrest me as if I was some kind of dangerous criminal? Every day I sat in the Temple teaching and you didn't arrest me then. But all this is happening to fulfill what the prophets wrote.” Then all the disciples abandoned him and ran away.

Those who'd arrested Jesus took him to the home of Caiaphas, the high priest, where the religious teachers and elders had gathered. Peter followed him at a distance, and went into the high priest's courtyard. He sat there with the guards to see how things would end.

The chief priests and the whole council were trying to find some false evidence against Jesus so they could put him to death. But they couldn't find anything, even though many false witnesses came forward. Eventually two came forward and reported, “This man said, ‘I can destroy God's Temple, and rebuild it in three days.’”

The high priest stood up and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What do you have to say in your defense?” But Jesus remained silent.

The high priest said to Jesus, “In the name of the living God I place you under oath. Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.”

“You said it,” Jesus replied. “And I also tell you that in the future you'll see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Almighty, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Then the high priest tore his clothes, and said, “He's speaking blasphemy! Why do we need any witnesses? Look, now you've heard for yourselves his blasphemy! What's your verdict?”

“Guilty! He deserves to die!” they answered. Then they spat in his face and beat him. Some of them slapped him with their hands, and said, “Prophesy to us, you ‘Messiah’! Who just hit you?”

Meanwhile Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant girl came up to him, and said, “You, you were with Jesus the Galilean!” But he denied it in front of everyone. “I don't know what you're talking about,” he said.

When he went back to the courtyard entrance another servant girl saw him and said to the people there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” Once again he denied it, saying with an oath, “I don't know him.” A little while later the people standing there came up to Peter and said, “You definitely are one of them. Your accent gives you away.” Then he started to swear: “Curses on me if I'm a liar! I don't know the man!” Immediately the cock crowed.

Then Peter remembered what Jesus had told him: “Before the cock crows, three times you will deny knowing me.” He went outside and wept bitterly.

Early in the morning all the chief priests and elders of the people consulted together and decided to have Jesus put to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

When Judas, the one who'd betrayed Jesus, saw that Jesus had been condemned to death, he regretted what he'd done and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. “I've sinned! I've betrayed innocent blood!” he told them.

“What's that got to do with us?” they replied. “That's your problem!” Judas threw the silver coins into the sanctuary and left. He went away and hanged himself. The chief priests took the silver coins and said, “This is blood money, so it's not lawful to put this in

the Temple treasury." So they agreed to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners. That's why the field is still called today the "Field of Blood." This fulfilled the prophecy spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: "They took thirty silver coins—the 'value' of the one who was bought at the price set by some of the children of Israel — and used them to pay for the potter's field, just as the Lord instructed me to do."

Jesus was brought before Pilate the governor who asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

"You said it," Jesus replied. But when the chief priests and elders brought charges against him, Jesus did not answer.

"Don't you hear how many charges they're bringing against you?" Pilate asked him. But Jesus didn't say anything, not a single word. This greatly surprised the governor.

Now it was the custom of the governor to release to the crowd during the festival whichever prisoner they wanted. At that time a notorious prisoner was being held, a man named Barabbas. So Pilate asked the crowds that had gathered, "Who do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus, called the Messiah?" (He had realized it was because of jealousy that they had handed Jesus over to him to be tried.) While he was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent a message to him that said, "Don't do anything to this innocent man, for I've suffered terribly today as a result of a dream about him."

But the chief priests and the elders convinced the crowds to ask for Barabbas, and to have Jesus put to death. When the governor asked them, "So which of the two do you want me to release to you?" they answered, "Barabbas."

"Then what shall I do with Jesus, called the Messiah?" he asked them.

They all shouted out, "Have him crucified!"

"Why? What crime has he committed?" Pilate asked. But they shouted even louder, "Crucify him!"

When Pilate saw it was a lost cause, and that a riot was developing, he took some water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I'm innocent of this man's blood. It's on your heads!" he told them. All the people answered, "His blood is on us, and on our children!" Then he released Barabbas to them, but he had Jesus flogged and sent to be crucified.

The governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and the whole battalion surrounded him. They stripped him and put a scarlet cloak on him. They made a crown of thorns and placed it on his head, and put a stick in his right hand. They kneeled down in front of him and mocked him, saying, "We salute you, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the stick and beat him over the head with it. When they'd finished mocking him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. On the way they found a man called Simon, from Cyrene, and they forced him to carry Jesus' cross.

When they arrived at Golgotha, meaning "Place of the Skull," they gave him wine mixed with gall. But having tasted it, he refused to drink it. After they had crucified him, they rolled dice to divide his clothes between them. Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. They placed a sign over his head with the charge against him. It read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." They crucified two rebels with him, one on the right, and one on the left. Those who passed by shouted insults at him, shaking their heads, saying, "You who promised to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, why don't you save yourself! If you really are the Son of God, then come down from the cross." The chief priests mocked him in the same way, along with the religious teachers and elders. "He saved other people, but he can't save himself!" they said. "If he really is the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and then we'll believe him! He trusts God so confidently—well let God rescue him now if he wants him, because he claimed 'I am the Son of God.'" The rebels who were crucified with him also insulted him in the same way.

From noon until three o'clock darkness covered the whole country. At about three o'clock Jesus shouted out loud, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" When some of those standing there heard it, they said, "He's calling for Elijah!" Immediately one of them ran and grabbed a sponge, soaked it in vinegar, put it on a stick, and gave it to Jesus to drink. But the others said, "Leave him alone. Let's see if Elijah will come and save him."

Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and breathed his last. Right then the veil of the Temple was torn apart from top to bottom. The ground shook, the rocks split apart, and the graves were opened. Many of those who had lived good lives and had fallen asleep in death were raised to life. After the resurrection of Jesus they went out from the graveyards into the holy city where many people saw them.

When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and what happened, they were terrified, and said, "This really was the Son of God!" Many women were also watching from a distance, those who had followed Jesus from Galilee and had supported him. These included Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

When evening came, a rich man named Joseph, from Arimathea (who was also a disciple of Jesus), went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate ordered it to be handed over to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it up in a fresh linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb, cut out of solid rock. He rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb, and left. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

The next day, after the Preparation day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went together to see Pilate. They said to him, "Sir, we recall that the imposter said while he was still alive, 'After three days, I'll rise again.' Give orders to secure the tomb until the third day. That way his disciples can't come and steal his body and tell people that he was raised from the dead, and the deception in the end will become worse than it was at first."

"I'll give you a guard of soldiers," Pilate told them. "Now go, and make it as secure as you possibly can."

So they went and made the tomb secure, sealing the entrance stone and posting soldiers as guards.

After Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. All of a sudden there was a tremendous earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and rolled away the stone, and sat on it. His face blazed like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards shook with fear, falling down as if they were dead.

The angel told the women, “Don't be afraid! I know you're looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He's not here. He's risen from the dead, just as he said he would. Come and see where the Lord was lying. Now go quickly and tell his disciples that he's risen from the dead and that he's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there, I promise you!”

They quickly left the tomb, both afraid and very happy, running to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus came to meet them, and greeted them. They went over to him, held on to his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Don't be afraid! Go and tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.”

As they left, some of the guards went into the city and explained to the chief priests everything that had happened. After the chief priests had met with the elders, and worked out a plan, they bribed the soldiers with a great deal of money.

“Say that his disciples came during the night and stole him while we were sleeping,” they told the soldiers. “And if the governor hears about this, we'll talk to him and you won't have to worry.”

So the soldiers took the money and did what they were told. This story has been spread among the Jewish people to this very day.

But the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him they worshiped him, though some doubted. Jesus came to them and told them, “All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So go and make disciples of people of all nations, and baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to follow all the commands I have given you. Remember, I am always with you, to the very end of the world.”

Mark

The Gospel According to Mark

Here is the beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Just as the prophet Isaiah wrote, “I'm sending my messenger ahead of you to prepare your way. A voice is calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the Lord's way! Make his paths straight.’”

John came, baptizing in the desert, announcing a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Everybody from the country of Judea and from Jerusalem went to him. They admitted their sins publicly and were baptized in the Jordan River.

John wore clothes made of camel hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. This is what he had to say: “After me someone is coming who is greater than I am. I'm not worthy to bend down and untie his sandals. I baptized you in water but he will baptize you in the Holy Spirit.”

Then Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. As Jesus came out of the water, he saw the heavens split apart and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him. A voice from heaven said, “You are my son, the one I love. I am very pleased with you.”

Right after this the Spirit sent him away into the desert where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was with the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Later, after John was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee, announcing God's good news.

“The time predicted has come,” he said. “God's kingdom has arrived! Repent and believe in the good news.”

As he was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew throwing a net into the water, for they made their living by fishing. “Come and follow me,” he told them, “and I will have you fishing for people.” They left their nets at once and followed him.

He went a little farther and saw James and his brother John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in a boat mending their nets. Immediately he called them to follow him, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired workers, and followed Jesus.

They left for Capernaum, and on the Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and taught there. The people were amazed at his teaching, for he spoke with authority, unlike the religious teachers.

Suddenly, right there in the synagogue, a man with an evil spirit started shouting out, “Jesus of Nazareth, why are you bothering us? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are! You're God's Holy One!”

Jesus interrupted the evil spirit, telling him, “Be quiet! Come out of him.”

The evil spirit screamed, threw the man into convulsions, and came out of him.

Everyone was amazed at what happened. “What is this?” they asked each other. “What is this new teaching that has such authority? Even evil spirits do what he tells them!” News about him spread quickly throughout the whole region of Galilee.

Then they left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon and Andrew, along with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, so they told Jesus about her. He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever immediately left her. Then she made them a meal.

After sunset that evening, those who were sick and demon-possessed were brought to Jesus. The whole of the town gathered outside. He healed many people who had various diseases, and threw out many demons. He did not permit the demons to speak, for they knew who he was.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up and went alone to a quiet place to pray. Simon and the others went to search for him. When they found him, they told him, “Everybody's looking for you.”

But Jesus replied, “We have to go to the other towns around here so that I can tell them the good news as well—for that's why I came.”

So he went all over Galilee, speaking in the synagogues and expelling demons.

A leper came to him asking for help. The man kneeled down before Jesus, saying, “Please, if you're willing, you can heal me!” With compassion Jesus reached out and touched the man, and said, “I am willing. Be healed!”

The leprosy left him immediately, and he was healed. Jesus sent him away with a strong warning. “Make sure you don't tell anybody anything about this,” he told him. “Go to the priest and show yourself to him. Give the offering which is required by the law of Moses for such cleansing, so that people will have proof.”

But the healed leper went out and told everyone what had happened. As a result Jesus could not openly go into the cities anymore, but had to stay out in the country where people came to him from everywhere around.

A few days later Jesus returned home to Capernaum, and news spread that he was there. So many people crowded inside the house that it was packed, even outside the door, as Jesus explained the message to them. Four men had brought a man who was paralyzed, but they could not get near Jesus because of the crowds. So they went up on the roof and took it apart. After they had made an opening above Jesus, they lowered down the mat with the paralyzed man lying on it.

When Jesus saw the trust these men had, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, “Friend, your sins are forgiven.”

Some of the religious teachers sitting there thought to themselves, “Why is he talking like this? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins? Only God can do that!”

Jesus knew right away what they were thinking. He said to them, “Why are you thinking like this? What's easier: to say to the paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Get up, pick up your mat, and walk’? But to convince you that the Son of man has the right to forgive sins, I say to you (the paralyzed man), ‘Get up, pick up your mat, and go home.’”

He stood up, picked up his mat, and walked out in front of everyone there. They were all amazed, and praised God, saying, “We've never ever seen anything like this!”

Jesus went out beside the sea once more and taught the crowds that came to him. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth.

“Follow me,” Jesus told him. Levi got up and followed Jesus.

That evening Jesus ate dinner at Levi's house. Many tax collectors and “sinners” joined Jesus and his disciples for the meal, for there were many of these people that followed Jesus.

When the religious leaders of the Pharisees saw Jesus eating with such people, they asked Jesus' disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

When Jesus heard this, he told them, “It's not healthy people who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I haven't come to invite those who live right, but those who don't—the sinners.”

Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some of them came to Jesus, and asked him, “Why is it that John's disciples and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't?”

“Do wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?” Jesus asked them. “No. While the bridegroom's with them, they can't fast. But the day is coming when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and then they'll fast. No one puts a patch that's not shrunk on old clothes. Otherwise the new piece will shrink away from the old, and make the tear worse. No one puts new wine in old wineskins. Otherwise the wine will burst the wineskins, and both the wine and wineskins will be wasted. No. You put new wine in new wineskins.”

One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through the grain fields, his disciples started picking heads of grain as they walked along. The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Look, why are they doing what is not permitted on the Sabbath?”

“Haven't you ever read what David did when he and his men were hungry and in need?” Jesus asked them. “He went into God's house when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the consecrated bread which no one except the priests are permitted to eat, and gave it to his men too.”

“The Sabbath was made for your benefit, not for you to benefit the Sabbath,” he told them. “So the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

Jesus went to the synagogue again. A man was there who had a crippled hand. Some of those there were watching Jesus to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath, because they were looking for a reason to accuse him of breaking the law. Jesus told the man with the crippled hand, “Come and stand here in front of everyone.”

“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, or to do evil? Should you save life, or should you kill?” he asked them. But they didn't say a word.

He looked around at them in exasperation, very upset by their hard-hearted attitude. Then he told the man, “Hold out your hand.” The man held out his hand, and it was healed. The Pharisees left, and immediately began plotting with Herod's party as to how they might kill Jesus.

Meanwhile Jesus returned to the Sea, and a large crowd followed him. They were from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Transjordan, and from the regions of Tyre and Sidon. So many people came to see him because they'd heard about all he was doing.

Jesus told his disciples to have a small boat ready in case the crowd crushed him, because he had healed so many that all the sick people kept on pressing towards him so they could touch him. Whenever the evil spirits saw him they would fall down in front of him and shout out, “You are the Son of God!” But he commanded them not to reveal who he was.

Then Jesus went away to the hill country. He called those he wanted to be with him, and they came to him. He chose twelve to be with him, and called them apostles. They were to be with him, and he would send them out to announce the good news, and with the authority to drive out demons. These are the twelve he chose: Simon (whom he called Peter), James the son of Zebedee and his brother John (who he called Boanerges, meaning “sons of thunder”), Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Revolutionary, and Judas Iscariot (who betrayed him).

Jesus went home, but such a large crowd gathered again that he and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. When Jesus' family heard about it, they came to take him away, saying, “He's lost his senses!” But the religious leaders from Jerusalem said, “He's possessed by Beelzebub! It's by the ruler of demons that he's driving out demons!”

But Jesus called them over to him. Using illustrations he asked them, “How can Satan throw out Satan? A kingdom fighting itself can't continue. A household that's divided is doomed. If Satan is divided and fights against himself, he won't last long—he'll soon come to an end. Clearly, if someone breaks into the house of a strong man and tries to take his things, he won't get far in his theft unless he ties up the strong man first.”

“I tell you the truth: all sins and blasphemies can be forgiven, but if people blaspheme by rejecting the Holy Spirit they can never be forgiven, because they are guilty of an eternal sin.” (Jesus said this because they said, “He has an evil spirit.”)

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. They waited outside and sent him a message, asking him to come out. The crowd that was sitting around him told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside asking for you.”

“Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” he responded. Looking around at all those sitting there in a circle, he said, “Here is my mother! Here are my brothers! Whoever does what God wants, they are my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Jesus began teaching beside the Sea again. So many people came to listen to him that he climbed into a boat and sat in it on the water while the crowd listened from the shore. He illustrated his teachings using many stories.

“Listen,” he said. “A sower went out to sow. Now as he was scattering the seeds, some fell on the path,

and birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on stony ground where there wasn't much earth. In the shallow soil the plants started growing quickly, but because the soil wasn't deep they were scorched when the sun came up. Since they didn't have any real roots, they soon withered. Other seeds fell among thorns. The thorns grew up and choked the sprouting seeds, so they produced nothing. Other seeds fell on good soil where they sprouted and grew. They produced a harvest of some thirty, some sixty, and some a hundred times what was planted. If you have ears to hear, listen to what I'm saying."

When he was by himself, his twelve disciples and the others who were with him asked him what the illustrations meant.

He told them, "The mystery of God's kingdom has been given to you to understand. But outsiders only have the stories, so that even though they see, they don't really 'see,' and even though they hear, they don't understand, otherwise they might turn to me and be forgiven."

"Don't you understand this story?" Jesus asked them. "If you can't, how are you going to understand all the other stories?

The sower sows the word. The seeds on the path where the word is sown illustrate those who hear the message, but then Satan immediately comes along and takes away the word that's been sown in them. Likewise the seeds on the rocky ground illustrate those who hear the word, and happily accept it right away. But since they have no real roots, they only last for a while until trouble or persecution comes, and then they quickly fall away. Those sown among the thorns illustrate those who hear the word, but worries of this world, the temptation of wealth, and other distractions choke the growth of the word, and it becomes unproductive. But the seeds sown on good soil illustrate those who hear the word, accept it, and are productive—producing thirty, sixty, and a hundred times what was originally sown.

Who puts a lamp under a bucket, or beneath a bed?" Jesus asked them. "No, you put a lamp up on a lamp-stand. Everything that is hidden will be revealed, and everything that is secret will be brought out into the open. If you have ears to hear, listen to what I'm saying! Pay attention to what you're hearing," he told them, "for you will be given according to how much you want to receive, measure for measure. More will be given to those who already have understanding, but those who don't want to know will have what little understanding they have taken from them.

God's kingdom is like a man sowing seed in the ground," Jesus said. "He goes to bed and gets up, day after day, but the man has no knowledge of how the seeds sprout and grow. The earth produces a harvest by itself. First a shoot appears, then the heads of grain, and then the heads of grain ripen. When the grain is ripe, the farmer reaps it with a sickle, because the harvest is ready.

What can we compare God's kingdom to? What illustration shall we use?" he asked. "It's like a mustard seed, the tiniest seed of all. But when it's sown it grows into a plant that's larger than other plants. It has branches big enough that birds can roost in its shade."

Jesus used many of these illustrated stories when he spoke to the people so they would understand as much as they could. In fact, when he spoke publicly, he only used stories; however in private he explained everything to his disciples.

Later that day, in the evening, he said to his disciples, "Let's go across to the other side of the Sea." Leaving the crowd behind, the disciples went with Jesus, just as he was, and got into a boat. Other boats went with them. Soon a terrible storm started blowing, and waves crashed against the boat, filling it with water. Jesus was asleep in the stern, resting his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting at him, "Teacher, don't you care that we're about to drown?"

Jesus woke up. He told the wind to die down and told the waves, "Be quiet! Be still." The wind stopped, and the water became completely calm. "Why are you so frightened? Haven't you learned to trust me?" he asked them.

They were stunned and terrified. They asked each other, "Who *is* this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

They arrived on the other side of the lake in the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat a man with an evil spirit came from the graveyard to meet him. This man lived among the tombs, and it had been impossible to tie him up any longer, even with a chain. He had often been tied up with chains and shackles, but he simply tore the chains apart and broke the shackles into pieces. No one had the strength to subdue him. Day and night he was always shouting out among the tombs and in the hills nearby, cutting himself with sharp stones.

Seeing Jesus from a distance he ran and kneeled in front of him. In a loud voice he cried out, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of Almighty God? Swear by God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had already told the evil spirit to leave the man.

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion, because we are many!" he replied. He also repeatedly pleaded with Jesus not to send them a long way away.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the hillside nearby. The evil spirits pleaded with him, "Send us to the pigs so we can enter them." Jesus allowed them to do this. The evil spirits left the man and went into the pigs. The whole herd, about two thousand, rushed down the steep cliff into the sea and drowned. The pig-keepers ran away, and spread the news all over town and in the countryside. People came out to see what had happened. When they found Jesus they saw the man who had been demon-possessed sitting there, dressed, and in his right mind—the one who had the legion of evil spirits—and they became frightened! Then those who had seen what had happened to the man who had been demon-possessed and the pigs told the others. They began pleading with Jesus to leave their district. As Jesus climbed into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus refused, telling him, "Go home to your own people, and

tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has been merciful to you."

So the man went on his way and began to tell the people of the Ten Cities everything Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.

Jesus went back again by boat to the other side of the lake where a large crowd gathered around him at the shore. A synagogue leader, a man named Jairus, came to him. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded with him, saying, "My little daughter is about to die. Please come and place your hands on her so she may be healed and live."

So Jesus went with him. Everybody followed, crowding and jostling him. A woman was there who had been ill from bleeding for twelve years. She'd suffered considerably under the care of many doctors, and had spent all she had. But nothing helped her—in fact she'd grown worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd, and touched his cloak. She was telling herself, "If I can just touch his cloak, I'll be healed."

The bleeding stopped immediately, and she felt her body healed from her disease. Jesus, sensing at once that power had gone out from him, turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my cloak?"

"Look at the crowd jostling you. What do you mean, 'Who touched me?'" the disciples replied.

But Jesus went on looking around to see who had done it. The woman, realizing what had happened to her, came and fell down before him, and told him the whole truth.

"My daughter, your trust in me has healed you. Go in peace. You have been completely cured of your disease," Jesus told her.

While he was still speaking some people came from the home of the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "You don't need to bother the Teacher any longer."

But Jesus paid no attention to what they said. He told the synagogue leader, "Don't be afraid, just trust in me." He wouldn't let anyone go with him except Peter, James, and James' brother John.

When they arrived at the synagogue leader's house, Jesus saw all the commotion, with people crying and wailing. He went in and asked them, "Why are you making such a commotion with all this crying? The little girl isn't dead, she's just sleeping." They laughed scornfully at him.

Jesus made everyone leave. Then he went into the room where the little girl was lying, taking with him the child's father and mother, and the three disciples. Taking the little girl's hand he said, "*Talitha koum,*" which means, "Little girl, get up!"

The little girl, who was twelve years old, got up immediately and began walking around. They were completely astonished at what had happened. He gave them strict instructions not to let anyone know, and he told them to give the little girl something to eat.

Jesus left and went home to Nazareth with his disciples. On Sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue, and many of those who were listening were surprised.

"Where does he get these ideas?" they asked. "What's this wisdom he's been given? Where does he get the power to do miracles? Isn't this the carpenter, Mary's son—the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Don't his sisters live here among us?" They were offended and rejected him.

"A prophet is treated with respect except in his home town, among his relatives, and within his own family," Jesus told them. The result was that Jesus could not do any miracles there, except to heal a few sick people. He was amazed at their lack of trust.

Jesus traveled around the villages, teaching as he went. He called together the twelve disciples, and began sending them out two by two, giving them authority over evil spirits. He told them not to take anything with them except a walking stick—no bread, no bag, and no money in their belts. They could wear sandals, but they were not to take an extra shirt.

"When you're invited into a home, stay there until you leave," he told them. "If you're not welcomed and not listened to, then shake the dust from your feet as you leave as a sign you have given up on them." So they went around telling people to repent. They drove out many demons, and healed many who were sick by anointing them with oil.

King Herod got to hear about Jesus since he had become well-known. Some said, "This is John the Baptist risen from the dead. That's why he has such miraculous powers." Others said, "It's Elijah." Still others said, "He's a prophet, like one of the prophets of the past."

But when Herod heard about it, he said, "It's John, the one I beheaded! He's come back from the dead!" For Herod had given orders to arrest and imprison John because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom Herod had married. John had been saying to Herod, "It's against the law to marry your brother's wife." So Herodias had a grudge against John and wanted him killed. But she wasn't able to arrange it because Herod knew John was a holy man who did what was right. Herod protected John and though what John said was very disturbing to him, he was still happy to hear what he had to say.

Herodias had her opportunity on Herod's birthday. He gave a banquet for the nobles, military officers, and important leaders of Galilee. Herodias' own daughter came in and danced for them. Herod and those eating with him were delighted at her performance, so he told the girl, "Ask me for whatever you like, and I'll give it to you." He confirmed his promise with an oath, "I'll give you up to half my kingdom."

She went out and asked her mother, "What should I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she replied.

The girl hurried back in and said to the king, "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a plate."

The king was very upset, but because of the oaths he'd made in front of his guests, he didn't want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner to bring him John's head. After beheading him in the prison, the executioner brought John's head on a plate and gave it to the girl, and the young girl handed it to her mother. When John's disciples heard what had happened they came and took his body and placed it in a tomb.

The apostles returned and gathered around Jesus. They told him all they had done and what they had taught.

"Come with me, just yourselves. We'll go to a quiet place, and rest for a while," Jesus told them, because there was so much coming and going that they didn't even have time to eat. So they went by boat to a quiet place to be alone.

But people saw them leaving and recognized them. So people from all the surrounding towns ran ahead and got there before them. When Jesus got off the boat he saw a huge crowd, and he felt pity for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them about many things.

It was getting late in the day and Jesus' disciples came to him. They told him, "We're miles from anywhere, and it's really late. You should tell the people to go and buy themselves something to eat in the villages and countryside nearby."

But Jesus replied, "You give them something to eat."

"What? We'd need more than six month's pay to buy bread to feed all these people," the disciples replied.

"Well, how much bread do you have?" Jesus asked. "Go and see."

They went and checked, and told him, "Five loaves, and a couple of fish."

Jesus told everyone to sit down in groups on the green grass. They sat in groups of hundreds and fifties. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish. Looking up to heaven he blessed the food and broke the bread into pieces. Then he handed the bread to the disciples to give to the people, and he divided the fish up between all of them. Everyone ate until they were full. Then they collected up the leftovers of the bread and fish—twelve basketfuls. A total of five thousand men plus their families ate the food.

Immediately after this Jesus instructed his disciples to get back into the boat. They were to go on ahead to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake while he sent the people on their way. Once he'd said goodbye to them he went up into the hills to pray.

Late that evening the boat was in the middle of the lake while Jesus was alone, still on land. He could see them being buffeted about as they rowed hard because the wind was blowing against them. In the early morning hours Jesus came to them, walking on the water. He would have passed them, but when they saw him walking on the water they thought he was a ghost. They screamed out because they could all see him and were absolutely terrified.

Jesus told them right away: "Don't worry, it's me. Don't be afraid!" He went over to them and climbed into the boat, and the wind died down. They were totally shocked, for they hadn't understood the meaning of the feeding miracle due to their stubborn, hard-hearted attitude.

After crossing the Sea they arrived at Gennesaret and moored the boat. As they climbed out, the people immediately recognized Jesus. They ran everywhere around the whole area to bring in all the sick on their mats to where they'd heard Jesus was. Wherever he went, in the villages, in the towns, or in the countryside, they put the sick in the marketplaces and begged Jesus to let the sick touch just the edge of his clothes. Everyone who touched him was healed.

The Pharisees and religious leaders who had come down from Jerusalem to meet Jesus noticed that some of his disciples ate with "unclean" (meaning unwashed) hands. (The Pharisees and all Jews don't eat until they wash their hands, following the tradition of their ancestors. In the same way, they don't eat when they return from the market until they have had a wash. They observe many other rituals, like the washing of cups, pots, and pans.)

So the Pharisees and religious leaders asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples follow the tradition of our ancestors? They eat food with unclean hands."

Jesus replied, "Isaiah was right about you hypocrites when he said, 'These people claim they honor me, but in their thinking they are far from me. There's no point in their worship of me, for what they teach as doctrines are merely human rules.' You disregard God's law, and instead you carefully observe human traditions."

"How cleverly you set aside God's law so you can support your traditions!" he told them. "Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and 'Whoever curses their father or mother should die.' But you say that if someone tells their father or mother, 'Anything you might have received from me is now *Corban*,' (that means dedicated to God), then you don't permit them to do anything further for their mother or father. By means of this tradition of yours that you pass down, you make God's word null and void. You do many other things like this."

Jesus called the crowd to him again and told them, "Please, everyone listen to me and understand. It's not what's on the outside and goes into you that makes you unclean. It's what comes out that makes you unclean."

Then Jesus went inside to escape the crowd, and his disciples asked him about his illustration.

"Don't you understand it either?" he asked them. "Don't you see that what you eat doesn't make you unclean? It doesn't go into your mind, but into your stomach, and then passes out of the body. So all foods are ceremonially 'clean.'

It's what comes out of you that makes you unclean. It's from the inside, from people's minds, that evil thoughts come: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, indecency, envy, slander, pride, thoughtlessness— all these evils come from inside and defile people."

Then Jesus left and went to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know he was staying in a house there, but he couldn't keep it a secret. As soon as a woman whose little daughter had an evil spirit heard about him, she came and fell at his feet. The woman was Greek, born in Syrophoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive out the demon from her daughter.

"First let the children eat until they're full," Jesus replied. "It's not right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

"True, sir," she said, "but even the dogs under the table eat the scraps the children leave."

Jesus told her, "For such an answer you may go—the demon has left your daughter." She went home and found the child lying on the bed, the demon gone.

Leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus passed through Sidon and then on to the Sea of Galilee and the territory of the Ten Cities. There they brought him a deaf man who also could not speak properly. They asked Jesus to touch the man with his hand and heal him. After Jesus took him aside from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers in the deaf man's ears. Then he touched the man's tongue with spit. Jesus looked up to heaven and with a sigh he said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open!" The man's ears were opened, his speech impediment was gone, and he began speaking properly. Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone, but the more he said this, the more they spread the news. They were totally amazed and said, "Everything he does is marvelous. He even makes the deaf hear, and the dumb speak."

Around this time there was another large crowd that had nothing to eat. Jesus called the disciples together and told them, "I feel for the crowd because they have already stayed with me for three days and they have nothing to eat. If I send them home without food, they'll faint on the way. Some have come from a long way away."

"Where could anybody find enough bread to feed them here in this wilderness?" answered his disciples.

"How many loaves do you have?" he asked.

"Seven," they replied.

He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. Then he took the seven loaves of bread, and gave thanks. He broke the bread and handed the pieces to his disciples to give to the crowd. They had a few fish as well, so having blessed them, he said, "Take these and share them too."

They ate until they were full, and then collected up seven baskets of leftovers. There were four thousand people there. After sending them on their way, Jesus climbed into a boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

The Pharisees arrived and began to argue with him, wanting him to give them a miraculous sign from heaven, trying to get him to prove himself. Jesus sighed deeply, and asked, "Why do you people want a sign? I tell you the truth: I will not give you a sign."

So he left them behind, climbed into the boat, and went back across the lake. But the disciples had forgotten to bring bread with them. All they had in the boat was one loaf.

"Watch out—beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and of Herod!" he warned them.

"He's saying that because we don't have any bread," they concluded.

Jesus knew what they were saying, and said, "Why are you talking about not having any bread? Are you still not thinking and not understanding? Have you closed your minds? You've got eyes to see, haven't you? And ears to hear? Don't you remember when I shared five loaves among five thousand? How many basketfuls of leftovers did you pick up?"

"Twelve," they replied.

"And the seven loaves divided among four thousand. How many basketfuls of leftovers did you pick up?"

"Seven," they answered.

"Do you still not understand?" he asked them.

They went to Bethsaida where some people brought a blind man to Jesus. They begged Jesus to touch him and heal him. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and took him outside the village. Jesus spat on the man's eyes and touched him with his hands.

Then Jesus asked him, "Can you see anything?"

The man looked around, and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees walking." So Jesus touched the man's eyes again. He could see properly—he was cured and his sight was clear. Jesus sent the man home, and told him, "Don't go back through the village."

Jesus and his disciples left to go to the villages of Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say I am?"

"Some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, others say one of the prophets," they replied.

"But who do you say I am?" he asked them.

"You are the Messiah!" Peter answered.

Jesus warned them not to tell anybody about him.

Then Jesus began to explain to them that the Son of man would suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and religious teachers. He would be killed, but three days later would rise again. Jesus explained this to them very clearly. But Peter took Jesus aside and started to reprimand him for what he said.

Jesus turned around and looking at his disciples, reprimanded Peter. "Get away from me, Satan," he said. "You're not thinking as God thinks, but as human beings do."

Jesus called the crowd and his disciples over to him, and told them, "If you want to follow me, you must give up on yourselves, pick up your cross and follow me. If you want to save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life because of me and the good news you will save it.

What use is it for you to gain everything in the whole world, and lose your life? What would you give in exchange for your life? If you're ashamed to acknowledge me and what I say among this unfaithful and sinful people, then the Son of man will be ashamed to acknowledge you when he comes with his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth: some standing here won't die before they see the kingdom of God having come with power."

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him, and led them up a high mountain to be by themselves. His appearance totally changed. His clothes shone a brilliant white, whiter than anyone on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared in front of them as well, talking with Jesus.

Peter spoke up and said, "Rabbi, it's great for us to be here! We should make three shelters—one each for you, Moses, and Elijah." (He really didn't know what to say because they were all so frightened!)

Then a cloud covered them, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, the one I love. Listen to him."

Then, all of a sudden, as they were watching, there was nobody. Only Jesus was with them.

As they came down the mountain Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone what they'd seen until the Son

of man had risen from the dead. They kept this to themselves, but they did argue with each other over what it meant to rise from the dead.

"Why do the religious teachers state that Elijah has to come first?" they asked him.

"It's true that Elijah comes first to prepare everything," Jesus replied. "But why then does it say in Scripture that the Son of man has to suffer so much and be treated with contempt? However, I tell you that Elijah has come, and they abused him in whatever way they wanted, just as Scripture said they would."

When they returned to the other disciples, they saw them surrounded by a large crowd and some religious teachers arguing with them. As soon as the crowd saw Jesus they were in total awe, and ran to greet him.

"What are you arguing with them about?" Jesus asked them.

One of the people in the crowd answered, "Rabbi, I brought my son to you. He has an evil spirit that prevents him speaking. Whenever he has a seizure it throws him down, and he foams at the mouth, grinds his teeth, and he becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive it out of him, but they couldn't do it."

"You unbelieving people!" Jesus responded. "How long must I remain here with you? How long do I have to put up with you? Bring him over here to me!"

So they brought him to Jesus. When the evil spirit saw Jesus it immediately sent the boy into convulsions and threw him on the ground, where he rolled around, foaming at the mouth.

"How long has he had this?" Jesus asked the boy's father.

"Since he was small," the father replied. "Often it throws him into the fire to burn him to death, or throws him into water to drown him. Please have mercy on us and help, if you can."

"Why do you say, 'if you can?'" replied Jesus. "Whoever trusts has every power!"

"I do trust in you," the man shouted out right away. "Help me not to distrust you."

Jesus, seeing that the crowd was closing in, commanded the evil spirit, "Spirit that causes deafness and dumbness, I order you to come out of him and never return."

The spirit screamed and threw the boy into severe convulsions. Then the spirit came out of the boy and left him for dead—to the extent that many of the people said, "He's dead."

But Jesus took the boy by the hand and helped him up, and he got to his feet.

Later, when Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him in private, "Why couldn't we drive the evil spirit out?"

"This kind can't be driven out except by prayer," Jesus told them.

They left and passed through Galilee. Jesus didn't want anyone to know where he was because he was teaching his disciples. "The Son of man will be betrayed to human authorities," he told them. "They will kill him, but three days later he will rise again." They didn't understand what he meant and were too afraid to ask him about it.

They arrived at Capernaum, and once they were inside the house where they were staying, Jesus asked them, "What were you talking about on the way?" But they didn't say anything because they had been arguing over who was the most important.

Jesus sat down and called the twelve disciples together. "If anyone wants to be first, he has to be the very last, the servant of everyone else," he told them. He took a small child and had the child stand right in the middle of them. Then he picked up and hugged the child, and told them, "Whoever welcomes a child like this in my name, welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me doesn't welcome me but the one who sent me."

John said to Jesus, "Rabbi, we saw someone driving out demons in your name. We tried to stop him because he wasn't one of us."

"Don't stop him," Jesus replied. "For no one who is doing miracles in my name can curse me at the same time. Anyone who is not against us is for us. Anyone who gives a cup of water to you in my name, because you belong to Christ, won't lose their reward, believe me.

But if anyone leads one of these little ones who trust in me into sin, it would be better for them if they were thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around their neck. If your hand leads you to sin, cut it off! It's better to enter eternal life as a cripple than to go with both hands into Gehenna, into the fire that can't be put out. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It's better to enter eternal life lame than to be thrown into Gehenna still having two feet. If your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out! It's better to enter the kingdom of God with just one eye than to be thrown into Gehenna still having both eyes, where the worm doesn't die and the fire never goes out. Everybody will be 'salted' by fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its taste, how could you make it salty again? You need to be like salt, and live in peace with one another."

Jesus left Capernaum and went to the region of Judea and Transjordan. Once again people flocked to see him, and he was teaching them like he always did. Some Pharisees came to see him. They tried to test him by asking the question, "Is divorce legal?"

"What did Moses tell you to do?" he asked in reply.

"Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send the woman away," they replied.

Then Jesus told them, "Moses only wrote down this rule for you because of your hard-hearted attitude. However, in the beginning, from creation, God made male and female. That's why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined in marriage to his wife, and the two become one body. They are no longer two but one. Let no one separate what God has joined together."

When they were back indoors, the disciples began asking him about this.

"Any man who divorces his wife and marries again commits adultery against her," he told them. "And if the wife divorces her husband and marries again she commits adultery."

Some people brought their children to Jesus so that he could bless them, but the disciples told them off and tried to keep the children away from Jesus. But when Jesus saw what they were doing, he became very upset and told them, "Let the children come to me! Don't stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to those who are

like these children. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't welcome the kingdom of God like a child won't enter it." He hugged the children, placed his hands on them, and blessed them.

As Jesus set out on his journey, a man came running over and kneeled down before him. "Good teacher, what should I do to make sure I have eternal life?" he asked.

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him. "No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not cheat, honor your father and mother..."

"Teacher," the man replied, "I've obeyed all these commandments since I was small."

Jesus looked at him with love and said, "You're only missing one thing. Go and sell everything you own, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me."

At this, the man's face fell, and he left feeling very sad, for he was very wealthy.

Jesus looked around, and said to his disciples, "It's only with difficulty that wealthy people enter the kingdom of God!"

The disciples were shocked at this. But Jesus went on, "My friends, it is difficult to enter God's kingdom. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for the rich to enter God's kingdom."

The disciples were even more confused. "Then who on earth can be saved?" they asked one another.

Looking right at them, Jesus replied, "From a human point of view, it's impossible—but not with God. Everything is possible with God."

Peter spoke up, "We've left everything to follow you..."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "anyone who has left behind their home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands because of me, and for the sake of the good news, will receive in return in due course a hundred times as many homes and brothers and sisters and children and lands—as well as persecution. In the world to come they will receive eternal life. However, many of the first will be last, and the last first."

They continued on their way to Jerusalem, with Jesus walking on ahead. The disciples were apprehensive and the other followers were afraid. So Jesus took the disciples aside and began to explain to them what was about to happen to him. "We're going to Jerusalem," he told them, "and the Son of man will be betrayed to the chief priests and religious teachers. They will condemn him to death and hand him over to the foreigners. They will mock him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. But three days later he will rise again."

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to see him.

"Teacher," they said, "We want you to do for us whatever we ask you."

"So what do you want me to do for you?" Jesus replied.

"When you're victorious and sit on your throne, make sure we sit beside you, one on the right, the other on the left," they told him.

"You don't know what you're asking," replied Jesus. "Can you drink the cup I drink? Can you be baptized with the baptism of pain I will suffer?"

"Yes, we can," they replied.

"You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the same baptism as me," Jesus told them. "But it's not for me to grant who should sit on my right or on my left. These places are reserved for those for whom they have been prepared."

When the other ten disciples heard about this, they started getting upset with James and John. Jesus called the disciples together and told them, "You realize that those who claim to rule over nations oppress their people. The rulers act like tyrants. But for you it's not like this. Anyone of you who wants to be a ruler must be your servant, and anyone who wants to be first among you must be the slave of all of you. For even the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Jesus and his disciples passed through Jericho, and as they were leaving town, accompanied by a large crowd, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting at the roadside. When he heard it was Jesus of Nazareth, he started shouting out, "Jesus, son of David, please have mercy on me!" Lots of people told him to be quiet, but that only made him shout even more, "Jesus, son of David, please have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped, and said, "Tell him to come here." So they called him over, telling him, "Good news! Get up. He's calling for you." Bartimaeus jumped up, threw off his coat, and rushed over to Jesus.

"What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus asked him.

"Teacher," he said to Jesus, "I want to see!"

"You can go. Your trust in me has healed you." Immediately Bartimaeus could see and he followed Jesus as he went on his way.

As they approached Jerusalem, near to Bethphage and Bethany, beside the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead. He told them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and as soon as you enter, you'll find a colt tied up that no one has ever ridden before. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you what you are doing, tell them, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back soon.'"

So they set off, and found a colt tied to a door, out on the street, and they untied it. Some of the people standing around asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt"? The disciples replied just as Jesus told them to, and the people let them go.

They brought the colt to Jesus, put their cloaks on it, and Jesus sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others laid down leafy branches that they'd cut in the fields.

Those leading in the front and those that were following were all shouting, "Hosanna! Bless the one coming in the name of the Lord. Bless the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went in to the Temple. He looked around him, observing everything, and then, since it was getting late, he returned to Bethany with the twelve disciples.

The next day, as they left Bethany, Jesus was hungry. From some distance away he saw a fig tree with leaves, so he went over to it to see if it had any fruit. But when he got there, he found it had only leaves, because it was not the season for figs.

He said to the tree, "May no one eat fruit from you ever again." His disciples heard his words.

They arrived back in Jerusalem, and Jesus went into the Temple. He started driving out the people who were buying and selling in the Temple. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of the people selling doves. He stopped anyone carrying things through the Temple.

He explained to them, "Doesn't Scripture say, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have turned it into a den of thieves!"

The chief priests and religious teachers heard what had happened, and tried to find a way to kill Jesus. But they were afraid of him, for everyone was so impressed by his teaching.

When evening came Jesus and his disciples left the city. The following morning as they returned, they saw the fig tree, withered from the roots up. Peter remembered what Jesus had done, and said to him, "Rabbi, look, the fig tree that you cursed has withered."

"Trust in God," Jesus replied. "Believe me when I say to you that if you told this mountain, 'Get out of here and be thrown into the sea,' and you don't doubt in your heart, but are convinced about what you're asking, then it will happen! I'm telling you that whatever you pray for, whatever you ask, trust that you've received it, and it's yours. But when you're praying, if you have something against someone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your sins."

They returned to Jerusalem, and as he was walking in the Temple, the chief priests, religious teachers, and the leaders approached him. "By what authority are you doing all this?" they demanded. "Who gave you the right?"

"Let me ask you a question," Jesus told them. "You answer me, and I'll tell you by whose authority I do these things. John's baptism—did that come from heaven, or from people?"

They discussed it among themselves. They said, "If we say it's from heaven, he'll reply, 'So why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, it's of human origin, well..." They were afraid of the crowd, because everyone believed that John was a true prophet.

So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

"Then I'm not telling you by whose authority I do these things," replied Jesus.

Then Jesus began to speak to them using illustrated stories.

"Once there was a man who planted a vineyard. He put a fence around it, dug a pit for a winepress, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to some farmers, and left on a journey.

When harvest-time came, he sent one of his servants to the tenant farmers to collect some of the grapes from the vineyard. But they grabbed hold of him, beat him up, and sent him away with nothing. So the man sent another servant. They hit him over the head and abused him. He sent another servant, and this one they killed. He sent many other servants, and they beat some of them and killed others. In the end the only one left was his son whom he loved, and eventually he sent him, thinking 'They will respect my son.' But the farmers said to themselves, 'Here's the owner's heir—if we kill him, we can get what he would have inherited!' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. Now what is the owner of the vineyard going to do? He will come and kill those farmers, and then he will lease the vineyard to others.

Haven't you even read this Scripture: 'The stone rejected by the builders has become the chief cornerstone. This is from the Lord, and it's marvelous to see!'"

The Jewish leaders tried to have him arrested because they realized that the illustration was directed at them, but they were afraid of the crowd. So they left him alone and went away. Later they sent some Pharisees with some of Herod's supporters to Jesus in an attempt to catch him out by what he said.

They arrived and said, "Teacher, we know you are a truthful person and you don't look for approval, because you don't care about status or position. Instead you teach God's way in accordance with the truth. So is it right to pay tribute to Caesar or not? Should we pay up, or should we refuse?"

Jesus, realizing how hypocritical they were, asked them, "Why are you trying to catch me out? Bring me a coin to look at."

They gave him a coin. "Whose is this image, and whose inscription?" Jesus asked them. "Caesar's," they replied.

"Then give back to Caesar what belongs to him, and give back to God what belongs to him," Jesus told them. They were amazed at his reply.

Then the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, came and asked a question:

"Teacher, Moses instructed us that if a man dies, leaving his widow childless, then his brother should marry his wife, and have children by her on his behalf. Once there were seven brothers. The first one got married, and then died without having children. The second married his widow, and then died, childless. The third did the same. In fact all seven died without having children. In the end the woman died too. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be, because she was the wife of all seven brothers?"

Jesus told them, "This proves you're mistaken, and that you don't know the Scriptures or the power of God. When the dead rise, they don't marry, and aren't given in marriage. They're like the angels in heaven. But concerning the resurrection, haven't you read in Moses' writings the story of the burning bush, where God spoke to Moses and told him, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He's not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are completely mistaken!"

One of the religious teachers came and heard them arguing. He recognized that Jesus had given them a good answer. So he asked him, "Which is the most important commandment of all?"

Jesus replied, "The first commandment is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your spirit, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is 'Love

your neighbor as yourself.' There's no more important commandment than these."

"That's right, Teacher," the man replied. "It's true as you said that God is one, and there is no other. We are to love him with all our heart, all our understanding, and all our strength, and we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is far more important than offerings and sacrifices."

Jesus saw that he gave a thoughtful answer, and said, "You're not far from the kingdom of God." After this no one was brave enough to ask him any more questions.

While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he asked, "Why do the religious teachers state that Christ is the son of David? David himself declared, inspired by the Holy Spirit, that the Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.' Since David himself calls him Lord, how can he be David's son?" The large crowd listened to what Jesus said with great delight.

Jesus continued to teach them, saying, "Beware of religious leaders! They love to walk around in long robes, to be greeted respectfully in the marketplaces. They love to have the most important seats in the synagogues, and the best places at banquets. They cheat widows out of what they own, and cover up the kind of people they really are with long-winded prayers. They will receive severe condemnation in the judgment."

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury collection box, watching people tossing in coins. Many of the rich were extravagantly throwing in a lot of money. Then a poor widow came along and put in just two small coins. He called his disciples together and told them, "I tell you the truth: this poor widow has put in more than all the rest together. All of them gave from their wealth what they had, but she gave from her poverty what she didn't have. She put in all she had to live on."

As Jesus was leaving the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, look at these massive stones and magnificent buildings!"

"You see all these great buildings?" Jesus replied. "Not one stone will be left on top of another. Everything will be torn down."

As Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives overlooking the Temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him in private, "Tell us: When will this happen? What's the sign that all this is about to be fulfilled?"

Jesus began telling them, "Make sure no one deceives you. Many will come in my name claiming, 'I am the Christ.' They will deceive many people. Don't be troubled when you hear of wars nearby and wars far away. These things must happen but this is not the end. Nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines too. These are the beginnings of the world's birth pains.

Watch out for yourselves! They will hand you over to the courts to be tried. You will be beaten in synagogues. Because of me you will have to stand before governors and kings, and you will be witnesses to them.

The good news must first be announced in every nation. When they come to arrest you and put you on trial, don't worry about what to say. Just say what you're told at that time, because it's not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit.

Brother will betray brother to death, and a father will betray his child. Children will turn against their parents and have them condemned to death. You will be hated by everyone because of me, but whoever endures until the end will be saved.

But when you see the 'idolatry that causes devastation' standing where it shouldn't be (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea should run to the mountains. Those who are on the roof—don't go back inside the house to get anything. Those who are out in the fields—don't go home to get a coat. How hard it will be for those who are pregnant or nursing at that time! Pray that this won't happen during the winter. For these will be days of trouble like never before since the beginning of God's creation until now, and they won't ever come again. If God doesn't cut short these days, no one will survive. However, for the sake of those God has chosen, he has cut them short.

So if anyone tells you, 'Look, here is the Messiah,' or 'Look, there he is,' don't believe it. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear, and they will perform miraculous signs and wonders to deceive the chosen of God, if that were possible. Watch out! I've told you everything before it happens.

This is what will happen after those troubles: 'The sun will become dark, the moon won't shine, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.'

Then they will see the Son of man as he comes on the clouds, possessing great power and glory. He will send out the angels, and gather together all his chosen ones from wherever they are, from the most distant part of the earth to the farthest point of heaven.

Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branches grow soft and send out leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, you know that it's near—right outside the door! I tell you the truth, this generation won't come to an end until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will come to an end, but my teachings will not.

No one knows the day or hour when this will happen—not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son; only the Father knows. Keep watch! Stay awake! For you don't know when this will happen. It's like a man who went away on a journey. He left his house, and gave each of his servants the authority to do what he told them. He told the doorkeeper to stay awake.

So keep watch, because you don't know when the owner of the house is coming back. It may be in the evening, in the middle of the night, before dawn, or in the morning. You don't want to be caught sleeping if he returns unexpectedly. What I'm telling you, I'm telling everyone: Watch!"

It was now two days before Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the religious leaders were trying to find a surreptitious way to arrest Jesus and have him killed. "But not during Passover," they said to themselves, "otherwise the people may riot."

Meanwhile Jesus was in Bethany, eating a meal at Simon the leper's home. A woman came in with an alabaster jar of very expensive pure nard perfume. She broke the jar open and poured the perfume on Jesus' head.

Some of those who were there became annoyed and said, "Why waste this perfume? It could've been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor." They were angry with her.

But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone! Why are you criticizing her for doing something beautiful to me? You'll always have the poor with you, and you can help them whenever you want. But you won't always have me with you. She did what she could: she anointed my body in anticipation of my burial. I tell you the truth: wherever the good news is spread in the world, people will remember what she did."

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the chief priests and arranged to betray Jesus to them. When they heard this, they were delighted, and promised to pay him. So Judas began to look for an opportunity to betray Jesus.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the time when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare the Passover meal for you?"

He sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city and there you'll meet a man carrying a water pot. Follow him, and when he goes into a house, ask the owner where I and my disciples can celebrate the Passover. He will take you to a large upstairs room that is furnished and ready. You can make preparations for us there."

The disciples went into the city, and found things just as he'd described them. They prepared the Passover meal. In the evening Jesus went there with the twelve disciples.

While they were sitting eating, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth: one of you is going to betray me; one who is eating with me now."

They were shocked, and they each asked, "It's not me, is it?"

"It's one of the Twelve, one of you sharing this food with me," he replied. "The Son of man will die, just as the Scriptures predicted. But how terrible it will be for the man who betrays the Son of man! It would be better for that man if he'd never been born." As they were eating, Jesus picked up some bread. He blessed it, and gave it to them. "Take it. This is my body," he told them.

Then he picked up the cup. He blessed it, and gave it to them. They all drank from it. "This is my blood," he told them, "the agreement that's being poured out for many. I tell you the truth, I won't drink of the fruit of the vine until the day I drink it fresh in God's kingdom."

After they had sung a psalm, they left for the Mount of Olives.

"All of you will abandon me," Jesus told them. "For as the Scriptures say, 'I will attack the shepherd, and the sheep will be completely scattered.' But after I have risen from the dead, I will go before you to Galilee."

"I won't abandon you even if everyone else does," Peter replied.

Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth that today, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny that you even know me three times."

But Peter was totally adamant, saying, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never deny you." All of them said the same.

They arrived at a place called Gethsemane, where Jesus told his disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray." He took Peter, James, and John with him. He began to be very disturbed and troubled.

Jesus told them, "My agony is so painful it feels like I'm dying. Please, remain here and stay awake." He went a little farther on and then fell to the ground. He prayed, asking to be spared the time that was coming, if it were possible.

"Abba, Father! You can do everything," he said. "Please, take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet it's not what I want, but what you want."

Then Jesus returned and found the disciples asleep. "Simon, are you sleeping?" he asked Peter. "Couldn't you stay awake for just an hour? Stay awake, and pray so you won't fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

He left them once more, and prayed, saying the same things. Then he returned, and again he found them sleeping because they couldn't keep their eyes open. They didn't know what to say! He returned a third time, and asked them, "Are you still asleep? Are you still resting? Well that's enough, because the time has come! Look, the Son of man is about to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let's go! See, here comes my betrayer."

Just as he was saying this, Judas—one of the twelve disciples—arrived with a mob carrying swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests, religious leaders, and elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a sign with them: "He's the one that I kiss. Arrest him, and take him away under guard."

Judas went right up to Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, and kissed him affectionately. So they grabbed hold of Jesus and arrested him. But one of those standing there pulled out his sword and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his ear.

"Am I some kind of rebel that you have come to arrest me with swords and clubs?" Jesus asked them. "I was there with you, teaching in the Temple every day. Why didn't you arrest me then? But this is happening to fulfill the Scriptures."

Then all Jesus' disciples deserted him and ran away. (One of his followers was a young man who was wearing only a linen garment. They seized hold of him, but he ran off naked, leaving the garment behind.)

They took Jesus to the high priest's house where all the chief priests, elders, and religious teachers had gathered. Peter followed him at a distance, and went into the courtyard of the high priest's house. He sat down with the guards and warmed himself by the fire.

Inside the chief priests and the whole governing council were trying to find some evidence to have Jesus put to death, but they couldn't find anything. Many were giving false testimony against him, but their statements didn't agree.

Some of them got up to speak falsely against Jesus. "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that

human hands built, and in three days I will build another without hands.'" But even so their testimony didn't agree.

Then the high priest stood up in front of the council, and asked Jesus, "Have you nothing to say in response to these charges made against you?" But Jesus remained silent and didn't answer. So the high priest asked again, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?"

"I am," Jesus replied, "and you will see the Son of man sitting on the right of the Mighty One, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

The high priest tore his clothes and asked, "Why do we need any more witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What's your reaction?"

They all found him guilty and condemned him to death. Then some of them began to spit on him. They blindfolded him, hit him with their fists, and said, "Why don't you prophesy then, you 'Prophet'!" The guards took him away and beat him up.

Meanwhile Peter was down below in the courtyard. One of the high priest's servant-girls passed by, and seeing Peter warming himself, looked straight at him and said, "You were with Jesus of Nazareth too!"

But he denied it. "I don't know what you're talking about or what you mean," he replied. Then he went out to the forecourt, and a rooster crowed.

Seeing him there, the servant girl repeated to those standing around, "This man is one of them!" Once more Peter denied it. A little while later they said to Peter again, "You're definitely one of them because you're a Galilean too!"

Peter began calling down curses on himself and he swore, "I don't know this man you're talking about." Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said to him: "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times." When he realized what he'd done, he burst into tears.

Early the next morning, the chief priest, elders, and religious teachers—the whole governing council—came to a decision. They had Jesus bound and sent him to be handed over to Pilate.

Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

"You said it," Jesus replied.

The chief priests kept on making many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many charges they're bringing against you!" But Jesus didn't give any more answers, much to Pilate's surprise.

Now it was Pilate's custom at the Passover feast to release a prisoner to the people, whoever they requested. One of the prisoners was a man called Barabbas who belonged to a group of rebels who had committed murder during an uprising. The crowd went to Pilate and asked him to release a prisoner following his usual custom.

"Do you want me to release to you the King of Jews?" he asked them, for he realized that it was because of their jealousy of Jesus that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas to them instead.

"Then what should I do with the one you call the King of the Jews?" he asked them.

"Crucify him!" they shouted back.

"Why? What crime has he committed?" Pilate asked them.

"Crucify him!" they shouted back even louder.

Wanting to please the mob, Pilate released Barabbas to them. First he had Jesus flogged and then handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers took him away into the Praetorium courtyard, where they called out the whole battalion. They put royal purple robes on him and made a crown of thorns that they placed on him. Then they saluted him, saying, "Hail King of the Jews!" They repeatedly beat him around the head with a rod, spat at him, and fell on their knees before him as if in worship. After they finished mocking him, they took off the purple robes, and put his own clothes back on him. Then they led him away to be crucified. They forced a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the countryside, to carry his cross. Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means "the Place of the Skull." They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him. They divided his clothes, and threw dice to decide who would have what. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. A sign with the written charge against him read: "The King of the Jews."

They crucified two rebels with him, one on his left and one on his right. People passing by shouted insults at him, shaking their heads, and saying. "Aha! You who claimed you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days; save yourself and come down from the cross!" Likewise the chief priests and the religious teachers made fun of him, saying to each other, "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he really is the Messiah, the King of Israel, then why doesn't he come down from the cross so we can see and believe!" Even those who were crucified with him insulted him.

At noon darkness fell over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani,*" which means, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" Some of those standing there heard this, and said, "He's calling for Elijah." One man ran and filled a sponge with vinegar, put it on a stick, and tried to give it to Jesus to drink. "Leave him alone," he said. "Let's see if Elijah will come to take him down." Then Jesus groaned loudly, and died. The Temple veil was ripped in two from top to bottom. When the centurion standing there in front of Jesus saw how he died, he said, "This man was truly the Son of God."

Some women were watching from a distance including Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. They had followed Jesus and had taken care of him while he was in Galilee. Many other women who had come with him to Jerusalem were also there.

It was Friday, the day before the Sabbath. When evening came, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the governing council who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, had the courage to go to Pilate and ask for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon, so he summoned the centurion and asked him if Jesus had already died. Once he had confirmation

from the centurion, Pilate gave permission for Joseph to take the body. Joseph bought a linen sheet. Then he took Jesus' body down from the cross and wrapped it in the sheet, and placed it in a tomb that had been cut out of rock. Then he rolled a heavy stone up against the entrance. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were watching where he was laid.

Once the Sabbath had ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought aromatic ointments so that they could go and anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. They were asking each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” But when they arrived and looked, they saw that the very large, heavy stone had already been rolled away.

When they went into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right, wearing a long white robe. They became very frightened.

“Don't be frightened,” he told them. “You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, the one who was crucified. He is risen from the dead. He is not here. Look, this is the place where they laid him to rest. Now go, and tell his disciples and Peter that he's going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there just as he told you.”

They left and ran from the tomb, shaking and confused. They said nothing to anyone because they were too scared.

When Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, he appeared first of all to Mary Magdalene, from whom he'd driven out seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him as they mourned and cried. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they didn't believe it. Later Jesus appeared in a different form to two other disciples who'd left to go to the countryside. They returned and told the others, but they didn't believe them either.

After this he appeared to the eleven disciples as they were eating. He rebuked them for their lack of trust and their stubbornness, because they had not believed those who'd seen him after he had risen.

Then he told them, “Go to the whole world, and announce the good news to everyone. Anyone who trusts in me and is baptized will be saved, but anyone who chooses not to trust will be condemned. The following signs will accompany those who trust in me: in my name they will drive out demons; they will speak new languages; they will be able to handle snakes; if they drink something poisonous they won't be harmed; they will place their hands on the sick and they will be healed.”

Then, the Lord Jesus, when he had finished speaking to them, was taken up into heaven where he sat down at the right hand of God. The disciples went out and spread the good news everywhere, and the Lord worked with them, confirming the message through miraculous signs that accompanied it.

Luke

The Gospel According to Luke

As you know, many others have attempted to put down in writing the things that have been fulfilled that involve us. They based their accounts on evidence from the earliest eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word, and so I also decided that since I have followed these things very carefully from the beginning, it would be a good idea to write out an accurate account of all that happened. I have done this Theophilus, Your Excellency, so you can be certain that what you were taught is completely reliable.

During the time when Herod was king of Judea, there was a priest called Zechariah, who came from the Abijah priestly division. He was married to Elizabeth, who was also descended from Aaron the priest. They both did what was right before God, being careful to follow all the Lord's commandments and regulations.

They had no children because Elizabeth wasn't able to have any, and they were both growing old. While Zechariah was serving as a priest before God, on behalf of his priestly division, he was chosen by lot according to priestly custom to enter the Temple of the Lord and burn incense. During the time of offering incense a large crowd of people were praying outside. An angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah, standing to the right of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw the angel, he was startled and became terrified.

But the angel told him, “Don't be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call him John. He will bring you joy and gladness, and many will celebrate his birth. He will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will refuse to drink wine or other alcoholic drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he's born. He will turn many Israelites back to the Lord their God. He will go ahead of the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the fathers back to thinking about their children, and to turn those who are rebellious back to a right understanding—to prepare a people ready for the Lord.”

“How can I be sure about this?” Zechariah asked the angel. “I'm an old man, and my wife is getting old too.”

“I am Gabriel,” the angel replied. “I stand in God's presence, and I was sent to speak to you and give you this good news. But since you didn't believe what I told you, you'll become dumb, unable to speak, until the appointed time when my words come true.”

Outside the people were waiting for Zechariah, wondering why he was taking so long in the Temple. When eventually he came out, he couldn't speak to them. They realized he'd seen a vision in the Temple, for though he could make gestures, he was completely unable to speak.

After he'd finished his time of service, he went back home. Some time later his wife Elizabeth became pregnant. She stayed at home for five months.

“The Lord has done this for me,” she said, “now that he's taken away my disgrace in the eyes of others.”

In the sixth month of her pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young girl called Mary who lived in the town of Nazareth in Galilee. She was engaged to a man named Joseph.

The angel greeted her. “You are very privileged,” he told her. “The Lord is with you.” Mary was very puzzled at what he said, and wondered what this greeting meant.

“Don't worry, Mary,” the angel went on, “for God has shown his graciousness to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You shall call him Jesus. He will be very great, and he will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will never come to an end.”

“How is this possible?” Mary asked. “I'm still a virgin.”

He replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will cover you. The baby who is to be born is holy, and will be called the Son of God. And Elizabeth, your relative, even she is pregnant in her old age. The woman that people said couldn't have children is already six months pregnant. Nothing is impossible for God.”

“Here I am, ready to be the Lord's servant,” said Mary. “May it happen to me just as you said.” Then the angel left her.

A little while later, Mary got herself ready and hurried up into the hills of Judea, to the town where Zechariah's house was. She called out to Elizabeth as she went in. As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, the baby jumped for joy inside her. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and cried out in a loud voice:

“How blessed you are among women, and how blessed will be the child born to you! Why am I so honored that the mother of my Lord should visit me? As soon as I heard you call out in greeting, my baby jumped for joy inside me. How fortunate you are, because you are convinced that the Lord will do what he has promised you!”

Mary replied, “How I praise the Lord! I am so happy with God my Savior, because he decided that I, his servant, was worthy of his consideration, despite my humble background. From now on every generation will say I was blessed. God Almighty has done great things for me; his name is holy. His mercy lasts for generation after generation to those who respect him. With his power he has broken to pieces those who arrogantly think they're so clever. He tears the powerful down from their thrones, and elevates those who are humble. He fills the hungry with good things to eat, and he sends the rich away empty-handed. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering him in mercy, just as he promised our fathers, to Abraham and his descendants for ever.” Mary stayed with her for three months and then returned home.

The time came for Elizabeth to have her baby and she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had showed her great kindness, and they celebrated together with her. Eight days later

they came to circumcise the boy. They planned to call him Zechariah after his father.

"No," Elizabeth said. "He shall be called John."

"But there's nobody among your relatives who has this name," they told her. Through gestures they asked Zechariah, the boy's father, what he wanted to call his son. Zechariah motioned for something to write on. To everyone's surprise he wrote, "His name is John." Immediately he could speak again, and he started praising God.

All those living nearby were in awe at what had happened, and the news spread throughout the hill country of Judea. Everyone who heard the news wondered what it meant. "What will the little boy grow up to be?" they asked, for it was clear he was very special to God.

Zechariah, his father, filled with the Holy Spirit, spoke this prophecy:

"The Lord, the God of Israel, he is wonderful, for he has come to his people and set them free. He has given us a great Savior from the line of his servant David, as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. He promised to save us from our enemies, from those who hate us. He was merciful to our fathers, remembering his holy agreement— the promise that he made to our father Abraham. He gives us freedom from fear and rescues us from our enemies, so we can serve him by doing what is good and right for our whole lives. Even though you are only a small child, you will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go ahead of the Lord to prepare his way, providing knowledge of salvation to his people through the forgiveness of their sins. Through God's caring kindness to us, heaven's dawn will break upon us to shine on those who live in darkness and under the shadow of death, and to guide us along the path of peace."

The boy John grew and became spiritually strong. He lived in the desert until the time came for his public ministry to Israel.

It was the time when Caesar Augustus issued a decree that there should be a census of everyone in the Roman Empire. This was the first census under governor Quirinius of Syria. So everybody went to their own city to be registered. Joseph was descended from King David, so he left Nazareth in Galilee to go to Bethlehem, the city of David, in Judea. He went to register there, together with Mary, who was pledged in marriage to him and expecting a baby. While they were there, the time came for her to have her baby. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him up in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger because the inn had no rooms left.

Nearby some shepherds were spending the night out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone all around them. They were scared out of their wits!

"Don't be afraid!" the angel told them. "I'm here to bring you good news that will make all the people really glad. The Savior has been born to you today, here in David's city. He is the Messiah, the Lord. You will recognize him by this sign: you will find the child wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger." Suddenly many heavenly beings appeared, praising God, saying,

"Glory to the God of heaven, and on earth peace to those who please him!"

After the angels had left them and returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what's happened concerning these things the Lord has told us about."

They hurried there and found Mary, Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. After they'd seen for themselves, they spread the news of what had happened and what they had been told about this baby. All those who heard about it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary was careful to remember all the things that had happened and often thought about them. The shepherds went back to watching their flocks, glorifying and thanking God for all that they'd heard and seen, for it was just as they'd been told.

After eight days, the time came for the baby to be circumcised, and he was named Jesus. This was the name given to him by the angel before he had even been conceived. When the time of their purification according to the law of Moses was finished, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as the law of the Lord states, "Every firstborn son must be dedicated to the Lord." There they made a sacrifice, as God's law also states, of "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons."

Living in Jerusalem at that time was a man called Simeon. Simeon did what was good and was very devout. He was waiting expectantly for the hope of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would not die before he saw the Lord's Messiah. Following the Spirit's leading, he went to the Temple. When Jesus' parents brought in the little boy to be dedicated as required by the Law, Simeon took Jesus in his arms, thanked God, and said,

"Lord and Master, now you can let your servant die in peace as you promised, because I have seen for myself your salvation which you have prepared for everyone. He is a light that will show you to the nations, the glory of your people Israel." Jesus' father and mother were shocked at what Simeon said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Jesus' mother Mary, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall and many to rise. He is a sign from God that many will reject, revealing what they really think. For you it will feel like a sword piercing right through you."

Anna the prophetess also lived in Jerusalem. She was the daughter of Phanuel of the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. She had been married for seven years, and then she had been widowed. She was eighty-four years old. She spent her time at the Temple in worship, fasting and praying. She came up to them right at that moment, and began praising God. She spoke about Jesus to all those who were looking forward to the time when God would set Jerusalem free.

Once they had completed everything God's law required, they returned to their home town of Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew strong, and was very wise. God's blessing was with him.

Jesus' parents traveled to Jerusalem every year for the Passover festival. When Jesus was twelve years old, they went to the festival as they always did. When the festival had finished and it was time to return home, the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem, but his parents didn't realize this. They assumed he was with all the others traveling home. A day passed before they started looking for him among their friends and relatives. When they couldn't find him they returned to Jerusalem to look for him there. It was three days before they found him in the Temple. He was sitting among the religious teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. All who heard him speak were surprised by his understanding and his answers.

His parents were totally confused when they saw what he was doing. His mother asked him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I—we've been worried sick! We've been looking everywhere for you!”

“Why is it that you were looking for me?” Jesus replied. “Didn't you know I should be here in my Father's house?” But they didn't understand what he meant. Then he went back with them to Nazareth, and did what he was told. His mother kept on thinking about everything that happened. Jesus grew steadily wiser and stronger, favored both by God and by the people.

By now Tiberias had been Caesar for fifteen years. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was ruler of Galilee, his brother Philip was ruler of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanius was ruler of Abiline. Annas and Caiphas were the current high priests. This was the time when the word of God came to John, Zechariah's son, who was living in the desert. He went throughout the whole Jordan region, announcing to everyone that they needed to be baptized to show they had repented and their sins had been forgiven. As Isaiah the prophet wrote: “A voice was heard crying out in the desert, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord: make his paths straight. Every valley will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be leveled. Crooked ways will be straightened, and rough roads will be smoothed. Every human being will see God's salvation.’”

John addressed the crowds that came to him to be baptized. “You viper's brood! Who warned you to flee from the coming judgment?” he asked. “Demonstrate that you have truly repented. Don't try to justify yourselves by saying, ‘We're Abraham's descendants.’ Let me tell you, God can create children of Abraham from these stones. The ax is set to begin chopping at the base of the trees. Any tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire.”

“So what should we do?” the crowds asked him.

“If you have two coats, then share with someone who doesn't have one. If you have food, then share with those who don't,” he told them.

Some tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher, what should we do?” they also asked.

“Don't collect any more tax than you're meant to,” he replied.

“What about us?” some soldiers asked. “What should we do?”

“Don't demand money with threats of violence. Don't make accusations that are untrue. Be satisfied with your wages,” he replied.

The people were waiting expectantly, and wondered whether John himself might be the Messiah. John replied and explained to everybody: “Yes, I am baptizing you in water. But the one who is coming is more important than me, and I'm not worthy to undo his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he's ready to separate the wheat from the chaff on his threshing floor. He'll gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with fire that can't be extinguished.”

John gave many warnings like this as he announced the good news to the people. But when John reprimanded Herod the ruler for marrying Herodias, Herod's brother's wife, and for all the evil things he'd done, Herod added to his crimes by having John thrown into jail.

Now it happened that after everyone had been baptized, Jesus was baptized as well. As he was praying, heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him, taking the form of a dove. A voice came from heaven, saying, “You are my son, the one I love. I am truly pleased with you.”

Jesus was around thirty when he began his public ministry. People presumed he was the son of Joseph. Joseph was the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Joanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melchi, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Joshua, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Salmon, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River and was led by the Spirit into the desert, where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. He didn't eat anything during that whole time, so at the end he was starving.

The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

“It is written in Scripture, ‘You shall not live on bread alone,’” Jesus answered.

The devil led him up to a high place, and in a rapid view showed him all the kingdoms of the world. Then the devil said to Jesus, “I will give you authority over all of them, and their glory. This authority has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want. Bow down and worship me and you can have it all.”

“It is written in Scripture, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall serve only him,’” Jesus replied.

The devil took Jesus to Jerusalem, set him on the top of the Temple, and told him, “If you are the Son of God, then jump! For it is written in Scripture, ‘He will order his angels to care for you, holding you up to protect you from stumbling over a stone.’”

“It is written in Scripture, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God,’” Jesus replied. When the devil had completed all his temptations, he waited for another opportunity.

Jesus returned to Galilee, full of the Spirit's power. News about him spread everywhere. Jesus taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. When he arrived in Nazareth, where he had grown up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day as usual. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Jesus unrolled the scroll and found the place where it's written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to announce good news to the destitute. He has sent me to proclaim that prisoners will be released, the blind will see, the oppressed will be freed, and to proclaim the time of the Lord's favor.” He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant. Then he sat down. Everybody in the synagogue was staring at him.

“This Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled today!” he told them. Everybody expressed their approval of him, amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn't this Joseph's son?” they wondered.

Jesus replied, “I'm sure you'll repeat this proverb to me, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ and ask, ‘Why don't you do here in your own hometown what we heard you did in Capernaum?’ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I guarantee that there were many widows in Israel during the time of Elijah when there was a drought for three and a half years, causing a great famine throughout the country. Yet Elijah wasn't sent to any of them. He was sent to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon! Even though there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, the only one who was healed was Naaman the Syrian!”

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue became furious. They jumped to their feet and threw him out of the town. Then they dragged him to the top of the hill on which the town was built in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through them and went on his way.

Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee. On Sabbath he started teaching them. They were amazed at what he taught them for he spoke with authority.

In the synagogue there was a man who was possessed by a demon. He cried out, “So, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: God's Holy One!”

Jesus interrupted him, saying. “Be quiet!” Then he ordered the demon, “Come out of him!” Throwing him to the ground right before them, the demon left the man without injuring him. They were all amazed and asked each other, “What is this teaching? With power and authority he orders evil spirits to leave—and they do!” News about Jesus spread throughout the nearby region.

Leaving the synagogue, Jesus went to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever and those who were there asked Jesus to help. Jesus went and stood over her. He told the fever to leave her—which it did. She got up right away and prepared a meal for them. When the sun set, they brought to him all who were sick, suffering from various diseases. Jesus placed his hands on them, one after the other, and he healed them. Demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are the Son of God.” But Jesus stopped them and refused to let them speak because they knew he was the Christ.

Early the following morning Jesus left to find some peace and quiet. But the crowds went out looking for him, and finally found him. They tried to stop him leaving because they did not want him to go.

But he told them, “I have to go to other towns to tell them the good news of the kingdom of God too, because that is what I was sent to do.” So Jesus went on traveling around, teaching the good news in the synagogues of Judea.

One day, as Jesus was standing beside the Sea of Galilee, people crowded around him to hear the word of God. Jesus noticed two boats lying on the shore, left there by fishermen who were washing their nets. Jesus got into a boat, the one that belonged to Simon, and asked him to push it out into the water, just offshore. Then Jesus sat down in the boat and taught the people from there.

After he'd finished speaking, he told Simon, “Go out into deeper water, and let down your nets for a catch.”

“Teacher, we worked hard all night, and didn't catch anything. But if you say so, I'll let down the nets,” Simon replied.

Having done this, a large shoal of fish filled the nets full to breaking point. They waved to their partners in the other boat, asking them to come over and help. The others came over and together they filled both of the boats with fish. The boats were so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he dropped to his knees before Jesus. “Lord, please stay away from me, for I am a sinful man!” he exclaimed. For he and everybody with him were completely amazed by the catch of fish that they had landed. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners, felt the same way.

“Don't be afraid,” Jesus told Simon. “From now on you'll be fishing for people!” So they dragged the boats onto the shore, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Once when Jesus was visiting one of the towns, he met a man there who had a very bad case of leprosy. The man fell with his face to the ground and begged Jesus, “Please Lord, if you're willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus reached out and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately the leprosy disappeared.

"Say nothing to anyone," Jesus instructed him. "Go and show yourself to the priest and make the ceremonial offerings as required by the law of Moses as proof that you've been healed."

Yet the news about Jesus spread more and more. Large crowds came to hear Jesus and to be healed from their diseases. But Jesus often used to retreat to quiet places and pray.

One day when Jesus was teaching, the Pharisees and religious teachers who had come from all over Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem were sitting there. The power of the Lord to heal was with him so he could heal. Some men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They tried to take him in and lay him in front of Jesus. But they couldn't find any way through the crowd, so they went up on the roof and made a hole in the roof tiles. Then they lowered the man down on the mat, right into the crowd in front of Jesus.

When Jesus saw the trust they had in him, he said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven."

The religious teachers and the Pharisees began to argue with that. "Who is this who's speaking blasphemies?" they asked. "Who can forgive sins? Only God can do that!"

Jesus knew what they were arguing about, so he asked them, "Why are you thinking to question this? What is easier? To say your sins are forgiven, or to say get up and walk? However, I will prove to you that the Son of man has the authority here on earth to forgive sins." Then he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, pick up your mat, and go home."

Immediately the man stood up in front of them. He picked up the mat he'd been lying on, and went home, praising God as he went. Everyone was completely astonished at what had happened, and in great awe they praised God, saying, "What we saw today was amazing!"

Later, as Jesus was leaving the town, he saw a tax collector called Levi sitting at his tax booth.

"Follow me," Jesus told him. Levi stood up, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Levi organized a large banquet at his home in Jesus' honor. Many tax collectors and others were in the crowd that sat down to eat with them. But the Pharisees and the religious teachers complained to Jesus' disciples, asking, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

"Healthy people don't need a doctor—but sick people do," Jesus replied. "I didn't come to call those who are living right to repentance—I came to call sinners."

"Well, John's disciples often fast and pray, and the Pharisees' disciples do so as well. But your disciples don't—they go on eating and drinking," they told him.

"Should the groomsmen fast while the bridegroom is with them?" Jesus asked. "No—but the time is coming when the bridegroom will be taken away from them. Then they can fast."

Then he gave them an illustration: "You don't tear out a patch from new clothes to mend old clothes. Otherwise you'd ruin new clothes, and the patch from the new wouldn't match the old. You don't put new wine into old wineskins, because if you did the new wine would burst the wineskins. Then both wine and wineskins would be wasted. You put new wine in new wineskins. And nobody after drinking old wine wants new wine, for they say, 'the old tastes good.'"

One Sabbath while Jesus was walking through grainfields, his disciples began picking some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating them. Some of the Pharisees questioned him, asking, "Why are you doing what is not permitted on the Sabbath?"

Jesus replied, "Have you never read what David did when he and his men were hungry? How he went into the house of God and took the consecrated bread? He ate it, and gave it to his men too. That's not permitted either. The consecrated bread is only for the priests."

Then he told them, "The Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath."

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue to teach. A man was there with a crippled right hand. The religious teachers and the Pharisees were observing Jesus closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. They wanted to find something to accuse him of.

But Jesus knew what was in their minds. He told the man with the crippled hand, "Get up, and stand here in front of everyone." The man got up and stood there.

Then Jesus turned to them and said, "Let me ask you a question. Is it legal to do good on the Sabbath, or to do bad? To save life, or to destroy it?"

He looked around at all of them there. Then he said to the man, "Hold out your hand." The man did so, and his hand became like new. But they flew into a rage, and began to discuss what they could do to Jesus.

One day shortly after, Jesus went up a mountain to pray. He remained there all night, praying to God. When morning came he called together his disciples, and chose twelve of them. These are the names of the apostles: Simon (also called Peter by Jesus), Andrew his brother, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Revolutionary, Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot (who became a traitor).

Jesus went back down the mountain with them, and stopped at a place where there was some flat ground. There a crowd made up of his disciples and many other people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, had gathered to listen to him and to be cured from their diseases. Those who were troubled by evil spirits were also healed. Everyone in the crowd tried to touch him, because power was coming out from him and healing them all.

Looking at his disciples, Jesus told them, "How happy are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. How happy are you who are hungry now, for you will eat all you need. How happy are you who are weeping now, for you will laugh.

How happy are you when people hate you, exclude you, insult you, and curse your name as evil because of me, the Son of man. When that day comes, be happy. Jump for joy, for great is your reward in heaven. Don't forget their forefathers mistreated the prophets just like this.

But how sad are you who are rich, for you have already received your reward. How sad are you who are

full now, for you will become hungry. How sad are you who laugh now, for you will mourn and cry. How sad are you when everyone praises you. Don't forget that their forefathers praised false prophets just like this.

But I say to those of you who are listening: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone hits you on one cheek, turn the other cheek. If someone takes your coat, don't prevent them taking your shirt. Give to anyone who asks you. If someone takes something from you, don't ask for it back. Do to others what you want them to do to you.

If you love those who love you, why should you deserve any credit for that? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, why should you deserve any credit for that either? Sinners do that as well. If you lend money expecting to be repaid, why should you deserve any credit for that? Sinners lend money to other sinners as well, expecting to be repaid what they loaned. No: love your enemies, do good to them, and lend without expecting to be repaid anything. Then you will receive a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High God, for he is kind to ungrateful and wicked people. Be compassionate, just as your Father is compassionate.

Don't judge, and you won't be judged; don't condemn, and you won't be condemned; forgive, and you'll be forgiven; give, and you will be given generously in return. When what you're given is measured out, it's pressed down so more can be added, spilling out over the top, pouring into your lap! For how much you give will determine how much you receive."

Then he illustrated the point: "Can a blind person lead another? Wouldn't they both fall into a ditch? Do students know more than the teacher? Only when they've learned everything: then they will be like their teacher. Why are you so worried about the speck that's in your brother's eye when you don't even notice the plank that's in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that's in your eye,' when you don't even see the plank that's in your own eye? Hypocrite! Take out the plank from your own eye first, and then you'll be able to see well enough to take out the speck from your brother's eye.

A good tree doesn't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree doesn't produce good fruit. You recognize a tree by the fruit it produces. You don't pick figs from thorn bushes, or harvest grapes from brambles. Good people produce what's good from the good things they value that they have stored inside them. Bad people produce what's bad from the bad things they have stored inside them. What fills people's minds spills out in what they say.

So why do you bother to call me, 'Lord, Lord,' when you don't do what I say? I'll give you an example of someone who comes to me, hears my instructions, and follows them. That person is like a man building a house. He digs down deep and lays the foundations on solid rock. When the river bursts its banks and the floodwater breaks against the house it's not damaged because it's built so well. The person who hears me but doesn't do what I say is like a man who builds a house without foundations. When the floodwater breaks against the house it collapses immediately—it's completely destroyed."

When he'd finished speaking to the people, Jesus left for Capernaum. A centurion lived there who had a servant he greatly valued who was sick and was about to die. When he heard about Jesus, the centurion sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his servant.

When the elders came to Jesus, they pleaded with him strongly, saying, "Please come and do what he asks. He deserves your help, because he loves our people and he built a synagogue for us."

Jesus went with them and as they approached the house, the centurion sent some friends to Jesus to tell him, "Lord, please don't trouble yourself by coming into my house, because I'm not worthy of that. I didn't even think that I was worthy to come and see you. Just give the command, and my servant will be healed. For I'm under the authority of my superior officers, and I have soldiers under my authority too. I command one to go and he goes, another to come and he comes. I command my servant to do something and he does it."

When Jesus heard this he was astounded. He turned to the crowd that was following him, and said, "I tell you, I haven't found trust like this even in Israel." Then the centurion's friends returned to the house and found the servant in good health.

Soon after Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a large crowd.

As he approached the town gate a funeral procession was coming the other way. The man who had died was the only son of a widow, and a sizeable crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her he was filled with compassion for her. "Don't cry," he told her. Jesus went over to the coffin and touched it, and the pall-bearers stopped.

Jesus said, "Young man, I tell you, get up." The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

A sense of awe filled everyone there and they praised God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us," and "God has visited his people." News about Jesus spread throughout Judea, and all around.

The disciples of John told John about all this. John called two of his disciples and told them to go and see Jesus, and ask, "Are you the one we've been expecting, or should we wait for someone else?" When they came to Jesus, they said, "John the Baptist sent us to you, to ask you, 'Are you the one we've been expecting or should we wait for someone else?'"

At that very moment Jesus was healing many people of their diseases, illnesses, evil spirits, and making the blind to see.

Jesus answered John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you've seen and heard. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers cured, the deaf hear, the dead raised back to life, the poor are told the good news. How good it is for those who are not offended because of me!"

After the messengers from John had left, Jesus began telling the crowd, "About John: what did you expect to see when you went out to meet him in the desert? Some reed blown about by the wind? Did you come looking for a man dressed in fine clothes? No, those

who have stylish clothes and live in luxury are found in palaces. Were you looking for a prophet? Yes he is, and I'm telling you, he's much more than a prophet.

It was written about him in Scripture: 'Look, I'm sending my messenger to go before you to prepare your way.' I tell you, no one born of women is greater than John, but even the most unimportant person in God's kingdom is greater than he is!" When they heard him, all of them—even the tax collectors—followed what God said was good and right, for they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the religious teachers rejected what God wanted them to do, for they had refused to be baptized by John.

"What shall I compare these people to?" asked Jesus. "What are they like? They're like children sitting in the market who tell one another, 'We played the flute for you but you didn't dance; we sang sad songs but you didn't cry.' When John the Baptist came he didn't eat bread or drink wine, but you say he's demon-possessed. Now the Son of man is here, and eats and drinks with people, but you say, 'Look, he spends his time eating too much food and drinking too much wine. Plus he's a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' However, God's wise ways are proved right by all who follow him!"

One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to come and eat with him. Jesus went to the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat the meal. A woman who was a sinner in that town found out that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house. She went there, carrying an alabaster jar of perfume. She kneeled beside Jesus and with her tears wet his feet, and dried them with her hair. She kissed his feet, and then she poured the perfume over them.

When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw this he said to himself, "If this man was really a prophet he would know who this woman was who's touching him, and what kind of person she was—that she's a sinner!"

Jesus spoke up and said, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, Teacher," he responded.

"Once two people were in debt to a money-lender. One owed five hundred *denarii*, the other only fifty. Neither of them could repay him, so he forgave the debts. Which one will love him the most?"

"The one he forgave the most, I would think," Simon answered.

"You're absolutely right," said Jesus. Turning to the woman, he said to Simon, "You see this woman? When I came into your house, you didn't give me water to wash my feet. But she has washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. You didn't give me a kiss, but since I came in she hasn't stopped kissing my feet. You didn't anoint my head with oil, but she poured perfume over my feet. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—that's why she loves so much. But whoever is forgiven little, only loves a little." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins have been forgiven."

Those who were sitting eating with him began talking among themselves, saying, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" But Jesus told the woman, "Your trust has saved you, go in peace."

Soon after this Jesus went around the towns and villages announcing the good news of God's kingdom. The twelve disciples went with him, along with a number of women who had been healed from evil spirits and sickness: Mary called Magdalene from whom he had cast out seven demons; Joanna, the wife of Herod's manager Chuza; Susanna; and many more who provided support from their personal resources.

Once when a large crowd of people gathered, coming from many towns to see him, Jesus spoke to them, using a story as an illustration. "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he scattered the seed, some fell on the road where people trampled on it and birds ate it up. Some fell on stony ground, and once the seeds had sprouted they withered for lack of moisture. Some seeds fell among thorns and as they both grew the thorns choked the plants. Some seeds fell on good earth and after they grew they produced a harvest one hundred times more than what had been sown." After he told them this, he called out, "If you have ears, then listen!"

But his disciples asked him, "What does this illustration mean?"

Jesus replied, "You've been given insights into the mysteries of God's kingdom, but the rest are given illustrations so that, 'Even though they see, they don't really see; and even though they hear, they don't really understand.'

This is the meaning of the illustration: The seed is God's word. The seeds that fall on the road are those who hear the message, but then the devil comes and steals away the truth from their minds so they won't trust in God and be saved. The seeds that fall on the stony ground are those who hear and welcome the message with joy but don't have any roots. They trust for a while but when difficult times come they give up. The seeds that fall among thorns are those who hear the message but it's choked out by life's distractions—worries, wealth, pleasure—so they don't produce anything. The seeds sown on good earth are those who are honest and do what is right. They hear the message of truth, hold on to it, and through their perseverance produce a good harvest.

You don't light a lamp and then cover it with a bucket, or hide it under a bed. No, you put it on a stand, so that anyone who comes in can see the light. For there's nothing hidden that won't be revealed; there's nothing secret that won't become known and obvious.

So pay attention how you 'hear.' To those who have received, more will be given; from those who don't receive, even what they think they have will be taken away!"

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived, but they couldn't get through the crowd to see him. Jesus was told, "Your mother and your brothers are outside. They want to see you."

"My mother and my brothers are those who hear God's word, and do what it says," Jesus replied.

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let's cross over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set off. As they were sailing, Jesus fell asleep, and a storm came down on the lake. The boat began filling with water and they were in danger of sinking. They went over to Jesus and woke him up. "Master, master, we're going to drown!" they said. Jesus woke up and

commanded the wind and the rough waves to stop. They stopped, and all was calm.

"Where is your trust?" he asked them. Terrified and amazed, they said to each other, "So who is this? He gives commands to the winds and the water, and they obey him!"

They sailed across to the Gerasene region that lies opposite Galilee. When Jesus stepped out of the boat onto the shore, a demon-possessed man from the town came to meet him. For a long time he hadn't worn any clothes or lived in a house. He lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus he screamed, fell down at Jesus' feet, and asked in a loud voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Please don't torture me, I beg you!" For Jesus had already commanded the evil spirit to leave the man. It had often seized him, and despite being tied down with chains and shackles, and placed under guard, he would break the chains apart and would be driven by the demon into the desert areas.

"What is your name?" Jesus asked him. "Legion," he replied, for many demons had entered him. They begged Jesus not to order them to go into the Abyss. There was a large herd of pigs feeding on the nearby hillside, and the demons begged him to be allowed to go into the pigs. Jesus gave them permission, so the demons left the man and entered the pigs. The herd rushed down the steep slope into the lake and drowned.

When the pig-keepers saw what had happened they ran off and spread the news through the town and the countryside. The people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus they found the man freed from the demons. He was sitting there at Jesus' feet, wearing clothes and in his right mind; and they became scared. Those who had seen what happened explained how the demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people from the Gerasene region asked Jesus to leave because they were overwhelmed by fear. So he got into the boat and went back. The man who had been freed from the demons begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away. "Go back home, and tell people all that God has done for you," Jesus told him. So he went away, telling the whole town all that Jesus had done for him.

A crowd of people was there to welcome Jesus when he returned, all eagerly expecting him. One was a man called Jairus, a synagogue leader, who came and fell at Jesus' feet. He pleaded with Jesus to come to his home because his only daughter was dying. She was about twelve years old.

While Jesus was on his way there, people were crowding around him. In the crowd was a woman who had suffered with bleeding for twelve years. She had spent all she had on doctors, but none of them had been able to heal her. She approached Jesus from behind and touched the hem of his cloak. Immediately the bleeding stopped.

"Who touched me?" Jesus asked. Everybody around denied doing so.

"But Master," said Peter, "there are people crowding around you, and they keep pushing up against you."

"Someone touched me," Jesus replied. "I know because power went out from me."

When the woman realized she couldn't go unnoticed, she came forward, trembling, and fell down before him. Right in front of everybody she explained the reason why she had touched Jesus, and that she'd been cured immediately.

Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your trust has healed you, go in peace."

While he was still speaking, someone came from the home of the synagogue leader to tell him, "Your daughter's dead. You don't need to bother the Teacher any longer."

But when he heard this, Jesus told Jairus, "Don't be afraid. If you trust, she will be healed."

When Jesus arrived at the house he didn't allow anyone else to go in except Peter, John, and James, and the girl's father and mother. All the people there were crying and mourning for her.

"Don't cry," Jesus told them. "She's not dead, she's just sleeping." They laughed at him, because they knew that she was dead. But Jesus took her by the hand, and said in a loud voice, "My child, get up!"

She came back to life, and she got up at once. Jesus told them to give her something to eat. Her parents were astonished at what had happened, but Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone about it.

Jesus called the twelve disciples together. He gave them power and authority over all demons, and the ability to heal diseases. Then he sent them out to proclaim God's kingdom and to heal the sick.

"Take nothing with you for the journey," he told them. "No walking stick, no bag, no bread, no money, not even any extra clothes. Whatever house you enter, stay there, and when you leave, leave from there. If people refuse to accept you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave town as a warning against them." They left and went around the villages, announcing the good news and healing everywhere they went.

Herod the tetrarch had heard about all that was happening, and he was very puzzled. Some were saying that John had been raised from the dead; others that Elijah had appeared; still others that one of the ancient prophets had come back to life.

Herod said, "There's no question I beheaded John. So who is this man? I'm hearing all these things about him." And he tried to find a way to meet Jesus.

When the apostles returned they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he left with them and went to a town called Bethsaida. However, the crowds found out where he was going and followed him there. He welcomed them and explained the kingdom of God to them, and healed those who needed healing.

Late in the day, the twelve disciples came to him and said, "You should send the crowd away now so they can go to the villages and farms nearby and find a place to stay and food to eat—there's nothing here where we are."

"*You* give them something to eat!" said Jesus.

"All we have here are five loaves and two fish—unless you want us to go and buy food for everyone," they said. There were about five thousand men present.

"Sit them down in groups of about fifty," he told his disciples. The disciples did so, and everybody sat down. Jesus picked up the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed the food and broke it

into pieces. He kept on giving the food to the disciples to share with the people. Everybody ate until they were full, and then twelve baskets of leftovers were collected.

At another time, when Jesus was praying in private with just his disciples with him, he asked them, "All these crowds of people—who do they say I am?"

"Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others say one of the ancient prophets risen from the dead," they replied.

"But what about *you*?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

"God's Messiah," Peter replied.

Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anybody about this. "The Son of man must experience terrible sufferings," he said. "He will be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the religious teachers. He will be killed, but on the third day he will rise again."

"If any one of you wants to follow me, you must deny yourself, pick up your cross daily, and follow me," Jesus told all of them. "For if you want to save your life, you will lose it; and if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it. What do you benefit by gaining the whole world if you end up lost or destroyed? If you are ashamed of me and my message, the Son of man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his glory, and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some standing here won't taste death until they see the kingdom of God."

About eight days later, after he had told them this, Jesus took Peter, John, and James with him and went up a mountain to pray. While he was praying, his face changed in appearance, and his clothing became a dazzling white. Two men appeared in brilliant glory. They were Moses and Elijah, and they began to talk with Jesus. They spoke about his death, which would soon happen in Jerusalem.

Peter and the others were asleep. When they woke up they saw Jesus in his glory, and the two men standing next to him. As the two men were about to leave, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it's great to be here. Let's make some shelters: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." He really didn't know what he was saying.

While he was speaking a cloud came and spread over them. They were terrified as they entered the cloud.

A voice spoke from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him!" When the voice finished speaking, Jesus was there alone. They kept this to themselves, and didn't tell anyone at that time what they'd seen.

The next day, when they had come down the mountain, a huge crowd was waiting to meet Jesus. A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, please look at my son. He's my only child. A spirit possesses him and he screams immediately. It sends him into convulsions and makes him foam at the mouth. It hardly ever leaves him alone and it causes him a lot of pain. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn't."

"What an unbelieving and corrupt people you are! How long do I have to remain here with you, and put up with you?" said Jesus. "Bring your son here." Even as the boy came over, the demon sent him into convulsions, throwing him to the ground. But Jesus intervened, rebuking the evil spirit and healing the boy, and then gave him back to his father. Everyone was amazed at this demonstration of God's power. However, even though everyone was amazed by all he did, Jesus warned his disciples, "Listen carefully to what I'm telling you: the Son of man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men."

But they didn't understand what this meant. Its meaning was hidden from them so they didn't realize its implications, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

Then an argument started among the disciples about which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, knowing what they were arguing about, picked up and placed a small child next to him.

Then he said to them, "Anyone who accepts this little child in my name accepts me, and anyone who accepts me accepts the one who sent me. Whoever is least among you all is the greatest."

John spoke up, saying, "Master, we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him because he wasn't one of us."

"Don't stop him," Jesus replied. "Anyone who isn't against you is for you."

As the time approached for him to ascend to heaven, Jesus was determined to go to Jerusalem. He sent messengers on ahead to a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people would not welcome him because he was determined to press on to Jerusalem. When James and John saw this, they asked Jesus, "Master, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to burn them up?" But Jesus turned, and reprimanded them. Then they proceeded to another village.

While they were walking, one man told Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go!"

Jesus told the man, "Foxes have their dens, and wild birds have their nests, but the Son of man doesn't even have a place to rest his head."

He told another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Master, first let me go home and bury my father."

"Let the dead bury their own dead," Jesus replied. "You go and proclaim God's kingdom."

Another man said, "Lord, I will follow you! But first let me go home and say goodbye to my family."

But Jesus told him, "Nobody once they've started plowing and then looks back is fit for God's kingdom."

After this, the Lord appointed seventy other disciples, and sent them in pairs to every town and place that he planned to visit.

"The harvest is large, but the number of workers is small," he told them. "Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers to his harvest fields. So get on your way: I'm sending you like sheep among wolves. Don't take any money or a bag or extra sandals, and don't spend time chatting with people you meet. Whatever house you enter, first of all say, 'May this house have peace.' If there's a peaceful person living there, then your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for a worker deserves to be paid. Don't go from house to house.

If you enter a town and the people there welcome you, then eat what's set before you and heal those who

are sick. Tell them, 'God's kingdom has come to you.' But if you enter a town and the people there don't welcome you, go through their streets telling them, 'We are wiping off even the dust from your town that clings to our feet to show you our disapproval. But you should recognize this: God's kingdom has come.'

I tell you, in the Day of Judgment it will be better for Sodom than for such a town. Shame on you Korazin! Shame on you Bethsaida! For if the miracles you saw happen had happened in Tyre and Sidon they would have repented a long time ago, and they would be sitting in sackcloth and ashes. That's why in the judgment it will be better for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, you won't be exalted to heaven; you will go down to Hades.

Anyone who hears you hears me, and anyone who rejects you rejects me. But anyone who rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

The seventy disciples returned in great excitement, saying, "Lord, even the demons do what we tell them in your name!"

Jesus replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to tread on snakes and scorpions, and to overcome all the enemy's strength, and nothing will harm you. But don't take delight that the spirits do what you tell them—just be glad that your names are written in heaven."

At that moment Jesus was filled with the joy of the Holy Spirit, and said, "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for you hid these things from the wise and clever people and revealed them to children! Yes, Father, you were pleased to do it in this way.

My Father has handed over everything to me. No one understands the Son except the Father, and no one understands the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."

When they were by themselves Jesus turned to the disciples and told them, "Those who see what you're seeing should be really happy! I tell you, many prophets and kings have wanted to see what you're seeing, but they didn't see, and wanted to hear the things you're hearing, but didn't hear."

Once an expert in religious law stood up and tried to trap Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "What do I have to do to gain eternal life?"

"What is written in the law? How do you read it?" asked Jesus.

"You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and your whole spirit, and your whole strength, and your whole mind; and love your neighbor as yourself," the man replied.

"You're right," Jesus told him. "Do this, and you will live."

But the man wanted to vindicate himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus replied, saying, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by robbers who stripped him and beat him, and left him for dead. It so happened that a priest was going the same way. He saw the man, but he passed by on the other side of the road. Then a Levite came along. But when he got to the place and saw the man, he also passed by on the other side.

Finally a Samaritan man came along. As he passed by, he saw the man and felt sorry for him. He went over and treated the man's wounds with oil and wine, and bandaged them. Then he placed the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day he gave two denarii to the innkeeper and told him, 'Take care of him, and if you spend more than this, I'll pay you back when I return.' Which one of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by robbers?"

"The one who showed him kindness," the man replied.

"You go and do the same," Jesus told him.

While they were on their way, Jesus arrived at a village, and a woman called Martha invited him to her home. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. Martha was concerned about all that needed to be done to prepare the meal, so she came to Jesus and said, "Master, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to come and help me!"

"Martha, Martha," the Lord replied, "you're worried and upset about all this. But only one thing is really necessary. Mary has chosen the right thing, and it shall not be taken away from her."

Once Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples asked him, "Lord, please teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples."

Jesus told them, "When you pray, say, 'Father, let your name be honored as holy. May your kingdom come. Give us every day the food we need. Forgive us our sins, just as we forgive everyone who sins against us. Keep us from temptation.'"

Jesus went on to tell them, "Say you have a friend and you go to him in the middle of the night and ask, 'My friend, lend me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine has come to visit me, and I don't have any food to give him.' Your friend in the house might reply, 'Don't bother me—I've already locked the door, and I and my children have gone to bed. I can't get up to give you anything now.' I tell you, even though he refuses to get up and give you anything, despite you being his friend, if you are persistent, your friend will get up and give you everything you need.

I tell you: ask, and you shall receive; seek, and you shall find; knock, and the door shall be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and everyone who seeks, finds; and to everyone who knocks the door will be opened. Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, would give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, would you give him a scorpion? So if you, even though you are evil, still know to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?"

Jesus was driving out a demon that had made a man dumb. When the demon had left, the man who was dumb spoke, and the crowds were amazed. But some of them said, "He is driving out demons using the power of Beelzebub, the ruler of demons." Others were trying to test Jesus by demanding a miraculous sign from heaven.

Jesus knew what they were thinking and said, "Any kingdom divided against itself will collapse. A family divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? You say that I

cast out demons using the power of Beelzebub. But if I drive out demons by the power of Beelzebub, by whose power do your own people drive them out? They themselves will condemn you as wrong!

However, if I am driving out demons by the power of God, then this proves God's kingdom has arrived. It's right here among you! When a strong man who is fully armed guards his house, all he owns is safe. But if a stronger man comes and defeats him, taking from him all his weapons that he depended on, then he can carry off all his possessions. Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who doesn't build together with me is breaking it all apart.

When an evil spirit leaves someone, it goes through the desert looking for a place to stay. When it doesn't find anywhere, it says, 'I'll return to the house I left.' When it returns, it finds its old home is swept and tidy. So it goes and finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there. In the end that man is worse off than before."

As he was speaking, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the womb from where you came and the breasts that nursed you." But Jesus said, "Even more blessed are those who hear God's word, and follow what it says."

As people crowded around him, Jesus began telling them, "This is an evil generation for it's looking for some miraculous sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. In the same way that Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of man be a sign to this generation. The queen of the south will rise in the judgment together with the people of this generation and will condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear Solomon's wisdom, and now there is someone greater than Solomon here! The people of Nineveh rise in the judgment together with this generation, and will condemn it, for they repented when they heard Jonah's message, and now there's someone greater than Jonah here!

No one lights a lamp and then hides it or places it under a bowl. No, you put it on a lamp stand so that those who come into the house can see the light. Your eye is the light for your body. When your eye is good, your whole body is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body is in the dark. So make sure the light you have in you is not actually darkness. If your whole body is full of light, with no areas of darkness, then it will be completely illuminated, just as a bright lamp gives you light."

After Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to come and eat with him. So Jesus went and sat down to eat a meal. The Pharisee was surprised that Jesus didn't wash his hands before eating as ceremonially required. So the Lord told him, "You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness. You're so foolish! Don't you think the one who made the outside made the inside as well? If, acting from within, you do acts of kindness to others, then everything will be clean to you. Shame on you Pharisees! You pay tithe on herbs and plants, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You need to pay attention to the latter, while not leaving the former things undone. Shame on you Pharisees! You love to have the best seats in the synagogues, and to be greeted with respect when you go to the markets. Shame on you! You are like unmarked graves that people walk over without knowing."

One of the experts in religious law reacted, saying, "Teacher, when you talk like this, you're insulting us too!"

Jesus replied, "Shame on you lawyers too! You place burdens on people that are too hard to carry, but you don't lift a finger to help them. Shame on you! You build memorial tombs to honor the prophets, but it was your own fathers who killed them in the first place! By doing this you are witnesses showing that you agree with what your fathers did. They killed the prophets, and you build their tombs!

This is why God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles; some they will kill, and others they will persecute.' Consequently, this generation will be held accountable for the blood of all the prophets shed from the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel right up to the blood of Zachariah who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held accountable for all of it. Shame on you lawyers! You have removed the key of knowledge. You didn't go in yourselves, and you prevented others from going in too."

As Jesus was leaving, the religious teachers and the Pharisees began to attack him aggressively, asking questions to provoke him. They were hoping to catch him out, trying to get him to say something they could use against him.

In the meantime so many thousands of people had gathered that they were stepping on each other. Jesus began speaking first to his disciples. "Beware the yeast of the Pharisees—hypocrisy. For there's nothing hidden that won't be revealed, nothing secret that won't be made known. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and whatever you whispered in private will be announced from the rooftops. I tell you, my friends, don't be afraid of those who kill the body, for once they've done that there's no more they can do. Let me make it clear whom you should be afraid of. You should be afraid of the one who after he has killed has the power to dispose of them in Gehenna. That's the one you should be afraid of. Aren't five sparrows sold for two pennies? But God doesn't forget a single one of them. Even the hairs on your head have been counted. Don't be afraid—you're worth more than many sparrows!

I tell you the truth, those who declare they belong to me, the Son of man will also declare they belong to him before God's angels, but those who deny me will be denied before God's angels. Everyone who speaks against the Son of man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.

When you're brought to trial before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, don't worry about how to defend yourself, or what you should say. The Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what's important to say."

Someone in the crowd asked Jesus, "Teacher, please tell my brother to share the inheritance with me."

"My friend," Jesus replied, "Who appointed me as your judge to decide how your inheritance should be divided?" He told the people, "Watch out, and beware of all greedy thoughts and actions, for a person's life isn't summed up by all the things they own."

Then he told them a story as an illustration. "Once there was a rich man who owned land that was very productive. After thinking things through, the man said to himself, 'What shall I do? I've nowhere to store my crops. I know what I'll do,' he decided. 'I'll pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and then I'll be able to store all my crops and everything I own. Then I'll tell myself: You have enough to live on for many years, so take life easy: eat, drink, and enjoy yourself!' But God said to him, 'You foolish man! Your life will be demanded back this very night, and then who will get everything you've stored up?' This is what happens to people who hoard up wealth for themselves but are not rich as far as God is concerned."

Jesus told his disciples, "That's why I tell you don't worry about life, about what to eat, or about what clothes you should wear. Life is about more than food, and the body is about more than wearing clothes. Look at the ravens. They don't sow or reap, they don't have any storerooms or barns, but God feeds them. And you're far more valuable than birds! Can you add an hour to your life by worrying about it? If you can't do anything about such small things, why worry about the rest? Think of the lilies and how they grow. They don't work, and they don't spin thread for clothes, but I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was as beautifully dressed as one of them.

So if God clothes the fields with such beautiful flowers, which are here today but gone tomorrow when they are burned in a fire to heat an oven, how much more will God clothe you, you who have so little trust! Don't be concerned about what you're going to eat or drink—don't worry about it. These are all things that people in the world worry about, but your Father knows you need them. Search for God's kingdom, and you'll be given these things as well. Don't be afraid, little flock, for your Father is happy to give you the kingdom. Sell what you have, and give the money to the poor. Get yourselves purses that don't wear out: treasure in heaven that will never run out, where no thief can steal it and no moth can destroy it. For what you value the most shows who you really are.

Be dressed and ready, and keep your lamps lit, like servants waiting for their master when he returns from his wedding feast, prepared to open the door quickly for him when he comes and knocks. How good it will be for those servants that the master finds watching when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will get dressed, have them sit down for a meal, and will come and serve them himself!

Even if he comes at midnight, or just before dawn —how good for them if he finds them watching and ready! But remember this: if the master knew when a thief was coming, he would keep watch, and not allow his house to be broken into. You must also be ready, for the Son of man is coming when you don't expect him."

"Is this story you're telling just for us, or for everyone?" Peter asked.

The Lord replied, "Who then is the trustworthy and wise manager, the one person in the household that the master puts in charge to share out their food at the right time? It will be good for that servant when his master returns and finds him doing what he should. I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of everything. But what if the servant were to say to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and then starts beating the other servants, both men and women, feasting and getting drunk? That servant's master will return unexpectedly one day at a time he didn't anticipate, and will punish him severely, treating him as totally untrustworthy.

That servant who knew what his master wanted and yet didn't get ready or follow his instructions, will be beaten severely; but the servant who didn't know and did things deserving punishment will be beaten only lightly. From those who are given much, much will be required, and from those who are entrusted with more, more will be demanded.

I have come to set the earth on fire, and I really wish it was already burning! But I have a baptism to go through, and I'm in agony, wishing it was over! Do you think that I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, I bring division. From now on, if there are five in a family, they will be divided against each other: three against two, and two against three. They will be divided against each other—father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds. "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'a rain-shower's coming,' and it happens. When a south wind blows, you say 'it's going to be hot,' and it is. You hypocrites, how is it that you know how to rightly interpret the weather but you don't know how to interpret the present time? Why don't you think for yourselves and judge what's the right thing to do? As you go with your accuser to the magistrate, on the way you should be working on a settlement. Otherwise you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you into prison. I tell you, you won't get out until you've paid the last penny."

It was around this time that some people told Jesus about Pilate's killing of some Galileans while they were offering sacrifices. "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than any other Galileans because they suffered like this?" Jesus asked. "No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all perish as well. What about those eighteen people that were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them? Do you think they were the worst people in the whole of Jerusalem? No, I tell you. But unless you repent, you will all perish as well."

Then he told them this story as an illustration. "Once there was man who had a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came to look for fruit on the tree, but he didn't find any. So he told the gardener, 'Look, for three years I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and I haven't found any. Chop it down! Why should it be taking up space?'

'Master,' the man replied, 'please leave it alone for just one more year. I'll dig the soil around it and put

down some fertilizer. If it produces fruit, then that's fine. If not, then chop it down.'"

One Sabbath Jesus was teaching in a synagogue, and a woman was there who had been crippled by an evil spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not stand straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and told her, "You're freed of your sickness." Then he placed his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up, and she praised God.

However, the synagogue leader was upset that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath. He said to the crowd, "There are six days for work. Come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath."

But the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't every one of you untie your ox or donkey from the stall and take it to drink? Why shouldn't this woman, this daughter of Abraham whom Satan has kept tied up for eighteen years, be untied and set free this Sabbath day?"

What he said shamed all his opponents, but everyone in the crowd was delighted by all the wonderful things he was doing.

Then Jesus asked, "So what is the kingdom of God like? What should I compare it to? It's like a mustard seed that a man planted in his garden. It grew into a tree, and the birds came and nested in its branches."

He asked again, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to? It's like yeast that a woman took and mixed into three measures of flour which made the whole batch rise."

Jesus went around the towns and villages, teaching on his way to Jerusalem.

Someone asked him, "Lord, will only a few be saved?"

Jesus replied, "Try very hard to enter the narrow doorway, because I tell you that many will try to go in, and won't succeed. Once the house owner gets up and closes the door, you'll be standing outside knocking on the door, saying, 'Master, please open the door for us.' But he'll reply, 'I don't know you or where you're from.' Then you'll say, 'But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets!' He'll reply, 'I tell you, I don't know you or where you're from. Get away from me, all of you who don't do what's good!' There will be crying and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you are thrown out. People will come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and they will sit down to eat in the kingdom of God. For the last shall be first, and the first shall be last."

At that moment some Pharisees came to Jesus and told him, "You should leave here. Herod wants to kill you!"

Jesus replied, "Go tell that fox that I will go on driving out demons and healing people for today and tomorrow, and on the third day I'll achieve what I came to do. Well anyway I must continue on my way for today and tomorrow, and the day after. For it wouldn't be right for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem!

Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often I have wanted to gather all your children together just like a hen does with her chicks under her wings, but you refused! Look, your house is left desolate, and I tell you that you won't see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

One Sabbath Jesus went to have a meal at the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees where they watched him closely. A man was there whose arms and legs were swollen. So Jesus asked the experts in religious law and the Pharisees, "Does the law allow healing on the Sabbath, or not?" But they kept quiet. Jesus touched the man, healed him, and sent him on his way.

Then Jesus said to them, "If your son or your ox happened to fall into a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you go and pull him out immediately?" They weren't able to give an answer.

So he told a story to the guests, noticing how they'd chosen to sit in places of honor. "When you're invited to a wedding reception, don't take the place of honor, because someone more important than you may have been invited," he began. "Your host who invited you both will come and tell you, 'Give this man your place.' Then in embarrassment you'll have to move to whatever place is left. Instead, when you're invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes in, he'll tell you, 'My friend, please move to a better seat.' Then you'll be honored before all the guests sitting with you. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Then he said to the man who had invited him, "When you give a lunch or a dinner, don't invite your friends, or your brothers, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors, for they may invite you back, and then you'd be repaid. Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind, and you will be blessed, for they have nothing to repay you with, and you'll be rewarded at the resurrection of the good."

When one of them eating at the table with Jesus heard this, he said to Jesus, "How wonderful it will be for those who feast in the kingdom of God!"

"Once there was a man who prepared a great banquet, and invited many guests," Jesus replied. "When it was time to eat he sent his servant out to tell everyone who had been invited, 'Come, because the banquet's ready.' But they all started to make excuses. The first said, 'I've just bought a field and I have to go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I've just bought five pairs of oxen and have to go and try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I've just got married, so I can't come.' The servant returned and told his master what they'd said. The home-owner became angry and told his servant, 'Quickly, go out into the streets and alleys of the town, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

Then the servant said, 'Master, I did what you told me, but there are still empty places.'

So the master told the servant, 'Go out on the country roads and lanes, and make people come—I want my house to be full. I tell you, not a single one of those people I invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

A large crowd was accompanying Jesus. He turned to them and said, "If you want to follow me but you don't hate your father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters—even your own life—

you can't be my disciple. If you don't carry your cross and follow me, you can't be my disciple. If you planned to build a tower, wouldn't you first work out how much it would cost, and see if you had enough money to complete it? Otherwise, if after laying the foundation you weren't able to finish it, everyone who saw it would laugh at you, saying, 'Look at him: he started building but he couldn't finish.'

What king goes to war with another king without first sitting down with his advisors to work out whether he and his ten thousand can defeat the one marching against him with twenty thousand? If he can't, he'll send representatives to ask for peace while the other king is still a long way off. In the same way every one of you who doesn't give up everything can't be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its taste, how can you make it salty again? It's no good for the soil or for fertilizer—you just toss it out. Whoever has ears, then listen!"

Tax collectors and other "sinners" often used to come and listen to Jesus. As a result the Pharisees and the religious teachers complained, "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them."

So Jesus told them this story as an illustration. "Imagine a man who had a hundred sheep lost one of them. Wouldn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and search for the one that's lost until he finds it? When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders. Once he gets home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Come and celebrate with me! I've found my lost sheep!' I tell you that there's more joy in heaven over a sinner that repents than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to repent.

Imagine a woman who has ten silver coins, and loses one of them. Wouldn't she light a lamp and sweep the house, carefully searching until she finds it? When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Come and celebrate with me! I've found the silver coin that I lost.' I tell you there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner that repents.

Once there was a man who had two sons," Jesus explained. "The younger one told his father, 'Father, give me my inheritance now.' So the man divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son packed up what he had and left for a distant country. Here he wasted all his money living a reckless life.

After he'd spent everything, the country was hit by a severe famine and he was starving. So he went and took a job with one of the farmers there who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He was so hungry that he would have eaten even the pig food, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said to himself, 'All of my father's workers have more than enough to eat—why am I dying from hunger here? I'm going home to my father! I'll tell him: Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Please treat me as one of your hired workers.' So he left and went home to his father.

Even though he was still far away in the distance, his father saw him coming, and his heart went out to his son. The father ran to his son, hugging and kissing him. The son said to him, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But the father told his servants, 'Quick—bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we've been fattening and kill it. Let's have a feast to celebrate because this is my son who was dead, but who has returned alive; he was lost but now he's found.' So they started celebrating.

Now the older son was working out in the fields. As he walked towards the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what was going on.

'Your brother is back,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he's come home safe and sound.'

The brother became angry. He refused to go in. So his father came out to plead with him.

He told his father, 'Look, all these years I've served you, and never disobeyed you, but you never once gave me even a young goat so I could have a party with my friends. Now this son of yours comes back, having spent your money on prostitutes, and you kill the fattened calf for him!'

'Son,' the father replied, 'you are always here with me. Everything I have is yours. But we should be happy and celebrate! This is your brother who was dead, but who has returned alive; he was lost but now he's found!'"

Jesus told his disciples this story. "There was once a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting what belonged to his master. So the rich man called in his manager, and asked him, 'What's this I hear about you? Bring in your accounts, because you won't be continuing as manager.'

The manager said to himself, 'Now what will I do since my master is going to fire me from my job? I'm not strong enough to dig, and I'm ashamed to beg. Oh, I know what I'm going to do so that when I'm sacked as manager people will make me welcome in their homes.'

So he invited all those who were in debt to his master to come and see him. He asked the first one, 'How much do you owe my master?' The man replied, 'A hundred units of oil.' He said to him, 'Sit down quickly. Take your bill, and change it to fifty.' Then he said to another, 'How much do you owe?' The man replied, 'A hundred units of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and change it to eighty.'

The rich man commended his dishonest manager for his cunning idea. The children of this world are more cunning towards one another than are the children of light.

I tell you, use the wealth of this world to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you'll be welcomed into an eternal home. If you can be trusted with very little you can also be trusted with much; if you are dishonest with very little you will also be dishonest with much. So if you can't be trusted when it comes to worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? And if you can't be trusted with what belongs to someone else, who will trust you with what is yours? No servant can obey two masters. Either he will hate

one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can't serve both God and Money."

The Pharisees, who loved money, heard what Jesus said and laughed at him. But Jesus told them, "You appear pious to people, but God knows what you're thinking. What people value highly is detested by God. What was written in the law and the prophets lasted until John. From then on the good news of the kingdom of God is being spread, and everyone is forcing their way in. However, it's easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for the smallest point of the Law to disappear. Any man who divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery, and a man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Once there was a man who was rich. He wore purple clothes and fine linen, and enjoyed a luxurious life. A beggar named Lazarus used to sit at his gate, covered in sores, longing to eat the leftovers from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

Then the beggar died, and angels carried him away to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham in the far distance, with Lazarus beside him.

'Father Abraham,' he called out, 'Have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I'm burning in agony.'

But Abraham replied, 'My son, remember that you enjoyed the good things of life, while Lazarus had a very poor life. Now he is here being comforted, while you suffer in torment. Apart from that, there's a great gulf that stretches between us and you. Nobody who wants to cross from here to you can do so, and nobody can cross from there over to us.'

The rich man said, 'Then Father, I beg you, please send him to my father's house. For I have five brothers and he can warn them so that they don't end up here in this place of torment.'

But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. They should listen to them.'

'No, Father Abraham,' said the man. 'But they would repent if someone went to them from the dead!'

Abraham said to him, 'If they won't listen to Moses and the prophets, they won't be convinced even if someone returns from the dead.'"

Jesus said to his disciples, "Temptations are unavoidable, but it will be a disaster for those through whom they come! For such people it would be better to have a millstone hung around the neck and be thrown into the sea than to cause these little ones to sin. So take care what you do. If your brother sins, warn him; and if he repents, forgive him. Even if he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times comes back and tells you, 'I'm really sorry,' forgive him."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Help us to have more trust!" The Lord replied, "Even if your trust was as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Uproot yourself, and plant yourself in the sea,' and it would obey you.

Say you have a servant who does plowing or shepherding. When he comes in from work, do you say to him, 'Come in and sit down now for a meal'? No. You say to him, 'Prepare a meal for me, get yourself dressed, and serve me until I've finished my meal. After that you can have your meal.' And do you thank the servant for doing what you told him? No. Likewise once you've done everything you were told, you should simply say, 'We are undeserving servants. We just did our duty.'"

As Jesus continued on his way to Jerusalem, he passed along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a particular village, ten lepers met him, standing at a distance. They called out, "Jesus, Master, please have mercy on us."

When Jesus saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." On their way there, they were healed. One of them when he saw that he was healed, returned to Jesus, shouting praises to God. He fell down at Jesus' feet, thanking him. He was a Samaritan.

"Weren't ten lepers healed?" Jesus asked. "Where are the other nine? Didn't anyone else come back to praise God—only this foreigner?"

Jesus told the man, "Get up and go on your way. Your trust has healed you."

Once, when the Pharisees came and asked him when God's kingdom would come, Jesus replied, "God's kingdom doesn't come with visible signs that you can observe. People won't be saying, 'Look, it's here' or 'Look, it's there,' for God's kingdom is among you."

Then Jesus told the disciples, "The time is coming when you'll long to see the day when the Son of man comes, but you won't see it. They'll be telling you, 'Look, there he is,' or 'Look, here he is,' but don't go running off after them. The day when the Son of man comes will be just like lightning that flashes, lighting up the sky from one side to the other. But first he will have to suffer many things, and be rejected by this generation.

The time when the Son of man comes will be like it was in Noah's day. People went on eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day Noah went into the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all. It will be like it was in Lot's day. People went on eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But on the day Lot left Sodom, fire and brimstone rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

The day when the Son of man appears will be just like that. If you're up on the roof that day don't go down and get your things; and if you're out in the fields don't go back home either. Remember Lot's wife! If you try to hold on to your life you'll lose it; but if you lose your life you'll save it. I tell you, at that time two will be in bed at night; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain, one will be taken; and the other left."

"Where, Lord?" they asked. "Where the carcass is, that's where the vultures gather," Jesus replied.

Jesus told them this story to encourage them to pray at all times, and not to become discouraged.

"Once there was a judge in this particular town who didn't respect God or care about anyone," Jesus explained. "In the same town lived a widow who time and again went to the judge, saying, 'Give me justice in the case against my enemy!' For a while he didn't want to do anything about it, but eventually he said to himself, 'Even though I don't respect God or care about anyone,

this widow is so annoying I'll make sure she receives justice. Then she won't wear me out by her coming to see me so often.'

Listen to what even an unjust judge decided," said the Lord. "Don't you think that God will make sure his chosen people receive justice, those who cry out to him day and night? Do you think he will make them wait? No, I tell you, he will give them justice quickly. However, when the Son of man comes, will he find people on earth who trust in him?"

He also told this story about those who are so sure that they are living right, and who put everybody else down.

"Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed to himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—cheats, criminals, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithe on my income.'

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He wouldn't even look up to heaven. Instead he beat his chest and prayed, 'God, please be merciful to me. I am a sinner.'

I tell you, it was this man who went home right in God's sight and not the other. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, while those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Parents were bringing their infants to Jesus to have him bless them by his touch. When the disciples saw what was happening, they tried to stop them. But Jesus called the children to him. "Let the little children come to me," he said. "Don't prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like them. I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

One of the rulers came to Jesus and asked him, "Good Teacher, what do I have to do to inherit eternal life?"

"Why do you call me good?" Jesus replied. "No one is good, only God. You know the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother."

"I've kept all these commandments since I was young," the man replied.

When Jesus heard this he told the man, "You still lack one thing. Go and sell all you have, give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me!"

But when the man heard this he became very sad, for he was very wealthy.

When he saw his reaction, Jesus said, "How difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

Those who heard this wondered, "Who can be saved then?"

Jesus replied, "What is impossible in human terms is possible for God."

Peter said, "We left everything to follow you!"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus told them, "anybody who leaves behind their home, wife, brothers, parents, or children for the sake of God's kingdom will receive so much more in this life, and eternal life in the world to come."

Jesus took the twelve disciples aside, and told them, "We're going to Jerusalem, and all that the prophets wrote about the Son of man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the foreigners, he will be mocked, insulted, and spat upon. They will flog him and kill him, but on the third day he will rise again."

But they didn't understand anything Jesus told them. The meaning was hidden from them and they didn't grasp what he was talking about.

As Jesus approached Jericho a blind man was sitting beside the road begging. He heard the crowd going past, so he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, son of David, please have mercy on me!" Those at the front of the crowd told him to stop shouting and be quiet, but he only shouted louder, "Son of David, please have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and told them to bring the blind man to him. As he came over, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, please, I want to see," he pleaded.

"Then see!" Jesus told him. "Your trust in me has healed you." Immediately the man could see. He followed Jesus, praising God. Everyone there who saw what happened also praised God.

Jesus entered Jericho and walked through the town. A man was there named Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector. He was very rich. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he couldn't see over the crowd. So he ran ahead, and climbed up a sycamore tree to see Jesus as he passed by.

When Jesus got there, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down quickly! I need to stay at your house today."

Zacchaeus climbed down quickly and was so happy to welcome Jesus to his home. When the people saw this they all complained, "He's gone to stay with such a sinner!" But Zacchaeus stood up and said before the Lord, "Look, I'm giving half of everything I own to the poor, and if I've cheated anybody, I'll pay them back four times as much!"

In response Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man has shown he is a son of Abraham too. For the Son of man came to search for and save those who are lost."

While they were still paying attention, Jesus told them a story for they were close to Jerusalem and the people thought that God's kingdom was going to become a reality right away.

"Once there was a nobleman who left home to go to a distant country to be crowned king there, and then to return. He called ten of his servants, divided money equally among them, and told them, 'Invest this money until I return.' But his people hated him, and sent a delegation after him to say, 'We won't have this man as king over us.'

After he had been crowned king he returned. He ordered his servants brought to him. He wanted to know what profit they had made by investing the money he had given them. The first servant came in and said, 'Lord, your money has earned ten times as much.'

'Well done! You're a good servant,' said the king. 'Since you proved yourself trustworthy in a very small matter, I'm placing you in charge of ten cities.'

The second servant came in and said, 'Lord, your money has earned five times as much.'

'I'm placing you in charge of five cities,' said the king.

Another servant came in and said, 'Lord, look, here's your money back. I kept it safe, wrapped up in a cloth. I was afraid of you because you're a hard man. You take what doesn't belong to you, and you harvest what you didn't plant.'

'I'll judge you by your own words,' the king replied. 'You know I'm a hard man, who as you say, takes what doesn't belong to me, and I harvest what I didn't plant. Why then didn't you deposit my money in the bank, so that when I returned I could have had my money with interest?'

The king told those who were standing beside him, 'Take the money away from him, and give it to the one who made ten times as much.'

'But master, he already has ten times as much,' they replied.

The king said, 'I tell you, to those who have, more will be given; but those who do not have, even what they have will be taken away from them. And as for my enemies who didn't want me to be king over them, bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

After he'd finished telling them this story, Jesus left for Jerusalem, walking on ahead. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany on the Mount of Olives, he sent two disciples, telling them:

"Go to the village farther on. As you enter it you'll find a colt tied up that no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' just say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

So the two disciples went and found that everything was just as Jesus had said. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" The disciples replied, "The Lord needs it." They brought the colt to Jesus. Then they threw their cloaks over it, and sat Jesus on its back. As he rode along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

As he approached Jerusalem, right where the road goes down from the Mount of Olives, the crowd of disciples all began shouting joyful praises to God at the top of their voices for all the miracles they had seen.

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord," they shouted. "Peace in heaven and glory in highest heaven." Some of the Pharisees who were in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, stop your disciples from saying that." But Jesus replied, "I tell you that if they keep quiet then the stones will shout!"

But as he got closer, he saw the city and wept over it. "I really wish today that you, even you, had known the path that leads to peace!" he said. "But now it's hidden from your eyes. The time is coming upon you when your enemies will besiege you, building ramps to attack you, encircling you and closing you in from every side. They will smash you to the ground, you and your children within you. They won't leave one stone on another within you, for you refused to accept salvation when it came to you."

Jesus entered the Temple and began driving out all the people trading there. He told them, "Scriptures state that my house will be a house of prayer, but you've turned it into a den of thieves."

He was teaching in the Temple every day. The chief priests, the religious teachers, and the leaders of the people were trying to kill him. But they couldn't find a way to do it because everyone appreciated him, hanging on his every word.

Once when Jesus was teaching the people in the Temple, telling them the good news, some of the chief priests and religious teachers came with the elders. They asked him, "Tell us: by whose authority are you doing what you do? Who gave you the right to do this?"

"Let me ask you a question too," Jesus replied. "Tell me: the baptism of John—was it from heaven, or was it just human?"

They talked about it among themselves: "If we say it was from heaven, he'll ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' And if we say it was just human, everybody will stone us for they're sure John was a prophet."

So they answered, "We don't know where it came from."

Jesus replied, "Then I won't tell you by whose authority I do what I do." Then he began to tell the people a story:

"Once there was a man who planted a vineyard, leased it to some farmers, and went to live in another country for a long while. At harvest-time he sent a servant to the tenant farmers to collect his share of the crop, but the farmers beat the servant and sent him away with nothing. So the owner sent another servant, but they beat him too and treated him shamefully, and sent him away with nothing. So he sent a third servant, but they wounded him and threw him out.

The owner of the vineyard asked himself, 'What shall I do? I know, I'll send my son whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.' But when they saw him coming, the farmers said to themselves, 'This is the owner's heir. Let's kill him! That way we can take his inheritance.' They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Now what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill these farmers and let others have the vineyard."

When they heard the story, they said, "May this never happen!" But Jesus looked at them and said, "Then why is it written in the Scriptures, 'The stone the builders rejected has now become the chief cornerstone'? Anyone who falls on that stone will be broken in pieces; anyone it falls upon will be crushed." Immediately the religious teachers and the chief priests wanted to arrest him because they realized that the story Jesus told was aimed at them, but they were afraid of what the people would do.

Watching for an opportunity they sent spies who pretended to be sincere. They tried to catch Jesus out in something he said so they could hand him over to the power and authority of the governor. They said, "Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is good and right, and that you're not swayed by the opinions of others. You truly teach the way of God. So should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus saw through their trickery, and said to them, "Show me a coin—a *denarius*. Whose image and inscription is on it?" "Caesar's," they answered.

"Then give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give back to God what belongs to God," he told

them. They weren't able to trap him by what he told the people. They were stunned at his reply, and fell silent.

Then some of the Sadducees, who deny the resurrection, came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher," they began, "Moses gave us a law that if a married man dies leaving a wife without children, then his brother should marry the widow and have children for his dead brother. Once there were seven brothers. The first had a wife, and died without having children. The second and then the third brother also married her. In the end all seven brothers married her, and then died without having children. Finally the wife died too. Now whose wife will she be in the resurrection, since all seven brothers had married her?"

"Here in this age people marry and are given in marriage," Jesus explained. "But those who are considered worthy to share in the age to come and the resurrection from the dead don't marry or are given in marriage. They can't die any longer; they're like the angels and are children of God since they're children of the resurrection. But on the question of whether the dead are raised, even Moses proved this when he wrote about the burning bush, when he called the Lord, 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him they all are alive."

Some of the religious teachers responded, "That was a good answer, Teacher." After this no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Then Jesus asked them, "Why is it said that Christ is the son of David? For David himself says in the book of Psalms: The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make all your enemies a footstool for your feet.' David calls him 'Lord,' so how can he be David's son?"

While everyone was paying attention, he said to his disciples, "Watch out for religious leaders who like to go around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the markets, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets. They cheat widows out of what they own, and cover up the kind of people they really are with long-winded prayers. They will receive severe condemnation in the judgment."

Looking around, Jesus watched rich people putting their gifts into the collection box. He also saw a very poor widow put in two small coins.

"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the rest together. All of them gave from their wealth what they had, but she gave from her poverty all she had to live on."

Some of those there were talking about the Temple, its fine stonework and the beautiful gifts that had been donated. But Jesus said, "Regarding these things you're looking at… The time is coming when not one stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed!"

"Teacher, when will this happen?" they asked him. "What will be the sign that these things are about to happen?"

"Make sure you're not deceived," Jesus warned them. "Many people will come claiming to be me, saying, 'Here I am!' and, 'The time has come!' but don't follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, don't be frightened, because these things have to happen first, but the end won't come immediately.

Nation will fight nation, and kingdom will fight kingdom," he told them. "There will be severe earthquakes, famines, and epidemic diseases in many lands, and extraordinary signs in the sky that are terrifying. But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will drag you before synagogues and throw you into prison, and put you on trial before kings and governors on account of me. But this will provide you an opportunity to speak on my behalf before them. So make up your mind beforehand not to worry about how to defend yourselves, for I will give you words of wisdom that your enemies won't be able to dispute or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by your parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, and they will kill some of you. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a single hair of your head will be lost. By standing firm you will gain your lives.

However, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you know that its destruction is near. Those who are in Judea should run away to the mountains, and those who are in Jerusalem should leave, and those who are in the countryside shouldn't enter the city. For these are days of punishment, fulfilling all that's written.

How hard it will be for those who are pregnant or nursing babies at that time! For terrible trouble is coming on the land and punishment against this people. They will be killed by the sword and taken away as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trodden down by the foreign nations until their time is fulfilled.

There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars, and on the earth the nations will be in distress, confused by the sea's rolling and crashing. People will be faint from fear, terrified about what is happening to the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they'll see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things happen, stand up and look up, because you will soon be saved."

Then he told them this story as an illustration. "Look at the fig tree, or any other kind of tree. When you see new leaves appear, you don't need to be told that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, you don't need to be told that God's kingdom is near. I tell you the truth, this generation won't come to an end before all this happens. Heaven and earth will come to an end, but my word will not.

Watch out that you don't become distracted by partying or getting drunk or by the worries of this life, so that this day catches you by surprise. For this day will come upon everyone who lives on the face of the earth. Always keep watch and pray, so that you may be able to escape all that will happen and stand before the Son of man."

Every day Jesus taught in the Temple, and every evening he went and stayed on the Mount of Olives. All the people came early in the morning to listen to him in the Temple.

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, also called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and

religious teachers were looking for a way to kill Jesus, but were afraid of what the people would do.

Satan entered into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples. He went and discussed with the chief priests and guard officers how he could betray Jesus. They were delighted, and offered him money. He agreed, and began to look for an opportunity to hand over Jesus when a crowd would not be there.

The Day of Unleavened Bread arrived when the Passover animal had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, telling them, "Go and prepare the Passover meal, so we can eat it together."

They asked him, "Where do you want us to prepare for it?"

He replied, "When you enter the city you'll meet a man carrying a jar of water. Follow him and go into the house he enters. Tell the owner of the house that the Teacher asks you, 'Where is the dining room where I can eat the Passover with my disciples?' He'll show you a large upstairs room that already has the necessary furniture. Prepare the meal there."

They went and found that everything was just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal there. When the time came, he sat down at the table with his apostles. He told them, "I've been really looking forward to eating this Passover meal with you before my sufferings begin. I tell you I shall not eat it again until the time is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

Jesus took the cup, and after he had given thanks, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. I tell you that I won't drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." He picked up some bread, and after he had given thanks, he broke it into pieces and gave it to them. "This is my body which is given for you; do this in order to remember me," Jesus told them. In the same way after they had finished supper, he picked up the cup and said, "This cup is the new agreement in my blood which is poured out for you."

"In spite of this, my betrayer is sitting right here with me at the table. For it has been determined that the Son of man will die, yet how disastrous it will be for his betrayer!" They began to argue among themselves as to who this might be and who could do this. At the same time they also got into a quarrel about which of them was the most important.

Jesus told them, "Foreign kings lord it over their subjects, and those having power even want people to call them 'benefactors.' But it should not be so with you! Whoever is highest among you should be like the lowest, and the leader should be like a servant. Who is greater—the one who sits at the table, or the one who serves? Isn't it the one who sits at the table? But I'm among you as the one who serves. You have stayed with me throughout my trials. And I grant to you authority to rule, just as my Father granted it to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

"Simon, Simon—Satan has asked to have all of you to sift like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your trust in me may not fail. And when you have returned, encourage your brothers."

Peter said, "Lord, I'm ready to go with you to prison, and to die with you!"

Jesus replied, "I'm telling you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me."

Jesus asked them, "When I sent you out without money, without a bag, and without an extra pair of sandals, did you lack anything?"

"No, nothing," they replied.

"But now, if you have money you should take it, as well as a bag, and if you don't have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one. I tell you that this statement in Scripture about me must be fulfilled: 'He was counted with the wicked.' What was said about me is now being fulfilled."

"Look, Lord, here are two swords," they said.

"That's enough," he replied.

Jesus left and as usual went to the Mount of Olives together with his disciples. When he arrived he said to them, "Pray that you don't give in to temptation." Then he left them and walked about a stone's throw away, where he kneeled down and prayed.

"Father," he prayed, "if you're willing, please take away this cup of suffering from me. But I want to do what you want, not what I want." Then an angel appeared from heaven to strengthen him.

In great distress Jesus prayed even harder, and his sweat fell like drops of blood onto the ground. He finished praying, stood up, and went over to the disciples. He found them asleep, worn out by grief. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray so that you won't fall into temptation."

While he was still speaking, a crowd appeared led by Judas, one of the twelve disciples. Judas went up to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus asked him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?"

Jesus' followers asked him, "Lord, should we attack them with our swords?" And one of them struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear.

"Stop! No more of this!" said Jesus. He touched the man's ear and healed him.

Then Jesus spoke to the chief priests, and the officers of the Temple guard, and the elders. "Am I some kind of criminal that you had to come with swords and clubs?" he asked. "You didn't arrest me before, even though I was with you in the Temple every day. But this is your moment now, the time when darkness is in power."

They arrested him and led him away, taking him to the chief priest's house. Peter followed at a distance. They started a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down by it. Peter was there among them. As he sat there, a servant girl noticed him in the firelight, and stared directly at him and said, "This man was with him." But Peter denied it. "Woman, I don't know him!" he said.

A little later someone else looked at him and said, "You're also one of them." "No, I'm not!" Peter replied. About an hour later, another person insisted, "I'm sure he was with him too—he's a Galilean." "I've no idea what you're talking about!" Peter replied. Right then, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered what the Lord had said, how he'd told him: "Before the cock crows today, you'll deny me three times." Peter went out and wept bitterly.

The men guarding Jesus began to mock him and beat him. They put a blindfold on him, and then asked him, “If you can prophesy, tell us who hit you that time!” and shouted many other insults at him.

Early in the morning the council of elders gathered together with the chief priests and religious teachers. Jesus was led before the council. “If you really are the Messiah, then tell us,” they said.

“Even if I were to tell you, you wouldn't believe me,” Jesus replied. “And if I were to ask you a question, you wouldn't answer. But from now on the Son of man will sit at the right hand of the mighty God.”

They all asked, “So are you the son of God?”

“You say that I am,” Jesus replied.

“Why do we need any more witnesses?” they said. “We've heard it ourselves from his own mouth!”

The whole council rose and took him to Pilate. There they started to accuse him. “We found this man deceiving our nation, telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar, and claiming he is Messiah, a king,” they said.

“Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate asked him.

“So you say,” replied Jesus.

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I don't find this man guilty of any crime.”

But they insisted, saying, “He is inciting rebellion all over Judea with his teachings, from Galilee to right here in Jerusalem.”

When he heard this, Pilate asked, “Is this man a Galilean?” When he discovered that Jesus came under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod who was also in Jerusalem at the time.

Herod was very pleased to see Jesus since he had wanted to meet him for a long time. He had heard about Jesus and was hoping to see him perform a miracle. He asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus did not answer him at all. The chief priests and religious teachers stood there, angrily accusing him. Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and mocked him. Then they placed a royal robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. From that day on Herod and Pilate were friends —before that they had been enemies.

Pilate called together the chief priests, rulers, and the people, and told them, “You brought this man before me, accusing him of inciting the people to rebellion. I've carefully examined him in your presence, and do not find him guilty of the charges you have brought against him. Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. He has done nothing that demands he should be put to death. So I will have him flogged and then release him.”

But they all shouted together, “Kill this man, and release Barabbas to us.” (Barabbas had been put in prison for taking part in a rebellion in the city, and for murder.)

Pilate wanted to release Jesus, so spoke to them again. But they kept on shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate asked them for the third time, “But why? What crime has he committed? I don't find any reason for executing him. So I will have him flogged and then release him.”

But they continued insisting with loud shouts, demanding that he be crucified. Their shouting succeeded, and Pilate gave the sentence they demanded. He released the man imprisoned for rebellion and murder, but he sent Jesus to be put to death in accordance with their demands.

As the soldiers led him away, they seized a man called Simon of Cyrene, who had come in from the countryside. They put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd followed him, along with women who were mourning and lamenting him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me. Weep for yourselves and your children. For the time is coming when they'll say, ‘Happy are those who are childless, and those who never had babies, and those who never nursed them.’ They'll say to the mountains, ‘Fall down on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ For if they do this to wood that is green, what will happen when it's dried out?”

They also took two others who were criminals to be executed with him. When they reached the place called the Skull they crucified him together with the criminals, one on his right, and the other on his left.

Jesus said, “Father, please forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing.” They divided up his clothes by throwing dice for them.

The people stood and watched and the leaders sneered at Jesus. “He saved others, let him save himself, if he is really God's Messiah, the Chosen One,” they said.

The soldiers also mocked him, coming up to him and offering him wine vinegar, saying, “If you're the King of the Jews, then save yourself.”

Above Jesus was a sign on which it was written, “This is the King of the Jews.”

One of the criminals hanging there joined in the insults against Jesus. “Aren't you the Messiah?” he asked. “Then save yourself—and us too!”

But the other criminal disagreed and argued with him, “Don't you fear God even when you're suffering the same punishment?” he asked. “For us the sentence is right since we're being punished for what we did, but this man didn't do anything wrong.”

Then he said, “Jesus, please remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus replied, “I promise you today you will be with me in paradise.” By this time it was around noon and darkness fell over the whole land until three in the afternoon. The sun's light was shut out, and the Temple veil was torn in two.

Jesus called out in a loud voice, “Father, I place myself in your hands.” Having said this he breathed his last.

When the centurion saw what had happened he praised God and said, “Surely this man was innocent.” When all the crowds that had come to watch saw what happened they went home beating their chests in grief. But all those who knew Jesus, including the women who'd followed him from Galilee, watched from a distance.

There was a man called Joseph who was good and honest. He was a member of the council, but he hadn't agreed with its decisions and actions. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. Joseph went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Once he'd taken it down, he wrapped it in a linen cloth. He laid Jesus in an unused tomb cut into the rock. It was preparation day and the Sabbath would

soon begin. The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee had followed Joseph and had seen the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid. They returned home and prepared spices and ointments. But on the Sabbath they rested, observing the commandment.

Very early on the first day of the week, the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they'd prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, but when they went in they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering what was going on, two men suddenly appeared dressed in clothes that shone brilliantly. The women were terrified and bowed down, their faces on the ground.

They said to the women, "Why are you looking for someone who is alive among the dead? He's not here; he's risen from the dead! Remember what he told you while you were still in Galilee: 'The Son of man must be betrayed into the hands of evil men, be crucified, and on the third day rise again.'" Then they remembered what he'd said.

When they returned from the tomb they reported all that had happened to the eleven disciples and to all the others. Those who told the apostles what had happened were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women with them. But it seemed like nonsense to them, so they didn't believe the women.

However, Peter got up and ran to the tomb. Bending down, he looked in and saw only the linen grave-clothes. So he went back home, wondering what had happened.

The same day two disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking about all that had happened. As they discussed and debated, Jesus came up and fell into step with them. But they were kept from recognizing him.

"What are you discussing as you walk along?" he asked them. They stopped, their faces sad. One of them, called Cleopas, replied, "Are you just visiting Jerusalem? You must be the only person who doesn't know the things that have happened in the past few days."

"What things?" Jesus asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet who spoke powerfully and performed great miracles before God and all the people. But our high priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the one who was going to rescue Israel. It's been three days now since all this happened.

But then some of the women in our group surprised us. At dawn they went to the tomb and they didn't find his body. They came back saying that they'd seen a vision of angels who told them he's alive. Some of us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women said —but they didn't see him."

Jesus told them, "You're so dull! How slow you are to trust in all that the prophets said! Didn't the Messiah have to suffer before he could enter into his glory?" Then, starting with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them everything that was said in Scripture about himself.

As they approached the village they were going to, Jesus made it seem as if he was going farther. But they urged him, saying, "Please come and stay with us. It's getting late—the day is almost over." So he went to stay with them.

When he sat down to eat with them, he took the bread and gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. Then he disappeared from view.

The two disciples said to each other, "Weren't our thoughts on fire when he spoke to us, as he explained the Scriptures to us?" They got up right away and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and those who were with them meeting together, who said, "The Lord has really risen again! He has appeared to Simon."

Then those who had just arrived explained to the other disciples what had happened to them on the road, and how they had recognized Jesus when he broke bread. While they were talking, Jesus himself stood among them, and said, "Peace to you!" They were startled and afraid, thinking they were seeing a ghost.

"Why are you frightened? Why are you doubting?" he asked them. "Look at my hands and my feet—you can see it's me. Touch me and you'll be certain, for a ghost doesn't have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

Having said this, he showed them his hands and feet. But they still couldn't believe it because they were so elated and amazed. He asked them, "Do you have anything to eat?" They gave him a piece of cooked fish, and he took it and ate it in front of them.

Then Jesus said to them, "This is what I explained to you while I was still with you. Everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms, had to be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds so they were able to understand the Scriptures. He told them, "It was written like this: the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and in his name repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. You are witnesses of all this. Now I'm going to send you what my Father promised—but wait in the city until you receive power from heaven."

Then he led them out until they were near Bethany, and lifting up his hands, he blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them, and was taken up to heaven. They worshiped him, and then they returned to Jerusalem full of joy. They spent all their time in the Temple praising God.

John

The Gospel According to John

In the beginning the Word already was. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. From the very beginning he was with God. Everything came into being through him; nothing came into being without him. In him was life, the life that was the light of everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not extinguished it.

God sent a man named John. He came as a witness to explain about the light so that everyone might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to witness to the light.

The true light was coming into the world to give light to everyone. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world didn't know who he was. He came to his own people, but they didn't accept him. But to all those who accepted him and trusted in him, he gave the right to become God's children. These are the children born not in the usual way, not as the result of human desire or a father's decision, but born of God. The Word became human and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son, full of grace and truth.

John gave his testimony about him, shouting out to the people, "This is the one I was telling you about when I said, 'The one who is coming after me is more important than me, for before I ever existed he already was.'" We have all been recipients of his generous nature, one gracious gift after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. While no one has ever seen God, God the one and only, who is close beside the Father, has shown us what God is like.

This is what John publicly stated when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" John declared plainly and clearly without hesitation, "I am not the Messiah."

"So then, who are you?" they asked. "Elijah?"

"No, I'm not," he answered.

"Are you the Prophet?"

"No," he replied.

"Well, who are you, then?" they asked. "We have to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

"I am a voice calling in the desert, 'Make the Lord's way straight!'" he said, using the words of the prophet Isaiah.

The priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees asked him, "Why then are you baptizing, if you're not the Messiah, or Elijah, or the Prophet?"

John replied, "I baptize with water, but standing among you is someone you don't know. He is coming after me, but I am not even worthy to untie his sandals." This all happened in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus approaching him, and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man who is coming after me is more important than me, for before I ever existed he already was.' I didn't know myself who he was, but I came baptizing with water so that he could be revealed to Israel."

John gave his evidence about him, saying, "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove and rest upon him. I wouldn't have known him except he who sent me to baptize with water had told me, 'The one you see the Spirit descend to and rest upon, he is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' I saw it happen and I declare that this is the Son of God."

The next day John was standing there with two of his disciples. He saw Jesus passing by, and said, "Look! This is the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard what he said they went and followed Jesus.

Jesus turned round and saw them following him. "What are you looking for?" he asked them.

"Rabbi (which means 'Teacher'), where are you staying?" they asked in reply.

"Come and see," he told them. So they went with him and saw where he was staying. It was about four p.m., and they spent the rest of the day with him.

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of these two disciples who had heard what John said and followed Jesus. He went at once to find his brother Simon and told him, "We've found the Messiah!" (which means "Christ"). He took him to Jesus. Looking directly at Simon, Jesus said, "You are Simon, son of John. But now you will be called Cephas," (which means "Peter").

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. Jesus found Philip there, and told him, "Follow me." Philip was from Bethsaida, the same town that Andrew and Peter came from.

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We've found the one that Moses wrote about in the law and that the prophets did too—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

"From Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael wondered.

"Just come and see," Philip replied.

As Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said about him, "Look, here's a true Israelite! There's nothing false about him."

"How do you know who I am?" Nathanael asked.

"I saw you there under the fig tree, before Philip called you," Jesus replied.

"Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the king of Israel!" Nathaniel exclaimed.

"You believe this just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree?" Jesus replied. "You'll get to see much more than that!" Then Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you will all see heaven open, and the angels of God going up and down on the Son of man."

Two days later a wedding was held at Cana in Galilee, and Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. The wine ran out, so Jesus' mother told him, "They don't have any more wine."

"Mother, why should you involve me? My time hasn't come yet," he replied.

His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Standing nearby were six stone jars used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each one holding twenty to thirty gallons. "Fill the jars with water," Jesus told them. So they filled them right up. Then he told them, "Pour some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So they took him some. The master of ceremonies didn't know where it had come from, only the servants knew. But when he tasted the water that had been turned to wine, he called the bridegroom over.

"Everyone serves out the best wine first," he told him, "and once people have had plenty to drink, then they put out the cheaper wine. But you have kept the best wine till last!" This was the very first of Jesus' miraculous signs, and was performed in Cana of Galilee. Here he revealed his glory, and his disciples put their trust in him.

After this Jesus left for Capernaum with his mother, brothers, and disciples where they stayed for a few days. Since it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went on to Jerusalem. In the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves; and money-changers sitting at their tables. He made a whip out of cords and drove everyone out of the Temple, along with the sheep and cattle, scattering coins of the money-changers and turning over their tables. He ordered the dove-sellers, "Take these things out of here! Don't turn my Father's house into a market!" His disciples remembered the Scripture that says, "My devotion for your house is like a fire burning inside me!"

The Jewish leaders reacted, asking him, "What right do you have to do this? Show us some miraculous sign to prove it!"

Jesus replied, "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I'll raise it up!"

"It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you're going to raise it up in three days?" the Jewish leaders replied. But the Temple Jesus was speaking of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he said, and so they believed in Scripture and Jesus' own words.

As a result of the miracles Jesus did while he was in Jerusalem during the Passover, many believed in him. But Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all about people. He didn't need anyone to tell him about human nature for he knew the way people think.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came at night to where Jesus was and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for nobody could do the miraculous signs you're doing unless God was with him."

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "Unless you are reborn, you can't experience God's kingdom."

"How can you be reborn when you're old?" Nicodemus asked. "You can't go back into your mother's womb and be born a second time!"

"I tell you the truth, you can't enter God's kingdom unless you are born of water and the Spirit," Jesus told him. "What's born of the body is body, and what's born of the Spirit is Spirit. Don't be surprised at my telling you, 'You must be reborn.' The wind blows wherever it wants, and just as you hear the sound it makes, but don't know where it's coming from or where it's going, that's how it is for everyone who is born of the Spirit."

"How is this possible?" Nicodemus asked.

"You're a famous teacher in Israel, and yet you don't understand such things?" Jesus replied. "I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know and give evidence regarding what we have seen, but you refuse to accept our testimony. If you don't trust what I say when I tell you about earthly things, how would you ever trust what I say if I were to tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven, but the Son of man came down from heaven. Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so the Son of man must be lifted up, so that everyone who trusts in him will have eternal life.

For God loved the world, and this is how: he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who trusts in him shouldn't die, but have eternal life. God didn't send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Those who trust in him are not condemned, while those who don't trust in him are condemned already because they didn't trust in the one and only Son of God. This is how the decision is made: the light came to the world, but people loved the darkness rather than the light, for their actions were evil. All those who do evil hate the light and don't come into the light, because they don't want their actions to be exposed. But those who do good come into the light, so that what God accomplishes in them can be revealed."

After this Jesus and his disciples went into Judea and spent some time with the people, baptizing them. John was also baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water there and people kept coming to be baptized. (This was before John was imprisoned.) An argument developed between John's disciples and a Jew over ceremonial purification. They went to John and told him, "Rabbi, the man you were with on the other side of the Jordan River, the one you testified in support of—see, now he's baptizing, and everyone is going to him!"

"No one receives anything unless they're given it from heaven," John replied. "You yourselves can testify that I declared, 'I'm not the Messiah. I've been sent to prepare his way.' The bridegroom is the one who has the bride! The best man waits, listening for the bridegroom, and is so happy when he hears the bridegroom's voice—in the same way my happiness is now complete. He must become more important, and I must become less important."

He who comes from above is greater than all; he who comes from the earth belongs to the earth and talks about earthly things. He who comes from heaven is greater than all. He gives evidence about what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts what he has to say. Yet anyone who accepts what he says confirms that God is truthful. For the one God sent speaks God's words, because God doesn't restrict the Spirit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Anyone who trusts in the Son has eternal life, but anyone who refuses to trust the Son will not experience eternal life but remains under God's condemnation.

When Jesus realized that the Pharisees had discovered that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John, (although it wasn't Jesus who was baptizing,

but his disciples), he left Judea and returned to Galilee. On the way he had to pass through Samaria. So he came to the Samaritan city of Sychar, near to the field that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, who was tired from the journey, sat straight down beside the well. It was around noon.

A Samaritan woman came to fetch water. Jesus said to her, "Please could you give me a drink?" for his disciples had gone to the town to buy food.

"You're a Jew, and I'm a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" the woman replied, for Jews don't associate with Samaritans.

Jesus answered her, "If you only recognized God's gift, and who is asking you, 'Please could you give me a drink?' you would have asked him and he would have given you the water of life."

"Sir, you don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where are you going to get the water of life from?" she replied. "Our father Jacob gave us the well. He drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock. Are you greater than he?"

Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks water from this well will become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give won't ever be thirsty again. The water I give becomes a bubbling spring of water inside them, bringing them eternal life."

"Sir," replied the woman, "Please give me this water so I won't be thirsty, and I won't have to come here to fetch water!"

"Go and call your husband, and come back here," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman answered.

"You're right in saying you don't have a husband," Jesus told her. "You've had five husbands, and the one you're living with now is not your husband. So what you say is true!"

"I can see you're a prophet, sir," the woman replied. "Tell me this: our ancestors worshiped here on this mountain, but you say that Jerusalem is where we must worship."

Jesus replied, "Believe me the time is coming when you won't worship the Father either on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You really don't know the God you're worshiping, while we worship the God we know, for salvation comes from the Jews. But the time is coming—and in fact it's here already—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for these are the kind of worshipers the Father wants. God is Spirit, so worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "Well, I know that the Messiah is coming," (the one who is called Christ). "When he comes he will explain it all to us."

Jesus replied, "I AM—the one who is speaking to you."

Just then the disciples returned. They were shocked that he was talking to a woman, but none of them asked "What are you doing?" or "Why are you talking with her?" The woman left her water jar behind and ran back to the town, telling the people, "Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Could this be the Messiah?"

So they went out of the town to go and see him. Meanwhile Jesus' disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, please eat something!"

But Jesus replied, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

"Did someone bring him food?" the disciples asked one another.

Jesus told them, "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to complete his work. Don't you have a saying, 'four more months until harvest?' Open your eyes and look around! The crops in the fields are ripe, ready for harvest. The reaper is being paid and harvesting a crop for eternal life so that both the sower and the reaper can celebrate. So the proverb 'one sows, another reaps,' is true. I sent you to reap what you didn't work for. Others did the hard work and you have reaped the benefits of what they did."

Many Samaritans from that town trusted in him because of what the woman said: "He told me everything I ever did." So when they came to see him they pleaded with him to stay with them. He stayed for two days, and because of what he told them many more trusted in him. They said to the woman, "Now our trust in him isn't just because of what you told us but because we have heard him for ourselves. We're convinced that he really is the Savior of the world."

After the two days he continued on to Galilee. Jesus himself had made the comment that a prophet is not respected in his own country. But when he arrived in Galilee, the people welcomed him, because they had also been at the Passover feast and had seen everything he'd done in Jerusalem. He visited Cana in Galilee again, where he had turned water into wine. Nearby in the town of Capernaum lived a royal official whose son was very sick. When he heard that Jesus had returned from Judea to Galilee, he went to Jesus and begged him to come and heal his son who was close to death.

"Unless you see signs and wonders you people really won't trust me," said Jesus.

"Lord, just come before my child dies," the official pleaded.

"Go on home," Jesus told him. "Your son will live!"

The man trusted what Jesus told him and left for home. While he was on his way, his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and recovering. He asked them what time it was when his son began to get better. "Yesterday at one p.m. the fever left him," they told him. Then the father realized this was the precise time when Jesus had told him, "Your son will live!" So he and everyone in his household trusted in Jesus. This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

After this there was a Jewish festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. Now near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem is a pool called Bethzatha in Hebrew, with five porches beside it. Crowds of sick people were lying in these porches—those who were blind, lame, or paralyzed. One man who was there had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus looked at him, knowing he had been lying there for a long time, and asked him, "Do you want to be healed?"

"Sir," the sick man answered, "I don't have anyone to help me get into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get there, someone always gets in before me."

"Stand up, pick up your mat, and start walking!" Jesus told him. Immediately the man was healed. He picked up his mat and started walking.

Now the day that this happened was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who'd been healed, "This is the Sabbath! It's against the law to carry a mat!"

"The man who healed me told me to pick up my mat and start walking," he replied.

"Who's this person who told you to carry your mat and walk?" they asked.

However, the man who'd been healed didn't know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the surrounding crowd. Later on Jesus found the man in the Temple, and told him, "Look, now you've been healed. So stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

The man went and told the Jews it was Jesus who had healed him. So the Jews started to harass Jesus because he was doing things on the Sabbath. But Jesus told them, "My Father is still working, and so am I." This was why the Jews tried even harder to kill him, for not only did he break the Sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.

So Jesus explained to them, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does the Son does as well. For the Father loves the Son, and reveals to him everything he does; and the Father will show to him even more incredible things that will completely amaze you. For just as the Father gives life to those he resurrects from the dead, in the same way the Son also gives life to those that he wants. The Father judges no one. He has given to the Son all the authority to judge, so that everyone may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who doesn't honor the Son doesn't honor the Father who sent him. I tell you the truth: those who follow what I say and trust the one who sent me have eternal life. They won't be condemned, but have gone from death to life.

I tell you the truth: The time is coming—in fact it's here already—when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live! Just as the Father has life-giving power in himself, so has he given the Son the same life-giving power in himself. The Father also granted the authority for judgment to him, for he is the Son of man. Don't be surprised at this, for the time is coming when all those in the grave will hear his voice and will rise again: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation. I can do nothing by myself. I judge based on what I'm told, and my decision is right, for I'm not doing my own will but the will of the one who sent me. If I were to make claims about myself, such claims wouldn't be valid; but someone else gives evidence about me, and I know what he says about me is true. You asked John about me, and he told the truth, but I don't need any human endorsement. I'm explaining this to you so you can be saved. John was like a brightly-burning light, and you were willing to enjoy his light for a while. But the evidence I'm giving is greater than John's. For I am doing the work that the Father gave me to do, and this is the proof that the Father sent me. The Father who sent me, he himself speaks on my behalf. You've never heard his voice, and you've never seen what he looks like, and you don't accept what he says, because you don't trust in the one he sent.

You search the Scriptures because you think that through them you'll gain eternal life. But the evidence they give is in support of me! And yet you don't want to come to me so that you might live. I'm not looking for human approval —I know you, and that you don't have God's love in you. For I've come to represent my Father, and you won't accept me; but if someone comes representing themselves, then you accept them! How can you trust in me when you look for praise from one another and yet you don't look for praise from the one true God? But don't think I will be making accusations about you to the Father. It's Moses who is accusing you, the one in whom you place such confidence. For if you really trusted Moses you would trust in me, because he wrote about me. But since you don't trust what he said, why would you trust what I say?"

Some time later Jesus left to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (also known as the Sea of Tiberias). A large crowd was following him, for they'd seen his miracles of healing. Jesus went up a hill and sat down there with his disciples. The time for the Jewish festival of the Passover was approaching. When Jesus looked up, and saw a large crowd coming towards him, he asked Philip, "Where can we buy bread to feed these people?" He only asked this to see how Philip would respond, because Jesus already knew what he was going to do.

"Two hundred silver coins wouldn't buy enough bread to give everyone only a little," Philip replied.

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. "There's a boy here who has five barley loaves and a couple of fish, but what good is that when there are so many people?"

"Have everybody sit down," Jesus said. There was plenty of grass there, so they all sat down, the men numbering around five thousand. Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and had it handed out to the people as they sat there. Then he did the same with the fishes, making sure the people had as much as they wanted. Once they were all full, he said to his disciples, "Collect what's left over so nothing is wasted." So they collected and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves the people had eaten. When the people saw this miracle, they said, "Surely this is the Prophet who was to come into the world." Jesus realized that they were about to force him to become their king, so he left them and went up into the hills to be by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, climbed into a boat, and headed across the water towards Capernaum. By now it was night and Jesus had not joined them yet. A strong wind began blowing and the sea grew rough. When they had rowed three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, coming towards the boat. They were very frightened. "Don't be afraid!" he told them. "It's me." Then they gladly took him into the boat, and immediately they reached the shore where they were going.

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the other side of the sea noticed that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not got into the boat

with his disciples, but they had left without him. Then other boats arrived from Tiberias, landing near to the place where they'd eaten the bread after the Lord had blessed it. Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went over to Capernaum, looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

"I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "you're looking for me because you ate as much bread as you wanted, not because you understood the miracles. Don't be preoccupied about food that doesn't last, but concentrate on the lasting food of eternal life which the Son of man will give you, for God the Father has placed his seal of approval on him."

So they asked him, "What should we be doing in order to do what God wants?"

Jesus replied, "What God wants you to do is to trust in the one he sent."

"What miracle are you going to perform for us to see so we can trust you? What are you able to do?" they asked. "Our forefathers ate manna in the desert in fulfillment of the Scripture that says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

"I tell you the truth, it wasn't Moses who gave you bread from heaven," Jesus replied. "It's my Father who gives you the true bread of heaven. For the bread of God is the one who comes from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Lord, please give us this kind of bread all the time!" they said.

"I am the bread of life," Jesus replied. "Anyone who comes to me will never be hungry again, and anyone who trusts in me will never be thirsty again. But as I explained to you before, you have seen me, but you still don't trust me. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and I won't reject any of them. For I came down from heaven not to do what I want, but to do what the one who sent me wants. What he wants is for me not to lose anyone he has given to me, but for me to raise them up at the last day. What my Father wants is for everyone who sees the Son and trusts in him to have eternal life, and for me to raise them up at the last day."

Then the Jews began to grumble about him because he had said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." They said, "Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and his mother. So how can he now tell us, 'I came down from heaven'?"

"Stop grumbling to each other," Jesus said. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me attracts them, and I will raise them up at the last day. As is written in Scripture by the prophets, 'Everyone will be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to and learns from the Father comes to me. Not that anyone has seen God, except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth: anyone who trusts in him has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the desert but they still died. But this is the bread that comes down from heaven, and anyone who eats it won't ever die. I am the life-giving bread from heaven, and anyone who eats this bread will live forever. The bread is my flesh that I give so that the world may live."

Then the Jews argued heatedly among themselves. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

Jesus told them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you cannot truly live. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I remain in them. Just as the life-giving Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. Now this is the bread that came down from heaven, not the kind your forefathers ate and still died. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever."

Jesus explained this while he was teaching in a synagogue at Capernaum. Many of his disciples when they heard it said, "This is hard to accept! Who can follow it?"

Jesus saw that his disciples were complaining about this, so he asked them, "Are you offended by this? Then what if you were to see the Son ascend to where he was before? The Spirit gives life; the physical body doesn't do anything. The words I've told you are spirit and life! Yet there are some of you who don't trust me." (Jesus had known from the very beginning who didn't trust him, and who would betray him.)

Jesus added, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is made possible by the Father."

From this time on many of Jesus' disciples gave up and no longer followed him. Then Jesus asked the twelve disciples, "What about you? You don't want to leave as well, do you?"

Simon Peter answered, "Lord, who would we follow? You're the one who has the words of eternal life. We trust in you, and we're convinced that you are God's Holy One."

Jesus replied, "Didn't I choose you, the twelve disciples? Yet one of you is a devil." (Jesus was referring to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. He was the one of the twelve disciples who would betray Jesus.)

After this, Jesus spent his time going from place to place in Galilee. He did not want to do so in Judea because the Jews were out to kill him. But as it was almost time for the Jewish festival of the Tabernacles, his brothers told him, "You ought to leave and go to Judea so your followers will be able to see what miracles you can do. No one who wants to be famous keeps what they do hidden. If you can do such miracles, then show yourself to the world!" For even his own brothers really didn't believe in him.

Jesus told them, "This is not my time to go, not yet; but you can go whenever you want, for any time's the right time for you. The world has no reason to hate you, but it does hate me, because I make it clear that its ways are evil. You go on to the festival. I'm not going to this festival because this is not the right time for me, not yet." After saying this he stayed behind in Galilee.

After his brothers left to go to the festival, Jesus also went, but not openly—he stayed out of sight. Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were searching for him and kept on asking, "Where is he?" Many people in the crowds were complaining about him. Some said, "He's a good man," while others argued, "No! He deceives

people." But no one dared to speak openly about him because they were afraid of what the Jewish leaders would do to them.

When the festival was halfway through, Jesus went to the Temple and began to teach. The Jewish leaders were very surprised, and asked, "How does this man have so much learning when he hasn't been educated?"

Jesus answered, "My teaching is not from me but from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to follow what God wants will know if my teaching comes from God or if I'm only speaking for myself. Those who speak for themselves want to glorify themselves, but someone who glorifies the one who sent him is truthful and not deceitful. Moses gave you the law, didn't he? Yet none of you keeps the law! Why are you trying to kill me?"

"You're demon-possessed!" the crowd replied. "No one's trying to kill you!"

"I did one miracle and you're all shocked by it," Jesus replied. "However, because Moses told you to circumcise—not that it really came from Moses, but from your forefathers before him—you perform circumcision on the Sabbath. If you circumcise on the Sabbath to make sure that the law of Moses isn't broken, why are you angry with me for healing someone on the Sabbath? Don't judge by appearances; decide what is right!"

Then some of those from Jerusalem began wondering, "Isn't this the one they're trying to kill? But see how openly he's speaking, and they're saying nothing to him. Do you think the authorities believe he's the Messiah? But that's not possible because we know where he comes from. When the Messiah comes, nobody will know where he's from."

While he was teaching in the Temple, Jesus called out in a loud voice, "So you think you know me and where I'm from? However, I did not come for my own sake. The one who sent me is true. You don't know him, but I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me."

So they tried to arrest him, but no one laid a hand on him because his time had not come yet. However, many of the crowd did put their trust in him. "When the Messiah appears, will he do more miraculous signs than this man has done?" they said. When the Pharisees heard the crowd whispering this about him, they and the chief priests sent guards to arrest Jesus.

Then Jesus told the people, "I'll be with you just a little longer, but then I'll return to the one who sent me. You'll search for me but you won't find me; and you can't come where I'm going."

The Jews said to each other, "Where could he be going that we couldn't find him? Is he planning to go to those scattered among the foreigners, and teach the foreigners? What does he mean by saying, 'You'll search for me but you won't find me; and you can't come where I'm going'?"

On the last and most important day of the festival, Jesus stood up and shouted out in a loud voice, "If you're thirsty, come to me and drink. If you trust in me, you will have streams of life-giving water flowing out from within you, as Scripture says." He was referring to the Spirit that those who trusted in him would later receive. The Spirit hadn't been given yet because Jesus hadn't yet been glorified.

When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This man is definitely the Prophet!" Others said, "He is the Messiah!" Still others said, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee? Doesn't Scripture say that the Messiah comes from David's lineage, and from David's home town of Bethlehem?" So the crowd had a strong difference of opinion about him. Some wanted to arrest him, but nobody laid a hand on him.

Then the guards returned to the chief priests and the Pharisees who asked them, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

"Nobody ever spoke like this man does," the guards replied.

"Have you been fooled too?" the Pharisees asked them. "Has a single one of the rulers or Pharisees believed in him? No! But this crowd knows nothing about teachings of the law—they're damned anyway!"

Nicodemus, who had previously gone to meet Jesus, was one of them and asked them, "Does our law condemn a man without a hearing and without finding out what he actually did?"

"So you're a Galilean as well, are you?" they replied. "Check the Scriptures and you'll discover that no prophet comes from Galilee!" Then they all went home,

but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he returned to the Temple where many people gathered around him and he sat down and taught them. The religious teachers and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught committing adultery and made her stand before everyone.

They said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. What do *you* say?" They said this to try and trap Jesus so they could condemn him. But Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger.

They kept on demanding an answer, so he stood up and told them, "Whichever one of you has never sinned may throw the first stone at her." Then he bent down again and went on writing on the ground.

When they heard this they began to leave, one by one, starting with the oldest, leaving Jesus alone in the middle of the crowd with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Where are they? Didn't anybody stay to condemn you?"

"No one did, sir," she replied.

"I don't condemn you either," Jesus told her. "Go, and don't sin anymore."

Jesus spoke again to the people, telling them, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me you won't walk in darkness for you will have the life-giving light."

The Pharisees replied, "You can't be your own witness! What you say doesn't prove anything!"

"Even if I am my own witness, my testimony is true," Jesus told them, "for I know where I came from and where I'm going. But you don't know where I came from or where I'm going. You judge in a typically human way, but I don't judge anyone. Even if I did judge, my judgment would be right because I am not doing this alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Your own law states that the testimony of two witnesses

is valid. I am my own witness, and my other witness is my Father who sent me."

"Where is your father?" they asked him.

"You don't know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me then you would know my Father as well." Jesus explained this while he was teaching near the Temple treasury. Yet no one arrested him because his time had not come yet.

Jesus told them again, "I'm leaving, and you'll search for me, but you'll die in your sin. You can't come where I'm going."

The Jews wondered out loud, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means when he says 'You can't come where I'm going'?"

Jesus told them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. That is why I told you that you'll die in your sins. For if you don't trust in me, the 'I am,' you'll die in your sins."

Then they asked him, "Who *are* you?"

"Exactly who I told you I was from the beginning," Jesus replied. "There's much I could say about you, and much I could condemn. But the one who sent me tells the truth, and what I'm saying to you here in this world is what I heard from him."

They didn't understand that he was talking to them about the Father.

So Jesus explained to them: "When you have lifted up the Son of man then you'll know that I am the 'I am,' and that I do nothing of myself, but only say what the Father taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not abandoned me, for I always do what pleases him." Many who heard Jesus say these things put their trust in him.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who trusted in him, "If you follow my teaching then you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"We're descendants of Abraham! We've never been anyone's slaves," they answered. "How can you say that we'll be set free?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave doesn't have a permanent place in the family, but the son is part of the family forever. If the Son sets you free, then you're truly free. I know you're Abraham's descendants, yet you're trying to kill me because you refuse to accept my words. I'm telling you what the Father has revealed to me, while you do what your father told you."

"Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you really were children of Abraham, you'd do what Abraham did," Jesus told them. "But you are trying to kill me now, because I told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham would never have done that. You're doing what your father does."

"Well *we* are not illegitimate," they responded. "God alone is our father!"

Jesus replied, "If God really was your father, you would love me. I came from God and now I am here. The decision to come wasn't mine, but the one who sent me. Why can't you understand what I'm saying? It's because you refuse to hear my message! Your father is the devil, and you love to follow your father's evil desires. He was a murderer from the beginning. He never stood for the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies he reveals his true character, for he's a liar and the father of lies. So because I tell you the truth, you don't believe me! Can any one of you prove that I'm guilty of sin? If I'm telling you the truth, why don't you believe me? Anyone who belongs to God listens to what God says. The reason you don't listen is because you don't belong to God."

"Aren't we right to call you a Samaritan who is demon-possessed?" said the Jews.

"No, I don't have a demon," Jesus replied. "I honor my Father, but you dishonor me. I'm not here looking to glorify myself. But there is one who does this for me and who judges in my favor. I tell you the truth, anyone who follows my teaching will never die."

"Now we know you're demon-possessed," said the Jews. "Abraham died, and the prophets did too, and you're telling us 'anyone who follows my teaching will never die'! Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and the prophets died. Who do you think you are?"

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. But it is God himself who glorifies me, the one you claim, 'He is our God.' You don't know him, but I know him. If I were to say, 'I don't know him,' I'd be a liar, just like you. But I do know him, and I do what he says. Your father Abraham was delighted as he looked forward to see my coming, and was so happy when he saw it."

The Jews replied, "You're not even fifty years old, and you've seen Abraham?"

"I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am," said Jesus.

At this they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus was hidden from them and he left the Temple.

As Jesus was passing by, he saw a man born blind. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Was it him who sinned, or was it his parents?"

Jesus replied, "It wasn't because of the sins of the man or his parents. But so that what God can do may be shown in his life, we have to keep on doing the work of the one who sent me as long as it is still daytime. The night is coming when no one can work. While I'm here in the world I am the light of the world."

After he'd said this, Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud with the saliva which he put on the man's eyes. Then Jesus told him, "Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam" (which means "sent"). So the man went and washed, and when he went home he could see.

His neighbors and those who had known him as a beggar, asked, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said he was, while others said "no, it's just someone who looks like him." But the man kept saying, "It *is* me!"

"So how is it you can see?" they asked him.

He replied, "A man called Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes and told me, 'Go and wash yourself in the Pool of Siloam.' So I went and washed, and now I can see."

"Where is he?" they asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

They took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees. Now it was the Sabbath when Jesus had made the mud and opened the blind man's eyes. So the Pharisees

also asked him how he could see. He told them, “He put mud on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.”

Some of the Pharisees said, “The man who did this can't be from God because he doesn't keep the Sabbath.” But others wondered, “How could a sinner do such miracles?” So they were divided in their opinion.

So they went on questioning the man. “What's your opinion about him, then, since it's your eyes he opened,” they asked.

“He's surely a prophet,” the man replied.

The Jewish leaders still refused to believe that the man who had been blind could now see until they had called in the man's parents.

They asked them, “Is this your son whom you say was born blind? So how is it that now he can see?”

His parents answered, “We know this is our son who was born blind. But we've no idea how he can see now, or who healed him. Why don't you ask him, he's old enough. He can speak for himself.” The reason his parents said this was because they were afraid of what the Jewish leaders would do. The Jewish leaders had already announced that anyone who declared that Jesus was the Messiah would be thrown out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, “Ask him, he's old enough.”

Once more they called in the man who had been blind, and told him, “Give God the glory! We know this man is a sinner.”

The man replied, “Whether he's a sinner or not, I don't know. All I know is that I was blind and now I can see.”

Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?”

The man replied, “I already told you. Weren't you listening? Why do you want to hear it again? You don't want to become his disciples too, do you?”

They shouted abuse at him, and said, “You're that man's disciple. We're disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this person, we don't even know where he comes from.”

The man answered, “That's incredible! You don't know where he comes from but he opened my eyes. We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he does listen to anyone who worships him and does what he wants. Never before in the whole of history has anyone heard of a man born blind being healed. If this man weren't from God, he could do nothing.”

“You were born totally sinful, and yet you're trying to lecture us,” they replied. And they threw him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, he went and found the man, and asked him, “Do you trust in the Son of man?”

The man replied, “Tell me who he is, sir, so I can put my trust in him.”

“You've already seen him. He's the one speaking with you now!” Jesus told him.

“I trust you, Lord!” he said, and he kneeled in worship before Jesus.

Then Jesus told him, “I've come into the world to bring judgment so that those who are blind may see, and those who see will become blind.”

Some Pharisees who were there with Jesus asked him, “We're not blind too, are we?”

Jesus answered, “If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty. But now that you say you see, your guilt remains.”

“I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn't come in through the gate of the sheepfold but climbs in some other way is a thief and a robber. The one who comes in through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him, and the sheep respond to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. After bringing them out, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They won't follow strangers. In fact they run away from a stranger because they don't recognize the voice of strangers.”

When Jesus gave this illustration those who were listening to him didn't understand what he meant. So Jesus explained again, “I tell you the truth: I am the gate of the sheep. All those who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep didn't listen to them. I am the gate. Anyone who comes in through me will be healed. They will be able to come and go, and find the food they need. The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I've come to bring you life, life full to overflowing. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The man paid to look after the sheep is not the shepherd and he runs away when he sees the wolf coming. He abandons the sheep because they're not his, and the wolf attacks and scatters the flock for the man is only working for pay and doesn't care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd. I know who are mine, and they know me, just as the Father knows me and I know him. I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock with one shepherd.

This is why the Father loves me, because I lay down my life so I may take it up again. No one takes it from me; I choose to lay it down. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it back. This is the command my Father gave me.”

The Jews were again divided in their opinion about Jesus over these words. Many of them said, “He's demon-possessed! He's mad! Why are you listening to him?” Others said, “These aren't the words of someone who's demon-possessed. Besides, a demon can't open eyes that are blind.”

It was winter, and the time of the Festival of Dedication in Jerusalem. Jesus was walking in the Temple through Solomon's Porch. The Jews surrounded him, asking, “How long are you going to keep us hanging in suspense? If you are the Messiah then tell us plainly!”

Jesus replied, “I already told you but you refuse to believe it. The miracles I do in my Father's name prove who I am. You don't believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep recognize my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life; they shall never be lost, and no one can snatch them from me. My Father who gave them to me is greater than anyone else; no one can snatch them from him. I and the Father are one.”

Once again the Jews picked up stones to stone him.

Jesus said to them, “You've seen many good deeds that I've done from the Father. Which one are you stoning me for?”

The Jews replied, “We're not stoning you for a good deed, but for blasphemy because you are just a man but you're claiming to be God.”

Jesus answered them, “Isn't it written in your law, ‘I said, you are gods’? He called those people ‘gods,’ the people to whom the word of God came—and Scripture can't be altered. So why are you saying the one whom the Father set apart and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said ‘I am the Son of God’? If I'm not doing what my Father does, then don't believe me. But if that is what I'm doing, even though you don't believe me, you should believe because of the evidence of what I've done. That way you can know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.”

Once again they tried to arrest him, but he escaped from them. He went back across the Jordan River to the place where John had begun baptizing, and he stayed there. Many people came to him, and they said, “John didn't perform miracles, but everything he said about this man has come true.” Many who were there put their trust in Jesus.

A man named Lazarus was sick. He lived in Bethany with his sisters Mary and Martha. Mary was the one who had anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair. It was her brother Lazarus who was sick. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus: “Lord, your close friend is sick.” When Jesus heard the news he said, “The end result of this sickness will not be death. Through this God's glory will be revealed so that the Son of God may be glorified.”

Even though Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, and had heard that Lazarus was sick, he remained where he was for two more days. Then he told the disciples, “Let's return to Judea.”

The disciples replied, “Rabbi, just a few days ago the Jews were trying to stone you. Do you really want to go back there now?”

“Aren't there twelve hours in a day?” Jesus replied. “If you walk during the day you don't stumble because you can see where you're going by the light of this world. But if you walk during the night you stumble because you have no light.” After telling them this, he said, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going to go there and wake him up!”

The disciples said, “Lord, if he's sleeping then he'll get better.”

Jesus had been referring to the death of Lazarus, but the disciples thought he meant actual sleep. So Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. For your sake I'm glad I wasn't there, because now you will be able to trust in me. Let's go and see him.”

Thomas, the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, “Let's go too so we can die with him.”

When he arrived, Jesus learned that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was just two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to console Mary and Martha at the loss of their brother. When Martha found out that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died. But I'm certain that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

Jesus told her, “Your brother will rise again.”

“I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day,” Martha answered.

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who trust in me will live, even though they die. All who live in me and trust in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one expected to come to this world.”

When she had said this, she went and told her sister Mary in private, “The Teacher's here, and asking to see you.”

As soon as she heard, Mary quickly got up and went to see him. Jesus hadn't arrived in the village yet. He was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who had been comforting Mary in the home saw how she'd got up quickly and left. So they followed her, thinking she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary arrived at the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you'd been here, my brother wouldn't have died.”

When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying as well, he was very troubled and upset. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

They replied, “Lord, come and see.”

Then Jesus cried too. “See how much he loved him,” the Jews said.

But some of them said, “If he could open the eyes of a blind man, couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?”

Very troubled, Jesus went to the tomb. It was a cave with a large stone placed at the entrance.

“Remove the stone,” Jesus told them.

But Martha, the dead man's sister, said, “Lord, by now there will be a terrible smell, for he's been dead for four days.”

“Didn't I tell you that if you trusted me you would see God's glory?” Jesus replied.

So they removed the stone. Jesus looked heavenwards, and said, “Father, thank you for listening to me. I know you always listen to me. I said this because of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.”

After saying this, Jesus shouted, “Lazarus, come out!”

The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of linen, and with a cloth around his face.

“Unbind him and set him free,” Jesus told them.

Consequently many of the Jews who had come to comfort Mary and who saw what Jesus did put their trust in him. But others went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the ruling council. “What shall we do?” they asked. “This man is doing many miracles. If we allow him to continue, everybody will believe in him, and then the Romans will destroy both the Temple and our status as a nation.”

“You don't understand anything!” said Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. “Can't you see that it's

better for you that one man die for the people so that the whole nation won't be destroyed?" He didn't say this on his own behalf, but as chief priest that year he was prophesying that Jesus would die for the nation. And this was not just for the Jewish nation, but for all the scattered children of God so that they might be gathered together and be made into one.

From that time on they made plans as to how they might kill Jesus. So Jesus did not travel openly among the Jews but went to a town called Ephraim in the region near the desert and stayed there with his disciples.

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover, and many people went from the countryside to Jerusalem to purify themselves for the Passover. People were looking for Jesus and talking about him as they stood in the Temple. "What do you think?" they asked each other. "Isn't he coming to the festival?" The chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who knew where Jesus was should report it so they could arrest him.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus went to Bethany, to the home of Lazarus who had been raised from the dead. There a dinner was arranged in his honor. Martha helped serve the food while Lazarus sat at the table with Jesus and the other guests. Mary brought a pint of pure nard perfume and anointed Jesus' feet, wiping them dry with her hair. The scent of the perfume filled the whole house.

But one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, who would later betray Jesus, asked, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth three hundred *denarii*."

He wasn't saying this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He was the one who looked after the disciples' money and he often took some for himself.

"Don't criticize her," Jesus replied. "She did this in preparation for the day of my burial. You'll always have the poor with you, but you won't always have me here."

A large crowd of Jews had found out that he was there. They came there not just to see Jesus but because they wanted to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. So the chief priests planned to kill Lazarus as well, since it was because of him that many people were no longer following the Jewish leaders but putting their trust in Jesus.

The following day the crowds of people who had come for the Passover festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They cut off palm branches and went to welcome him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one coming in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the king of Israel."

Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, as Scripture says: "Don't be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, riding a donkey's colt." At the time, Jesus' disciples did not understand what these things meant. It was only later when he was glorified that they realized what had happened had been prophesied and applied to him.

Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb and raise him from the dead, and were telling the story. That was the reason so many people went to meet Jesus—because they had heard about this miracle.

The Pharisees said to one another, "Look, we're getting nowhere. Everyone's running after him."

Now some Greeks had come to the festival to worship. They came to Philip of Bethsaida in Galilee, and said, "Sir, we'd like to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew. Then they both went to Jesus and told him.

Jesus responded, "The time has come for the Son of man to be glorified. I tell you the truth: unless a grain of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains just one grain. But if it dies, it produces many more grains of wheat. If you love your own life you will lose it, but if you don't love your own life in this world you will keep your life forever. If you want to serve me you need to follow me. My servants will be where I am, and my Father will honor anyone who serves me.

Now I am troubled. What should I say? 'Father, save me from this coming time of suffering?' No, for this is why I came—to go through this time of suffering. Father, show the glory of your character."

A voice came from heaven, saying, "I have shown its glory, and I will show it again." The crowd that was standing there heard it. Some said it thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus told them, "This voice spoke not for my sake, but for yours. Now is the judgment of this world; now the prince of this world will be thrown out. But when I am lifted up from the earth I will attract everyone to me." (He said this to point out the kind of death he was going to die.)

The crowd responded, "The Law tells us that the Messiah will live forever, so how can you say the Son of man must be 'lifted up'? Who is this 'Son of man'?"

Jesus replied, "The light is here with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light so that the darkness doesn't overtake you. Those who walk in the dark don't know where they're going. Put your trust in the light while you still have it so that you can become children of light." When Jesus had told them this, he left and hid himself from them.

But despite all the miracles he had done in their presence, they still did not trust in Jesus. This fulfilled the message of Isaiah the prophet, who said, "Lord, who has believed what we told them? To whom has the Lord's power been revealed?"

They were not able to trust him, and as a result they fulfilled what Isaiah also said: "He blinded their eyes, and made their minds dull, so that their eyes would not see, and their minds would not think, and they would not turn to me—for if they did I would heal them." Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and said this in reference to him.

Even so many of the leaders did trust in him. However, they did not openly admit it because they did not want the Pharisees to expel them from the synagogue, loving human admiration more than God's approval.

Jesus called out, "If you trust in me you're not just trusting in me but also in the one who sent me. When you see me, you're seeing the one who sent me. I have come as a light shining into the world, so if you trust in me you won't remain in the dark. I don't judge anyone who hears my words but doesn't do what I say. I came to save the world, not to judge it. Anyone who rejects me

and does not accept my words will be judged at the end-time judgment in accordance with what I have said. For I'm not speaking for myself but for my Father who sent me. He is the one who instructed me what to say and how to say it. I know that what he told me to say brings eternal life—so whatever I say is what the Father told me."

It was the day before the Passover festival, and Jesus knew that the time had come to leave this world and go to his Father. He had loved those in the world who were his own, and he now demonstrated his complete love for them. It was during supper, and the devil had already put the thought of betraying Jesus into the mind of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. Jesus knew that the Father had placed everything under his authority, and that he had come from God and was going back to God. So Jesus stood up from eating supper, took off his robe and wrapped a towel around his waist. He poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who asked him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You won't realize what I'm doing for you now. But one day you'll understand."

"No!" Peter protested. "You'll never wash my feet!"

Jesus replied, "If I don't wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord, wash not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Simon Peter exclaimed.

Jesus responded, "Those who have had a bath only need to wash their feet and then they're clean all over. You are clean—but not all of you." For he knew who was betraying him. That's why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After Jesus had washed their feet, he put his robe back on, and sat down. "Do you understand what I've done to you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that's who I am. So if I, your Teacher and Lord, washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have set you an example, so you should do just as I did. I tell you the truth, servants are not more important than their master, and the one sent is not greater than the sender. Now that you understand these things, you will be blessed if you do them. I'm not talking about all of you—I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill Scripture: 'The one who shares my food has turned against me.' I'm telling you this now, before it happens, so when it does happen you will be convinced that I am who I am. I tell you the truth, whoever welcomes anyone I send welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me."

After he had said this, Jesus was deeply troubled, and declared: "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." The disciples looked at each other, wondering which of them Jesus was talking about. The disciple whom Jesus loved was sitting next to Jesus at the table, leaning close to him. Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus which one he was talking about. So he leaned over to Jesus and asked, "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus replied, "It's the one to whom I will give a piece of bread after I have dipped it." After dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. Once Judas had taken the bread, Satan entered him. "What you're going to do, do it quickly," Jesus told him.

No one at the table understood what Jesus meant by this. Since Judas was in charge of the money, some of them thought that Jesus was telling him to go and buy what was needed for the Passover festival, or to donate something to the poor. Judas left immediately after he'd taken the piece of bread, and went out into the night.

After he'd left, Jesus said, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and through him God is glorified. If God is glorified through him, then God will glorify the Son himself, and will glorify him immediately. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, but I'm telling you now just as I told the Jews: you cannot come where I'm going.

I am giving you a new command: Love one another. Love one another in the same way I have loved you. If you love one another you will prove to everyone that you are my disciples."

Simon Peter asked him, "Where are you going, Lord?"

Jesus answered, "You can't follow me now where I'm going. You will follow me later."

"Lord, why can't I follow you now?" Peter asked. "I'll lay down my life for you."

"Are you really ready to die for me? I tell you the truth: before the cock crows you will deny me three times," Jesus replied.

"Don't be anxious. Trust in God, trust in me as well. In my Father's house there are many rooms. If this wasn't so I would have told you. I'm going to prepare a place for you. Once I've gone and prepared a place for you, I will come again and take you back with me, so that you can be there with me too. You know the way to where I'm going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus replied, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and you have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we'll be convinced."

Jesus replied, "Have I been with you such a long time, Philip, and yet you still don't know me? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I live in the Father and the Father lives in me? The words I speak are not mine; it's the Father living in me who is doing his work. Believe me when I tell you that I live in the Father, and the Father lives in me, or at least believe because of the evidence provided by all that I've done.

I tell you the truth, anyone who trusts in me will do the same things I am doing. In fact they will do even greater things because I am going to the Father. I'll do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified through the Son. Whatever you ask for in my name, I will do it.

If you love me, you will keep my commands. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, the Spirit of truth, who will always be with you. The world cannot accept him because it isn't looking for him

and doesn't know him. But you know him because he lives with you and will be in you.

I will not abandon you like orphans: I will come back to you. Soon the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I live in the Father, you live in me, and I live in you. Those who keep my commands are the ones who love me, those who love me will be loved by my Father. I will love them too, and will reveal myself to them."

Judas (not Iscariot) responded, "Lord, why would you reveal yourself to us and not to the world?"

Jesus replied, "Those who love me will do as I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with them. Those who don't love me don't do what I say. These words don't come from me, they come from the Father who sent me.

I'm explaining this to you while I'm still here with you. But when the Father sends the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, in my place, he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I'm giving you. The peace I give you is nothing like what the world gives. Don't be anxious, and don't be afraid.

You've heard me tell you, 'I am going away, but I will come back to you.' If you really loved me, you would be happy because I'm going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I've explained this to you now before it happens so that when it does happen you will be convinced. I can't talk to you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no power to control me, but I'm doing what my Father told me to do so that the world will know that I love the Father. Now get up. Let's go."

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every one of my branches that doesn't bear fruit. He prunes every branch that bears fruit so it can bear even more. You are already pruned and made clean through what I've told you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it remains part of the vine, so it is for you: you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me. I'm the vine, you're the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce plenty of fruit—for apart from me you can't do anything. Anyone who doesn't remain in me is like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Such branches are gathered together, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, then you can ask for whatever you want, and it will be given you. My Father is glorified as you produce plenty of fruit, proving you are my disciples.

As the Father loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you do what I say, you will remain in my love, just as I do what my Father says and remain in his love. I've explained this to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

This is my command: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than to give your life for your friends. You're my friends if you do what I tell you. I don't call you servants any longer, for servants are not taken into their master's confidence. I call you friends, for everything my Father told me I've explained to you. You didn't choose me, I chose you. I have given you the responsibility to go and produce lasting fruit. So the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command to you: love one another.

If the world hates you, remember that it hated me before it hated you. If you were part of this world, it would love you as its own. But you're not part of the world, and I chose you out of the world—that's why the world hates you.

Remember what I told you: servants aren't more important than their master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too. If they did what I told them, they would do what you tell them too. But everything they do to you will be because of me, for they don't know the one who sent me. If I hadn't come and spoken to them, they wouldn't be guilty of sin—but now they have no excuse for their sin. Anyone who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not given them such a demonstration through things that no one had ever done before, they wouldn't be guilty of sin, but despite seeing all this they hated both me and my Father. But this just fulfilled what Scripture says, 'They hated me for no reason at all.'

But I will send you the Comforter from the Father. When he comes, he will give evidence about me. He is the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father. You will also give evidence about me because you were with me from the beginning."

"I've told you this so you won't give up your trust in me. They will expel you from the synagogues—in fact the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing God a service. They'll do this because they have never known the Father or me. I've told you this so that when these things happen, you'll remember what I told you. I didn't need to tell you this right at the beginning because I was going to be with you. But now I'm going to the one who sent me, and yet not one of you is asking me, 'Where are you going?' Of course, now that I've told you, you're full of grief.

But I'm telling you the truth: it's better for you that I go away, for if I don't the Comforter won't come to you. If I go away, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convince those in the world that they have wrong ideas regarding sin, about what is right, and about judgment: Sin, for they don't trust in me. What is right, for I'm going to the Father and you won't see me any longer. Judgment, for the ruler of this world has been condemned.

There's much more I want to explain to you, but you couldn't stand it now. However, when the Spirit of truth comes, he will teach you the whole truth. He doesn't speak for himself, but he only says what he hears, and he will tell you what's going to happen. He brings me glory for he teaches you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine. This is why I said that the Spirit teaches you whatever he receives from me. In a little while you won't see me anymore, but then a little while after that you will see me."

Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean, 'In a little while you won't see me, but a little while after that you will see me'? and 'For I'm going to the Father'?" They were asking, "What does he

mean by 'in a little while'? We don't know what he's talking about."

Jesus realized that they wanted to ask him about this. So he asked them, "Are you wondering about my comment, 'In a little while you won't see me, but a little while after that you will see me'? I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will grieve, but your grief will turn into joy. A woman in labor suffers pain because her time has come, but once the baby is born, she forgets the agony because of the joy that a child has been brought into the world. Yes, you're grieving now, but I will see you again; and you will rejoice, and no one can take away your joy.

When that time comes you won't need to ask me about anything. I tell you the truth, the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you haven't asked for anything in my name, so ask and you shall receive, and your happiness will be complete. I've been talking to you using picture language. But shortly I won't use such picture language any more when I speak to you. Instead I'll explain the Father to you very plainly.

At that time you will ask in my name. I'm not saying to you that I will plead with the Father on your behalf, for the Father himself loves you—because you love me and believe that I came from God. I left the Father and came into the world; now I leave the world and return to my Father."

Then the disciples said, "Now you're talking very plainly and not using picture language. Now we're certain that you know everything, and that in order to know what questions people are thinking you don't need to ask them. This convinces us that you came from God."

"Are you really convinced now?" Jesus asked. "The time is coming—in fact it's just about to happen—when you will be scattered, each of you to your own homes, leaving me all alone. But I'm not really alone, for the Father is with me. I've told you all this so that you may have peace because you are one with me. You will suffer in this world, but be brave—I have defeated the world!"

When Jesus finished saying this he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you. For you gave him authority over all people so that he might give eternal life to all those you have given to him. Eternal life is this: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. I have brought glory to you here on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. Now Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the beginning of the world.

I have revealed your character to those you gave me out of the world. They belonged to you; you gave them to me; and they have done what you said. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. I have given them the message that you gave me. They accepted it, completely convinced that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I'm praying for them—not for the world, but for those you gave me, for they belong to you. All who belong to me are yours, and those who belong to you are mine, and I have been glorified through them.

I am leaving the world, but they will remain in the world; I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name, the name that you gave to me, so that they may be one, just as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you gave to me. I watched over them so that no one was lost except the 'son of the lost,' so Scripture was fulfilled.

Now I'm coming to you, and I say these things while I am still here in the world so they may share completely in my joy. I gave them your message, and the world hated them because they are not of the world, just as I'm not of the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but for you to protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I'm not of the world. Make them holy by the truth; your word is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. I dedicate myself for them so that they may also be truly holy.

I'm not only praying for them, I'm also praying for those who trust in me because of their message. I pray that they all may be one, just as you, Father, live in me, and I live in you, so that they too may live in us so that the world will believe you did send me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, so that they may be one, just as we are one. I live in them, and you live in me. May they be completely one, so the whole world will know that you did send me, and that you love them, just as you love me.

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so they can see the glory which you gave to me—for you loved me before the world was created. Good Father, the world does not know you, but I know you, and these here with me know that you sent me. I have revealed your character to them and will continue to make it known, so that the love you have for me will be in them, and I will live in them."

After Jesus had finished speaking, he and his disciples crossed over the Kidron brook and went into an olive grove. Judas the betrayer knew the place, for Jesus had often gone there with his disciples. So Judas took with him a troop of soldiers together with guards from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They arrived there carrying torches, lanterns, and weapons.

Jesus knew everything that was going to happen to him. He went to meet them, and asked, "Who are you looking for?"

"Are you Jesus of Nazareth?" they asked.

"I am," Jesus told them. Judas the betrayer was standing with them. When Jesus said "I am," they fell back and dropped to the ground.

So he asked them again, "Who are you looking for?"

"Are you Jesus of Nazareth?" they asked again.

"I already told you I am," Jesus replied. "So if I'm the one you're looking for, let these others go." These words fulfilled what he had previously said: "I have not lost any of those you gave me."

Then Simon Peter drew a sword and struck Malchus, the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear.

Jesus told Peter, "Put the sword away! Do you think I shouldn't drink the cup the Father has given me?"

Then the soldiers, their commander, and the Jewish guards arrested Jesus and tied his hands. First they took him to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the current

high priest. Caiaphas was the one who had told the Jews, “It's better that one man die for the people.”

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and another disciple did so too. This disciple was well-known to the high priest, and so he entered the high priest's courtyard with Jesus. Peter had to remain outside by the door. So the other disciple who was known to the high priest went and spoke to the servant girl watching the door and brought Peter inside. The girl asked Peter, “Aren't you one of that man's disciples?”

“Me? No, I'm not,” he replied. It was cold, and the servants and guards were standing by a fire they had made, warming themselves. Peter went and stood with them, warming himself.

Then the chief priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and what he had been teaching. “I've spoken openly to everyone,” Jesus replied. “I always taught in the synagogues and in the Temple where all the Jewish people meet. I haven't said anything in secret. So why are you questioning me? Ask the people who heard me what I told them. They know what I said.”

When he said this, one of the guards standing nearby slapped Jesus, saying, “Is that any way to speak to the high priest?”

Jesus replied, “If I said something wrong, tell everyone what was wrong with it. But if what I said was right, why did you hit me?”

Annas sent him, his hands still tied, to Caiaphas the high priest.

As Simon Peter stood warming himself by the fire, the people there asked him, “Aren't you one of his disciples?”

Peter denied it and said, “No, I'm not.”

One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked Peter, “Didn't I see you in the olive grove with him?” Peter denied it again, and immediately a cock crowed.

Early in the morning they took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. The Jewish leaders didn't enter the palace because if they did they would become ceremonially unclean and they wanted to be able to eat the Passover meal.

So Pilate came out to meet them. “What charge are you bringing against this man?” he asked.

“If he wasn't a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you,” they answered.

“Then you take him and judge him according to your law,” Pilate told them.

“We're not permitted to execute anyone,” the Jews answered. This fulfilled what Jesus had said about how he would die.

Pilate went back into the governor's palace. He summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“Did you think of this question yourself, or did others talk to you about me?” Jesus responded.

“Am I a Jew?” Pilate countered. “It was your own people and high priests who handed you over to me. What is it that you've done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it was of this world, my subjects would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from here.”

Then Pilate asked, “So you are a king, then?”

“You say that I'm a king,” Jesus replied. “The reason why I was born and I came to the world was to give evidence for the truth. All those who accept the truth pay attention to what I say.”

“What is truth?” Pilate asked.

Having said this Pilate went back out to the Jews and told them, “I find him not guilty of any crime. However, it is customary for me to release a prisoner to you at Passover. Do you want me to release the king of the Jews?”

“No, not him! We want Barabbas instead!” they shouted back. Barabbas was a rebel.

Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. Soldiers made a crown of thorns and placed it on his head, and put a purple robe on him. Time and again they went up to him and said, “Hail, king of the Jews!” and slapped him.

Pilate went outside once more and said to them, “I'm bringing him out here to you so you'll know I find him not guilty of any crime.” Then Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. “Look, here's the man,” said Pilate.

When the chief priests and the guards saw Jesus, they shouted out, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

“You take him and crucify him,” Pilate answered. “I find him not guilty.”

The Jewish leaders replied, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

When Pilate heard this he was more afraid than ever, and he went back into the governor's palace. He asked Jesus, “Where do you come from?” But Jesus didn't respond.

“Are you refusing to talk to me?” Pilate said to him. “Don't you realize that I have the power to have you released or to crucify you?”

“You would have no power over me unless it had been given to you from above,” Jesus answered. “Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of the greater sin.”

Because of this statement Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders shouted, “If you set this man free you're not Caesar's friend. Anyone who sets himself up as a king is rebelling against Caesar.”

When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus outside and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called Stone Pavement (Gabbatha in Hebrew). It was around noon on the preparation day before the Passover.

“Look, here is your king,” he said to the Jews.

“Kill him! Kill him! Crucify him!” they screamed out.

“Do you want me to crucify your king?” Pilate asked.

“The only king we have is Caesar,” the chief priests replied.

So he handed Jesus over to them to be crucified.

They led Jesus away, who carried his own cross, and went out to the “Place of the Skull,” (Golgotha in Hebrew). They crucified him there, and two others with him: one on either side, with Jesus between them.

Pilate had a notice made and placed on the cross which said, “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” Many people read the notice because the place where

Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek.

Then the chief priests came to Pilate and asked him, "Don't write 'the king of the Jews,' but 'This man said I am the king of the Jews.'"

Pilate replied, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his clothes and divided them in four so that each soldier had his share. There was also his robe, made without seams, woven in one piece. So they said to each other, "Let's not tear it, but let's decide who will have it by rolling dice." This fulfilled the Scripture that says, "They divided my garments among them and rolled dice for my clothing." So that is what the soldiers did.

Standing near the cross were Jesus' mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Mother, this is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "This is your mother." From then on the disciple took her into his home.

Jesus now realized that he had finished all that he had come to do. In fulfillment of Scripture, he said, "I'm thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was standing there, so they soaked a sponge in the vinegar, put it on a hyssop stick, and held it to his lips. After he'd had the vinegar, Jesus said, "It's finished!" Then he bowed his head and breathed his last.

It was preparation day, and the Jewish leaders didn't want to leave the bodies on the crosses during the Sabbath day (in fact this was a special Sabbath), so they asked Pilate to break the legs, so that the bodies could be removed. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first one and then the other of those crucified with Jesus, but when they came to Jesus they saw he was already dead, so they didn't break his legs. However, one of the soldiers stuck a spear into his side, and blood mixed with water came out. The one who saw this has given this evidence, and his evidence is true. He's certain that what he says is true so you can believe it too. It happened like this so Scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and as another Scripture says, "They will look at the one they pierced."

After this Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate if he could take down the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave his permission. Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but in secret because he feared the Jews. So Joseph came and took the body away. He was joined by Nicodemus, the man who had first visited Jesus at night. He brought with him a mixture of myrrh and aloes weighing about seventy-five pounds. They took Jesus' body and wrapped it in linen cloth together with the mixture of spices, in accordance with Jewish burial customs. There was a garden near where Jesus was crucified; and in the garden was a new, unused tomb. Since it was the Jewish day of preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus to rest there.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been moved from the entrance. So she ran to tell Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, "They've taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they've put him." Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. The two of them were running together, but the other disciple ran faster and reached the tomb first. He bent down, and looking in he saw the grave-clothes lying there, but he didn't go in.

Then Simon Peter arrived after him and went right into the tomb. He saw the linen grave-clothes lying there, and that the cloth that had been on Jesus' head wasn't with the other grave-clothes but had been folded and placed on its own.

Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first went inside as well. He looked around and believed it was true—for up till then they hadn't understood the Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

But Mary stayed outside the tomb crying. As she was crying, she bent down and looked into the tomb. She saw two angels in white, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of where Jesus' body had been lying.

"Why are you crying?" they asked her.

She answered, "Because they've taken my Lord away, and I don't know where they've put him." After she'd said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she didn't realize it was Jesus.

"Why are you crying?" he asked her. "Who are you looking for?"

Assuming he was the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you've taken him away, tell me where you've put him so I can go and get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned to him and said, "Rabboni," which means "Teacher" in Hebrew.

"Don't hold onto me," Jesus said to her, "for I haven't yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." So Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples, "I've seen the Lord," and she explained to them what he had said to her.

That evening, on the first day of the week, as the disciples were meeting together behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "May you have peace." After this greeting he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were full of joy to see the Lord.

"May you have peace!" Jesus told them again. "In the same way the Father sent me, so I'm sending you." Saying this, he breathed on them, and told them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven; if you hold them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain."

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas, who was called the Twin, wasn't with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We've seen the Lord."

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger in them, and put my hand in his side."

One week later the disciples were together inside the house; and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, and Jesus came and stood among them.

"May you have peace!" he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand in the wound on my side. Stop doubting and trust in me!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas responded.

"You trust in me because you've seen me," Jesus told him. "Happy are those that haven't seen me yet still trust in me."

Jesus did many other miraculous signs while he was with his disciples that are not recorded in this book. But these are written down here so that you may trust that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by trusting in him as he is you will have life.

Later Jesus appeared again to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee. This is how it happened. Simon Peter, Thomas the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and Zebedee's sons, and two other disciples were together.

"I'm going fishing," Simon Peter said to them. "We'll come with you," they replied. So they left and went out in the boat, but all night they caught nothing.

When dawn came Jesus was standing on the shore, but the disciples didn't know it was him. Jesus called to them, "My friends, haven't you caught anything?"

"No," they replied.

"Throw the net out on the right side of the boat, and you'll find some," he told them. So they threw out the net, and they weren't able to haul it in because it had so many fish. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, "It's the Lord." When Peter heard it was the Lord, he put some clothes on because he was undressed, and jumped into the sea. The other disciples followed in the boat, pulling the net full of fish, because they were not far from the shore, only about a hundred yards. Once they'd landed they saw a fire with fish cooking on it, and some bread.

Jesus told them, "Bring some of the fish you've just caught." Simon Peter went aboard and pulled the net full of fish ashore. There were 153 large fish, yet even so the net hadn't torn.

"Come and eat some breakfast," Jesus said to them. None of the disciples was brave enough to ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. Jesus took the bread and gave it to them and the fish as well. This was the third time Jesus had appeared to the disciples after being raised from the dead.

After breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he replied, "you know I love you."

"Take care of my lambs," Jesus told him.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" he asked for the second time.

"Yes, Lord," he answered, "you know I love you."

"Look after my sheep," Jesus said to him.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me?" he asked a third time.

Peter was hurt that Jesus had asked him for the third time if he loved him. "Lord, you know everything. You know I love you," Peter told him.

"Take care of my sheep," said Jesus.

"I tell you the truth," said Jesus, "when you were young, you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted. But when you're old, you'll hold out your hands and someone will dress you and take you where you don't want to go." Jesus said this to explain the kind of death by which he would glorify God. Then he said to Peter, "Follow me."

As Peter turned round, he saw the disciple Jesus loved following them, the one who had leaned over to Jesus during the supper and asked, "Lord, who is going to betray you?"

Peter asked Jesus, "What about him, Lord?"

Jesus told him, "If I want him to remain alive here until I return, why is that your concern? You follow me!"

This is why the saying spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus didn't say to him that he wouldn't die, just that "If I want him to remain alive here until I return, why is that your concern?"

This disciple confirms what happened and wrote all this down. We know that what he says is true. Jesus did many other things as well, and if it all was written down, I doubt the whole world could hold all the books that would be written.

Acts

Acts of the Apostles

Dear Theophilus, in my previous book I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day he was taken up to heaven. This was after he'd given instructions through the Holy Spirit to his chosen apostles. Over the course of forty days after the death he suffered, he showed himself to them, proving that he was alive with convincing evidence. He appeared to them, and told them about the kingdom of God. While he was still with them he instructed them, "Do not leave Jerusalem. Wait to receive what the Father promised, just as you heard it from me. It's true that John baptized in water, but in just a few days' time you will be baptized in the Holy Spirit."

So when the disciples met with Jesus, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will re-establish Israel's kingdom?"

"You don't need to know about the dates and times that are set by the Father's authority," he told them. "But you will be given power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest places on earth."

After Jesus had told them this, he was taken up as they were watching and a cloud hid him from their sight. While they were staring intently at the sky as he ascended, two men dressed in white were suddenly standing beside them. "Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky?" they asked. "This same Jesus who has been taken up from you to heaven shall come in the same way you saw him go into heaven."

Then the disciples went back to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives which is about a Sabbath day's walk from Jerusalem. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the upper room where they were staying: Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. They all joined together in prayer, together with the women and Mary, Jesus' mother, and his brothers.

At this time Peter stood up and addressed a crowd of around one hundred and twenty believers who had gathered together.

"My brothers and sisters," he said, "The Scriptures, spoken by the Holy Spirit through David, had to be fulfilled regarding Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. He was counted as one of us, and shared in this ministry."

(Judas had bought a field with his ill-gotten gains. There he fell down headfirst, and his body burst apart, spilling out all his intestines. Everybody who lived in Jerusalem heard about this so that the field was called in their language "Akeldama," which means, "Field of blood.") As it's written in the book of Psalms, "Let his home be abandoned, and no one live there," and "Let someone else take over his position."

"So now we have to choose someone who has been with us the whole time that Jesus was with us, from the time John was baptizing up until the day Jesus was taken up to heaven from us. One of these must be chosen to join together with us as we witness, giving evidence of Jesus' resurrection." Two names were put forward: Joseph Justus, also known as Barsabbas, and Matthias. They prayed together and said, "Lord, you know everyone's thoughts. Please show us which of these two you have chosen to replace Judas as an apostle in this ministry that he gave up to go to where he belongs." They cast lots, and Matthias was chosen. He was counted as an apostle with the other eleven.

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all meeting together in one place. Suddenly a noise came from heaven like a roaring wind that filled the whole house where they were staying. They saw what looked like separate tongue-shaped flames that settled on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages as the Spirit gave them the ability to do so.

At that time there were devout Jews from every nation on earth living in Jerusalem. When they heard this noise, a large crowd of them gathered. They were puzzled because everyone heard their own language being spoken. They were totally amazed, saying, "Look, these people who are speaking—aren't they all Galileans? So how is it that we can all hear them speaking in our own mother tongue? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia; from Egypt and the area of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them speaking in our own languages about all the great things God has done."

They were all amazed and confused. "What does this mean?" they asked each other. But others jeered and said, "They've been drinking too much wine!"

Then Peter stood up with the eleven disciples and spoke in a loud voice: "Fellow Jews and everyone living here in Jerusalem: pay attention to me and I'll explain all this to you! These men aren't drunk as you presume. It's only nine in the morning! What's happening is what was predicted by the prophet Joel: God says, 'In the last days I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams. I will pour out my Spirit on my servants, both male and female, and they will prophesy. I will also give you miraculous signs in the heavens above and on the earth below—blood, fire, and swirling smoke! The sun will become dark, and the moon will become red like blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord. But whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

People of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man confirmed by God to you by the powerful miracles and signs that God performed through him, right here among you—as you well know. God, knowing beforehand what would happen, followed his plan and resolved to hand him over to you. By means of the hands of wicked men, you killed him by nailing him to a cross. But God raised him back to life, freeing him

from the burden of death, because death did not have the power to keep him a prisoner.

David says of him, ‘I saw the Lord always in front of me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. That's why I'm so happy! That's why my words are full of joy! That's why my body lives in hope! For you will not abandon me in the grave, nor will you allow your Holy One to experience decay. You have revealed to me the ways of life. You will fill me with joy with your presence.’

My brothers and sisters, let me tell you plainly that our ancestor David died and was buried, and his tomb is here with us to this day. But he was a prophet, and knew that God had promised on oath to place one of his descendants on his throne. David saw what would happen and spoke about the resurrection of Christ—for Christ was not abandoned to the grave nor did he experience decay.

God has raised this Jesus from the dead, and we're all witnesses of that. Now he's been exalted to God's right hand, and has received from the Father the Holy Spirit whom he promised, and has poured out what you're seeing and hearing. For David didn't ascend into heaven, but he did say: The Lord told my Lord, ‘Sit down here at my right hand until I have made your enemies a stool to put your feet on.’ Now let everyone in Israel be totally convinced of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you killed on a cross, both Lord and Messiah!”

When the people heard this they were conscience-stricken. They asked Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

“Repent!” Peter told them. “All of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is given to you, to your children, and to all who are far away—everyone the Lord our God calls.”

Peter went on speaking, giving them much more evidence. He warned them, “Save yourselves from this perverted generation.” Those who accepted what he'd said were baptized, adding about three thousand people to the group of believers that day.

They committed themselves to what the apostles had taught them, and to the fellowship of the believers, “breaking bread” and praying together. Everyone was in awe, and many miracles and signs were done through the apostles. All the believers were together and shared everything they had. They sold their property and belongings, sharing the proceeds with everyone as they needed. Day after day they continued to meet together in the Temple, and ate together in their homes. They enjoyed their meals humbly and happily. They praised God, and everyone thought favorably of them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Peter and John were on their way up to the Temple at the time of the afternoon prayer, around 3 p.m. A man who had been lame from birth was being carried there. Every day he was placed beside the Temple gate called “Beautiful” so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. He saw Peter and John as they were about to enter the Temple and asked them for some money. Peter looked right at him. John did, too.

“Look at us!” Peter said. The lame man gave them his full attention, expecting to get something from them. “I don't have any silver or gold,” Peter told him, “but I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!”

Peter took him by the right hand and helped him up. Right away his feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet, and then began to walk. He went with them into the Temple, walking and jumping and praising God. Everyone there saw him walking around and praising God. They recognized him as the beggar who used to sit by the Temple's Beautiful Gate, and they were surprised and amazed at what had happened to him. He held on tightly to Peter and John while everyone ran to them by Solomon's Porch in complete astonishment at what had happened.

When Peter saw this opportunity he told them, “People of Israel, why are you surprised at what's happened to this man? Why are you staring at us as if it was by our own power or faith that we made him walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our forefathers—has glorified his servant Jesus. He was the one you betrayed and rejected in the presence of Pilate, even after Pilate had decided to release him. You rejected the one who is holy and good, and demanded a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, the one God raised from the dead—and we are witnesses to this. By trusting in Jesus' name this man was healed by him. You see this man here; you know him. Through trusting in Jesus this man has received complete healing right in front of all of you.

Now I know, brothers and sisters, that you did this in ignorance, like your rulers. But God fulfilled what he had prophesied through all the prophets: that his Messiah would suffer. Now repent, and change your ways, that your sins can be wiped away, so the Lord can send opportunities for you to heal and recover, and send Jesus, the Messiah appointed for you. For he must stay in heaven until the time when everything is restored, as God announced through his holy prophets long ago.

Moses said, ‘The Lord God will send you a prophet from among your own people who is like me. You must listen to everything he tells you. Anybody who doesn't listen to him will be totally removed from the people.’ All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel on, prophesied about these days. You are the sons of the prophets, and of the agreement which God made with your fathers when he said to Abraham, ‘From your descendants all the families of the earth will be blessed.’ God prepared his Servant and sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your evil ways.”

While they were talking to the people, the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and the Sadducees came up to them. They were angry that they were teaching the people, telling them that through Jesus there is resurrection from the dead. They arrested them and placed them under guard until the following day since it was already evening. But many who had heard the message believed it, and the total number of believers grew to about five thousand.

The next day, the rulers, elders, and religious leaders met together in Jerusalem. They included the high

priest Annas, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest's family. They brought Peter and John before them and asked, “By what power or by whose authority have you done this?”

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered them. “Rulers of the people, and elders: Are we being interrogated regarding a good deed done to a man who couldn't help himself, and how he came to be healed? If so, all of you should know, and all the people of Israel, that it was in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the one you killed on a cross and whom God raised from the dead—it's because of him that this man stands before you completely healed. ‘He is the stone you builders rejected, but he has been made the chief cornerstone.’ There is no salvation in anyone else; there is no other name under heaven given to humanity that can possibly save us.”

When they saw Peter and John's confidence, and realized they were uneducated, ordinary men, they were very surprised. They also recognized them as Jesus' companions. Since they could see the man who had been healed standing right there with them, they had nothing to say in response to what had happened.

So they instructed them to wait outside the council while they discussed the matter among themselves. “What should we do with these men?” they asked. “We can't deny a significant miracle has happened through them. Everybody living here in Jerusalem knows about it. But to prevent it spreading among the people any further, we should threaten them never to speak to anybody in this name again.”

So they called them back in and ordered them never to speak or teach in the name of Jesus again. But Peter and John responded, “Whether it's right in God's eyes to obey you rather than God—you decide. We can't help talking about what we've seen and heard!”

After making more threats they let them go. They couldn't work out how to punish them because everyone was glorifying God for what had happened. For the man who received this miracle of healing was more than forty years old. After the disciples had been released, they went to the other believers and told them everything the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard what had happened, they prayed to God together:

“Lord, you made heaven and earth and sea, and everything that is in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through David, our forefather and your servant, saying ‘Why did the people of the other nations become so angry? Why did they plot so foolishly against me? The kings of the earth prepared for war; the rulers united together against the Lord and against his Chosen One.’

Now this has really happened right here in this city! Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the foreigners and the people of Israel, united together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed as Messiah. They did whatever you had already decided because you had the power and the will to do it.

Now Lord: look at all their threats against us! Help us your servants to speak your word really boldly. As you exercise your power to heal, may signs and miracles be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus!”

When they had finished praying, the building they were meeting in was shaken. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God boldly. All the believers thought and felt the same way. None of them claimed anything they had as their own, but shared everything with each other. The apostles gave their testimony regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with tremendous power, and God greatly blessed them all. None of them needed anything because those who had lands or properties sold them. They took the proceeds and presented them to the apostles to be shared with those in need. Joseph, the one the apostles called Barnabas (meaning “son of encouragement”), was a Levite, a Cypriot national. He sold a field that belonged to him. Then he brought the money and presented it to the apostles.

Now a man called Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold some property. He kept back some of the money he received for himself, and brought the rest to present to the apostles. His wife knew what he was doing.

Then Peter asked him, “Ananias, why did you let Satan convince you to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back some of the money from the land you sold? While you had the land, didn't it belong to you? And after you sold it, didn't you still have control over what you did with the money? Why did you decide to do this? You haven't lied to human beings, but to God!”

Hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died. Everyone who heard what happened was terrified. Some of the young men got up and wrapped him in a shroud. Then they carried him out and buried him.

About three hours later his wife arrived, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, “Tell me, did you sell the land for this price?”

“Yes, that was the price,” she replied.

Then Peter told her, “How could you agree together to swindle the Spirit of the Lord? Look, those who buried your husband are just returning, and they'll carry you out too!”

Immediately she fell down dead at his feet. The young men came back in and found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Great fear spread through the whole church, as well as among everyone who heard what had happened.

Many miraculous signs were performed among the people by the apostles. All the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Porch. Nobody else dared to join them even though they were greatly respected. However, many men and women came to believe in the Lord. As a result, people brought those who were sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that as Peter passed by his shadow might fall on them. Crowds from the towns around Jerusalem brought their sick and those afflicted by evil spirits. They were all healed.

However, the high priest and those with him (who were Sadducees) became very jealous and decided to intervene. They arrested the apostles and threw them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and led them out. “Go to the Temple and tell the people everything about this new way of life!” he told them. They did as they were

told and went into the Temple at around dawn and began teaching.

Then the high priest and his followers called a council meeting with all the leaders of Israel. He sent for the apostles to be brought from prison. But when the officials went to the prison they couldn't find the apostles so they went back and told the council, “We found the prison all locked up, with guards at the doors. But when we had them open up, we couldn't find anyone inside.”

Now when the captain of the Temple guards and the chief priests heard this they were totally baffled, and wondered what was going on. Then someone came in and said, “Look, the men you put in prison are right there in the Temple teaching people!”

So the captain went with his guards and brought them in, but did not use force because they were afraid that the people would stone them. The apostles were brought in and made to stand in front of the council.

“Didn't we order you not to teach in this name?” the high priest demanded to know. “Now look—you've filled the whole of Jerusalem with your teaching, and you're trying to blame us for his death!”

But Peter and the apostles answered, “We have to obey God rather than men. The God of our forefathers raised Jesus from the dead—the one you killed by hanging him on a cross. God exalted him to a position of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior, as a way to bring repentance to Israel, and for the forgiveness of sins. We are witnesses of what happened, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

When the council heard this they were furious and wanted to kill them. But then one of the council members stood up to speak. He was Gamaliel, a Pharisee and a doctor of law who was respected by everyone. He ordered the apostles sent out for a short while.

Gamaliel addressed the council: “Leaders of Israel, be careful what you plan to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas tried to make a name for himself, and about four hundred men joined him. He was killed and all who followed him were scattered and it came to nothing. Then after him Judas of Galilee came along at the time of the census, and he attracted some followers. He also died, and those who listened to him were dispersed. So in the current case I recommend that you leave these men alone, and just let them go. If what they are planning or what they are doing comes from their own human thinking, then it will be defeated. But if it comes from God, you won't be able to defeat them. You could even find yourselves fighting against God!”

They were convinced by what he said. So they called the apostles back in, had them whipped, and ordered them not to say anything in the name of Jesus. Then they let them go. The apostles left the council, happy to be considered worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus. Every day they continued to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, in the Temple and from house to house.

At this time, when the number of believers was increasing rapidly, the Greek-speaking believers started arguing with the Aramaic-speaking believers. They complained that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food.

The twelve apostles called all the believers together, and told them, “It's not appropriate for us to give up spreading the word of God so we can wait at tables. Brothers, choose from among you seven trustworthy men full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will hand this responsibility over to them. We ourselves will give our full attention to prayer and the ministry of spreading the word.”

Everybody was happy with the arrangement, and they chose Stephen (a man full of trust in God and of the Holy Spirit), Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus (originally a Jewish convert from Antioch). These men were presented to the apostles who prayed for them and placed their hands on them in blessing. The word of God continued to spread, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem greatly increased, with a large number of priests committing themselves to trusting in Jesus.

Stephen, full of grace and God's power, performed wonderful miracles among the people. But some started arguing with him. They were from the synagogue called “the Free,” as well as Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and people from Cilicia and Asia Minor. But they weren't able to stand against Stephen's wisdom or the Spirit with which he was speaking. So they bribed some men to say, “We heard this man blaspheme Moses, and God too!”

They stirred up the people, and together with the elders and the teachers of the law, they came and arrested him. They brought him before the council, and called false witnesses who testified against him.

“This man is always slandering the holy Temple and the law,” they said. “We've heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple, and will change the laws we received from Moses.”

Everyone sitting on the council looked closely at Stephen, and his face shone like the face of an angel.

“Are these allegations true?” the high priest asked.

“Brothers and fathers, listen to me!” Stephen replied. “God in his glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was living in Mesopotamia, before he moved to Haran.

God told him, ‘Leave your country and your relatives, and go to the country that I'm going to show you.’ So he left the country of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. After his father's death, God sent him here to this country where you now live. God didn't give Abraham an inheritance here, not even one square foot. But God did promise Abraham that he would give him and his descendants possession of the land, even though he had no children. God also told him that his descendants would live in a foreign country, and that they would be enslaved there, and would be mistreated for four hundred years. God said, ‘I will punish the nation that enslaves them. Eventually they will leave and come here to worship me.’ God also gave Abraham the agreement regarding circumcision, and so when Isaac was born, Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day. Isaac was the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of the twelve patriarchs.

The patriarchs, who were jealous of Joseph, sold him into slavery in Egypt. But God was with him, and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave him wisdom and helped him gain the favor of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him governor over Egypt and the royal household.

Now a famine occurred throughout Egypt and Canaan. It caused terrible misery, and our forefathers had no food. When Jacob heard there was grain in Egypt he sent our forefathers down on their first visit. During their second visit, Joseph revealed to his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh discovered Joseph's family background. Joseph sent for his father and all his relatives—seventy-five in total. Jacob traveled to Egypt, and died there—as did our forefathers. Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought with silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem.

As the time approached regarding the promise that God had made to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt increased. A new king came to the throne in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. He took advantage of our people and treated our ancestors badly, forcing them to abandon their babies so they would die. It was at this time that Moses was born. He was a handsome child, and for three months he was looked after in his father's home. When he had to be abandoned, Pharaoh's daughter rescued him and took care of him as her own son.

Moses received instruction in all areas of Egyptian knowledge, and he became a powerful speaker and leader. However, when he was forty years old, he decided to visit his relatives, the Israelites. He saw one of them being mistreated, so he intervened to defend him. On behalf of the man he took revenge and killed the Egyptian. Moses thought his fellow Israelites would see that God was rescuing them through him, but they didn't. The next day when he arrived, two Israelites were fighting one another. He tried to reconcile them and stop the fight. 'Men! You are brothers!' he told them. 'Why are you attacking each other?'

But the man who had started the fight pushed Moses away. 'Who put you in charge over us? Are you our judge now?' he asked. 'Are you going to kill me like you killed the Egyptian yesterday?' When he heard this, Moses ran away. He went and lived in exile in the land of Midian, where two sons were born to him.

Forty years later, in the desert of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to him in the flames of a burning bush. When Moses saw this, he was amazed at the sight, and went over to take a closer look. The voice of the Lord spoke to him: 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.' Moses shook with fear and didn't dare look up. The Lord told him, 'Take off your sandals, because where you are standing is holy ground. I have closely observed the suffering of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their groans. I have come down to rescue them. Now come over here, for I'm sending you to Egypt.'

This was the same Moses that the people had rejected when they said, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?' God sent him to be both a ruler and a liberator, by means of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. Moses led them out after performing miraculous signs in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and continued to do so in the desert for forty years. This is the same Moses who promised the Israelites, 'God will send you a prophet like me from among your people.' Moses was with God's assembled people in the desert when the angel spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and there with our forefathers he received God's living word to give to us. He was the one our fathers wouldn't listen to. They rejected him and decided to return to Egypt. They told Aaron, 'Make gods for us to lead us, because we don't know what's happened to this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt.' Then they made an idol in the shape of a calf, sacrificed to it, and celebrated what they themselves had made!

So God gave up on them. He left them to their worship of the stars in the sky. This is what the prophets wrote, 'Were you giving offerings or making sacrifices to me during the forty years in the desert, you Israelites? No, you carried the Tabernacle of the god Moloch and the image of the god Rephan's star, images that you made so you could worship them. So I will banish you in exile beyond Babylon.'

Our ancestors had the Tabernacle of Testimony in the desert. God had told Moses how he should make it following the blueprint he had seen. Later on, our forefathers carried it with them when they went in with Joshua to occupy the land taken from the nations the Lord drove out before them. It stayed there until the time of David. David found favor with God and asked to make a more permanent home for the God of Jacob. But it was Solomon who built a Temple for him. Of course the Almighty doesn't live in temples we make. As the prophet said, 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth the place I put my feet. What kind of dwelling could you build for me?' the Lord asks. 'What bed could you make for me to rest in? Didn't I make everything?'

You arrogant, hard-hearted people! You never listen! You always fight against the Holy Spirit! You act just like your fathers did! Was there ever a prophet your fathers didn't persecute? They killed those who prophesied about the coming of the one who is truly good and right. He is the one you betrayed and murdered—you who received the law by means of the angels, but refused to keep it."

When they heard this, the council members became mad with rage, and snarled at him, grinding their teeth. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed up into heaven and saw God's glory, with Jesus standing at God's right hand. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand."

But they held their hands over their ears and shouted as loudly as they could. They rushed together at him, dragged him out of the city, and began to stone him. His accusers laid their coats down beside a young man called Saul. As they went on stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." He kneeled down, calling out, "Lord, please don't hold this sin against them!" And after he said this, he died.

Saul approved of his killing. On that very day terrible persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except for the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. (Some faithful

followers of God buried Stephen, with great mourning.) But Saul set about destroying the church, going from house to house, dragging both men and women off to prison.

Those who had been scattered spread the word wherever they went. Philip went to the town of Samaria, and told them about the Messiah. When the crowds heard what Philip was saying and saw the miracles he did they all paid attention to what he was telling them. Many were freed from possession by evil spirits that screamed as they came out, and many who were lame or disabled were healed. The people who lived in the city were overjoyed.

Now there was a man named Simon who lived in the city. He practiced sorcery. He claimed that he was someone very important, and had astounded the people of Samaria so they all paid attention to him. From the lowest to the highest in society they said, "This man is 'God the Great Power.'" They were impressed by him because he had amazed them with his magic for so long.

But when they believed in what Philip told them about the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Simon too believed and was baptized. He accompanied Philip, amazed at the miraculous signs and wonders he saw.

When the apostles back in Jerusalem heard that the people of Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to visit them. When they arrived they prayed for the converts in Samaria to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit hadn't come to any of these converts yet—they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The apostles placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given when the apostles placed their hands on people, he offered them money. "Give me this power, too," he asked them, "so that anyone I place my hands on will receive the Holy Spirit."

"May your money be destroyed together with you for thinking God's gift is something that can be bought!" Peter replied. "You're not part of any of this. None of this work belongs to you, because in God's eyes your attitude is totally wrong. Repent of your evil ways! Pray to the Lord and ask forgiveness for thinking like this. I can see that you are full of bitter envy, and chained down by your sin."

"Please pray for me, that nothing you've said may happen to me!" Simon replied.

After they had given their testimony and shared the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, sharing the good news in many Samaritan villages along the way.

An angel of the Lord told Philip, "Get ready and go south to the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." So Philip set out, and met an Ethiopian man, a eunuch who had a high position in the service of the Kandake, Queen of Ethiopia. He was her chief treasurer. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship there, and was returning from his trip, sitting in his chariot. He was reading out loud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The Spirit told Philip, "Go over close to the chariot." So Philip ran over, and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah.

"Do you understand what you're reading?" Philip asked him.

"How can I, unless someone explains it?" the man replied. He invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. The Scripture passage he was reading was this: "He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered. Like a lamb is silent in front of his shearer, he didn't say a word. He was humiliated and denied justice. No one can speak of his descendants, for his life came to an end."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, who is the prophet talking about? Is it himself, or someone else?" Philip started explaining, beginning from this Scripture, telling him about Jesus. As they continued on, they came to a stretch of water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's water here—why shouldn't I be baptized?" He ordered that the chariot be stopped. Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came out of the water the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again, but he continued on his way full of joy. Philip found himself at Azotus. He spread the good news in all the towns along the way until he arrived at Caesarea.

But meanwhile Saul was making violent threats against the disciples of the Lord, wanting to kill them. He went to the high priest and asked for letters of authorization to take with him to the synagogues in Damascus, giving him permission to arrest any believers in the Way that he found, men or women, and bring them back to Jerusalem as prisoners.

As Saul approached Damascus, suddenly he was surrounded by a light that blazed down from heaven. He fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

"Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, the one you're persecuting," he replied. "Get up, go on into the city, and you'll be told what to do."

The men who were traveling with Saul stood there speechless. They heard the voice speaking, but they didn't see anyone. Saul got to his feet, and when he opened his eyes, he couldn't see anything. His companions took him by the hand and led him into Damascus. For three days he couldn't see, and he didn't eat or drink anything.

A follower of Jesus called Ananias lived in Damascus, and the Lord spoke to him in a vision.

"Ananias!" he called.

"I'm here, Lord," Ananias responded.

"Get up, and go to Straight Street," the Lord told him. "Ask at Judas' house for someone called Saul, from Tarsus. He's praying. He's seen in vision a man called Ananias come and place his hands on him so he can regain his sight."

"But Lord," Ananias replied, "I've heard a lot about this man—about all the evil things he did to the believers in Jerusalem. The chief priests have given him the power to arrest everyone here that worships and follows you."

But the Lord told him, "Get on your way, because he is the person I have chosen to take my name to for-

eigners and kings, as well as to Israel. I will show him what he'll have to suffer for my name's sake."

So Ananias left and went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul. "Brother Saul," he said, "The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were traveling here, has sent me so you can regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. He got up and was baptized. He also had something to eat and felt stronger.

Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. He immediately started speaking in the synagogues, saying, "Jesus is the Son of God." All who heard him were amazed, and asked, "Isn't this the man who caused so much trouble in Jerusalem for those who believed in Jesus? Wasn't he coming here to have the believers arrested and taken in chains to the chief priests?" Saul grew more and more confident, proving Jesus was the Messiah so convincingly that the Jews who lived in Damascus could not refute him.

Some time later the Jews plotted together to kill him, but Saul learned of their intentions. Day and night they waited by the city gates looking for the chance to murder him. So during the night his followers took him and lowered him down in a basket from an opening in the city wall. When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to meet with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him because they were not convinced he was really a disciple. However, Barnabas took him to meet the apostles, and explained to them how Saul had seen the Lord on the road and how the Lord had spoken to Saul. Barnabas also explained how in Damascus Saul had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.

Saul stayed with the apostles and accompanied them all over Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. He talked and debated with the Greek-speaking Jews, but they tried to kill him. When the brothers learned of this they took him to Caesarea, and sent him to Tarsus.

During this time the whole church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria was left in peace. The church grew strong and increased rapidly in numbers as the believers lived reverently for the Lord, encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

Peter was traveling around and went to visit the believers who lived in Lydda. There he met a man called Aeneas who was paralyzed and had been confined to his bed for eight years. Peter told him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you! Get up and pick up your mat!" Immediately Aeneas got up. Everyone living in Lydda and Sharon saw him, and became believers in the Lord.

In Joppa lived a follower called Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek). She was always doing good and helping the poor. However, about this time she became sick, and died. After washing her body, they laid her out in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa, so the disciples in Joppa, hearing that Peter was in Lydda, sent two men to him with the message, "Please come to us right away." So Peter got ready and left with them. When he arrived they took him upstairs. All the widows were there crying, and they showed him the coats and clothes that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter told them all to leave, kneeled down, and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and lifted her up. He called in the believers and the widows, and presented her to them alive. The news spread through the whole of Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Peter spent a long time in Joppa, staying at the house of Simon the tanner.

In Caesarea lived a man named Cornelius who was a Roman centurion of the Italian battalion. He was a religious man who, together with everyone in his household, had great reverence for God. He gave generously to the poor, and prayed regularly to God. At about 3 p.m. one day he had a vision in which he saw very clearly an angel of God who came to him and called to him, "Cornelius!"

Frightened, Cornelius stared at him and asked, "What do you want, Lord?"

"God has paid attention to your prayers, and recognized your generosity to the poor," he told Cornelius. "Now send some men to Joppa, and fetch Simon, also called Peter, who is staying at Simon the tanner's house down by the sea shore."

When the angel who had spoken to him had left, Cornelius called in two of his house-servants and a soldier of his personal guard, a religious man. After he'd explained to them all that had happened he sent them to Joppa.

The next day, as they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up onto the top of the house to pray. It was about noon, and he was getting hungry, wanting to eat. But while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance, and he saw heaven opened. He saw something coming down that looked like a large sheet held by its four corners, being lowered onto the earth. Inside were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds. He heard a voice say, "Get up Peter, kill and eat!"

But Peter replied, "Certainly not, Lord! I have never eaten anything that is impure and unclean."

He heard the voice speak again, "Don't you call unclean what God has made clean!" This happened three times, and then the sheet was quickly taken back into heaven.

While Peter was puzzling over what the vision he'd seen really meant, the men sent by Cornelius had found out where Simon's house was and were standing at the gate. They called out, asking whether Simon, also called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still wondering about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look, there are three men looking for you. Get up, go downstairs, and go with them. Don't worry at all because I'm the one who sent them."

So Peter went downstairs to meet the men. "I'm the one you're looking for," he said. "Why are you here?"

"We come from Cornelius, a good, religious man who has reverence for God and is widely respected among the Jewish people," they replied. "A holy angel instructed him to send for you to come to his house so he can hear what you have to tell him." So he invited them in and they stayed there.

The next day he got up and left with them. Some of the brothers from Joppa went with them too. The following day they arrived in Caesarea where Cornelius

was waiting for them with his relatives and close friends whom he'd called together. When Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. But Peter pulled him back up, telling him, “Stand up! I'm only a man!”

Peter spoke with Cornelius, and then went on in where he found many other people waiting for him. He said to them, “You certainly know that it's not permitted for a Jew to be associated with or to visit foreigners. But God has shown me that it's not for me to call anyone impure or unclean. That's why I came without any argument when I was sent for. So now I want to know the reason why you sent for me.”

“Four days ago, at about this time—three in the afternoon—I was praying in my house,” Cornelius explained. “Suddenly I saw a man standing in front of me, dressed in clothes that shone brightly. He told me, ‘Cornelius, your prayers have been heard, and God has recognized your generosity to the poor. Send someone to Joppa for Simon Peter. He's staying at Simon the tanner's house, down by the sea shore.’ So immediately I sent for you, and it was good of you to come. That's why we're all here, meeting together before God, ready to hear everything the Lord has told you.”

Peter replied, “I'm totally convinced that God has no favorites. In every nation God accepts those who respect him, and do what is good and right. You know the message he sent to Israel, sharing the good news of peace that comes from Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know that this good news spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, following John's call to baptism. It's about Jesus of Nazareth—how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went around doing good, healing all those who were under the devil's control, for God was with him.

We can testify to all that he did in Judea and Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross. But God raised him back to life on the third day, and had him appear, not to everyone, but to those witnesses chosen by God—including us, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He gave us the responsibility of publicly telling this to the people, to testify that he is the one God chose as the Judge of the living and the dead. He is the one all the prophets spoke about, that everyone who trusts in him will receive forgiveness through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on all of them who were listening to the message. The Jewish believers who had come with Peter were astonished, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was also poured out on the foreigners. They heard them speaking in tongues, glorifying God. Then Peter asked, “Is anybody going to prevent them being baptized in water, since they have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” He gave orders for them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they pleaded with him to spend some time with them.

The apostles and brothers in Judea heard that foreigners had also accepted the word of God. When Peter arrived back in Jerusalem, those who believed circumcision was still essential argued with him. “You went into the homes of uncircumcised men, and ate with them,” they said.

Peter began to explain to them everything that had happened. “While I was in the town of Joppa I was praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. Something that looked like a large sheet was being let down by its four corners from heaven, and it came down to me. When I looked inside I saw animals, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds.

Then I heard a voice that told me, ‘Get up, Peter, kill and eat.’

But I replied, ‘Absolutely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth!’

The voice from heaven spoke again, and said, ‘Don't you call unclean what God has made clean!’ This happened three times, and then it was all taken back into heaven. At that very moment three men were standing in front of the house where we were staying. They had been sent from Caesarea to see me. The Spirit told me to go with them, and not to worry about who they were. These six brothers here also went with me, and we went into the man's house. He explained to us how an angel had appeared to him in his house, who told him, ‘Send someone to Joppa, and fetch Simon, also called Peter, who will tell you what you need to hear so you can be saved—you and your whole household.’

When I started speaking, the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as happened to us in the beginning. Then I remembered what the Lord said, ‘John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ Since God gave them the same gift as he gave us when we trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, what power did I have to oppose God?”

After they had heard this explanation, they didn't argue with him anymore, and praised God, saying, “Now God has granted the opportunity to repent and have eternal life to foreigners as well.”

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that happened when Stephen was killed, traveled all the way to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. They only spread the good news among the Jews. But when some of them who were from Cyprus and Cyrene arrived in Antioch, they shared the good news with the Greeks too, telling them about the Lord Jesus. The power of the Lord was with them and a large number trusted in the Lord and turned to him.

News about what had happened reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw for himself how God's grace was working, he was delighted. He encouraged all of them to completely dedicate themselves to God and to stay true. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit, who put his whole trust in God. Many people were brought to the Lord. Then Barnabas went on to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he found him, he took Saul back with him to Antioch. Over the course of the next year they worked together with the church, teaching the message to crowds of people. It was in Antioch that the believers were first called “Christians.”

It was during this time that some prophets went from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them called Agabus stood up and gave a prophetic warning by the Spirit that there would be a terrible famine that would affect the known world. (This came true in the reign of Emperor Claudius.) The believers decided to send funds

to help the brothers that lived in Judea, with everyone giving according to what they had. So they did this and sent the money with Barnabas and Saul to the church leaders there.

Around this time King Herod began to persecute some members of the church. He had James, John's brother, executed by the sword. When he saw that the Jews were pleased by this, he had Peter arrested too. (This was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread.) After having Peter arrested, he threw him in prison, with four squads of four soldiers each to guard him. He planned to have Peter brought out for a public trial after the Passover.

While Peter was kept in prison the church prayed earnestly to God for him. The night before Herod was to have him put on trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, chained to each of them, and with guards at the door keeping watch. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and a light shone in the cell. The angel shook Peter awake, saying "Quick! Get up!" The chains fell from his wrists, and the angel told him, "Get dressed, and put on your sandals." So he did. Then the angel told him, "Put on your coat and follow me." So Peter followed the angel out. He didn't realize that what the angel was doing was actually happening—he thought he was seeing a vision.

They passed the first and second sets of guards, and came to the iron gate that led into the city. This opened for them by itself. They went out and down the street, when suddenly the angel left him. When Peter came to his senses, he said, "Now I realize this really happened! The Lord sent an angel to rescue me from Herod's power, and from everything that the Jewish people had planned."

Now that he was conscious of what had happened, Peter went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Many believers had gathered there, and were praying. When he knocked on the gateway door, a servant girl called Rhoda came to open up. But recognizing Peter's voice, in her excitement she didn't open the door. Instead she ran back inside shouting, "Peter's at the door!"

"You're mad!" they told her. But she kept on insisting it was true. So they said, "It must be his angel." Peter continued knocking. When they did eventually open the door, they saw it was him, and were totally shocked.

Peter held up his hand for them to be quiet, and then explained to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. "Let James and the brothers know about this," he told them, and then left to go somewhere else.

When daylight came the soldiers were totally confused as to what had happened to Peter. Herod had a thorough search made for him, but he couldn't be found. After interrogating the guards, Herod ordered that they should be executed. Then Herod left Judea and went to stay in Caesarea.

Now Herod had become furious with the people of Tyre and Sidon. They sent a joint delegation to see him and managed to win Blastus, the king's personal assistant, over to their side. They pleaded for peace with Herod because they were dependent on the king's territory for food. When the day came for their appointment with the king, Herod put on his royal robes, sat on his throne, and gave a speech to them. The audience shouted in response, "This is the voice of a god, not that of a man!" Immediately the angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory. He was consumed by worms and died.

But the word of God spread, and more and more people believed. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem once they had finished their mission, taking John Mark with them.

The church at Antioch had prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (the childhood friend of Herod the tetrarch), and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart Barnabas and Saul to do the work I've called them to." After they had fasted, prayed, and placed their hands on them in blessing, they sent them on their way.

So Barnabas and Saul, directed by the Holy Spirit, went to Seleucia. From there they sailed to Cyprus. Arriving at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their assistant. They traveled throughout the island and eventually came to Paphos. There they found a Jewish magician, a false prophet by the name of Bar-jesus. He was close to the governor, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. Sergius Paulus invited Barnabas and Saul to come and visit him since he wanted to hear the word of God. But the magician Elymas (his Greek name) opposed them, trying to prevent the governor from trusting in God.

Saul, also called Paul, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and looked straight at him. "You are full of deception and all kinds of evil, you son of the devil, you enemy of all that is right! Will you never give up perverting the Lord's true ways? Look, the Lord's hand is on you and you will become blind. You will not see the sun for some time." Immediately mist and darkness fell on him, and he had to find someone who could lead him by the hand. When the governor saw what happened he trusted in God, amazed at the teaching about the Lord.

Then Paul and those with him sailed from Paphos and went to Perga in Pamphylia, while John left them and went back to Jerusalem. They went through Perga and on to Antioch of Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and were seated. After the readings from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders sent them a message saying, "Brothers, please share with the congregation any words of encouragement you may have."

Paul stood up, motioned with his hand to get their attention, and began speaking. "Men of Israel, and all of you who have reverence for God, listen to me. The God of the people of Israel chose our forefathers, and gave our people prosperity during their stay in the land of Egypt. Then with his mighty power he led them out of Egypt, and he patiently dealt with them in the desert for about forty years.

After he had overthrown seven nations living in the land of Canaan, God divided their land among the Israelites and gave it to them to inherit. This took about four hundred and fifty years. Then he provided them with judges as leaders until the time of the prophet Samuel. Then the people asked for a king, and God

gave them Saul, son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin, who ruled for forty years. Then God removed Saul, and made David their king. God approved of David, saying 'I found David the son of Jesse to be a man according to my own heart; he will do everything I intend.'

Jesus is David's descendant; he is the Savior that God promised to bring to Israel. Before Jesus came, John announced the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. As John was completing his mission, he said, 'Who do you think I am? I am not the one you're looking for. But after me one is coming whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.'

My brothers, children of Abraham and those of you who have reverence for God: the message of this salvation has been sent to us! The people living in Jerusalem and their leaders didn't recognize Jesus or understand the words spoken by the prophets that are read every Sabbath. In fact they fulfilled the prophetic words by condemning him! Even though they couldn't find any evidence to sentence him to death, they still asked Pilate to have him killed. After they had fulfilled everything predicted that they would do to him, they took him down from the cross and buried him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and he appeared over the course of many days to those who had followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to the people.

We are here to bring to you the good news of the promise that God made to our forefathers, that he has now fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus from the dead. As it is written in Psalm 2: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' God raised him from the dead, never to die again, as he indicated by saying, 'I will give you what is holy and trustworthy, as I promised to David.' As another psalm says, 'You will not allow your Holy One to see decay.' But David died, after he had done what God wanted in his own time, and he was buried with his ancestors, and his body decayed. The one God raised from the dead saw no decay.

My brothers, I want you to understand that we're telling you that through this man sins are forgiven. Through him everyone who trusts in him is made morally right from all that is wrong—in a way that you could never be set right by the law of Moses. Make sure that what the prophets said doesn't happen to you: 'You who are scornful, look in amazement, and die! For what I'm doing in your lifetime is something that you could never believe, even if someone told you!'"

As they were leaving, the people pleaded with them to tell them more the next Sabbath. After the meeting in the synagogue, many of the Jews and the converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas who spoke with them, encouraging them to continue to hold on to the grace of God. The following Sabbath almost the whole town turned out to hear the word of God. However, when the Jews saw the crowds, they became extremely jealous, contradicting what Paul was saying and cursing him.

So Paul and Barnabas spoke out strongly, saying "We had to speak the word of God to you first. But now that you're rejecting it—you're deciding that you're not worthy of eternal life—well now we're turning to the foreigners. That's what the Lord has told us to do: 'I've made you a light to the foreigners, and through you salvation will go to the ends of the earth.'" When the foreigners heard this they were overjoyed, praising the Lord's word, and all those chosen for eternal life trusted in God. So God's word was spread throughout the region. But the Jews incited the prominent religious women and leaders of the city to persecute Paul and Barnabas, and had them expelled from their territory. So they shook the dust off their feet against them as a sign of protest, and went on to Iconium. And the believers continued to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

In Iconium the same thing happened. Paul and Barnabas went to the Jewish synagogue and spoke so convincingly that many of both the Jewish and Greek-speaking worshipers trusted in Jesus. But the Jews that refused to believe in Jesus stirred up the feelings of the foreigners, and poisoned them against the believers. Paul and Barnabas stayed there a long time, speaking to them boldly in the Lord, who confirmed their message of grace through the miraculous signs that they were enabled to perform. The inhabitants of the town were divided, with some supporting the Jews and some the apostles. But then the foreigners and the Jews, together with their leaders, decided to attack and stone Paul and Barnabas. However, they found out about it and fled to the region of Lycaonia, to the towns of Lystra and Derbe, where they continued to share the good news.

In the town of Lystra there was a disabled man who was lame in both feet. He had been crippled from birth and had never been able to walk. He sat there listening to Paul speaking. When Paul looked directly at him, and realized that the man was trusting in God to heal him, Paul said in a loud voice, "Stand up on your feet!" The man jumped to his feet and started walking. When the crowds saw what Paul had done, they shouted out in the language of Lycaonia, "The gods have come down to us looking like men!" They identified Barnabas as the Greek god Zeus, and Paul as the god Hermes because he was one who did most of the talking.

The priest of the temple of Zeus that lay just outside the town, brought oxen and wreaths to the town gates. He planned to carry out a sacrifice in front of the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul learned what was happening, they tore their clothes, and rushed into the crowds, shouting out, "People, what are you doing? We are human beings with the same kind of nature as you. We came to bring you good news, so you could turn from these pointless things to a God who is truly alive. He is the one who made heaven, earth, and sea, and everything in them. In past times he allowed all the nations to follow their own ways. Even so he still provided evidence of himself by doing good, sending you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, providing all the food you need, and filling you with happiness." With these words they barely managed to stop the crowds from offering sacrifices to them.

But then some Jews from Antioch and Iconium arrived and won over the crowds. They stoned Paul, and dragged him outside the town, thinking he was dead. But when the believers gathered around him, he got up, and went back into the city. The next day he

and Barnabas left for Derbe. After sharing the good news with the people in that town, and after many had become believers, they went back to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They encouraged the believers to remain firm and to continue to trust in Jesus. “We have to go through many trials to enter God's kingdom,” they said.

After they had appointed elders for every church, and had prayed and fasted with them, Paul and Barnabas left them in the Lord's care, the one that they trusted in. They passed through Pisidia, and arrived in Pamphylia. They spoke God's word in Perga, and then went on to Attalia. From there they sailed back to Antioch where they had started out, having been dedicated there in God's grace to the work they had now accomplished. When they arrived, they called the church together. They reported everything God had done through them, and how he had opened a door for the foreigners to trust in him. They stayed there with the believers for a long time.

Then some men arrived from Judea who started teaching the believers, “Unless you're circumcised according to the rules set down by Moses, you can't be saved.” Paul and Barnabas had many arguments and debates with them. So Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go to Jerusalem and talk to the apostles and leaders there about this issue. The church sent them on their way, and as they traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, they explained how foreigners were being converted, which made all the believers very happy. When they arrived in Jerusalem they were welcomed by the church members, the apostles, and the elders. They explained everything God had done through them. But they were opposed by some of the believers who belonged to the Pharisee faction. They said, “These converts have to be circumcised, and instructed to observe the law of Moses.”

The apostles and elders met together to discuss the issue. After much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that some time ago God chose me from among you so that the foreigners could hear the message of good news and trust in Jesus. God, who knows what we're thinking, has shown that he accepts them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us. He doesn't make any distinction between us and them—he cleansed their thoughts as they trusted in him.

So why do you want to oppose God and put a burden on the believers that our fathers weren't able to bear, and we can't either? We're convinced that we're saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way they are.” Everyone listened attentively to Barnabas and Paul as they explained the miraculous signs that God had performed through them among the foreigners.

After they had finished speaking, James spoke up, saying, “Brothers, listen to me. Simon has described how God first revealed his concern for the foreigners by taking from them a people committed to him. This is in accordance with the words of the prophets, as it's written, ‘In the future I will return, and I will rebuild the fallen house of David; I will rebuild its ruins and set it straight. I will do this so that those who are left may come to the Lord, including the foreigners who call on my name. This is what the Lord says, who revealed these things long ago.’

So my decision is that we shouldn't make it difficult for foreigners who turn to God. We should write to them and tell them to avoid food sacrificed to idols, sexual immorality, meat of animals that have been strangled, and from consuming blood. For the law of Moses has been taught in every town for a long, long time—it's read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

Then the apostles and elders, together with the whole church, decided it would be good to choose some representatives and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They chose Judas Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, and sent them with this letter:

“Greetings from us, the apostles and elders and brothers, to the non-Jewish brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: We have heard that some from our group have confused you with their teachings, causing you trouble. We certainly didn't tell them to do this! So we have agreed to choose some representatives and send them to you together with our much-loved brothers Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So we are sending to you Judas and Silas who can verbally confirm what we're saying. It seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place on you any heavier burden than these important requirements. You should avoid: anything sacrificed to idols; blood; meat from strangled animals; and sexual immorality. You will do well to observe these requirements. God bless you.”

The men were sent on their way to Antioch. When they arrived they called everybody together and delivered the letter. After they had read it, the people were so happy for the encouraging message. Judas and Silas, who were also prophets, encouraged the brothers, explaining many things, and strengthening them. After spending some time there they were sent back by the brothers with their blessing to the believers in Jerusalem. But Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch, teaching and proclaiming the word of God along with many others.

Some time later Paul said to Barnabas, “Let's go back and visit the believers in every town where we shared the word of the Lord, and see how they're doing.” Barnabas planned to take along John Mark too. But Paul didn't think it was a good idea to take him with them, since he'd left them in Pamphylia and hadn't continued working with them. They had such a strong disagreement that they separated. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and as they left, the believers committed them to the grace of the Lord. Paul traveled through Syria and Cilicia, encouraging the churches there.

Paul went first to Derbe, and then on to Lystra, where he met a believer by the name of Timothy. He was the son of a Jewish Christian mother, and his father was Greek. The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. Paul wanted Timothy to travel with him, so he circumcised him because the Jews in the area all knew that Timothy's father was Greek. As they went through the different towns they gave them the requirements the apostles and elders in Jerusalem had

said should be observed. The churches were strengthened in their trust in the Lord and every day their numbers increased.

They traveled through the districts of Phrygia and Galatia, since the Holy Spirit prevented them from going to the province of Asia to speak the word. When they arrived at the border of Mysia they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to enter. So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas.

There Paul saw in vision during the night a man from Macedonia standing up, pleading with him, "Please come over to Macedonia and help us!" After Paul saw this vision, we immediately made arrangements to go to Macedonia, since we concluded that God had called us to share the good news with them.

We set sail from Troas and made straight for Samothrace. The next day we went on to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, the most important city in Macedonia, and also a Roman colony. We stayed in this city for several days. On the Sabbath day we went out of the citytown gates down to the riverside where we thought people would come to pray. We sat down and talked with the women who had gathered there.

One of them was called Lydia, who sold purple cloth from the town of Thyatira. She worshiped God, and she listened to us. The Lord opened her mind to what Paul was saying, and she accepted what he told her. After she and all her household were baptized, she pleaded with us, "If you really think that I'm truly committed to the Lord, then come and stay at my house." She kept on insisting until we agreed!

One day when we were going down to the place of prayer we met a slave girl possessed by an evil spirit. She earned her masters a great deal of money by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and the rest of us around, shouting, "These men are the servants of Almighty God. They are telling you how to be saved!" She went on doing this for several days. This bothered Paul so he turned around and told the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to leave her!" The spirit immediately left her.

But when her masters saw they had lost their means of making money, they grabbed hold of Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities at the marketplace. They brought them in front of the magistrates, and accused them: "These Jewish men are causing a great disturbance in our town," they said. "They're advocating things that are illegal for us as Romans to accept or to practice." The crowd joined together in an attack on them. The magistrates tore off Paul and Silas' clothes, and ordered them beaten with rods. After giving them a severe beating, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them locked up. The jailer followed his orders. He threw Paul and Silas into the inner cell and shackled their feet in the stocks.

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing praises to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly a tremendous earthquake shook the foundations of the prison. Immediately all the doors flew open and everyone's chains fell off.

The jailer woke up and saw the doors of the prison wide open. He drew his sword and was about to kill himself, thinking that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted out, "Don't hurt yourself—we're all still here!"

The jailer asked for lights to be brought and rushed in. Shaking with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas. He escorted them out and asked them, "Sirs, what do I have to do so I can be saved?"

"Trust in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your whole household," they replied. Then they shared the word of the Lord with him and everyone who lived in his house. Even though it was late at night he bathed their wounds, and he was baptized right away, along with all his family. He took them home and had a meal prepared for them. The jailer and his whole family were full of joy because they trusted in God.

Early the next day the magistrate sent officials to the jailer, telling him, "Release those men." The jailer told Paul, "The magistrates have sent word to release you. So you can leave, and go in peace."

But Paul told them, "They publicly beat us without a trial—and yet we're Roman citizens! Then they threw us in prison. Now they want to quietly let us go? No, they should come themselves and release us!"

The officials went back and reported this to the magistrates. When they heard that Paul and Silas were Roman citizens they were really worried, and went to apologize to them. They escorted them out and begged them to leave town. So Paul and Silas left the prison and went to Lydia's house. There they met with the believers, encouraged them, and then went on their way.

After Paul and Silas had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia they arrived at Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As usual, Paul went into the synagogue and over the course of three Sabbaths he debated with them using the Scriptures. He explained what the Scriptures meant, proving that the Messiah had to die and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I'm telling you about—he is the Messiah," he told them. Some of them were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, along with many Greek-speaking worshipers and some leading women of the town.

But the Jews became jealous and with some rabble-rousers they gathered from the marketplace they formed a mob. They rioted in the town, and attacked Jason's house. They tried to find Paul and Silas so they could bring them before the people. When they couldn't find them they dragged Jason and some of the other believers before the town leaders, shouting, "These people are famous for causing trouble, turning the world upside down. Now they've come here, and Jason has made them welcome in his house. They all defy Caesar's decrees, committing treason by saying there is another king called Jesus." The people and the leaders of the town were very disturbed when they heard this. So they made Jason and the others post bail before they let them go.

The believers had Paul and Silas leave for Berea that very night. When they arrived in Berea they went to the Jewish synagogue. The people there had a better attitude than those in Thessalonica in that they were very quick to accept the word, and every day they examined the Scriptures to make sure what they were

told was right. As a result many of them became believers, along with some highly-placed Greek women and men.

But when the Jews in Thessalonica heard that Paul was also spreading the word of God in Berea, they went there and caused the same kind of trouble, stirring up the crowds. Immediately the believers sent Paul to the coast, while Silas and Timothy remained behind. Those escorting Paul took him as far as Athens, and then returned with instructions from Paul to Silas and Timothy that they should join him there as soon as possible.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens he was very troubled to see all the idolatry in the city. He debated in the synagogue with the Jews and those who worshiped God, as well as in the marketplace with those he happened to meet from day to day. Some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also argued with him. "What is he going on about?" they wondered. Others concluded, "He seems to be teaching about some foreign gods," because he was speaking about Jesus and the resurrection. So they took him to the Areopagus, and asked him, "Please tell us about this new teaching that you're promoting. We're hearing from you things that sound odd to us, so we'd like to know what they mean." (All the Athenians, including foreigners who lived there, spent their whole time doing nothing except explaining or listening to something new.)

Paul stood up right in the middle of the Areopagus and said, "People of Athens, I notice you are very religious about everything. As I was walking along, looking at your shrines, I found an altar that had the inscription, 'To an Unknown God.' This unknown God whom you worship is the one I'm describing to you. The God who created the world and everything in it, the Lord of heaven and earth, doesn't live in temples we make. He doesn't need to be served by us as if he needed anything, since he is the source of all life for every living being. From one man he made all the peoples who live on the earth, and decided beforehand when and where they should live. God's purpose was that they should seek him, hoping they would reach out for him and find him —though he isn't far from any one of us. In him we live, move, and exist. Just as one of your own poets wrote, 'We are his family.'"

"Since we are his family we shouldn't think that God is like gold, or silver, or stone, shaped by human artistry and thinking. God disregarded people's ignorance in the past, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent. For he has set a time when he will rightly judge the world by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone that he is the one by raising him from the dead."

Some of them laughed when they heard about the resurrection of the dead, while others said, "Please come back so we can hear more about this later." So Paul left them. A few men joined him and trusted in God, including Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, as well as a woman called Damaris, and some others.

Paul then left Athens and went to Corinth where he met a Jew named Aquila. Aquila was originally from Pontus, and had just arrived from Italy with his wife Priscilla because Claudius had ordered all Jews expelled from Rome. Paul went to see them, and because they were in the same business of tent-making, he stayed with them. He debated in the synagogue every Sabbath, convincing both Jews and Greeks. When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul felt he had to become more direct in what he said, and told the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. When they opposed him and cursed him, he shook out his clothes and told them, "Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent of any guilt, and from now on I will go to the foreigners."

He left and went to stay with Titius Justus, who worshiped God and whose house was next door to the synagogue. Crispus, leader of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his whole household. Many of the people of Corinth who heard the message became believers and were baptized.

The Lord told Paul in a vision at night: "Don't be afraid. Speak up, don't keep quiet— because I am with you, and no one will attack you, for many people in this city are mine." Paul stayed there for eighteen months, teaching the people the word of God.

However, during the time when Gallio was the governor of Achaia, the Jews united in an attack against Paul and brought him before the court. "This man is persuading people to worship God illegally," they declared.

But just as Paul was about to defend himself, Gallio told the Jews, "If you Jews were bringing criminal charges or some serious legal offense, there would be a reason for me to listen to your case. But since you're only arguing over words and names and your own law, then you deal with it yourselves. I won't rule on such matters." Then Gallio had them ejected from the court. Then the crowd turned on Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him right outside the court, but Gallio wasn't concerned about this at all.

Paul stayed on for a while. Then he left the believers and sailed for Syria, taking Priscilla and Aquila along with him. He had his head shaved while in Cenchrae, because he had taken a vow.

They arrived in Ephesus, where Paul left the others behind. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews. They asked him to stay longer, but he refused. He said his goodbyes, and set sail from Ephesus, telling them, "I'll come back and see you if it's God's will."

After landing at Caesarea he went to greet the church members, and then carried on to Antioch. He spent some time there and then went from town to town through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, encouraging all the believers.

In the meantime a Jew named Apollos, originally from Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus. He was a gifted speaker who knew the Scriptures well. He had been taught the way of the Lord. He was spiritually passionate, and in his speaking and teaching he presented Jesus accurately, but he only knew about John's baptism. He started speaking openly in the synagogue. So when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to join them and explained the way of God to him more fully. When he decided to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples there telling them to welcome him. When he arrived he was very helpful to those who through grace trusted God, because he

was able to strongly refute the Jews in public debate, demonstrating from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah.

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul took the inland route and arrived in Ephesus where he found some believers. “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” he asked them.

“No, we haven't heard anything about a Holy Spirit,” they told him.

“So what baptism did you receive?” he asked.

“John's baptism,” they replied.

“John baptized with the baptism of repentance,” said Paul. He told the people that they should trust in the one who would come after him—that is, they should trust in Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. After Paul had placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve of them in total.

Paul went to the synagogue and over the course of the next three months spoke boldly to those who were there, discussing with them and trying to convince them about the kingdom of God. But some of them were stubborn, and refused to accept. They denounced the Way to the crowd. So Paul gave up on them and left the synagogue, taking the believers with him. Then he had discussions every day at the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

This went on for the next two years, with the result that everyone who lived in the province of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. God performed unusual miracles through Paul, so much so that they took handkerchiefs or aprons Paul had touched to heal the sick and to drive out evil spirits.

Some Jews who were going around exorcising decided to use the name of the Lord Jesus when they drove out evil spirits. They'd say, “I command you to leave in the name of the Jesus that Paul talks about.” The ones doing this were the seven sons of Sceva, a Jew and a chief priest.

But one day an evil spirit responded, “I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?” The man with the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered all of them. He beat them so severely that they ran out of the house, naked and badly injured.

People living in Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, heard about this. They were all in awe at what had happened, and the name of the Lord Jesus gained great respect. Many came to trust in the Lord and confessed their sins, openly admitting their evil practices. A number of those who used to practice sorcery collected their books on magic and brought them to be burned publicly. They worked out how much the books were worth, and the total was fifty thousand silver coins. In this way the word of the Lord grew strong and spread widely.

Some time after this Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing first through Macedonia and Achaia. “After I've been there, I'll have to go to Rome,” he said. He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia, while he stayed on for a while in the province of Asia.

It was about this time that serious problems occurred regarding the Way. A man called Demetrius, a silversmith, was producing small silver replicas of the temple of the goddess Artemis. This business brought in a great deal of work for such craftsmen. Demetrius called them together, along with others who worked in similar trades, and said, “Fellow-workers, you know that it's through this business we make our money. As you're no doubt aware from what you've seen and heard—not just here in Ephesus, but throughout almost the whole of Asia—this man Paul has convinced and misled many people, telling them that there are no such things as gods made by human hands. It's not just a question that our business will be in danger of losing respect, but that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be considered worthless. Artemis herself would be dethroned from her high position as the one whom everyone in Asia and the whole world worships.”

When they heard this they became furious, and shouted out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” The city was in complete chaos. People rushed towards the amphitheatre, dragging along with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions who were from Macedonia. Paul thought he should confront the mob, but the other believers would not let him. Some of the provincial officials, who were Paul's friends, also sent a message begging him not to go into the amphitheater.

Some were shouting one thing, and some something else, for the crowd that had gathered was in total confusion—most of them had no idea why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front. Alexander motioned with his hand for them to be quiet, wanting to explain things to the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all took up a chant that lasted for about two hours, shouting “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

After the town clerk had managed to quiet the mob down, he told them, “People of Ephesus, who doesn't know that the city of the Ephesians is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image that fell from heaven? Since these facts can't be denied, you should stay calm—don't do anything rash. You have brought these men here, but they haven't robbed any temples or blasphemed against our goddess. So if Demetrius and the other craftsmen have a complaint against anyone, then go to the authorities and the courts. They can press charges there. If there's anything else, it can be taken to the legal assembly. In fact we ourselves are in danger of being accused of being responsible for this riot today, since there was no reason for it, and we can't justify why it happened.” When he had finished speaking, he dismissed the crowd.

Once the uproar had died down, Paul called the believers together and encouraged them. Then he said goodbye, and left for Macedonia. He passed through the area, sharing many words of encouragement with the believers there, and then traveled on to Greece. After he had spent three months there and just as he was about to sail to Syria, it was discovered that the Jews were plotting against him. So he decided to return through Macedonia. These were the people who traveled with him: Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius from Derbe; Timothy; Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of

Asia. They went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. After the Festival of Unleavened Bread we sailed from Philippi, and met them five days later in Troas, where we spent a week.

Paul was speaking on the first day of the week as we gathered together to break bread. He was planning to leave in the morning, and went on speaking until midnight. (The upstairs room where we were meeting was lit by many lamps.)

A young man called Eutychus was sitting in the window, and he began feeling very sleepy. As Paul went on speaking he fell sound asleep and tumbled down from the third story. When they picked him up they found he was dead.

Paul went down, stretched himself out upon him, and hugged him. “Don't worry, he's alive,” he said.

Paul went back upstairs, broke bread, and ate together with them. He went on talking with them until dawn came, and then he left. They took the young man home alive and well, and were very thankful for this.

We went on ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos. There we were due to pick up Paul, since that was what he had planned as he decided to travel on foot. He did indeed meet us at Assos. We picked him up, and went on to Mitylene. Sailing on from there we arrived off Kios, and the next day we stopped briefly at Samos, and the following day we arrived at Miletus. Paul had planned to sail on past Ephesus so he wouldn't have to spend time in the province of Asia. He was keen to get to Jerusalem in time for the Day of Pentecost.

From Miletus Paul sent a message to the elders of the church in Ephesus. When they arrived, he told them, “You know how I always behaved while I was with you from the first day I arrived in the province of Asia. I served the Lord in humility and in tears. I put up with the troubles and stress caused by the plots of the Jews. However, I never held back from sharing with you anything that would be to your benefit, and I taught you in public, going from house to house. I witnessed both to Jews and Greeks that it was essential to repent and turn to God, and to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Spirit is insisting that I go to Jerusalem, and I have no idea what will happen to me there. All I know is that in every city I visit the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and suffering are waiting for me. But I don't consider my life as worth anything to me. I only want to finish my mission and the ministry that the Lord Jesus gave to me, to witness to the good news of the grace of God.

Now I am certain that you will not see my face again, you among whom I shared the news of the kingdom. So I declare to you today that I am not responsible if anyone is lost. I didn't hesitate to tell you everything God wants you to know. Take care of yourselves and of all the flock, which the Holy Spirit has given to you to supervise. Feed the Lord's church which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave vicious wolves will come among you, and won't spare the flock. From among your own group men will rise up perverting what is right and good so they can lead believers to follow them. So watch out! Don't forget that for three years I went on instructing all of you night and day, often crying over you. Now I commit you to God's care and to the message of his grace, which is able to build you up and provide you with the inheritance that belongs to all who are kept right with him. I never had any desire for anyone's silver or gold or clothing. You know that I worked with my own hands to provide for my own needs, as well as for those who were with me. I have given you an example in everything: work to help those who are weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

When he finished speaking, he kneeled down and prayed with all of them. They all wept as they hugged and kissed him. What upset them the most was what he said about never seeing him again... Then they walked down to the ship with him.

After we had said goodbye to them, we sailed directly to Cos, and the next day on to Rhodes. From there we went to Patara where we found a ship going to Phoenicia. We went on board and set sail. We passed within sight of Cyprus on the left, and continued on to Syria where we landed at Tyre, where the ship's cargo was to be unloaded. We found the believers and stayed there for a week. Through the Holy Spirit the believers told Paul not to go to Jerusalem. When the time was up, we left and went back to the ship to continue our journey. All the believers, and wives and children, accompanied us as we left the city. We kneeled down on the beach and prayed, and said our goodbyes. Then we boarded the ship, and they went back home. Our voyage from Tyre ended at Ptolemais where we greeted the believers and stayed with them for a day.

The next day we left and went to Caesarea. We stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist (one of the Seven). Philip had four unmarried daughters who prophesied. After we'd stayed there for several days, a prophet called Agabus arrived from Judea. Approaching us, he took Paul's belt, and bound his own hands and feet. Then he said, “The Holy Spirit says, ‘This is how the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt, and will hand him over to the foreigners.’”

When we heard this, we and the believers there pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. However, Paul answered, “What are you doing, crying and breaking my heart? I'm ready not only to be bound in Jerusalem, but to die in Jerusalem for the sake of the Lord Jesus.” Since he couldn't be persuaded otherwise we gave up, and said, “May the Lord's will be done.”

After this we packed our bags and headed for Jerusalem. Some of the believers from Caesarea came with us, and they took us to the home of Mnason, where we were going to stay. He came from Cyprus and was one of the early believers.

When we arrived in Jerusalem, the believers there welcomed us warmly. The next day Paul went with us to see James, and all the church leaders were there. After greeting them, Paul went through in detail everything God had done for the foreigners through his ministry.

When they heard what had happened they praised God and told Paul, “Brother, you can see how many thousands of Jews have come to trust in the Lord, and they all keep the Law very carefully. They have been told that you teach Jews living among the foreigners to ignore the Law of Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children and not to follow our customs.

So what should we do about it? People will certainly get to hear that you've arrived here. This is what we want you to do: Four men among us have taken a vow. Go with them and perform the purification rituals with them, paying for them to have their heads shaved. That way everyone will know there's no truth to the rumors they've heard about you, but that you yourself observe the Law in the way that you live. As to the foreigners who have trusted the Lord, we already wrote a letter regarding our decision that they should refrain from eating food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from any animal that is strangled, and from sexual immorality."

So Paul took the men with him, and the next day went and purified himself with them. Then he went to the Temple to give notice regarding the end of the time of purification and the offering which would be made for each of them.

The seven days were almost over when some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the Temple and incited the crowd against him and seized him. "Men of Israel, help!" they shouted. "This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere to oppose our people, the Law, and the Temple. He's also brought Greeks into the Temple, defiling this holy place." (They said this because they had seen him previously in the city with Trophimus the Ephesian and presumed that Paul had brought him into the Temple.) The whole city was shocked by this and people came running. They grabbed hold of Paul and dragged him out of the Temple. Immediately the doors were shut. As they tried to kill him, news came to the Roman troop commander that the whole of Jerusalem was in an uproar.

Immediately the commander took some centurions and soldiers and ran down to the mob. When the mob saw the commander and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul. Then the commander came over and arrested Paul, and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He asked who he was, and what he had done. Some in the mob were shouting one thing and some another. Since the commander couldn't find out the truth due to all the noise and confusion, he ordered Paul brought into the fortress.

When Paul got to the stairs, he had to be carried by the soldiers because the mob was so violent. People in the crowd that was following were shouting, "Get rid of him!" Just as he was about to be taken inside the fortress, Paul asked the commander, "Can I tell you something?"

"Do you know Greek?" asked the commander. "Aren't you the Egyptian who recently incited a rebellion and led four thousand Assassins into the desert?"

"I am a Jew, a citizen of Tarsus in Cilicia, an important city," Paul replied. "Please let me talk to the people."

The commander gave Paul permission to speak. So Paul stood on the stairs and motioned for silence. When it was quiet he spoke to them in Aramaic.

"Brothers and fathers," he said, "Please listen as I give my defense before you." When they heard him speaking to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet.

"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia," he began. "However, I was brought up here in this city, and sat at the feet of Gamaliel. I was taught to strictly observe the law of our fathers. I was zealous for God, just like all of you here today, and I persecuted the people of this Way —having them put to death, and imprisoning both men and women.

As the high priest and the council of the elders can also verify, I received from them letters of authorization addressed to the Jewish brothers in Damascus, and went there to arrest these people and bring them as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished.

At around noon, while I was on my way and approaching Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven shone all around me. I fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

'Who are you, Lord?' I answered.

'I am Jesus of Nazareth, the one you are persecuting,' he told me.

Those who were traveling with me did see the light, but they didn't hear the voice that spoke to me.

'What shall I do, Lord?' I asked.

The Lord told me, 'Get up and go into Damascus, and there you'll be told everything that's arranged for you to do.'

Since I couldn't see because of the brightness of the light, those who were with me led me by the hand into Damascus. There a man called Ananias came to see me. He was a religious man who observed the law, and was highly respected by the Jews who lived in the town. He stood in front of me and said, 'Brother Saul, receive back your sight.' At that very moment I could see again, and I looked at him.

He told me, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know his will, to see the one who is truly good and right, and to listen to what he has to say to you. You will testify for him to everyone about what you have seen and heard. So what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash away your sins as you call on his name.'

I returned to Jerusalem, and as I was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance. I saw a vision of the Lord telling me, 'Hurry! You need to leave Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept what you are telling them about me.'

I replied, 'Lord, they certainly know that I went from synagogue to synagogue, beating and imprisoning those who trusted in you. When Stephen was killed for testifying about you I was standing there in full agreement with those who killed him, holding their coats for them.'

The Lord told me, 'Leave now, for I am sending you far away to the foreigners.'"

Up until this point they had listened to what he was saying, but then they started shouting, "Get rid of this man from the earth—he doesn't deserve to live!" They screamed and tore off their coats and threw dust into the air. The commander ordered Paul brought into the fortress, and gave orders for him to be interrogated by flogging so he could find out the reason people were shouting so much against Paul. As they stretched him out and tied him down to flog him, Paul asked the centurion standing there, "Is it legal to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't had a trial?"

When the centurion heard what Paul said, he went to the commander and asked him, “What are you doing? This man is a Roman citizen.” The commander came, and asked Paul, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?”

Paul replied, “Yes I am.”

“I paid a lot of money to buy Roman citizenship,” said the commander.

“But I was born a citizen,” Paul replied.

Those who were about to interrogate Paul left immediately. The commander was worried when he found out that Paul was a Roman citizen because he had placed him in chains.

The next day, wanting to find out the reason why the Jews were accusing Paul, he had him released and taken before the chief priests and the whole council which he ordered to assemble. He had Paul brought down and placed him before them.

Paul, looking sraight at the council, said, “Brothers, right up to now I have always conducted myself before God with a clear conscience.”

Ananias the high priest ordered the officers standing beside Paul to hit him on the mouth.

Paul said to him, “God will hit you, you whitewashed wall! You're sitting there to judge me according to the law, and yet you order me to be hit in contravention of the law!”

The officers standing beside Paul said, “How dare you insult the high priest!”

“Brothers, I didn't know that he was the high priest,” Paul replied. “As Scriptures say, ‘You must not speak evil of any ruler of your people.’”

When Paul realized that some of the council were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, he shouted out, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee! I'm on trial because of my hope in the resurrection of the dead!”

When he said this, a tremendous argument broke out between the Pharisees and Sadducees that split the council. (The Sadducees say there is no resurrection from the dead, no angels, and no spirits, but Pharisees believe in all of these.)

A great commotion erupted and some of the Pharisee teachers of the law stood up and argued fiercely, saying, “We find this man not guilty! Maybe a spirit spoke to him, or an angel!”

The argument was getting out of hand, so the commander, concerned that they would tear Paul to pieces, ordered the soldiers to go and rescue him from them by force, and take him back into the fortress. Afterwards, during the night, the Lord stood by Paul, and told him, “Keep up your courage! Just as you have given your testimony about me in Jerusalem, so you must be my witness in Rome as well.”

Next day some Jews plotted together, and they took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. Over forty were part of this conspiracy.

They went to the chief priests and leaders and said, “We have taken a solemn oath not to eat anything until we have killed Paul. So you and the council should send word to the commander that he should bring Paul down to meet with you, as if you wanted to examine his case in more detail. We're ready to kill him along the way.”

But Paul's nephew (his sister's son) heard about their planned ambush, and he went into the fortress and told Paul about it. Paul called over one of the centurions, and told him, “Take this young man to the commander, because he has some information to share with him.”

So the centurion took Paul's nephew and brought him to the commander and told him, “The prisoner Paul called me over and asked me to bring this young man to you. He has something to tell you.” The commander took the young man by the hand and drew him aside. “What do you have to tell me?” he asked quietly.

“The Jews have arranged to ask you to bring Paul to the council tomorrow, as if they wanted to ask more detailed questions about his case,” he explained. “Please don't listen to them, because they have planned to ambush him with more than forty men who have taken an oath not to eat or drink until they have killed him. They're ready right now, waiting for you to agree to the request.”

The commander sent the young man on his way, warning him, “Don't tell anyone that you've told me about this.” He summoned two centurions and told them, “Get two hundred soldiers ready to go to Caesarea, together with seventy cavalry-men and two hundred spearmen. Be ready to leave at nine p.m. tonight. Provide horses for Paul to ride to make sure he gets to Governor Felix safely.”

He also wrote a letter that went like this:

“From Claudius Lysias to His Excellency Governor Felix, greetings! This man was seized by the Jews and they were about to kill him, when I arrived on the scene with soldiers and rescued him, because I had found out he was a Roman citizen. I wanted to know the reason for their accusations, so I took him before their council. I found out the charges against him had to do with issues regarding their law, but he was not guilty of anything that merited death or imprisonment. When I discovered a plot against this man I sent him to you right away, ordering his accusers to make their complaints before you.”

So the soldiers followed their orders and took Paul overnight to Antipatris. The next morning they sent him on with the cavalry, and went back to the fortress.

When the cavalry arrived at Caesarea they delivered the letter to the governor and brought Paul before him. After reading the letter, the governor asked Paul what province he came from. When he learned he was from Cilicia he told Paul, “I will investigate your case when your accusers arrive.” He ordered Paul detained in Herod's palace.

Five days later Ananias the high priest arrived with some of the Jewish leaders, and with a lawyer called Tertullus. They presented formal charges against Paul to the governor. When Paul was summoned, Tertullus began making his case against him. He said, “Your Excellency Governor Felix, we have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and as a result of your wise judgment, reforms have been enacted for the benefit of the nation. All of us throughout the country are so very grateful to you for this.

But in order not to bore you, please be so kind as to give us your attention for a short while. We discovered

that this man is a real pest, stirring up rebellions among Jews all over the world, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect. He tried to defile the Temple, so we arrested him. By interrogating him yourself you will discover the truth of our accusations." The Jews joined in, saying that this was all true.

The Governor motioned for Paul to respond. "Recognizing you have been a judge over this nation for many years, I gladly make my defense," Paul began. "You can easily verify that I arrived in Jerusalem to worship just twelve days ago. Nobody found me arguing in the Temple with anyone, or inciting people to riot in any synagogue or anywhere in the city. Nor can they prove to you any of their accusations against me.

But I will admit this to you: I serve the God of our fathers following the beliefs of the Way, which they call a heretical sect. I believe everything the law teaches and what is written in the books of the prophets. I have the same hope in God that they do, believing that there will be a resurrection of the good and the wicked. Consequently I try to make sure I always have a clear conscience before God and everyone.

Having been away for a few years I returned to bring some money to help the poor and to give offerings to God. That's what they found me doing in the Temple —completing the ceremony of purification. There was no crowd and no disturbance. But some Jews from the province of Asia were there, who should be present here before you today to bring their charges, if they have anything against me. Otherwise let these men here explain themselves what crime they found me guilty of when I stood before the council, except for the time when I shouted out to them, 'I am on trial before you today because of my belief in the resurrection of the dead.'"

Felix who was well-informed about the Way then adjourned the trial. "When Lysias the commander comes I will make my decision regarding your case," he said. He ordered the centurion to keep Paul in custody but to allow him some measure of freedom and to let Paul's friends care for him without interference.

Some days later Felix returned with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him speak about trusting in Christ Jesus. He discussed with them about living right, self-control, and the coming judgment. Felix became alarmed and told Paul, "You can go now, and I'll send for you when I get the chance." Hoping that Paul would give him a bribe, Felix often sent for Paul and talked with him. Two years passed and Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. To stay in favor with the Jews, Felix left Paul in prison.

Three days after Festus had arrived in the province he left Caesarea to go to Jerusalem. The chief priests and Jewish leaders came to him and brought their charges against Paul. They begged Festus as a favor to send Paul to Jerusalem, plotting to ambush and kill him on the way. But Festus replied that Paul was in custody at Caesarea and that he himself would be there shortly. "Your leaders can come with me, and make their accusation against this man, if he has done anything wrong," he told them.

After staying there with them for no more than eight or ten days, Festus returned to Caesarea. The following day he took his seat as judge, and ordered that Paul be brought before him. When he came in the Jews that had come from Jerusalem surrounded him and brought many serious charges against him that they couldn't prove.

Paul defended himself, telling them, "I have not sinned at all against the Jewish law, the Temple, or Caesar." But Festus, who was looking to gain favor with the Jews, asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried before me there about these matters?"

"I'm standing before Caesar's court to be tried, right where I should be," Paul replied. "I have not done any wrong to the Jews, as you very well know. If I've committed a crime and have done something that deserves death, I do not ask to be pardoned from a death sentence. But if there's no substance to these accusations they're making against me, then nobody has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"

Festus then conferred with the council, and replied, "You have appealed to Caesar. To Caesar you shall go!"

Several days later, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice arrived in Caesarea and came to pay their respects to Festus. They were staying some time so Festus presented Paul's case to the king, explaining, "There's a man that Felix left as a prisoner here. When I was in Jerusalem, the Jewish chief priests and leaders came and made accusations against him and asked me to sentence him. I replied that it is not according to Roman law to convict anyone without having them face their accusers and giving them the opportunity to defend themselves against the charges. So when his accusers arrived here, I wasted no time and convened the court the very next day. I ordered the man to be brought in.

However, when the accusers got up they didn't bring charges of criminal acts as I expected. Instead they brought up controversies over religious questions, and over a man called Jesus who was dead but whom Paul insisted was alive. Since I was undecided as to how to proceed in investigating such matters, I asked him if he was willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried there. However, Paul appealed for his case to be heard by the emperor, so I ordered him detained until I could send him to Caesar."

"I would like to hear the man myself," Agrippa told Festus.

"I'll arrange for you to hear him tomorrow," Festus replied.

The next day Agrippa arrived with Bernice in great ceremonial splendor and entered the auditorium with the commanders and leading citizens. Then Festus ordered Paul to be brought in.

"King Agrippa, and everyone who is present here with us," Festus began, "you see before you this man whom all the Jewish people, both here and in Jerusalem, have complained to me about, shouting that he shouldn't be allowed to live. However, I discovered he has not committed any crime that deserves death, and since he has appealed to the emperor I decided to send him there. But I don't have anything specific to write about him to His Imperial Majesty. That's why I have brought him before you so I can have something definite to write. It doesn't seem fair to me to send on a

prisoner without explaining the charges made against him."

Agrippa then said to Paul, "You are free to speak on your own behalf."

With a sweep of his arm, Paul began his defense. "I am delighted, King Agrippa, to make my defense before you today regarding everything I am accused of by the Jews, particularly because you are an expert in all Jewish issues and customs. I beg your patient indulgence as you listen to what I have to say.

All the Jews know my life story—from my earliest days beginning in my own country and then in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can verify, if they choose to, that I have followed the religious school that observes our faith in the strictest way—I lived as a Pharisee.

Now I am standing here to be judged regarding the promised hope God gave to our fathers that our twelve tribes hoped to receive as they continually dedicated themselves in God's service. Yes, it's because of this hope that I'm accused by the Jews, Your Majesty! Why should any of you think it's unbelievable that God raises the dead?

Previously I was sincerely convinced I should do as much as I could to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This is what I did in Jerusalem. I threw many of the believers in prison, having been given authority to do this by the chief priests. When they were sentenced to death I cast my vote against them. I had them punished in all the synagogues, trying to make them recant. I was so furiously opposed to them that I went to cities outside our country to persecute them.

That's why one day I was on my way to Damascus with the authority and orders from the chief priests. At about noon as I was on my way, Your Majesty, I saw a light from heaven that blazed brighter than the sun. It shone around me and those who were traveling with me. All of us fell to the ground. Then I heard a voice speaking to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It's hard for you to fight against me!'

'Who are you, Lord?' I asked.

'I am Jesus, the one you're persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'But pick yourself up and get to your feet. The reason why I've appeared to you is to appoint you as my servant, to be a witness for me, telling others how you have seen me and everything I will reveal to you. I will save you from your own people and from the foreigners. I am sending you to them to open their eyes so they can turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, and so they can receive forgiveness for their sins and a place with those who are set right as they trust in me.'

Clearly, King Agrippa, I could not disobey this vision from heaven. First in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, and then all over Judea and also to the foreigners I shared the message of repentance: how they should turn to God, demonstrating their repentance through their actions. That's why the Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to kill me.

God has looked after me so I can stand here today as a witness to everyone, both to ordinary people and to those who are important. I am only repeating what Moses and the prophets said would happen— how the Messiah had to suffer, and that by being the first to rise from the dead he would announce the light of God's salvation to both Jews and foreigners."

Festus interrupted Paul as he made his defense, shouting out, "Paul, you've gone mad! All your knowledge is driving you insane!"

"I'm not mad, Festus your Excellency," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and makes sense. The king recognizes this, and I'm explaining it very clearly. I am sure that he is aware of what's been happening, because none of this took place as if it were hidden in a corner.

King Agrippa, do you believe what the prophets said? I'm sure you do!"

"Do you think you can convince me to become a Christian so quickly?" Agrippa asked Paul.

"Whether it takes a short time or a long time doesn't matter," Paul answered. "But my prayer to God is that not just you, but everybody listening to me today would become like me—except for these chains!"

The king stood up, along with the governor and Bernice, and everyone who had been sitting with them. They conferred together after they had left. "This man hasn't done anything that deserves death or imprisonment," they concluded. Agrippa told Festus, "He could have been freed if he hadn't appealed to Caesar."

When the time came for us to sail to Italy, Paul and some other prisoners were handed over to a centurion called Julius, of the Imperial Regiment. We boarded a ship based in Adramyttium that was headed to the coastal ports of the province of Asia, and we set sail. Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, went with us. The next day we had a brief stop at Sidon, and Julius was kind enough to let Paul go ashore and visit his friends so they could provide what he needed.

We set out from there and sailed to the leeward of Cyprus because the winds were against us. Then we sailed directly across the open sea off the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, arriving at the port of Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found a ship from Alexandria that would be sailing to Italy, and arranged for us to join it.

We sailed slowly for several days and eventually arrived off Cnidus. But since the winds wouldn't allow us to continue we sailed across to the lee of Crete, near to Salmone. With some difficulty we made our way along the coast until we arrived at a place called Fair Havens, near to the town of Lasea. We'd lost a lot of time, and the voyage was becoming dangerous because it was now after the Fast. Paul warned them, "Men, I predict that this voyage will result in much hardship and loss—not just of the cargo and the ship, but also our very lives." But the centurion paid more attention to the advice of the ship's captain and its owner than to what Paul said.

Since the harbor was not large enough to over winter in, the majority were in favor of leaving and trying if possible to reach Phoenix and spend the winter there —a harbor in Crete that faces northwest and southwest.

When a moderate south wind began to blow, they thought they could do what they planned. They pulled up the anchor and sailed close inshore along the coast of Crete. But it wasn't long before a hurricane-force wind called a "northeaster" blew from the land. The

ship was forced out to sea and could not face into the wind. So we had to give in and allow ourselves to be driven before the wind.

We were eventually able to run into the lee of a small island called Cauda, and managed with some difficulty to secure the ship's boat on board. After hoisting it aboard, the sailors bound ropes around the hull to strengthen it. Then, worried that they would be wrecked on the Syrtis banks, they lowered the sea anchor and allowed the ship to be driven along.

The following day as we were violently thrown about by the storm, the crew started throwing the cargo overboard. On the third day they grabbed the ship's gear and tossed it into the sea. We hadn't seen the sun or the stars for many days as the storm beat down on us; so any hope of our being saved was lost.

Nobody had eaten anything for a long time. Then Paul stood before them and told them, “Men, you should have listened to me and not sailed from Crete. Then you could have avoided all this hardship and loss. But now I advise you keep up your courage, because nobody is going to be lost, just the ship. Last night an angel of my God and whom I serve, stood beside me.

‘Don't be afraid, Paul,’ he told me. ‘You have to stand trial before Caesar. See, God has graciously given to you everyone who is sailing with you.’ So men, have courage! I trust God, and I'm convinced things will happen just as I was told. However, we will be wrecked on some island.”

At around midnight on the fourteenth night of the storm, still being blown over the Sea of Adria, the crew suspected they were getting close to land. They checked the depth and found it was forty meters, and a little while later they checked again and it was thirty meters. They were concerned that we might be wrecked on rocks, so they dropped four anchors from the stern, and prayed for daylight to come.

The crew tried to leave the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the water with the pretext that they were going to drop anchors from the ship's bow. But Paul told the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless the crew stays with the ship, you will be lost.” So the soldiers cut the ropes holding the ship's boat, and let it loose.

At daybreak Paul urged all of them to eat something. “It's been fourteen days now that you haven't eaten anything because you've been so worried and preoccupied,” he told them. “Please do what I say and eat some food. This will help give you strength. For not even a hair from anyone's head is going to be lost!” When he'd finished speaking he picked up a loaf of bread, and gave thanks to God for it in front of everyone. Then he broke the bread, and began to eat. Everyone was encouraged and they ate too. The total number of people on board was two hundred and seventy-six.

Once they'd had enough to eat, the crew made the ship lighter by throwing the supplies of wheat overboard. When dawn came they didn't recognize the coastline, but they saw a bay that had a beach. They planned to try running the ship aground there. So they cut the anchor ropes, leaving the anchors in the sea. At the same time they untied the ropes holding the rudders, raised the foresail to the wind, and made for the beach.

But they struck a sandbar and the ship grounded. The bow hit, and stuck so firmly it couldn't be moved, while the stern began to be broken apart by the pounding surf.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners so none of them could swim away and escape. But the centurion, because he wanted to save Paul's life, prevented them from doing this, and ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and make for land. The rest grabbed hold of planks and other wreckage, so that everyone was able to reach land safely.

When we were safely ashore, we discovered that we were on the island of Malta. The people there were very kind—they started a fire and called all of us over so we could warm up from the rain and the cold. Paul collected a bundle of firewood and threw it on the fire. But a poisonous snake was driven out of the bundle because of the heat and bit him, fastening itself on his hand. When the people there saw the snake hanging from his hand, they said to each other, “This man must be a murderer. Even though he escaped death from the sea, Justice won't let him live.”

However, Paul shook the snake off into the fire, and suffered no ill effects. They were expecting him to swell up, or suddenly fall down dead. But after waiting a long time, they saw that nothing bad had happened to him so they changed their minds and decided he must be a god.

Nearby were lands that belonged to Publius, the chief official of the island. He welcomed us and looked after us for three days very hospitably. Now Publius' father was sick, lying in bed suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him, and prayed for him, placed his hands on him, and healed him. After this happened, everyone else who was sick on the island came and was healed. They presented us with many gifts, and when we had to sail they provided everything we needed for the voyage.

After a three month stay we set sail aboard a ship from Alexandria that had spent the winter at the island. It had a figurehead of the Heavenly Twins. We stopped at Syracuse, and spent three days there. From there we sailed on to Rhegium. The following day a south wind blew, and on the second day we arrived at the port of Puteoli, where we discovered some believers. They asked us to stay with them for a week.

So we came to Rome. When some of the believers from Rome heard we had arrived they came to meet us at the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. When Paul saw them, he was thankful to God and much encouraged. When we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay under house arrest with a soldier to guard him.

Three days later Paul invited the Jewish leaders there to come to see him. When they were all together he told them, “Brothers, even though I had not done anything wrong against the people or the customs of our forefathers, I was arrested in Jerusalem and handed over to the Roman authorities. After they had interrogated me they wanted to release me because I had done nothing that warranted execution. But the Jewish leaders opposed this, so I was forced to appeal to

Caesar—not that I had any accusations against my own people. That's why I asked to see you, and talk to you, because it is on account of the hope of Israel that I am chained up like this."

"We have not received any letters from Judea about you, and none of our people have come here with reports against you or to speak badly of you," they told him. "But we do want to hear from you what you believe—especially regarding this sect, which we know is condemned everywhere."

They made an appointment to meet with him. On that day many people came to where he was staying. From morning till night Paul was explaining to them, telling them about the kingdom of God. He tried to convince them about Jesus using the writings of the law of Moses and the prophets. Some accepted what Paul said, but some refused to believe. They couldn't agree among themselves, and they left after Paul told them this: "The Holy Spirit said it well through Isaiah the prophet to your forefathers, 'Go to these people and tell them: Even though you hear, you won't ever understand, and even though you see, you won't ever comprehend. For the minds of these people have become calloused and hard, their ears cannot hear, their eyes are shut, in case they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and understand with their minds, and might come back to me and I would heal them.'

Consequently you should know that this salvation that comes from God has been sent to the foreigners and they will listen."

For two full years Paul stayed there in the house he rented, welcoming everyone who came to see him. He spoke of the kingdom of God, and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ very boldly. No one prevented him.

Romans

Epistle to the Romans

This letter comes from Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ. I was called to be an apostle by God. God appointed me to announce the good news that he had previously promised through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. The good news is about his Son, whose human forefather was David, but who was revealed as God's Son by his resurrection from the dead through the power of the Holy Spirit. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. It was through him that I received the privilege of becoming an apostle to call all nations to obedient trust in him. You are also included among those who were called to belong to Jesus Christ.

I'm writing to all of you in Rome who are loved by God, and called to be his special people. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

Let me begin by saying that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because the way in which you trust in God is spoken about all over the world. I'm always praying for you, as God can confirm—the God I serve with the whole of my being as I share the good news about his Son. In my prayers I'm always asking that I might eventually come and see you, if that's what God wants. I really want to visit you and share with you a spiritual blessing to strengthen you. In this way we can be encouraged together by each others' trust in God, both your trust and mine. I want you to know, my brothers and sisters, I often planned to visit you, but I was kept from coming up till now. I want to see some good spiritual results among you just as I've seen among other people. For I have an obligation to work for both the civilized and the uncivilized, both the educated and the uneducated. That's why I'm really keen to come to Rome and share the good news with you.

I'm certainly not ashamed about the good news, for it's God's power to save everyone who trusts in him—to the Jewish people first, and then to everyone else as well. For in the good news God is revealed as good and right, trustworthy from start to finish. As Scripture says, "Those who are right with God live by trusting him."

God's hostility is revealed from heaven against those who are godless and who are not morally right, those who suppress the truth through the evil that they do. What can be known about God is obvious, because he has made it very clear to them. Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible aspects of God—his eternal power and divinity—are clearly visible in what he has made. Such people have no excuse, because even though they knew God, they did not praise him or thank him, but instead their thinking about God turned into complete foolishness, and darkness filled their empty minds. Even though they claimed to be wise, they became foolish. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for idols, images of mortal human beings, birds, animals, and reptiles. So God abandoned them to the evil desires of their depraved minds, and they did shameful, degrading things to each other. They exchanged God's truth for a lie, worshiping and serving creatures instead of the Creator, who deserves praise forever. Amen.

That's why God abandoned them to their evil desires. Their women exchanged natural sex for that which is unnatural, and in the same way the men gave up sex with women and burned with lust for each other. Men did indecent things to each other, and as a result they suffered the inevitable consequences of their perversions. Since they didn't consider it worthwhile to get to know God, he abandoned them to their worthless, distrustful way of thinking, doing things that should never be done. They filled themselves with all that's wrong: evil, greed, hate, envy, murder, quarreling, deception, malice, and gossip. They're back-stabbers and God-haters. They're arrogant, proud, and boastful. They devise new ways of sinning. They rebel against their parents. They don't want to understand, they don't keep their promises, they don't show any kindness or compassion. Even though they realize exactly what God requires, they do things that deserve death. Not only do they do such things themselves, they also support others in doing them.

So if you judge others you don't have any excuse, whoever you are! For in whatever way you condemn others, you're judging yourself, because you're doing the same things. We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is based on truth. When you judge them do you really think that you however can avoid God's judgment? Or is it that you're treating his wonderful kindness, tolerance, and patience with contempt, not realizing that God in his kindness is trying to lead you to repent? Due to your hard-hearted attitude and your refusal to repent, you're making things far worse for yourself on the day of retribution when God's judgment is demonstrated to be absolutely right. God will make sure everyone receives what they deserve according to what they've done. Those who have kept on trying to do what is good and right will receive glory and honor, immortality and eternal life. But those who think only of themselves, rejecting the truth and deliberately choosing to do evil, will receive punishment and furious hostility. Everyone who does evil will have trouble and suffering—the Jewish people first, and the foreigners too. But everyone who does good will have glory, honor, and peace—the Jewish people first, and the foreigners too. God has no favorites.

Those who sin even though they don't have the written law are still lost, while those who sin that do have the written law will be condemned by that law. Just listening to what the law says doesn't make you right in God's sight. It's those who *do* what the law says who are made right. The foreigners don't have the written law, but when they instinctively do what it says, they are following the law even without having the written law. In this way they show how the law works that's written in their minds. As they think about what they're doing, their conscience either accuses them for doing wrong or defends them for doing what is good and right. The good news I share is that a day is coming

when God will judge, through Jesus Christ, everyone's secret thoughts.

What about you who call yourself a Jew? You rely on the written law and boast about having a special relationship to God. You know what he wants; you do what's right because you've been taught from the law. You're absolutely sure that you can guide the blind, and that you are a light to those in darkness. You think you can set ignorant people straight, a teacher of “children,” because you know from the law all the truth there is to know. So if you're busy teaching others, why don't you teach yourself? You tell people not to steal, but are you stealing? You tell people not to commit adultery, but are you committing adultery? You tell people not to worship idols, but do you profane temples?

You boast about having the law, but don't you misrepresent God by breaking it? As Scripture says, “God's character is defamed among the foreigners because of you.” Being circumcised has value only if you do what the law says. But if you break the law, your circumcision is as worthless as those who are not circumcised at all. If a man who is not circumcised keeps the law, he should be considered as being circumcised even though he's not. The uncircumcised foreigners who keep the law will condemn you if you break the law, even though you have the written law and circumcision. It's not what's on the outside that makes you a Jew; it's not the physical sign of circumcision. What makes you a Jew is on the inside, a “circumcision of the heart” that doesn't follow the letter of the law but the Spirit. Someone like that is looking for praise from God, not from people.

So does a Jew have any advantage? Does circumcision have any benefits? Yes, there are many benefits! First of all, God's message was entrusted to them. What if some of them didn't trust in God? Does their lack of trust in God obliterate the trustworthiness of God? Of course not! Even if everyone else is proved to be lying, God always tells the truth. As Scripture says, “What you say will be proved right, and you will win your case when you are judged.”

But if the fact that we're wrong helps to show that God is right, what should we conclude? That God is wrong to pronounce judgment on us? (I'm talking from a human perspective here.) Of course not! How else could God judge the world? Someone could say, “Why am I still condemned as a sinner if my lies make the truth of God and his glory more obvious in contrast?” Is it a case of, “Let's sin to bring about good”? That's what some people have slanderously accused us of saying. They should be rightly condemned!

So then, are we Jews better than others? Definitely not! Remember that we've already argued that both Jews and foreigners are under the control of sin. As Scripture says, “No one does what is right, not even one. No one understands; no one seeks God. Everyone has turned their backs on him; everyone does what is totally wrong. No one does what is good, not a single one. Their throats are like an open grave; their tongues spread deceit; their lips ooze with the venom of snakes. Their mouths are full of bitterness and curses, and they are quick to cause pain and death. Their way leads to disaster and misery; they don't know how to live in peace. They don't care about respecting God at all.”

It's clear that everything in the law applies to those who live under the law so that no one could have any excuses, and to make sure everyone in the whole world is answerable to God. For no one is made right before God by doing what the law requires. The law only helps us recognize what sin really is.

But now God's character of goodness and right has been demonstrated. It has nothing to do with law-keeping, even though it was spoken of by the law and the prophets. This character of God that is good and right comes to everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ, those who place their confidence in him. It doesn't matter who we are: We have all sinned, and we fall far short of God's glorious ideal. Yet through the free gift of his grace, God makes us right through Christ Jesus who sets us free. God openly presented Jesus as the gift that brings peace to those trusting in him, the one who shed his blood. God did this to demonstrate he is truly good and right, for previously he would hold back and pass over sins, but now at this present time God proves he is fair and does what is right, and that he makes right those who trust in Jesus.

So do we have anything to boast about then? Absolutely not, there's no place for that! And why's that? Is it because we follow the law of observing requirements? No, we follow the law of trusting in God. We conclude that people are made right with God through their trust in him, and not from legal observance. Is God only the God of the Jews? Isn't he the God of other people as well? Of course he is! There is only one God, and he makes us morally right through our trust in him, whoever we are, Jew or foreigner. Does that mean that by trusting in God we do away with the law? Of course not! In fact we affirm the importance of the law.

Let's take Abraham as an example. From a human viewpoint he is the father of our nation. Let's ask, “What was his experience?” For if Abraham was set right by what he did, he would have had something to boast about—but not in God's eyes. However, what does Scripture say? “Abraham trusted God, and so he was considered as being a good person who did right.” Whoever works gets paid—it's not considered as a gift, but because they've earned their wages. But God, who makes sinners right, considers them as right not because they've worked for it but because they trust in him. This is why David speaks of the happiness of those whom God considers as right, and not because they worked for it: “How happy are those whose wrongs are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. How happy are those the Lord does not consider sinful.”

Now is this blessing just for the Jews, or is it for others too? We've just stated that Abraham was accepted as good and right because he trusted God. But when did this happen? When Abraham was a Jew or before? It was actually before he became a Jew by being circumcised, which was a confirmation of his trust in God to make him right. This happened before he was circumcised, so he is the father of everyone who trusts in God and are considered as right by God, even though they may not be circumcised Jews. He is also the father of circumcised Jews not merely because they're circumcised, but because they follow the example of

the trust in God our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

God's promise to Abraham and his descendants that the world would belong to him was not based on his keeping of the law, but because he was made right through his trust in God. For if the promised inheritance is based on keeping the law, then the issue of trusting God is not necessary, and the promise is pointless. For the law results in punishment—but if there's no law then it cannot be broken.

So the promise is based on trusting God. It is provided as a free gift, guaranteed to all the children of Abraham—not merely to those who follow the law, but also to those who trust like Abraham, the father of us all. As Scripture says, “I've made you the father of many nations.” For in the presence of God, Abraham trusted in the God who makes the dead alive and speaks into existence what didn't previously exist. Against all hope Abraham in hope trusted God, so he could become the father of many peoples, just as God had promised him: “This is how many descendants you'll have!” His trust in God didn't weaken even though he thought his body was practically dead (he was around a hundred years old), and knew that Sarah was too old to have children. He held on to God's promise—he didn't doubt it. Instead his trust in God grew stronger, and he gave glory to God. He was totally convinced that what God had promised he had the power to deliver. That's why Abraham was considered right by God.

The words “Abraham was considered right” weren't just written down for his benefit. They were for us too, those of us who will be considered as right, since we trust in God who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead. Jesus was handed over to die because of our sins, and was raised to life to make us right.

Now that we have been made right by God by trusting in him, we have peace with him through our Lord Jesus Christ. It's through Jesus, trusting in him, that we've gained access to this position of grace where we now stand, looking forward with happiness and confidence to sharing in God's glory. Not only this —we also remain confident when problems come, because we know that experiencing problems develops spiritual stamina. Spiritual stamina in turn develops a mature character, and this mature character results in confident hope. Since we have this hope we're never disappointed, for God's love has been poured into us through the Holy Spirit he's given us. When we were completely helpless, at just the right time Christ died for us ungodly people. Who would die for anybody else, even someone who does what's right? (Though perhaps somebody would be brave enough to die for someone really good.) But God demonstrates his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Now that we are made right by his death, we can be absolutely sure we'll be saved by him from the coming judgment. While we were his enemies, God made us his friends through the death of his Son, and so we can be absolutely sure that he will save us through the life of his Son. In addition to this we now celebrate what God has done through our Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile us and make us his friends. For through one man sin entered the world, and sin led to death. In this way death came to everyone, for everyone sinned. Even before the law was given, sin was in the world, however it wasn't counted as sin because there was no law. But death still ruled from Adam until Moses, even over those who didn't sin in the same way as Adam did.

Now Adam prefigured the one to come. But the gift of Jesus is not like the sin of Adam. Though many people died because of one man's sin, God's grace is so much greater and has been shared with so many through his gracious gift in the person of Jesus Christ. The result of the gift is not like that of the sin. The result of Adam's sin was judgment and condemnation, but the gift sets us right with God, despite our many sins. As a result of one man's sin, death ruled because of him. But God's grace is so much greater and his gift sets us right, for everyone who receives it will rule in life through the person of Jesus Christ! Just as one sin brought condemnation on everyone, in the same way one right act gave everyone the opportunity to live right. Just as through one man's disobedience many became sinners, in the same way through one man's obedience many are made right with God. When the law was introduced, sin became even more obvious. But while sin became much more obvious, grace became even more obvious! Just as sin ruled us and brought us death, now grace rules by making us right with God, bringing us eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So what's our response? Should we continue to sin so we can have even more grace? Of course not! Since we're already dead to sin, how can we continue to live in sin? Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Through baptism we were buried with him in death so that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father we too can live a new life. If we've become one with him in dying like he did, then we'll be raised like him too.

We know that our old self was crucified with him to dispose of the dead body of sin so that we wouldn't be enslaved by sin any longer. Anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Since we died with Christ, we have confidence that we will also live with him, for we know that because Christ has been raised from the dead he won't ever die, because death has no longer any power over him. In dying, he died to sin once and for all, but now he lives, and he lives for God! In just the same way you should consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus. Don't let sin have control over your mortal body, don't give in to its temptations, and don't use any parts of your body as evil tools of sin. Instead dedicate yourselves to God as those who have been brought back from death to life, and use all parts of your body as tools to do something good for God. Sin won't rule over you, because you're not under law but under grace.

So then, should we sin because we're not under law, but under grace? Of course not! Don't you realize that if you make yourselves someone's slaves, obeying their orders, then you are slaves to the one you obey? If you are slaves of sin, the result is death; if you obey God, the result is you are made right with him. Thank God that though you once were slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly chose to follow the truth about God that you

learned. Now that you've been freed from sin, you've become slaves of doing what is morally right.

I'm using this everyday example because your human thinking is limited. Just as you once enslaved yourselves to immorality, piling up sin upon sin, now you must enslave yourselves to what is pure and right. When you were slaves to sin you were not required to do what's right. But what were the results back then? Aren't you ashamed of the things you did? Such things that lead to death! But now that you're set free from sin, and have become God's slaves, the results will be a pure life—and in the end, eternal life. The wage sin pays is death, but God's free gift is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Brothers and sisters (I'm speaking here to people who know the law), don't you see that the law has authority over someone only while they're alive? For example, a married woman is bound by the law to her husband while he's alive, but if he dies, she's released from this legal obligation to him. So if she lives with another man while her husband is alive, she would be committing adultery. However, if her husband dies and then she marries another man, she wouldn't be guilty of adultery.

In the same way, my friends, you've become dead to the law through the body of Christ, and so now you belong to someone else—Christ, who was raised from the dead so that we could live productive lives for God. While we were controlled by old nature, our sinful desires (as revealed by the law) were at work within us and resulted in death. But now we've been set free from the law, and have died to what kept us in chains, so that we can serve in the newness of the spirit and not the old letter of the law.

So what do we conclude? That the law is sin? Of course not! I wouldn't have known what sin was unless the law defined it. I wouldn't have realized that wanting to have other people's things for myself was wrong without the law that says, “Don't desire for yourself what belongs to someone else.” But through this commandment sin found a way to stir up in me all kinds of selfish desires—for without law, sin is dead. I used to live without realizing what the law really meant, but when I understood the implications of that commandment, then sin came back to life, and I died. I discovered that the very commandment that was meant to bring life brought death instead, because sin found a way through the commandment to deceive me, and used the commandment to kill me!

However, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, right, and good. Now would something that is good kill me? Of course not! But sin shows itself to be sin by using good to cause my death. So by means of the commandment, it's revealed how evil sin really is. We realize that the law is spiritual; but I'm all-too-human, a slave to sin. I really don't understand what I'm doing. I do the things I don't want to do, and what I hate doing, that's what I do! But if I'm saying that I do what I don't want to, this shows that I admit the law is good and right. So it's no longer me who does this, but sin living in me— for I know that there's nothing good in me as far as my sinful human nature is concerned. Even though I want to do good, I'm just not able to do it. The good I want to do, I don't do; while the evil I don't want to do, that's what I end up doing! However, if I'm doing what I don't want to, then it's no longer me doing it, but sin living in me.

This is the principle I've discovered: if I want to do what's good, evil is always there too. My inner self is delighted with God's law, but I see a different law at work within me that is at war with the law my mind has decided to follow, making me a prisoner of the law of sin that is within me. I'm totally miserable! Who will rescue me from this body that's causing my death? Thank God—for he does this through Jesus Christ our Lord! Here's the situation: while I myself choose with my mind to obey God's law, my human nature obeys the law of sin.

So there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. What the law couldn't do because it was powerless due to our sinful nature, God was able to do! By sending his own Son in human form, God dealt with the whole problem of sin and destroyed sin's power in our sinful human nature. In this way we could fulfill the good requirements of the law by following the Spirit and not our sinful nature. Those who follow their sinful nature are preoccupied with sinful things, but those who follow the Spirit concentrate on spiritual things. The sinful human mind results in death, but having the mind led by the Spirit results in life and peace. The sinful human mind is hostile to God because it refuses to obey the law of God—in fact it never can, and those who follow their sinful nature can never please God. But you're not following your sinful nature, but the Spirit—if it's true that the Spirit of God is living in you. For those that don't have the Spirit of Christ in them don't belong to him.

However, if Christ is in you, even though your body is going to die because of sin, the Spirit gives you life because you're now right with God. The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you. He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your dead bodies through his Spirit that lives in you. So brothers and sisters, we don't have to follow our sinful nature that operates according to our human desires. For if you live under the control of your sinful nature, you're going to die. But if you follow the way of the Spirit, putting to death the evil things you do, then you will live. All those who are led by the Spirit of God are God's children. You were not given a spirit to enslave and terrify you once more. No, what you received was the spirit that makes you children in God's family. Now we can shout out, “God is our Father!” The Spirit himself agrees with us that we're God's children. If we're his children, then we're his heirs. We are heirs of God, and heirs together with Christ. But if we want to share in his glory we must share in his sufferings.

Yet I'm convinced that what we suffer in the present is nothing compared to the future glory that will be revealed to us. All of creation is patiently waiting, longing for God to reveal his children. For God allowed the purpose of creation to be frustrated. But creation itself waits in hope for the time when it will be set free from the slavery of decay and share the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that all creation

groans with longing, suffering birth-pains even up till now. Not only creation, but we too, who have a foretaste of the Spirit, we groan inwardly as we wait for God to "adopt" us—the redemption of our bodies. For we were saved by hope. Yet hope that's already seen isn't hope at all. Who hopes for what they can already see? Since we're hoping for what we haven't yet seen, we wait for it patiently.

Similarly the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We don't know how to speak with God, but the Spirit himself intercedes with and through us by groans that can't be put into words. The one who examines the minds of everyone knows the Spirit's motives, because the Spirit pleads God's cause on behalf of the believers. We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, those whom he has called to be part of his plan. For God, choosing them in advance, set them apart to be like his Son, so that the Son would be the first of many brothers and sisters. Those that he chose, he also called; and those that he called, he also made right; and those that he made right, he also glorified.

So what's our response to all this? If God is for us, who can be against us? God, who did not hold back his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, won't he also freely give us everything? Who can accuse God's special people of anything? It's God who sets us right, so who can condemn us? It's Christ Jesus who died—more importantly, who was raised from the dead—who stands at God's right-hand, presenting our case.

Who can separate us from Christ's love? Can oppression, distress, or persecution? Or hunger, poverty, danger, or violence? Just as Scripture says, "For your sake we're in danger of being killed all the time. We're treated like sheep to be slaughtered." No—in all that happens to us we're more than conquerors through him who loved us. I'm absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor devils, neither the present nor the future, nor powers, neither height nor depth, in fact nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am in Christ, and what I say is true. I'm not lying! My conscience and the Holy Spirit confirm how terribly sad I am, how I have never-ending pain in my heart, for my own people, my brothers and sisters. I would rather be cursed myself, separated from Christ, if that would help them. They are my fellow-Israelites, God's chosen people. God revealed to them his glory and made agreements with them, giving them the law, true worship, and his promises. They are our forefathers—ancestors of Christ, humanly-speaking, the one who rules over everything, the eternally-blessed God. Amen.

It's not that God's promise has failed. For not every Israelite is a true Israelite, and not all those who are descended from Abraham are his true children. For Scripture says, "Your descendants will be counted through Isaac," so it's not Abraham's actual children who are counted as God's children, but only those children of God's promise who are considered his true descendants.

This is what the promise was: "I will return next year and Sarah will have a son." In addition Rebecca's twin sons had the same father, our forefather Isaac. But even before the children were born, and before they'd done anything right or wrong (so that God's purpose could continue, proving God's calling of people is not based on human performance), she was told, "The older brother will serve the younger one." As Scripture says, "I chose Jacob, but rejected Esau."

So what should we conclude? That God was unjust? Certainly not! As he said to Moses, "I will be merciful to whoever I should show mercy, and I will have compassion on whoever I should show compassion." So it does not depend on what we want, or our own efforts, but the merciful nature of God. Scripture records God saying to Pharaoh: "I put you here for a reason—so that through you I could demonstrate my power, and so that my name could be made known throughout the earth." So God is merciful to those he wishes to be, and hardens the attitude of those he wants to. Now you'll argue with me and ask, "So why does he still blame us then? Who can resist the will of God?" That's no way to speak, for who are you—a mere mortal—to contradict God? Can something that is created say to its creator, "Why did you make me like this?" Doesn't a potter have the right to use the same batch of clay to make both a decorative bowl and an everyday pot?

It's as if God, wanting to demonstrate his opposition to sin and to reveal his power, bears patiently with these "pots destined for destruction," so that he might reveal the greatness of his glory through these "pots of mercy" which he has prepared in advance for glory. This is who we are—people he has called, not just from among the Jews, but from among the foreigners too...

As God said in the book of Hosea, "Those who are not my people I will call my people, and those who are not loved I will call the ones I love," and, "It will happen that at the place where they were told, 'You're not my people,' there they will be called the children of the living God."

Isaiah cries out regarding Israel: "Even if the children of Israel have become as numerous as the sands of the sea, only a small number will be saved. For the Lord is going to quickly and completely finish his work of judgment on the earth." As Isaiah previously said, "If the Lord Almighty had not left us some descendants, we would have become just like Sodom and Gomorrah."

What shall we conclude, then? That even though the foreigners were not even looking to do right, they did grasp what is right, and through their trust in God did what was morally right. But the people of Israel, who looked to the law to make them right with God, never succeeded. Why not? Because they relied on what they did rather than trusting in God. They tripped on the stumbling-block, just as Scripture predicted: "Look, I'm placing in Zion a stumbling-block, a rock that will offend people. But those who trust in him won't be disappointed."

My brothers and sisters, my heart's desire—my prayer to God—is for the salvation of the people of Israel! I can testify to their passionate dedication to God, but it's not based on knowing him as he truly is. They don't understand how God makes us right with him, and they try to make themselves right. They refuse to accept God's way of making people right. For Christ is the fulfillment of the law. All those who trust in him are made right. Moses wrote, "Whoever does what is

right by obeying the law will live." But the attitude of doing right that comes from trust says this: "Don't ask 'who'll go to heaven?' (asking to bring Christ down)," or "'who'll go to the place of the dead?' (asking to bring Christ back from the dead)." What Scripture actually says is: "The message is very close to you—it's what you talk about and what's in your mind." In fact it's this message based on trust that we're presenting. For if you declare that you accept Jesus as Lord, and you are convinced in your mind that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. Your trust in God makes you right and good, and your declaration of accepting God saves you. As Scripture says, "Those who trust in him will not be disappointed."

There's no difference between Jew and Greek—for the same Lord is Lord of everyone, and he gives generously to everyone who asks him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." But how can people call on someone they don't trust? How can they trust someone they haven't heard about? How can they hear unless they're told? How can they go out and tell others unless they're sent? Just as Scripture says, "Those who come bringing the good news are truly welcome!" But not everyone has accepted the good news. As Isaiah asks: "Lord, who trusted in the news they heard from us?" Trusting in God comes from hearing—hearing the message of Christ.

It's not that they haven't heard. Quite the opposite: "The voices of those speaking for God have been heard all over the earth—their message went out to the whole world." So my question is, "Didn't Israel know?" First of all Moses says, "I'll make you jealous by using people who aren't even a nation; I will make you angry by using ignorant foreigners!" Then Isaiah said it even more strongly: "I was found by people who weren't even looking for me; I revealed myself to people who weren't even asking for me." As God says to Israel, "All day long I reached out my hands to a disobedient and stubborn people."

But then I ask, "Has God rejected his people?" Of course not! I'm an Israelite myself, from the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected his chosen people. Don't you recall what Scripture says about Elijah? How he complained about Israel to God, saying, "Lord, they've killed your prophets and destroyed your altars. I'm the only one left, and they're trying to kill me too!"

How did God answer him? "I still have seven thousand left who have not worshiped Baal." Today it's just the same: there are still some faithful people left, chosen by God's grace. And since it's through grace, then clearly it's not based on what people do, otherwise grace wouldn't be grace!

So what do we conclude? That the people of Israel didn't achieve what they were striving for—only the chosen, while the rest became hard-hearted. As Scripture says, "God dulled their minds so their eyes could not see and their ears could not hear, to this very day." David adds, "May their feasts become a trap for them, a net that catches them, a temptation that brings punishment. May their eyes become blind so they cannot see, and may their backs always be bent low in dejection."

So am I saying that they stumbled and consequently failed completely? Not at all! But as a result of their mistakes, salvation came to other nations, to "make them jealous." Now if even their failure benefits the world, and their loss profits the foreigners, how much more beneficial it would be if they were to completely fulfill what they were meant to be.

Now let me speak to you foreigners. Insofar as I'm a missionary to foreigners, I promote what I'm doing that somehow I might make my people jealous and save some of them. If the result of God's rejection of them is that the world becomes God's friends, the result of God's acceptance of them would be like the dead coming back to life! If the first part of the bread dough given as an offering is holy, then so is all the rest; if the roots of a tree are holy, then so are the branches. Now if some of the branches have been broken off, and you—a wild olive shoot—have been grafted in, and have shared with them the benefit of nourishment from the olive tree's roots, then you shouldn't look down on the other branches. If you're tempted to boast, remember it's not you who are supporting the roots, but the roots that are supporting you. You could make the claim, "Branches were broken off so I could be grafted in." All well and good—but they were broken off because of their failure to trust in God, and you stay there because you trust in God. So don't think highly of yourselves, but be respectful, because if God didn't spare the original branches, he won't spare you either. You should recognize both God's kindness and toughness—he was tough on the fallen, but God is kind to you so long as you trust in his kindness—otherwise you'll be removed too. If they no longer refuse to trust in God, they can be grafted in as well, for God is able to graft them back in again. If you could be cut from a wild olive tree, and then be grafted artificially onto a cultivated olive tree, how much more easily they could be grafted back naturally to their own tree.

I don't want you, my brothers and sisters to miss this previously-hidden truth, for otherwise you could become conceited. The people of Israel have become hard-hearted in part, until the process of the foreigners coming in is complete. This is how all Israel will be saved. As Scripture says, "The Savior will come from Zion, and he will turn Jacob away from his opposition to God. My promise to them is that I'll take away their sins."

Though they are enemies of the good news—and this is to your benefit—they are still the chosen people, and loved because of their forefathers. God's gifts and his calling can't be withdrawn. At one time you disobeyed God, but now God has shown you mercy as a result of their disobedience. In just the same way that they're now disobedient as you were, they will also be shown mercy like you received. For God treated everyone as prisoners because of their disobedience so that he could be merciful to everyone.

Oh how deep are God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge! How incredible his decisions, how unimaginable his methods! Who can know God's thoughts? Who can give him advice? Who has ever given anything to God that God would be obliged to repay? Everything comes from him, everything exists through him, and everything is for him. Glory to him forever, Amen!

So I encourage you, my brothers and sisters, because of God's compassion for you, to dedicate your bodies as a living offering that is holy and pleasing to God. This is the logical way to worship. Don't follow the ways of this world; instead be transformed by the spiritual renewal of your mind so you can demonstrate what God's will really is—good, pleasing, and perfect. Let me explain to all of you, through the grace given to me, that no one should think of themselves better than they ought to. You should think about yourselves realistically, according to the degree of trust God has shared with you.

Just as there are many parts to the body, but they don't all do the same thing, so we are one body in Christ, even though we are many—and we all belong to one another. We each have different gifts that vary according to the grace given to us. So if it's speaking for God, then you should do so depending on how much you trust in God. If it's the ministry of service then you should serve; if teaching then you should teach; if encouragement then you should encourage; if giving then you should give generously; if leadership then you should lead with commitment; if being merciful then you should do so gladly.

Love must be genuine. Hate what is evil; hold on tightly to what is good. Be completely dedicated to each other in your love as family; value others more than yourselves. Don't be unwilling to work hard; serve the Lord with an enthusiastic spirit. Remain cheerful in the hope you have, put up with the troubles that come, keep on praying. Share in providing for the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers with hospitality. Bless those who persecute you—bless them, and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy; cry with those who are crying. Think about one another. Don't consider yourself more important than others; live humbly. Don't be conceited. Don't pay back anyone evil for evil. Make sure you show everybody that what you're doing is good, and as far as it's up to you, live at peace with everyone. My dear friends, don't seek revenge, but leave it to God to execute judgment—as Scripture points out, "'It's for me to dispense justice, I will repay,' says the Lord." If those who hate you are hungry, give them food; if they're thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing so you pile fiery coals on their heads. Don't be defeated by evil—conquer evil with good.

Everyone should obey government authorities, because no one has the power to rule unless God gives permission. These authorities have been put there by God. Whoever resists the authorities opposes what God has put in place, and those who do so shall find themselves judged accordingly. For rulers don't frighten those who do right, but those who do wrong. If you don't want to live in fear of the authorities, then do what is right, and you'll have their approval. Those in power are God's servants, put there for your own good. If you do wrong, you should be frightened—it's not without reason that authorities have the power to punish! They are God's servants, punishing offenders. So it's important to do as you're told, not just because of the threat of punishment, but because of what your conscience tells you. That's why you have to pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants taking care of such things. Pay whatever you owe: taxes to the tax authorities, fees to the fee-collectors; give respect to those who should be respected, honor those who should be honored. Don't owe anybody anything, except love for one another—for those who love their neighbor have kept the law.

"You must not commit adultery, you must not kill, you must not steal, you must not jealously want things for yourself"—these and the other commandments are summed up in the statement, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love doesn't do wrong to anyone, so love fulfills the law. You should do this because you realize how urgent the time is—that it's high time for you to wake up from your sleep. For salvation is closer to us now than when we first put our trust in God. The night is nearly over, the day is almost here! So let's get rid of our dark deeds and put on the armor of light. Let's behave properly, showing that we're people who are living in the light. We shouldn't spend our time going to wild parties and getting drunk, or having affairs and acting immorally, or getting into fights and being jealous. Instead put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and forget about following your sinful desires.

Accept those who are still struggling to trust in God, and don't get into arguments over personal opinions. One person may believe they can eat anything, while another whose trust is weak only eats vegetables. Those who eat anything must not look down on those who won't, and those who won't eat must not criticize those who do—for God has accepted them both. What right do you have to judge someone else's servant? It's their own master who decides whether they are right or wrong. With the Lord's help they will be able to take their stand for right.

Some people consider some days more important than others, while others consider each day the same. Everyone should be completely convinced in their own minds. Those who respect a special day do so for the Lord; and those who eat without worrying do so for the Lord since they give thanks to God; while those who avoid eating certain things do so for the Lord, and they also give thanks to God.

None of us live for ourselves, or die for ourselves. If we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord—so whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. This was the reason Christ died and came back to life—so that he could be the Lord of both the dead and the living. So why do you criticize your fellow-believer? Why do you despise your fellow-believer? For all of us will stand before God's throne of judgment.

For the Scriptures say, "'As surely as I am alive,' the Lord says, 'Every knee shall bow before me, and every tongue will declare that I am God.'" So every one of us will have to explain ourselves to God. Therefore let's not judge each other anymore, but decide to do this instead—we won't put obstacles in the way of fellow-believers, or cause them to fall.

I'm certain—persuaded by the Lord Jesus—that nothing in itself is ceremonially unclean. But if someone considers it to be unclean, to them it is unclean. If your fellow-believer is hurt by you over matters of food, then you're no longer behaving in a loving way. Don't destroy someone for whom Christ died by the food you choose to eat. Don't let the good things you do be

misrepresented— for God's kingdom is not about eating and drinking, but about living right, having peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Anyone who serves Christ in this way pleases God, and is appreciated by others. So let's pursue the path of peace, and find ways to encourage each other. Don't destroy the work of God with arguments over food. Everything is clean—but it would be wrong to eat and offend others. It's better not to eat meat or drink wine or anything else that would cause your fellow-believer to stumble. What you personally believe is between you and God. Happy are those who don't condemn themselves for doing what they think is right! But if you have doubts whether it's right or wrong to eat something, then you shouldn't, because you're not convinced it's right. Whatever isn't based on conviction is sin.

Those of us who are spiritually strong ought to support those who are spiritually weak. We shouldn't just please ourselves. We should all encourage others to do what's morally right, building them up. Christ didn't live to please himself, but as Scripture says of him, “The insults of those who abused you have fallen on me.” These Scriptures were written down in the past to help us understand, and to encourage us so that we could wait patiently in hope.

May the God who gives patience and encouragement help you to be in full agreement among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that you can with one mind and with one voice together glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

So accept one another, just as Christ accepted you, and give God the glory. I maintain that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show God tells the truth, keeping the promises he made to their forefathers. He also came that foreigners could praise God for his mercy, as Scripture says, “Therefore I will praise you among the foreigners; I will sing praises to your name.” And also: “Foreigners, celebrate with his people!” And again: “All you foreigners, praise the Lord, let all peoples praise him.” And again, Isaiah says, “Jesse's descendant will come to rule the nations, and foreigners will put their hope in him.”

May the God of hope completely fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you will overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit! I'm convinced that you, my brothers and sisters, are full of goodness, and that you are filled with every kind of knowledge, so you are well able to teach one another. I've been blunt in the way I have written to you about some of these things, but this is just to remind you. For God gave me grace to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the foreigners, like a priest sharing God's good news, so that they could become an acceptable offering, made holy by the Holy Spirit.

So even though I have something to boast about because of my service for God, (I wouldn't dare talk about any of this except as Christ has done it through me), I have led foreigners to obedience through my teaching and demonstration, through the power of signs and miracles done with the Holy Spirit's power. From Jerusalem all the way over to Illyricum, everywhere I've shared fully the good news of Christ. In fact I was keen to spread the good news in places that hadn't heard the name of Christ, so that I wouldn't be building on what others have done. As Scripture says, “Those who haven't been told the good news will discover him, and those who haven't heard will understand.”

That's why I was prevented so many times from coming to see you. But now, as there's nowhere left here to work, and since I've looked forward to visiting you for many years, when I go to Spain I hope to see you when I pass through. Maybe you can give me some help for my journey once we've enjoyed some time together. At the moment I'm on my way to Jerusalem to help the believers there, because the believers in Macedonia and Achaia thought it was a good idea to send a contribution to the poor among the believers in Jerusalem. They were happy to do this because they're in their debt. Now that foreigners are sharing their spiritual benefits, they owe it to the Jewish believers to help them in material things. So once I've done this, and have safely delivered this contribution to them, I'll visit you on my way to Spain. I know that when I come, Christ will give us his full blessing.

I want to encourage you, my brothers and sisters through our Lord Jesus Christ and through the love of the Spirit, to join together in praying hard for me. Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea. Pray that my work in Jerusalem will be welcomed by the believers there. Pray that I will come to you with gladness, as God wills, so we can enjoy one another's company. May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

I recommend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deaconess at the Cenchreae church. Please welcome her in the Lord, as believers should, and help her in whatever way she needs, because she has been a great help to many people, myself included. Pass on my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their lives for me. It's not just me who is very thankful for them, but all the churches of the foreigners too. Please also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home. Pass on my best wishes to my good friend Epaenetus, the first person to follow Christ in the province of Asia. Give my greetings to Mary, who worked hard for you, and also Andronicus and Junia, from my own country and fellow-prisoners. They are well-known among the apostles, and became followers of Christ before me. Give my best to Ampliatus, my good friend in the Lord; to Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ; and to my dear friend Stachys. My greetings to Apelles, a trustworthy man in Christ. Greetings to Aristobulus's family, to my countryman Herodion, and to those from Narcissus' family who belong to the Lord. My best wishes to Tryphaena and Tryphosa, hard workers for the Lord, and to my friend Persis, who has done so much in the Lord. Give my greetings to Rufus, an exceptional worker, and his mother—who I count as my mother too. Greetings to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the fellow-believers who are with them. Best wishes to Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and to all the believers with them. Greet one another affectionately. All the churches of Christ send their greetings to you.

Now I'm pleading with you my fellow-believers: watch out for those who cause arguments and confuse people about the teachings you learned. Stay away

from them! These people are not serving Christ our Lord but their own appetites, and by their smooth-talking and pleasant words they deceive the minds of unsuspecting people.

Everyone knows how faithful you are. This makes me really happy. However, I want you to be wise about what's good, and innocent of anything bad. The God of peace will soon break the power of Satan and make him subject to you. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Timothy my co-worker sends his greetings, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my fellow-countrymen. Tertius—who wrote down this letter—also sends you greetings in the Lord. My host Gaius, and the whole church here, send you greetings. Erastus the city treasurer, sends his best wishes, as does our fellow-believer Quartus.

Now to him who can make you strong
Through the good news I share and the message of Jesus Christ,
According to the mystery of truth that has been revealed,
The mystery of truth, hidden for eternity, now made visible;
Through the prophets' writings, and
Following the command of the eternal God,
The mystery of truth is made known to everyone everywhere so they can trust and obey him;
To the one and only wise God,
Through Jesus Christ—
To him be glory for ever. Amen.

1 Corinthians

First Epistle to the Corinthians

This letter comes from Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the will of God, and from Sosthenes, our brother. It is sent to the church of God in Corinth, those who are being made right in Christ Jesus, called to live holy lives—and to everyone who worships the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere, the Lord both of them and of us.

May you have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm always thanking God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus. Through him you have been made rich in everything, in all that you say and every aspect of what you know. In fact the testimony of Christ was proved valid in your experience, so that you're not missing any spiritual gift as you wait for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also keep you strong to the very end, so you will be kept right until the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. God is trustworthy who called you to share together in fellowship with his son Jesus Christ our Lord.

Brothers and sisters, I plead with you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you all agree and that you're not divided. Instead develop a united attitude and purpose. For I have been told things about you, my brothers and sisters, by some of Chloe's people—that you are quarreling among yourselves. Let me explain what I mean. You're all making different claims: “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Peter,” or “I follow Christ.” Is Christ divided? Did Paul die on a cross for you? Was it in the name of Paul that you were baptized?

I'm grateful to God that I didn't baptize any of you, except Crispus and Gaius, so nobody can claim they were baptized in my name. (Oh, and I also baptized the Stephanas family—I can't think of anyone else.) For Christ didn't send me out to baptize, but to spread the good news, and not with eloquent human wisdom, otherwise the cross of Christ would be made powerless.

For the message of the cross is nonsense to those who are lost, but it's the power of God to those of us who are saved. As Scripture says, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will wipe out the cleverness of the clever.”

So how about the wise, the writers, and the philosophers of this age? Hasn't God turned the wisdom of this world into foolishness? Since God in his wisdom allowed the world in its wisdom not to know God, it was God's gracious plan that by the foolishness of the good news those who trusted in him would be saved. The Jews ask for miraculous signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, but our message is of Christ killed on a cross—offensive to the Jews, and foolishness to the foreigners. However, for those who are called by God, both Jews and foreigners, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than we are; and the weakness of God is stronger than we are.

Brothers and sisters, remember your calling—and that this did not include many who are wise, humanly speaking; not many who are powerful; not many who are important. Instead God chose the things the world considers foolish to humiliate those who think they are wise. He chose the things the world considers weak to humiliate those who think they are strong. He chose the things that are unimportant and despised by the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that nobody should boast in God's presence.

It's because of him that you live in Christ Jesus, who God made to be wisdom for us. He sets us right, keeps us right, and frees us. So as Scripture says, “Whoever wants to boast, let them boast in the Lord.”

Brothers and sisters, when I came to you I didn't try to impress you with wonderful words or great wisdom when I told you what God had to say to you. I decided that while I was with you I didn't want to concentrate on anything except Jesus Christ, and that he was crucified. I came to you in weakness, fearful and trembling. I didn't speak to you with persuasive words of wisdom to convince you. I just explained it all to you through the evidence and power of the Spirit. That way your trust in God wouldn't rely on human wisdom but on the power of God.

However, we do use words of wisdom when we speak to those who are spiritually mature, but this isn't wisdom that comes from this world, or from the rulers of this world who soon fade from the scene. On the contrary we explain God's wisdom in terms of a revealed mystery that was previously hidden which God planned for our glory before the creation of the worlds.

None of the rulers of this world understood anything about this—for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as Scripture says, “No one has ever seen, and no one has ever heard, and no one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” But God has revealed this to us through the Spirit, because the Spirit delves into the depths of God. Who knows anyone's thoughts except the actual person? In the same way no one knows God's thoughts except the Spirit of God. For we have received the Spirit from God, not the spirit of this world, so that we could understand what God so generously gave us. That's what we speak about—not using words taught by human wisdom, but what the Spirit teaches. We explain what is spiritual using spiritual terms. Of course people who are not spiritual don't accept what comes from God's Spirit. It's just foolish nonsense to them, and they can't understand it, because what is spiritual has to be properly examined. People who are spiritual investigate everything, but are not placed under investigation themselves. For “who understands the Lord's mind, and would think to instruct him?” But we *do* have Christ's mind!

My brothers and sisters, I couldn't talk with you as spiritual believers, but as worldly people—like baby Christians. I gave you milk—I couldn't give you solid food to eat, because you weren't ready for it. Even now you're not ready for it, because you're still worldly. Since you're still jealous and argumentative, doesn't that show you're worldly, behaving just like ordinary

people do? When one of you says, “I follow Paul,” while another says, “I follow Apollos,” doesn't that show you're being so very human?

Who is Apollos, anyway? And who is Paul? We're just servants through whom you believed. Each of us does the work God gave us to do. I did the planting, Apollos did the watering—but it was God who made you grow!

So the one who does the planting doesn't count for anything, any more than the one who does the watering. The only one who matters is God who is growing you! The one planting and the one watering have the same goal, and both will be rewarded according to what they've done.

We are workers together with God—and you are God's field, his building. Through the grace of God that he gave to me, I laid down the foundation like a skilled building supervisor. Now someone else is building on it. Whoever does the building needs to watch what they're doing. For no one can lay any other foundation than what's already laid—that is Jesus Christ. Those who build on that foundation may use gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, or straw— but whatever is used to build with will be exposed. For on the Day of Judgment, fire will reveal it and test it. Everyone's work will be shown for what it is. Those whose building survives will be rewarded. Those whose building is burned up will lose out. They will still be saved, but it will be like passing through fire! Don't you know you are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? Anyone who destroys God's temple will be destroyed by God, for God's temple is holy, and you are the temple.

Don't deceive yourselves. If there's any one of you who thinks they're worldly wise, they should become fools so they can become truly wise! This world's wisdom is plain foolishness to God. As Scripture says, “He uses the cleverness of the wise to catch them out,” and “The Lord knows the arguments of the wise are pointless.” So don't boast about people. For you have everything, whether it's Paul or Apollos or Peter—or the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the future. You have everything— and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

So think of us as Christ's servants given the responsibility for “the mysteries of God.” More than this, those who have such responsibilities are required to be trustworthy. Personally it hardly matters to me if you or anyone else judges me—in fact I don't even judge myself. I don't know of anything I've done wrong, but that doesn't make me morally right. It's the Lord who judges me. So don't judge anything before the right time—when the Lord comes. He will bring to light all the darkest secrets that are hidden, and he will reveal people's motives. God will give everyone whatever praise they deserve.

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied this to Apollos and myself as an example for you. That way you will learn not to go beyond what has been written, and not in arrogance prefer one over the other. Who made you so special? What do you have that you weren't given? Since you were given it, why do you proudly claim you weren't? You think you have all you need. You think you're so wealthy. You think you're kings already, and don't need us. I wish you were really ruling as kings, so we could rule with you! The way I see it, God has put us apostles on display as the last in the line, condemned to die. We have been made a public show before the entire universe, to angels and to human beings. We're Christ's fools, but you are so wise in Christ! We're the weak ones, but you are so strong! You have the glory, but we are despised! Right up till now we're hungry and thirsty. We have no clothes. We're badly beaten up, and we have no place to call home. We struggle on doing manual work. When people curse us, we bless them. When they persecute us, we put up with it. When they insult us, we respond with kindness. Even now we are treated like dirt, the worst trash in the whole world.

I'm not writing like this to make you feel ashamed, but to caution you as my children whom I love so much. Even though you may have thousands of Christian instructors, you don't have many fathers—it was in Christ Jesus that I became your father when I shared the good news with you. So I'm pleading with you to imitate me!

That's why I sent Timothy to you, my trustworthy son in the Lord whom I love so much. He will remind you about the way I follow Christ, just as I always teach in every church I visit. Some among you have become arrogant, thinking I wouldn't bother coming to see you. But I am coming to visit you soon, if that's what the Lord wants. Then I'll find out what these arrogant people are saying, and what kind of power they have. For the kingdom of God is not about mere words, but about power. So what do you want? Shall I come with a stick to beat you, or in love and a gentle spirit?

I hear reports that sexual immorality is happening among you, immorality that even the foreigners don't practice. A man is living with his father's wife! You are so proud of yourselves! Shouldn't you have wept with sadness, and excluded the man who did this? Even though I'm not physically present there, I am there in spirit and just as if I were there I've already made my judgment of the one who has done this. When you meet together in the name of the Lord Jesus, I'll be there with you in spirit and with the power of our Lord Jesus. Hand over this man to Satan so his sinful nature may be destroyed and he himself be saved on the day of the Lord.

You shouldn't be proud about this. Don't you know that it only takes a little yeast to make the whole batch of dough rise? Get rid of this old yeast so that you can be a new batch of dough to make bread without yeast. Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed. So let us celebrate this festival, not with old yeast or the yeast of evil and wickedness, but with the bread made without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

In my previous letter I wrote that you should not associate with immoral people. I wasn't referring to the immoral people of this world, those who are greedy and cheat others, or those who worship idols, otherwise you'd have to leave this world! What I meant when I wrote was that you shouldn't associate with anyone who is called a Christian who is immoral or greedy or worships idols; or who is abusive or a drunkard or who cheats others. Don't even share a meal with anyone like that! It's not my place to judge those outside the church.

But shouldn't you judge those who are inside the church? God judges those that are outside the church. “Expel the wicked from among you.”

How dare any of you file a lawsuit before pagan judges if you have a dispute with your neighbor! Instead you should bring this before other believers. Don't you know that Christian believers will judge the world? If you're going to judge the world, are you not fit to judge in the most minor cases? Don't you know we are going to judge angels? How much more those things that relate to this life! So if you have to judge things that relate to this life, how can you go to judges that are not respected by the church? I'm trying to shame you by saying this. What? You can't find one wise person among you who can settle a dispute that you have?

Instead one believer takes another believer to court, and places the issue before unbelievers! The very fact you have lawsuits against each other already is a complete disaster. Wouldn't it be better to accept the injustice? Why not let yourselves be defrauded? But you would rather cause injustice and defraud even your fellow-believers in church.

Don't you know those who are unjust will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be fooled! People who are immoral, worship idols, commit adultery, are sexual perverts, homosexuals, thieves, greedy, drunkards, abusers, or cheats, will not inherit the kingdom of God. Some of you were once like that, but you have been made clean and holy. You have been made right in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.

People say, “I'm free to do anything”—but not everything is appropriate! “I'm free to do anything”—but I will not let anything control me! People say, “Food for the stomach, and the stomach for food”—but God will destroy both of them. Also, the body is not meant to be used for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us up the same way. Don't you know your bodies are parts of Christ's body? Should I take the parts of Christ's body and join them to a prostitute? Absolutely not! Don't you realize that anyone who has sex with a prostitute becomes “one body” with her? Remember that Scripture says, “The two will become one body.” But whoever is joined to the Lord is one with him in spirit! Stay away from sexual immorality! All other sins that people commit are outside of the body, but sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit that is within you, that you received from God? You don't belong to yourself—a price was paid for you! So glorify God in your body!

Now about what you wrote to me: “It's good not to marry.” However, because of the temptation to sexual immorality, it is better that each man have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should meet his wife's sexual needs, and the wife her husband's. The wife's body doesn't just belong to her, but her husband; and similarly the husband's body doesn't just belong to him but his wife. So don't deprive each other, except by mutual consent for a while—for example because you want to spend time in prayer. Afterwards come together again so that Satan won't tempt you to sin because of your lack of self-control. I'm telling you this not as a command, but as a concession. However, I wish that everyone was like me, but each person has their own gift from God—one has this gift, one has another. To those who are not yet married, or who are widowed, I would say it is better if they remain like me. But if they lack self-control, then they should get married—for it is better to marry than burn with desire.

These are my instructions to those who are married—in fact not from me but the Lord: The wife should not leave her husband (or if she does, she should not remarry, or she should return to her husband); and the husband should not leave his wife. Now, to the rest of you (and this is me speaking, not the Lord), I would say, If a Christian man has a non-Christian wife and she is willing to stay with him, he should not leave her. And if a Christian woman has a non-Christian husband, and he is willing to stay with her, she should not leave her husband.

For a husband who is not a Christian, the marriage relationship is made holy by the Christian wife, and for a wife who is not a Christian, the marriage relationship is made holy by the Christian husband. Otherwise it would mean your children were impure, but now they are holy. However, if the non-Christian spouse leaves, let them leave. In such cases the Christian man or woman is not slavishly bound, for God has called us to live in peace. Wives, who knows? You may save your husband! Husbands, who knows? You may save your wife!

Apart from such cases, each of you should remain in the situation that the Lord has placed you, and continue to live the life to which God has called you. That's my instruction to all the churches. Were you circumcised when you were converted? Don't become uncircumcised. Were you uncircumcised when you were converted? Don't become circumcised. Circumcision doesn't mean anything, and uncircumcision doesn't mean anything. Keeping the commandments of God is what really matters. Everyone should remain in the position they were in when they were called. If you were a slave when you were called, don't worry—though if you have an opportunity to become free, take it. If you were a slave when the Lord called you, you are now free, working for the Lord. In the same way if you were called when you were free, you are now Christ's slave! A price has been paid for you, so don't become a slave to anyone. Brothers and sisters, remain in the position you were in when you were called, living with God.

Now about “people who are not married,” I don't have a specific instruction from the Lord, so let me give you my opinion as someone who by the Lord's mercy is considered trustworthy. Because of the present difficult situation we are in I think it is best to just stay as you are. Are you already married? Don't try to get divorced. Are you unmarried? Don't look to get married. If you do get married, you haven't sinned. If an unmarried woman gets married, she hasn't sinned. But you will have many troubles in this current world and I would want to spare you these. I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, that time is short, and from now on for those who are married it may seem as if they are not married,

and those who weep as if they did not weep, and those that celebrated as if they had not celebrated, and those that bought as if they did not own, and those who are engaged with the world as if it is not fulfilling—for the present world order is passing away.

I would prefer you to be free from such worries. A man who is not married pays attention to what is important to the Lord, and how he can please the Lord. But a man who is married pays attention to what is important in this world, and how he can please his wife. As a result his loyalties are divided. Similarly an unmarried woman or girl pays attention to what is important to the Lord, so she may live a life dedicated both in body and spirit. But a married woman pays attention to what is important in this world, and how she can please her husband. I'm telling you this for your benefit. I'm not trying to put a noose around your neck, but to show you the right thing to do so you can serve the Lord without being distracted.

But if a man thinks he's behaving improperly with the woman he's engaged to, and if he thinks he will give in to his strong sexual desire, and if he thinks he ought to get married, he is not sinning by getting married. But if a man stays true to his principles, and there is no obligation to marry, and if he has the power to keep his feelings under control and stay engaged to her, he does well not to marry. So the man who marries the woman he's engaged to does well, while the one who does not get married does better.

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wants in the Lord. But in my opinion she would be happier if she didn't remarry—and I think I too have the Spirit of God when I say this.

Now about “food sacrificed to idols.” So “we all have knowledge” about this subject. Knowledge makes us proud, but love strengthens us. If anyone thinks they know anything, they don't know as they really should know! But whoever loves God is known by God.

So regarding eating food sacrificed to idols: we know that there are no such things as idols in the world, and that there is only one real God. Even though there are some things called “gods,” whether in heaven or on earth—in fact there are many “gods” and “lords.” But for us there is only one God, the Father, from whom everything was made, and he is the goal of our existence; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom everything was made, and he is the means of our existence.

But not everyone has this “knowledge.” Some who up to now have been so used to idols as a reality that when they eat food sacrificed to an idol, their conscience (which is weak) tells them they have defiled themselves. But food doesn't gain us God's approval! If we don't eat this food, we're not bad, and if we do eat this food, we're not good. Just take care not to use this freedom you have to eat food sacrificed to idols to become offensive to those with a weaker attitude. If another believer sees you who have such “better knowledge” eating food in an idol temple, won't his weak conscience be convinced to eat food sacrificed to idols? By your “better knowledge” the weaker believer is destroyed, a believer for whom Christ died. In this way you sin against other believers, wounding their weaker consciences, and you sin against Christ. So if eating food sacrificed to idols would cause my fellow believer to stumble, I will never eat such meat ever again, so that I don't offend any believer.

Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Haven't I seen Jesus our Lord? Aren't you the results of my work in the Lord? Even if I'm not an apostle to others, at least I am one to you. The proof of my being an apostle of the Lord is you!

Here is my reply to those who question me about this: Don't we have the right to be provided with food and drink? Don't we have a right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the rest of the apostles, the Lord's brothers, and Peter? Is it only Barnabas and myself who have to work to support ourselves? Which soldier ever had to pay his own salary? Who plants a vineyard and doesn't get to eat its fruits? Who feeds a flock and doesn't consume its milk?

Am I just speaking from a human point of view? Doesn't the law say the same thing? In the law of Moses it's written, “Don't muzzle the ox when it's threshing out the grain.” Was God just thinking about oxen? Wasn't he directing this at us? Surely this was written for us—for anyone who plows should plow in hope and anyone who threshes should hope to share in the harvest. If we sowed what is spiritual with you, does it really matter if we reap some material benefit? If others exercise this right over you, don't we deserve it even more? Even so we did not exercise this right. On the contrary we would rather put up with anything than hold back the gospel of Christ.

Don't you know that those who work in temples receive their meals from temple offerings, and those who serve at the altar receive their portion of the sacrifice on the altar? In just the same way the Lord ordered that those who announce the good news should live from supporters of the good news. But I have not made use of any of these provisions, and I'm not writing about this to suggest it should be done in my case. I'd rather die than to have anyone take away my pride in not having received any benefit.

I have nothing to boast about in sharing the good news because it's something I feel compelled to do. In fact it's dreadful for me if I don't share the good news! If I'm doing this work because of my own choice, then I have a reward. But if it wasn't my choice, and an obligation was placed on me, then what reward do I have? It's the opportunity to share the good news without charging for it, not demanding my rights as a worker for the good news.

Even though I am free and serve no one, I have placed myself in service to everyone so that I might gain more. To the Jews I behave like a Jew so that I might win Jews. To those who are under the law I behave as someone under the law (even though I am not obligated under the law), so that I might win those under the law. To those who don't operate according to the law, I behave like them (though not disregarding God's law, but operating under the law of Christ), so that I might gain those who don't observe the law.

To those who are weak, I share in their weakness so that I may win the weak. I have ended up being

“everyman” to everyone so that by using every possible means I might win some! I do all this for the sake of the good news so that I too may share in its blessings!

Wouldn't you agree that there are many runners in a race, but only one gets the prize? So run your best, so you may win! Every competitor who participates in the games maintains a strict training discipline. Of course they do so to win a crown that doesn't last. But our crowns will last forever!

That's why I run straight in the right direction. I fight accurately, not punching the air. I also treat my body severely to bring it under my control, for I don't want somehow to be disqualified after sharing the good news with everybody else.

Now I want to explain this to you, brothers and sisters. Our forefathers lived under the cloud, and they all passed through the sea. Symbolically then they were baptized “into Moses” in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink, for they “drank from a spiritual rock” that accompanied them. That rock was Christ. However, God wasn't happy with most of them, and they perished in the desert.

Now these experiences are examples to us to show us we should not desire what is evil, as they did. You must not worship idols, as some of them did, as it's recorded in Scripture: “The people feasted and drank, and indulged in pagan worship.” We must not commit sexual sins, as some of them did, and as a result 23,000 died in one day. Nor should we push God to the limit, as some of them did, and were killed by snakes. Don't complain at God, as some did, and died at the hands of the destroying angel.

All the things that happened to them are examples to us and were written down to warn us, we who are living close to the end of time. So if you think you're strong enough to stay standing—be careful you don't fall! You won't experience any greater temptation than anyone else, and God is trustworthy. He won't allow you to be tempted more than you can bear, and when you are tempted, he will provide for you a way out so you can stay strong. So my good friends, stay away from idol worship.

I'm talking to sensible people, so you decide whether I'm telling the truth. When we give thanks for the cup we use in the Lord's Supper, don't we share in the blood of Christ? When we break the communion bread, don't we share in the body of Christ? By eating from one loaf of bread, we show that even though we are many, we are one body. Look at the people of Israel. Don't those who eat the sacrifices made on the altar share together? What am I saying then? That anything sacrificed to idols means anything, or that an idol has any real existence? Of course not! The pagans are sacrificing to demons, and not to God. I don't want you to have anything to do with demons! You can't drink the Lord's cup as well as the cup of demons; you can't eat from the Lord's table as well as the table of demons. Are we trying to make the Lord jealous? Are we stronger than he is?

Some say, “I'm free to do anything”—but not everything is appropriate! “I'm free to do anything”—but not everything is constructive! You shouldn't look out for yourself, but for your neighbor. Eat whatever is sold in the market without asking questions because of your conscience, for “the earth and everything in it belong to God.”

If a non-Christian invites you to a meal, and you feel like going, eat whatever you are served, without asking questions because of your conscience. But if someone tells you, “This food has been sacrificed to idols,” don't eat it for the sake of the one who mentioned it and for conscience' sake. His conscience I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be determined by someone else's conscience? If I choose to eat with thankfulness, why should I be criticized for eating what I'm thankful to God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, make sure to do everything to the glory of God. Don't cause offense, whether it's to Jews or Greeks or the church of God— just as I try to please everybody in all I do. I don't think of what benefits me, but what benefits others, so that they may be saved.

You should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. I'm grateful that you always remember me and that you are keeping to the teachings just as I passed them on to you. I do want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, the man is the head of the woman, and God is the head of Christ. A man's head is dishonored if he prays or prophesies with his head covered. A woman's head is dishonored if she prays or prophesies with her head uncovered—it's just as if she had her hair shaved off. If a woman's head is not covered, then she should have her head shaved. If it's scandalous for a woman to be shorn or shaven, then she should have her head covered. A man shouldn't cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, while the woman is the glory of the man. Man didn't come from woman, but woman came from man; and man was not created for the woman, but the woman was created for the man. That's why the woman should have this sign of authority on her head out of respect for the watching angels. Even so, from the Lord's perspective, the woman is as essential as the man, and the man as essential as the woman. As the woman came from the man, so the man comes from the woman—but more importantly everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: is it appropriate for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Doesn't nature itself indicate that a man with long hair disgraces himself? However, a woman with long hair brings herself glory, because her hair is given to her as a covering. But if anyone wants to argue about this, we don't have any other custom than this, and neither do any other of God's churches.

Now in giving you the instructions that follow I can't commend you, because when you meet together you cause more harm than good! First of all, I hear that when you have church meetings that you are split into different factions, and I believe there's some truth to this. Of course such splits among you must happen so those who are genuine can prove themselves by their evidence! When you meet together you're not really celebrating the Lord's Supper at all. Some want to eat first before everyone else, leaving others hungry. Still others get drunk. Don't you have your own houses to eat and drink in? Do you look down on God's church, and humiliate those who are poor? What should I tell

you? That you're doing really well? I have nothing good to say about you for doing this!

For I received from the Lord what I passed on to you: the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took some bread. After giving thanks, he broke the bread into pieces and said, "This bread is my body, which is given for you. Remember me by doing this." In the same way he took the cup, after the meal, and said, "This cup is the new agreement sealed with my blood. Remember me when you drink it. For every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you announce the Lord's death, until he returns."

So anyone who eats the bread or drinks from the Lord's cup in a dishonorable way will be guilty of doing wrong against the body and blood of the Lord. Let each person examine themselves, and then let them eat the bread and drink from the cup. Those who eat and drink bring judgment on themselves if they don't recognize their relationship with the body of the Lord. That's the reason why many of you are weak and sick, and some even have died. However, if we really examined ourselves, we would not be judged like this. But when we are judged, we are being disciplined by the Lord so that we won't be condemned along with the world. So my brothers and sisters, when you meet together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry, then eat at home so that when you meet together you won't bring condemnation on yourselves. I'll give you more directions when I visit.

Now about "spiritual gifts." My brothers and sisters, I want to explain this to you. You know that when you were pagans, you were deceived, being led astray by worshiping idols who couldn't even speak. Let me make it clear to you: no one who speaks in the Spirit of God says, "Curse Jesus!" and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord!" except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they come from the same Spirit. There are different kinds of ministries, but they come from the same Lord. There are different ways of working, but they come from the same God, who is at work in all of them. The Spirit is given to each of us and is revealed for the good of all. One person is given by the Spirit the ability to speak words of wisdom. Another is given a message of knowledge by the same Spirit. Another receives the gift of strongly trusting in God by the same Spirit. Another receives gifts of healing from that one Spirit. Another is given the ability to perform miracles. Another receives the gift of prophecy. Another is given the gift of spiritual discernment. Another receives the ability to speak different languages, while another is given the gift of interpreting languages. But all of these gifts are the work of the one and the same Spirit, sharing with each person as he alone chooses.

Just like the human body is one unit but has many parts—all the parts of the body even though there are many of them, make up one body—so is Christ. For it was through one Spirit that we were all baptized into one body. It doesn't matter whether we are Jews or Greeks, slave or free—we all were given the one Spirit to drink. The body is not made of one part, but many parts. If the foot were to say, "Because I'm not a hand, I'm not part of the body," would that make it not part of the body? If the ear were to say, "Because I'm not an eye, I'm not part of the body," would that make it not part of the body? If the whole body was an eye, how could you hear anything? If the whole body was an ear, how could you smell anything?

But God has arranged each part in the body, every last one of them, placing them just as he wanted. If they were all the same part, what would happen to the body? However, since there are many parts, they make up the body. The eye can't tell the hand, "I don't need you," or the head tell the feet, "I don't need you." Quite the opposite: some of those parts of the body that seem the most insignificant are the most essential. In fact those parts of the body we do not consider to be decent to reveal we "honor" more by covering them up—what is indecent we treat with greater modesty! What's presentable doesn't need such covering up. God has so arranged the body that more honor is given to the parts that are less presentable. This is so there wouldn't be any conflict within the body—the different parts should care equally for each other. So when one part is suffering, all the other parts of the body suffer with it, and when one part is treated well, then all the other parts of the body are happy too!

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one makes up a part of it. In the church, God has arranged first for some to be apostles, secondly for some to be prophets, thirdly teachers. Then there are those who perform miracles, those with healing gifts, those who can help others, those good at administration, and those who can speak different languages. Not everyone is an apostle, or a prophet, or a teacher, or able to perform miracles. Not all have healing gifts, or the ability to speak languages, or to interpret languages. But you should really want to have the most significant gifts. So now I will show you a far better way.

If I were to have eloquence in human languages—even the language of angels—but have no love, then I would only be an echoing gong or a clashing cymbal. If I were to speak prophecies, to know every secret mystery and be completely knowledgeable, and if I were able to have so much faith I could move mountains, but have no love, then I am nothing. If I were to donate everything I own to the poor, or if I were to sacrifice myself to be burned as a martyr, and have no love, then I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous. Love is not boastful. Love is not proud. Love does not act improperly, or insist on having its own way. Love is not argumentative and doesn't keep a record of wrongs. Love takes no delight in evil but celebrates the truth. Love never gives up, keeps on trusting, stays confident, and remains patient whatever happens.

Love never fails. Prophecies will come to an end. Tongues will become silent. Knowledge will become useless. For our knowledge and our prophetic understanding are incomplete. But when completeness comes, then what is incomplete disappears. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I grew up I left behind such childlike ways. At the moment we peer into a mirror's dim reflection, but then we shall see face to face. For now I only have partial knowledge, but then I shall know completely, just as I am completely known. Trust,

hope, and love last forever—but the most important is love.

Make love your most important objective! But also do your best to gain spiritual gifts, especially the ability to speak God's message. Those who speak in a tongue are not talking to people, but to God, because nobody can understand them as they speak mysteries in the Spirit. However, the words of those who speak for God build people up—they provide encouragement and comfort. Those that speak in a tongue only build themselves up, but those who speak God's message build up the church. I would like it if you all spoke in tongues, but I'd prefer if you could speak God's message. Those who speak for God are more important than those who speak in tongues, unless they interpret what's been said, so that the church can be built up.

Brothers and sisters, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what benefit would I be to you unless I bring you some revelation, or knowledge, or prophetic message, or teaching? Even when it comes to something non-living such as musical instruments like a flute or a harp—if they don't produce clear notes, how will you know what tune is being played? Similarly, if the trumpet doesn't give a clear sound, who will get ready for battle? It's the same situation for you—unless you speak using words that are easy to understand, who will know what you're saying? What you say will be lost on the wind. There are surely many languages in this world, and there is meaning in every one of them. If I don't understand the language, those who speak make no sense to me, and I make no sense to them. It's the same for you—if you are keen to have spiritual gifts, try to have many of those that will build up the church. Anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that they're able to translate what they say. For if I pray out loud in a tongue, my spirit is praying, but it does nothing for my understanding!

So then, what should I do? I will pray “in the Spirit,” but I will pray with my mind too. I will sing “in the Spirit,” but I will sing with my mind too. For if you only pray “in the Spirit,” how can ordinary people that don't have understanding say “Amen” after your prayer of thanks, since they haven't a clue what you said? You might have said a great prayer of thanks, but the other hasn't been helped! I thank God that I can speak in tongues more than all of you. But in church I would rather speak five understandable words to teach others than ten thousand words in a tongue nobody understands. Brothers and sisters, don't think like children. Be as innocent as babies in regard to evil, but be grown up in your understanding. As Scripture records, “‘I will speak to my people through other languages and the lips of foreigners, but even then they won't listen to me,’ says the Lord.”

Speaking in tongues is a sign, not to believers, but those who don't believe. Speaking God's prophetic message is the opposite: it is not for those who don't believe, but for believers. If the whole church is meeting together and you are all speaking in tongues, and some people come in who don't understand, or people who don't believe, won't they say that you are insane? But if everyone is speaking God's message, and someone comes in who isn't a believer, or someone who doesn't understand, they will be convinced and called to account by everyone's words. Their secret thoughts will be revealed, so they will fall to their knees and worship God, affirming that God is truly among you.

So then, brothers and sisters, what should you do? When you meet together, different people will sing, or teach, or share a special message, or speak in a tongue, or give an interpretation. But everything should be done to build up and encourage the church. If anyone wants to speak in a tongue, make it just two, or three at the most, taking turns, and someone should interpret what is said. If there's no one there to interpret, those who speak in tongues should keep quiet in church and only speak to themselves, and God. Similarly, have two or three of those who give God's prophetic message speak, and let everyone else think about what was said. However, if a special revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, then the first speaker should give way to them. You can all speak for God, one at a time, so that everyone can learn and be encouraged. It is for those who speak for God to control their prophetic inspiration, for God is not a God of disorder but of peace and quiet. This is the way it should be in all the churches of God's people. “Women should stay quiet in the churches—they shouldn't speak. They should respect their situation, as the laws states. If they want to learn they can do so at home, asking their husbands. It is not proper for women to speak in church.” What? Did the word of God begin with you? Are you the only ones it came to? Anyone who thinks they are a prophet, or that they have some spiritual gift, should be aware that what I'm writing to you is a command of the Lord. Those who ignore this will themselves be ignored. So my brothers and sisters, make it your aim to speak for God. Don't prohibit speaking in tongues. Just make sure everything done is done properly and in an orderly manner.

Now I want to remind you about the good news I announced to you. You accepted it, and you have stood firm for it. It is through this good news that you are saved if you hold on to the message that I gave you. Otherwise you trusted for nothing! I passed on to you what I myself had also received, a message of vital importance: that Christ died for our sins, according to Scripture; he was buried and was raised from the dead on the third day, again in accordance with Scripture. He appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still alive today, though some have died. He appeared to James, then all the apostles. Last of all, he also appeared to me, someone born as it were at the wrong time. For I'm the least important apostle of all, not even fit to be called an apostle since I persecuted God's church. But by God's grace I am what I am, and his grace given to me wasn't wasted. On the contrary I've worked harder than all of them—though not me, but God's grace working through me. So whether it's I or they, this is the message we shared with you that brought you to trust in God.

Now if the message declares that Christ has been raised from the dead, how is it that some of you say there's no resurrection of the dead? If there's no resurrection of the dead then Christ hasn't been raised either.

And if Christ isn't raised, then our message we shared with you is pointless, and your trust in God is pointless too. In addition, we would be shown to be false witnesses of God when we testified that God raised Christ from the dead. But God didn't raise Christ from the dead if it's true that there's no resurrection. If the dead are not raised, then Christ hasn't been raised either, and if Christ hasn't been raised, then your trust in God is useless, and you are still in your sins. This also means that those who died in Christ are lost. If our hope in Christ is only for this life, we're the most pitiful people of all!

But Christ *has* been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of the harvest from those who have died. Just as death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead came through a man. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in their own turn: Christ the firstfruits, then those who belong to Christ when he comes. After this comes the end, when Christ hands over the kingdom to God the Father, having destroyed all rulers, authorities, and powers. Christ has to rule until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. As Scripture says, “He put everything under his feet.” (Of course when it says “everything” is put under him it's obvious this doesn't refer to God who placed everything under Christ's authority.) When everything has been placed under Christ's authority, then the Son will also place himself under God's authority, so that God who gave the Son authority over everything may be all in all.

Otherwise what will those people do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then would people be baptized for them? As for us, why do we place ourselves in danger hour after hour? I die every day—let me say it bluntly, my brothers and sisters. This is just as sure as the pride I have for what Christ Jesus has done in you. Humanly speaking, what would I gain by fighting with those people in Ephesus who were like wild animals, if the dead are not raised? If the dead are not raised, “let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die”!

Don't be fooled: “Bad company ruins good character.” Come to your senses as you should, and stop sinning! Some of you don't know God. I tell you this to shame you.

Of course somebody will ask, “How exactly are the dead raised? What kind of body will they have?” What a foolish question! What you sow doesn't sprout into life unless it dies. When you sow, you don't sow the plant it will grow into, just the bare seed, whether wheat or whatever you're planting. God makes the plant grow into the form he has chosen, and different seeds produce different plants with different forms. What living things are made from is not the same. Human beings have one kind of body tissue, while animals have another, birds another, and fish another. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. Heavenly bodies have one kind of beauty, earthly bodies another. The sun shines in one way, and the moon another, while the stars are different again, with each one shining in a different way.

It's the same with the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in decay; it is raised to last forever. It is sown in shame; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown as a natural body; it is raised as a spiritual body. Just as there are natural bodies there are spiritual bodies. As Scripture says, “The first man, Adam, became a living being”; but the last Adam a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural—the spiritual came after that. The first man is from the dust of the earth; the second man is from heaven. Earthly people are like the man made from the earth; heavenly people are like the man from heaven. Just as we bore the likeness of the earthly man so we shall bear the likeness of the man from heaven. However, I tell you this, my brothers and sisters: our present bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of God. These decaying bodies cannot inherit what lasts forever.

Listen, I'm going to reveal a mystery! Not all of us will die—but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised never to die again, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must be clothed with a body that never perishes. This mortal life must be clothed with immortality. When this perishable body has been clothed with a body that never perishes, and this mortal life has been clothed with immortality, then the Scripture will come true that says, “Death has been totally conquered and destroyed. Death—where's your victory? Death—where's your sting?” The sting that causes death is sin; and the power of sin is the law; but praise God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. So my dear brothers and sisters: be strong, stand firm, doing everything you can for the Lord's work, since you know that nothing you do in the Lord is wasted.

Now about “collecting money for fellow-believers.” I'm giving you the same instructions for you to follow as I did to the churches in Galatia. On the first day of the week everybody should set aside at home some money you've earned. I don't want there to be any collections to have to be made when I'm with you. When I get there I will write recommendation letters for whoever you choose, and they will take your donation to Jerusalem. If it works out for me to go too, they can come with me.

After I've been to Macedonia, I plan to come and visit you. I pass that way through Macedonia and I may stay with you for a while, perhaps spend the winter, and then you can send me on my way to wherever I'm headed. This time I don't want to come and see you for just a short time. I hope I can stay for a while with you, if that's what the Lord permits. However, I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, because a tremendous door of opportunity has opened up for me there, though there are plenty who oppose me.

Now if Timothy arrives, make sure that he has nothing to fear by being with you, for he's working for the Lord just as I am. Don't let anyone look down on him. Cheerfully send him on his way so he can come and see me—the brothers and sisters and I are waiting for him. As for our brother Apollos: I urged him to go and see you together with the other believers, but he wasn't willing to go at the moment. He'll come and visit when he gets the chance.

Stay alert. Stand firm in your trust in God. Take courage. Be strong. Whatever you do, do it in love. You know that Stephanas and his family were among the first converts in Achaia, and they dedicated themselves to helping God's people. I'm pleading with you, my brothers and sisters, to respect their leadership, and everyone who helps the work with such dedication. I'm delighted that Stephanas, Fortunatas, and Achaicus have arrived here, for they did what you weren't able to. They have been a great source of encouragement to me, and to you. People like that deserve your recognition.

The churches of Asia send their greetings. Aquila and Priscilla, along with the church that meets in their home, send their best wishes. All the brothers and sisters here send their greetings. Greet one another affectionately. I Paul write this greeting with my own hand. Anyone who doesn't love the Lord should be excluded from the church. Come Lord! May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. My love to all of you in Christ Jesus. Amen.

2 Corinthians

Second Epistle to the Corinthians

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the will of God, and from Timothy, our brother. It is sent to the church of God in Corinth, together with all of God's people throughout Achaia. May you have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise be to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is the compassionate Father and the God of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those who are also in trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. The more we share in Christ's sufferings, the more we receive the abundant comfort of Christ. If we are in distress, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are being comforted, it is for your comfort, which results in you patiently bearing the same sufferings that we suffer. We have great confidence in you, knowing that as you share in our sufferings you also share in our comfort.

Brothers and sisters, we won't keep you in the dark about the trouble we had in Asia. We were so overwhelmed that we were afraid we wouldn't have the strength to continue—so much so we doubted we would live through it. In fact it was like a death sentence inside us. This was to stop us relying on ourselves and to trust in God who raises the dead. He saved us from a terrible death, and he will do so again. We have total confidence in God that he will continue to save us. You help us by praying for us. In this way many will thank God for us because of the blessing that God will give us in response to the prayers of many.

We take pride in the fact—and our conscience confirms it—that we have acted properly towards people, and especially to you. We have followed God's principles of holiness and sincerity, not according to worldly wisdom but through the grace of God. For we are not writing anything complicated that you can't read and understand. I hope you'll understand in the end, even if you only understand part of it now, so that when the Lord comes you will be proud of us, just as we are of you.

Because I was so sure of your confidence in me I planned to come and visit you first. That way you could have benefited twice, as I would go on from you to Macedonia, and then return from Macedonia to you. Then I would have had you send me on my way to Judea. Why did I change my original plan? Do you think I make my decisions lightly? Do you think that when I plan I'm like some worldly person who says Yes and No at the same time? Just as God can be trusted, when we give you our word it's not both Yes and No. The truth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was announced to you by us—me, Silvanus, and Timothy—and it wasn't both Yes and No. In Christ the answer is absolutely Yes! However many promises God has made, in Christ the answer is always Yes. Through him we respond, saying Yes to the glory of God.

God has given both us and you the inner strength to stand firm in Christ. God has anointed us, placed his stamp of approval on us, and given us the guarantee of the Spirit to convince us. I call God as my witness that it was to avoid causing you pain that I chose not to come to Corinth. This isn't because we want to dictate how you relate to God, but because we want to help you have a joyful experience—for it's by trusting God that you stand firm.

That's why I decided that I would avoid another sad visit with you. For if I make you sad, who will be there to make me happy? It won't be those I've made sad! That's why I wrote what I did, so that I wouldn't be sad over those who should make me happy. I was so sure that all of you would share in my happiness. I was crying many tears when I wrote to you, in great anguish and with a heavy heart—not to make you sad, but so you would know how much love I have for you.

Not to put it too strongly, but the person caused more pain to all of you than to me. This person suffered enough punishment from the majority of you, so now you should forgive him and be kind to him. Otherwise he may sink into despair. So I urge you to publicly affirm your love towards him. That's why I wrote, so I could discover your true character and whether you're doing everything you were told to do. Anyone you forgive, I forgive too. What I have forgiven, whatever it may be, I have forgiven before Christ for your benefit. In this way Satan will not be able to take us in, because we know the tricks he thinks up.

Now when I arrived in Troas to spread the good news of Christ, the Lord opened a door of opportunity for me. But my mind wasn't at peace because I couldn't find my brother Titus. So I said goodbye and went over to Macedonia.

But praise be to God, who always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ, and reveals through us the sweet scent of his knowledge wherever we go! We are like a fragrance of Christ to God, rising up from among those who are being saved as well as those who are dying. To those who are dying it is the smell of decay, while to those who are being saved it is the scent of life! But who is up to such an assignment? We are not like the majority who trade in the word of God for profit. Quite the opposite: we are sincere in sharing the word of God in Christ, knowing God is watching us.

Are we starting to speak well of ourselves again? Or do we need to have some letter of recommendation for you, or from you, as some people do? You are our letter, written in our experience with you, that everybody reads and knows about. You demonstrate that you are a letter from Christ, delivered by us; not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not written on stone slabs but in our living experience as human beings. We have total confidence before God through Christ.

Not that we would consider ourselves able to do this on our own—it's God who gives us this capacity! He also gave us the ability to be ministers of a new agreement, based not on the letter of the law, but on the spirit. The letter of the law kills, but the spirit gives life. However, the old way of relating to God, written in

letters carved in stone, ended in death, even though it came with God's glory—so much so that the Israelites couldn't even bear to look at Moses' face because it shone so brightly, even though the glory was fading. If that was so, shouldn't the new way of relating to God in the Spirit come with even greater glory? If the old way that condemns us has glory, the new way that makes us right with God has so much more glory! For the old that was once glorious has no glory at all in comparison with the incredible glory of the new. If the old that is fading away had glory, the new that continues has so much more glory.

Since we have such a confident hope, we are truly bold! We don't have to be like Moses, who had to put on a veil to cover his face so the Israelites wouldn't be dazzled by the glory, even though it was fading away. In spite of that, they had a hard, stubborn attitude. For right up until today when the old agreement is read, the same “veil” remains. Only through Christ can it be removed. Even today, whenever the books of Moses are read, a veil covers their minds. But when they turn and accept the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there's freedom. So all of us, with our faces unveiled, see and reflect the glory of the Lord as in a mirror. We are being transformed into the same mirror image, whose glory grows brighter and brighter. This is what the Lord the Spirit does.

So then, since God in his mercy has given us this new way of relating to him, we don't give up. But we have given up secret, shameful acts. We don't behave in deceitful ways and we don't distort the word of God. We demonstrate who we are by revealing the truth before God so everybody can decide in their own minds. Even if the good news we share is veiled, it is veiled to those who are dying. The god of this world has blinded the minds of those who don't trust in God. They can't see the light of the good news of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We are not promoting ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord. In fact we are your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, “Let light shine out of the darkness,” shone in our minds to illuminate the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in clay jars, to show that this supreme power comes from God and not from ourselves.

We are attacked from every direction, but we are not crushed. We are at a loss as to what to do, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but never abandoned by God. We are knocked down, but not dead yet! In our bodies we always share in the death of Jesus, so that we can also demonstrate the life of Jesus in our bodies. While we live we are always under the threat of death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be revealed in our mortal bodies. As a result, we are facing death so that you may have life!

Since we have the same spirit of trust in God that Scripture refers to when it says, “I trusted in God, and so I spoke out,” we also trust in God and speak out for him. We know that God who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus, and will bring us into his presence with you. It's all for you! As God's grace reaches many more, thankfulness to God will be even greater, to his glory.

So we don't give up. Even though our physical bodies are falling apart, our inner selves are being renewed daily. These trivial troubles we have only last for a little while, but they produce for us an ever-increasing degree of glory. We don't concern ourselves with what can be seen, for we look forward to what can't be seen. What we see is temporary, but what we can't see is eternal.

We know that when this earthly “tent” we live in is taken down, we have a house prepared by God, not made by human hands. It is eternal and is in heaven. We sigh with longing for this, wanting so badly to be clothed with this new heavenly home. When we put on this clothing we won't be seen naked. While we are in this “tent” we sigh, being weighed down by this life. It's not so much that we want to take off the clothing of this life but that we look forward to what we shall be clothed with, so that what is mortal may be overwhelmed by life. It's God himself who prepared us for all this, and who provided the Spirit as a guarantee to us. So we remain confident, knowing that while we are at home here in our physical bodies, we are away from the Lord. (For we live by trusting in God, not by seeing him.) As I say, we are confident, wanting to be away from the body so we can be at home with the Lord. That's why our goal, whether home here in our bodies or not, is to make sure we please him. For all of us must appear before Christ's seat of judgment. Each of us will receive what we deserve for what we have done in this life, whether it is good or bad.

Knowing how we are in awe of the Lord, we try to convince others. It's clear to God what we are, and I hope that it's clear to your minds too. We are not trying to speak well of ourselves again, just trying to give you the opportunity to be proud of us, so you can answer those who are proud of outward show and not what they are inside. If we are “crazy people,” it's for God. If we make good sense, it's for you. Christ's love urges us on, because we're absolutely sure that he died for everyone, and so everyone died. Christ died for everyone so that they shouldn't live any longer for themselves, but for him who died and rose again for them.

From now on we don't look at anyone from a human point of view. Even though we once viewed Christ this way, we don't do so any longer. That's why anyone who is in Christ is a new being—what was old is gone, the new has come! God did all this by changing us from enemies into friends through Christ. God gave us this same work of changing his enemies into his friends. For God was in Christ, bringing the world back from hostility to friendship with him, not counting anyone's sins against them, and giving us this message to change his enemies into his friends. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God is pleading through us: “Please, won't you come back and be God's friend?” God made Jesus, who never personally sinned, experience the consequences of sin so that we could have a character that is good and right just as God is good and right.

As workers together with God we also plead with you not to make your acceptance of God's grace worth-

less. Just as God said, “At the right time I heard you, and on the day of salvation I rescued you.” Believe me: now is the right time! Now is the day of salvation!

We don't put anything in anyone's way that would trip them up, making sure the work we do won't be criticized. Instead we try to demonstrate we are good servants of God in every way we can. With a great deal of patience we put up with all kinds of trouble, hardship, and distress. We have been beaten up, thrown into prison, and attacked by mobs. We have been worked to the bone, suffering sleepless nights and hunger. We demonstrate who we are by living blameless lives in the knowledge of God, with a great deal of patience, being kind and filled with the Holy Spirit, showing sincere love. We speak truthfully, living in the power of God. Our weapons consist of what is true and right; we attack with our right hand and we defend with our left. We continue whether we are honored or dishonored, whether we are cursed or praised. People call us frauds but we tell the truth. We are disregarded, even though we are well-known; given up for dead, but we're still alive; lashed, but not killed. Seen as miserable, we are always rejoicing; as poor, but we make many rich; as destitute, but we own everything!

I've been speaking bluntly, my Corinthian friends, loving you with a big heart! We haven't kept our love from you, but you have kept your love from us. Please respond in the same way, as if you were my children, and be big-hearted!

Don't join together with people who don't believe—for what connection does goodness have with wickedness? What do light and darkness have in common? How could Christ and the devil ever agree? How could a believer and an unbeliever share together? What compromise could the Temple of God make with idols? For we are a temple of the living God, just as God said: “I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” “So leave them, and separate yourselves from them, says the Lord. Don't touch anything that is unclean, and I will accept you.” “I will be like a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

Dear friends, since we have these promises, we should wash ourselves clean from all that makes both body and spirit dirty, aiming for complete holiness out of reverence for God. Please accept us as your friends! We haven't done anyone wrong, we haven't corrupted anyone, and we haven't taken advantage of anyone. I'm not saying this to condemn you—as I already told you, you mean so much to us that we live and die together with you! I speak up very strongly for you because I am so proud of you. You are such an encouragement to me. I am so happy for you despite all our troubles.

When we arrived in Macedonia we didn't have a minute's peace. We were attacked from every direction, with external conflicts and inner fears. Even so, God who encourages the downhearted, encouraged us with Titus' arrival. Not just by his arrival, but also by the encouragement you gave him. He told us how you were longing to see me, how sorry you were, and how concerned you were about me, which made me even happier. Even though I made you sorry by the letter I wrote, I don't regret it—though I did regret it because the letter did hurt you, but just for a while. I'm happy now, not for hurting you, but because this pain led you to change your minds. You were made sorry in a way God would want, and so weren't harmed by us in any way. The kind of sorrow God wants us to have makes us change our minds and brings salvation. This kind of sorrow leaves no sense of regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what happened to you when you had this very same experience of sorrow that God wants. Remember how enthusiastic you became, how keen you were to defend yourselves, how angry you were at what had happened, how seriously you took it, how you longed to do right, how concerned you were, how you wanted justice to be done. In all of this you showed that you were sincere in wanting to make things right.

So when I wrote to you, I wasn't writing about who did the wrong or who was wronged, but to show you how devoted you are to us in God's sight. We are so encouraged by this. Added to our own encouragement, we were so pleased to see how happy Titus was, because you set his mind at rest. I boasted to him about you, and you didn't let me down. Just as all I've told you is true, my boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true too! Titus cares for you even more as he remembers how you did what he told you, how you welcomed him with great respect. I am so happy that I can be completely confident of you.

Brothers and sisters, we want to let you know about the grace of God shown to the Macedonian churches. Even though they have suffered terrible trouble, they are overflowing with happiness; and even though they are very poor, they are also overflowing in their generosity. I can confirm that they gave what they could, in fact even more than that! By their own choice they kept on pleading with us to have a part in this privilege of sharing in this ministry to God's people. They didn't just do what we hoped they would do, but they gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us, as God wanted them to do. So we have encouraged Titus—since it was he who started this work with you—to return and complete this gracious ministry of yours.

Since you have an abundance of everything—your trust in God, your eloquence, your spiritual knowledge, your complete dedication, and in your love for us—make sure that your abundance also extends to this gracious ministry of giving. I'm not ordering you to do this, but to prove how sincere your love is in comparison with the dedication of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even though he was rich, he became poor for you, so that through his poverty you could become rich. This is my advice: it would be good if you finished what you started. Last year you were not only the first to give but the first to want to do so. Now finish what you planned to do. Be as keen to finish as you were to plan, and give as you are able. If the willingness is there, it's fine to give what you have, not what you don't have! This is not to make things easier for others and harder for you, but simply to be fair. At the moment you have more than enough and can meet their needs, and in turn when they have more than enough they can meet your needs. In that way everyone is treated fairly. As Scripture says, “The one who had

much didn't have any excess, and the one who didn't have much didn't have too little."

Thanks be to God that he gave to Titus the same devotion for you that I have. Though he agreed to do what we told him, he's coming to see you because he really wants to, and had already decided to do so. We're also sending with him a brother who is praised by all the churches for his work in spreading the good news. He was also appointed by the churches to go with us as we deliver this gracious offering we're carrying. We do this to honor the Lord and to show our eagerness to help others. We want to guard against anyone criticizing us about how we use this gift. We're concerned to do things the right way, not only in the eyes of the Lord, but also in the eyes of everyone. We're also sending with them another brother who has proved to be reliable on many occasions, and who is eager to help. He is now even more eager to help because of the great confidence he has in you. If anyone asks about Titus, he is my companion. He works with me on your behalf. The other brothers are representatives from the churches and an honor to Christ. So please welcome them before all the churches and show them your love, proving how rightly proud we are of you.

I really don't need to write to you about this offering for God's people. I know how keen you are to help —I was boasting about this to those in Macedonia that you in Achaia have been ready for over a year, and your enthusiasm has encouraged many of them to give. But I'm sending these brothers so that my boasting about you regarding this won't be proved wrong, and that you're prepared, just as I said you would be. This is just in case some Macedonians should come with me and find you unprepared. We, not to mention you, would be really embarrassed if this project failed! That's why I decided I should ask these brothers to visit you in advance, and complete the arrangements to collect this offering, so that it would be ready as a gift, and not as something demanded.

I want to remind you of this: If you only sow a little, you'll only reap a little; if you sow plenty, you'll reap plenty. Everybody should give as they've already decided—not reluctantly, or because they have to, for God loves those who give with a cheerful spirit. God is able to graciously provide you with everything, so that you will always have all you need—with plenty to help others too. As Scripture says, "He gives generously to the poor; his generosity is everlasting." God, who provides seed to the sower and gives bread for food, will provide and multiply your "seed" and increase your harvest of generosity. You will be made rich in every way so that you can always be very generous, and your generosity will lead others to be grateful to God. When you serve in this way, not only are the needs of God's people met, but also many will give grateful thanks to God. By giving this offering you show your true nature, and those who receive it will thank God for your obedience, since it shows your commitment to the good news of Christ and your generosity in giving to them and everyone else. They will pray for you with much fondness because of God's abundant grace working through you. Thank God for his gift that is far greater than words can express!

This is me Paul, personally appealing to you through Christ's kindness and gentleness, the one who is "shy" when I have to face you but who is "bold" when I'm not there. I'm pleading with you, so that the next time I'm with you I won't have to be as tough as I think I'll have to be, boldly dealing with those who think we behave in worldly ways. Even though we live in this world, we don't fight as the world does. Our weapons are not of this world but God's mighty power that destroys fortresses of human thinking, demolishing misleading theories. Every high wall that stands tall and proud against the knowledge of God is knocked down. Every rebel idea is captured and brought into obedient agreement with Christ. When you are completely obeying Christ then we're ready to punish any disobedience.

Look at what's staring you in the face! Anyone who considers that they belong to Christ should think again —just as they belong to Christ, so do we! Even though I may seem to be boasting a little too much about our authority, I'm not embarrassed about it. The Lord gave this authority to us to build you up, not to knock you down. I'm not trying to scare you by my letters. People say, "His letters are tough and severe, but in person he's feeble, and he's a useless speaker." People like that should realize that what we *say* through letters when we're not there we will *do* when we are there!

We're not so arrogant to compare ourselves with those who think so much of themselves. Those who measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves with themselves, are really foolish! But we won't boast about ourselves in extravagant terms that can't be measured. We simply measure what we have done using God's system of measurement that he gave us—and that includes you. We are not over-extending our authority in saying this, as if we didn't get as far as you, for we did get to you and share with you the good news of Christ. We're not boasting in extravagant terms that can't be measured, claiming credit for what others have done. On the contrary, we hope that as your trust in God grows, our work among you will greatly increase. Then we can share the good news in places way beyond you, without boasting about what's already been done where someone else has worked. "If anyone wants to boast, boast about the Lord." It's not those who praise themselves that are respected, but those that the Lord praises.

I hope you can put up with a little more foolishness from me—well you already do put up with me! I agonize over you with a divine kind of jealousy, for I promised you to a single husband—Christ—so that I could present you as a pure virgin to him. I worry that in some way, just as the serpent deceived Eve with his devious cunning, that you might be led astray in your thinking from your sincere and pure commitment to Christ. If anyone comes and tells you about a different Jesus to the one we shared with you, you easily go along with them, accepting a different spirit to the one you received, and a different kind of good news to the one you believed.

I don't believe I'm inferior to these "super-apostles." Even though I may not be skilled in giving speeches, I do know what I'm talking about. We have

made this absolutely clear to you in every way. Was it wrong of me to humble myself so you could be elevated, since I shared the good news with you at no charge? I robbed as it were other churches, taking pay from them so I could work for you. When I was there with you and needed something, I wasn't a burden to anyone because the believers who came from Macedonia took care of my needs. I was determined never to be a burden to you and I never shall. This is as certain as the truth of Christ that is in me: nobody in all Achaia will stop me boasting about this! And why? Because I don't love you? God knows that I do! I'll continue to do what I've always done, so as to remove any opportunity for those who want to boast that their work is the same as ours. These people are false apostles, dishonest workers, who pretend to be apostles of Christ. Don't be surprised at this for even Satan himself pretends to be an angel of light. So it's no wonder then if those who serve him pretend to be agents of good. But their final end will be in accordance with what they've done.

Let me say it again: Please don't think I'm being foolish. However, even if you do, accept me as someone who is foolish, and let me also boast a little. What I'm saying is not as the Lord would say it—all this foolish boasting. But since many others are boasting in the way the world does, let me boast too. (You're happy to put up with fools, since you are so wise!) You put up with people who make you slaves, who take what you have, who exploit you, who arrogantly put you down, who hit you in the face. I'm so sorry that we were too weak to do anything like that! But whatever people dare to boast about, I dare to do too. (Here I'm talking like a fool again.)

Are they Hebrews? Me too. Are they Israelites? Me too. Are they descendants of Abraham? Me too. Are they servants of Christ? (I know I'll sound like I'm crazy, talking like this.) But I have done so much more. I've worked harder, been imprisoned more often, whipped more times than I can count, faced death time and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent twenty-four hours adrift on the ocean. During my many journeys I have faced the dangers of crossing rivers, robber gangs, attacks from my own countrymen, as well as from foreigners. I have faced danger in cities, in the deserts, and on the sea. I have faced the danger of people who pretend to be Christians. I have faced hard labor and struggles, many sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, often going without food, cold, without enough clothing to keep warm.

Besides all this, I face the daily concerns of dealing with all the churches. Who is weak, and I don't feel weak too? Who is led into sin, and I don't burn up? If I have to boast, I will boast about how weak I am. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus—may he be praised forever—knows I am not lying. While I was in Damascus, the governor under King Aretas had the city guarded in order to capture me. But I was lowered in a basket from a window in the city wall, and so I escaped from him.

I suppose I have to boast, even though it doesn't really help. Let me go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was taken up to the third heaven (whether physically in the body, or out of it, I don't know, but God knows). I know that this man (whether taken up physically in the body, or apart from it, I don't know, but God knows), how he was taken up into Paradise, and heard things too wonderful to be spoken, in words so sacred that no human being is allowed to say. Something like that I'll boast about, but I won't boast about myself, except for my weaknesses. I wouldn't be foolish if I wanted to boast, because I'd be telling the truth. But I won't boast, so that nobody will think more of me than what they see me doing or hear me saying. Also, because these revelations were so amazingly great, and so that I wouldn't become proud, I was given a "thorn in my flesh"—a messenger from Satan to hurt me so that I wouldn't become proud. I pleaded with the Lord three times to get rid of this problem. But he told me, "My grace is all you will need, for my power is effective in weakness." That's why I happily boast about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may reside in me. So I appreciate weaknesses, insults, troubles, persecutions, and difficulties that I suffer for Christ's sake. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong!

I'm talking like a fool, but you made me do it! You should really have been speaking well of me, for in no way am I inferior to the super-apostles, even though I don't count for anything. Yet the marks of an apostle were patiently demonstrated among you—signs, wonders, and powerful miracles. In what way were you inferior to the other churches except I wasn't any burden to you? Please forgive me for doing you wrong!

Now I'm preparing to visit you for the third time, and I won't be a burden to you. I don't want what you have, I want you yourselves! After all, children shouldn't save up for their parents, but parents should for their children. I will happily spend myself, and be spent, for you. If I love you so much more, will you love me even less? Well, even if that's so, I wasn't a burden to you. Maybe I was being devious, and tricked you with my cunning ways! But did I take advantage of you by anyone I've sent to you? I urged Titus to go and see you, and I sent another brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? No, we both have the same spirit and use the same methods. Maybe you're thinking that all along we've been just trying to defend ourselves. No, we speak for Christ before God. Everything we do, friends, is for your benefit. I do worry when I visit that somehow I won't find you as I would want to, and that you won't find me as you would want to! I'm afraid that there will be arguments, jealousy, anger, rivalry, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorder. I'm afraid that when I visit, my God will humble me in your presence, and that I will be weeping over many of those who have sinned previously, and who still have not repented of impurity, sexual immorality, and indecent acts that they committed.

This is my third visit to you. "Any charge must be verified by two or three witnesses." I already warned those of you who were sinning when I visited the second time. Even though I'm not there, I'm warning them again—and all the rest of you—that when I visit I won't hesitate to act against them, since you're demanding

proof that Christ is speaking through me. He is not weak in the way he relates to you; rather he works powerfully among you. Even though he was crucified in weakness, now he lives through the power of God. We too are weak in him, but you will see that we live with him through the power of God. Examine yourselves to see if you are trusting God. Put yourselves to the test. Don't you yourselves realize that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless you have failed the test… However, I hope that you realize that we have not failed the test.

We pray to God that you won't do anything bad—not so we can show we passed the test, but so you can do what is good, even if we appear to be failures. We can't do anything against the truth, only for the truth. We're happy when we are weak, and you are strong—we pray that you may continue to improve. That is why I write about this while I'm not with you, so that when I am with you I won't have to treat you harshly by imposing my authority. The Lord gave me authority for building up, not for tearing down.

Finally, brothers and sisters, I say goodbye. Continue to improve spiritually. Encourage one another. Be in agreement. Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet each other with Christian affection. All the believers here send their greetings. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Galatians

Epistle to the Galatians

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle not appointed by any human organization or human authority. Quite the contrary: I was appointed by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. All the brothers and sisters here with me join in sending this letter to the churches in Galatia.

May the grace and peace of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Jesus gave himself for our sins to set us free from this current world of evil, following the will of our God and Father. To him be glory forever and ever! Amen.

I'm shocked at how quickly you're abandoning the God who by the grace of Christ called you. You are turning to a different kind of good news that isn't good news at all! Some people there are confusing you, wanting to pervert the good news of Christ. But if anyone, even we ourselves, or even an angel from heaven, should promote any other kind of good news than what we have already told you, let them be condemned! I repeat what we've told you before: if anyone promotes any other kind of good news than what you've already accepted, let them be condemned!

Whose approval do you think I want—that of people, or of God? Do you think I'm trying to please people? If I wanted to please people I wouldn't be a servant of Christ!

Let me make it clear, my friends, regarding the good news I'm declaring—it did not come from any human being. I didn't receive it from anyone, and nobody taught it to me—it was Jesus Christ who revealed it to me. You heard how I behaved as a follower of the Jewish religion—how I fanatically persecuted God's church, savagely trying to destroy it. I surpassed my contemporaries in the practice of the Jewish religion because I was so fervently devoted to the traditions of my ancestors.

But when God (who had set me apart from birth) called me through his grace, and was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I could announce the good news to the nations, I didn't discuss this with anyone. I didn't go to Jerusalem to talk to those who preceded me as apostles; instead I left for Arabia, and then later returned to Damascus. After three years I went to Jerusalem to visit Peter. I stayed with him for two weeks. I didn't see any other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. (Let me assure you before God that I'm not lying about what I'm writing to you!) Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. Even so, my face wasn't known to those in the churches of Judea. They had only heard people say, “The man who used to persecute us is now spreading the faith he once tried to destroy!” —and they praised God because of me.

Fourteen years later I returned to Jerusalem with Barnabas. I took Titus along with me. I went because of what God had shown me. I met with the recognized church leaders there in private and explained to them the good news I was sharing with the foreigners. I didn't want the course I had followed, and what I was working so hard for, to come to nothing. But as it turned out, nobody even insisted that Titus who was with me should be circumcised, though he was Greek. (That issue only arose because some false Christians slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, trying to make us slaves. We never gave in to them, not even for a moment. We wanted to make sure to keep the truth of the good news unchanged for you.)

But those considered to be important didn't add anything to what I said. (It doesn't concern me what kind of leaders they were, because God doesn't judge people the way we do.) On the contrary, once they realized that I'd been given responsibility to share the good news with the foreigners just as Peter had been given the responsibility to share the good news with the Jews, (for the same God who worked through Peter as apostle to the Jews also worked through me as apostle to the foreigners), and once they recognized the grace that had been given to me, then James, Peter, and John, who bore the responsibility of church leadership, shook Barnabas and me by the hand as their fellow-workers. We were to work for the foreigners, while they would work for the Jews. Their only instruction was to remember to look after the poor, something I was already very committed to.

However, when Peter came to Antioch I did have to confront him directly, because he was clearly wrong in what he did. Before some of James' friends arrived, Peter used to eat with the foreigners. But when these people came he stopped doing this and stayed away from the foreigners. He was afraid of being criticized by those who insisted that men had to be circumcised. As well as Peter, other Jewish Christians became hypocritical too, to the extent that even Barnabas was persuaded to follow their hypocrisy.

When I realized that they weren't taking a firm stand for the truth of the good news, I said to Peter in front of everyone, “If you're a Jew yet live like the foreigners and not like Jews, why are you forcing the foreigners to live like Jews? We may be Jews by birth, and not ‘sinners’ like the foreigners, but we know that nobody is made right by doing what the law demands —it is only through trusting in Jesus Christ. We have trusted in Christ Jesus so that we could be made right by placing our confidence in Christ, and not through doing what the law says—because nobody is made right by observing the requirements of the law.”

For if, as we look to be made right in Christ, we ourselves prove to be sinners, does that then mean that Christ is in the service of sin? Of course not! For if I were to rebuild what I've destroyed, then I only demonstrate I'm a law-breaker. For through the law I died to the law in order that I could live for God. I've been crucified with Christ— so it's no longer I who lives, but it is Christ living in me. The life I now live in this body, I live by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me, and who gave himself for me. How could I dismiss God's grace? For if we could be made right through keeping the law then Christ died a pointless death!

You Galatians, you've lost your heads! Who has put you under a spell? The death of Jesus Christ on a cross was clearly presented to you so you could see! So tell me—did you receive the Spirit by keeping the law, or by placing your trust in what you heard? You really have lost your heads! You began living in the Spirit. Do you really think you can now make yourselves perfect by your own human efforts? Did you go through so much suffering for nothing? (It really wasn't for nothing was it?) Let me ask you: does God give you the Spirit and do so many miracles among you because you keep the law, or is it because you trust in what you heard?

It's just like Abraham who "trusted God, and was considered to be right." So you should acknowledge that those who trust in God are the children of Abraham. In Scripture it was foreseen that God would make right the foreigners who trusted in him. The good news is revealed to Abraham beforehand with the words, "Through you all the nations will be blessed." Consequently those who trust in God are blessed along with Abraham who trusted God. All those who rely on keeping the law are under a curse, for as Scripture says, "Cursed is everyone who doesn't carefully obey everything that's written in the book of the law." Clearly nobody is made right with God by attempting to keep the law, for "Those who are made right will live by trusting God." Obedience to the law has nothing to do with trusting God. Scripture only says, "You will live if you observe everything the law requires." Christ has rescued us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As Scripture says, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— so that through Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham could come to the foreigners as well, and we could receive the promise of the Spirit by trusting God.

Brothers and sisters, here's an example from daily life. If a contract is drawn up and agreed, signed and sealed, nobody can ignore it or add to it. Now the promises were given to Abraham, and to his son. It doesn't say, "sons" as if plural, but singular: "and to your son," meaning Christ. Let me explain. The law, coming four hundred and thirty years later, doesn't cancel the previous agreement that God made, breaking the promise. If the inheritance is derived from obedience to the law, it no longer comes from the promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham by means of the promise.

What was the point of the law, then? It was added to show what wrongdoing really is, until the son came to whom the promise had been made. The law was put in place by angels through the hand of a mediator. But a mediator isn't needed when there's only one person involved. And God is one!

So does the law work against God's promises? Of course not! For if there was a law that could give life, then we could be made right by keeping it. But Scripture tells us that we all are prisoners of sin. The only way we can receive God's promises is by trusting in Jesus Christ. Before we trusted in Jesus we remained in the custody of the law until this way of trusting was revealed. The law was our guardian until Christ came, so that we could be made right by trusting him. But now this way of trusting Jesus has come, we no longer need such a guardian. For you are all God's children through your trust in Christ Jesus. All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There's no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female—you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's children, and you are heirs of the promise!

Let me explain what I'm saying. An heir who is underage is no different from a slave, even though the heir may be the owner of everything. An heir is subject to guardians and managers until the time set by the father. It's just the same for us. When we were children, we were slaves subject to the basic rules of the law. But at the appropriate time God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the rule of law, so that he could rescue those who were kept under the rule of law, so that we could receive the inheritance of adopted children.

To show you are his children, God sent the Spirit of his Son to convince us, causing us to call out, "Abba," meaning "Father." Since you are now no longer a slave, but a child, and if you are his child, then God has made you his heir.

At the time when you didn't know God, you were enslaved by the supposed "gods" of this world. But now you've come to know God—or better, to be known *by* God. So how can you go back to those useless and worthless rules? Do you want to be slaves to those rules all over again? You're observing special days and months, seasons and years. I'm concerned that all I did for you has been wasted!

I'm pleading with you, my friends: be like me, because I became like you. You've never treated me badly. You remember that it was because I was sick that I shared with you the good news on my first visit. Even though my illness was difficult for you, you didn't despise or reject me—in fact you treated me like an angel of God, like Christ Jesus himself.

So what's happened to all your gratefulness? I tell you, back then if you could have pulled out your eyes and given them to me, you would have! So what has happened—have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? These people are keen to gain your support, but not for any good reasons. On the contrary, they want to keep you away from us so that you will enthusiastically support them. Of course it's good to want to do good. But this should be at all times, not just when I'm there with you! My dear friends, I want to work with you until Christ's character is duplicated in you. I really wish I could be with you right now so I could change my tone of voice… I'm so worried about you.

Answer me this, you people who want to live under the law: Don't you hear what the law is saying? As Scripture says, Abraham had two sons, one from the servant girl, and one from the free woman. However, the son from the servant girl was born following a human plan, while the son from the free woman was born as the result of the promise. This provides an analogy: these two women represent two agreements. One agreement is from Mount Sinai—Hagar—and she gives birth to slave children. Hagar symbolizes Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the current Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the heavenly Jerusalem is free. She is our mother.

As Scripture says, “Rejoice you who are childless and who have never given birth! Shout aloud for joy, you who have never been in labor—for the abandoned woman has more children than the woman who has a husband!” Now my friends, we are children of promise just like Isaac. However, just as the one born according to a human plan persecuted the one born through the Spirit, so it is today. But what does Scripture say? “Send away the servant girl and her son, for the son of the servant girl will not be an heir together with the son of the free woman.” Therefore, my friends, we're not children of a servant girl, but of the free woman.

Christ set us free so we could have real freedom. So stand firm and don't get burdened down again by a yoke of slavery. Let me, Paul, tell you bluntly: if you rely on the way of circumcision, Christ will be of absolutely no benefit to you. Let me repeat: every man who is circumcised has to keep the whole of the law. Those of you who think you can be made right by the law are cut off from Christ—you have abandoned grace.

For through the Spirit we trust and wait in hope to be made right. For in Christ Jesus being circumcised or uncircumcised doesn't achieve anything; it's only trust working through love that matters. You were doing so well! Who got in the way and prevented you from being convinced by the truth? This “persuasion” certainly isn't from the one who calls you. You only need a little bit of yeast to raise the whole batch of dough. I'm confident in the Lord that you won't change the way you think, and that the one who is confusing you will face the consequences, whoever he is.

As for me, brothers and sisters, if I were still advocating circumcision—why am I still persecuted? If that was true, it would remove the issue of the cross that offends people so much. If only those who are causing you trouble would go even further than circumcision and castrate themselves!

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to freedom! Just don't use your freedom as an excuse to indulge your sinful human nature—instead serve one another in love. For the whole law is summed up in this one command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you attack and tear into one another, watch out that you don't completely destroy yourselves! My advice is to walk by the Spirit. Don't satisfy the desires of your sinful human nature. For the desires of the sinful nature are opposed to the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are opposed to the sinful nature. They fight one another, so you don't do what you want to do. But if the Spirit leads you, you're not under the law.

It's clear what the sinful human nature produces: sexual immorality, indecency, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, rivalry, jealousy, anger, selfish ambition, dissension, heresy, envy, drunkenness, feasting, and similar things. As I warned you before so I warn you again: nobody who behaves like this will inherit the kingdom of God.

But the Spirit produces fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trust, gentleness, self-control—and there's no law against these kinds of things! Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed to the cross their sinful human nature, together with all their sinful passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit we should also walk in the Spirit. Let's not become boastful, or irritate and envy one another.

My friends, if someone is led astray by sin, you who are spiritual should bring them back with a gentle spirit. Watch out that you don't get tempted too. Carry each other's burdens, for in this way you fulfill the law of Christ. Those who think they're really something—when they're actually nothing—only fool themselves. Carefully examine your actions. Then you can be satisfied with yourself, without comparing yourself to anyone else. We have to take responsibility for ourselves.

Those that are taught the Word should treat their teachers well, sharing with them all good things. Don't be fooled, God can't be treated with contempt: whatever you sow, that's what you reap. If you sow according to your sinful human nature, from that nature you'll reap self-destruction. But if you sow according to the Spirit, from the Spirit you'll reap eternal life. Let's never tire of doing good, for we'll reap a harvest at the proper time, if we don't give up. So while we have time, let's do good to everyone—especially to those who belong to the family of faith.

Notice how big the letters are, now that I'm writing with my own hand! Those people who only want to make a good impression are forcing you to be circumcised just so they won't be persecuted for the cross of Christ. Even those who are circumcised don't keep the law, but they want to have you circumcised so that they can boast about you and claim you as their followers. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through this cross, the world has been crucified to me, and I've been crucified as far as the world is concerned. Circumcision or uncircumcision doesn't matter—what matters is that we're created brand new! Peace and mercy to all who follow this principle, and to the Israel of God! Please, don't anyone trouble me anymore, because I carry on my body the scars of Jesus. My brothers and sisters, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Ephesians

Epistle to the Ephesians

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to God's will, to the Christians in Ephesus and those who trust in Christ Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Praise God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with all that's spiritually good in the heavenly world, just as he chose us to be in him before the beginning of this world, so that in love we could be holy and without fault before him. He decided in advance to adopt us as his children, working through Jesus Christ to bring us to himself. He was happy to do this because this is what he wanted. So we praise him for his glorious grace that he so kindly gave us in his beloved Son. Through him we gain salvation through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins as a result of his priceless grace that he so generously provided for us, together with all wisdom and understanding.

He revealed to us his previously-hidden will through which he was happy to pursue his plan at the appropriate time to bring everyone together in Christ —those in heaven and those on the earth. *In him*— we were chosen beforehand, according to the plan of the one who is working everything out according to his will, for the purpose that we who were the first to hope in Christ could praise his glory. *In him*—you too have heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation. *In him*—because you trusted in him you were stamped with the seal of the Holy Spirit's promise, which is a down-payment on our inheritance when God redeems what he's kept safe for himself—us, who will praise and give him glory!

That's the reason, because I've heard of your trust in the Lord Jesus and the love that you have for all Christians, why I never stop thanking God for you and remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom to see and know him as he really is. May your minds be enlightened so you can understand the hope he's called you to— the glorious riches he promises as an inheritance to his holy people. May you also understand God's amazing power that he demonstrated in raising Christ from the dead. God seated Christ at his right hand in heaven, far above any other ruler, authority, power, or lord, or any leader with all their titles—not only in this world, but also in the coming world too. God has made everything subject to the authority of Christ, and has given him the responsibility as head over everything for the church, which is his body, filled full and made complete by Christ, who fills and brings everything to completion.

At one time you were dead in your sins and evil actions, living your lives according to the ways of the world, under the control of the devil, whose spirit is at work in those who disobey God. All of us were once like that, our behavior determined by the desires of our sinful human nature and our evil way of thinking. Like everyone else, in our nature we were children of anger.

But God in his generous mercy, because of the amazing love he had for us even while we were dead in our sins, has made us alive together with Christ. Trusting in him has saved you! He raised us up with Christ, and in Christ Jesus seated us with him in heaven, so that in all eternity to come he could demonstrate the amazing extent of his grace in showing us kindness through Christ Jesus. For you've been saved by grace through trusting in him—it's not through yourselves, it's the gift of God! This has nothing to do with human effort, so don't be proud of yourselves. We're the product of what God does, created in Christ Jesus to do good, which God already planned that we should do.

So you who are “foreigners” humanly-speaking, called “uncircumcised” by those who are “circumcised” (which is only a procedure carried out by human beings), you need to remember that once you had no relationship to Christ. You were barred as foreigners from being citizens of Israel, strangers to the agreement God had promised. You had no hope and you lived in the world without God. But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once a long way off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Christ is our peace. Through his body he made the two into one, and broke down the separating wall of hostility that divided us, freeing us from the law with its requirements and regulations. He did this so he could create in himself one new person out of the two and so make peace, and completely reconcile both of them to God through the cross as if they were just one body, having destroyed our hostility towards each other.

He came and shared the good news of peace with those of you who were far away, and those who were nearby, because through him we both gain access to the Father through the same Spirit. That means you're no longer strangers and foreigners; you are fellow citizens of God's people and belong to God's family that's being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together, growing to form a holy temple for the Lord. You too are being built together in him as a place for God to live by the Spirit.

This is why, I, Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ for the sake of you foreigners, (well, I'm assuming you've heard that God gave me the specific responsibility of sharing God's grace with you), how, by what God showed me, made clear the mystery that was previously hidden. I wrote to you briefly before about this, and when you read this you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ. In past generations this wasn't made clear to anyone, but now it's been revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit that foreigners are joint heirs, part of the same body, and in Christ Jesus share together in the promise through the good news.

I became a minister of this good news through the gift of God's grace that I was given by his power that was at work in me. This grace was given to me, the least important of all Christians, in order to share with the foreigners the incredible value of Christ, and to help everyone see the purpose of the mystery which

from the very beginning was hidden in God who made everything. God's plan was that through the church the various aspects of his wisdom would be revealed to the rulers and authorities in heaven. This was in accordance with God's eternal purpose that he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord. Because of him and our trust in him we can come to God in total freedom and confidence. So I'm asking that you don't get discouraged that I'm suffering—it's for you and you should value that!

This is why I kneel before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its nature and character, asking him that out of his wealth of glory he may strengthen you in your innermost being with power through his Spirit. May Christ live in you as you trust in him, so that as you are planted deep in love, you may have the power to comprehend with all God's people the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love. May you know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you're made full and complete by the fullness of God.

Now may he who—through his power working in us—can do infinitely more than we ever ask for or even think about, may he be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations for ever and ever. Amen.

So I—this prisoner in the Lord—am encouraging you to make sure you live according to the principles to which you were called. Don't think proudly of yourselves; be gentle and patient, showing tolerance to each other in love. Make every effort to remain one in the Spirit through the peace that binds you together. For there's one body, and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope. The Lord is one, our trust in him is one, and there's one baptism; there's one God and Father of everyone. He is over all and through all and in all.

To each of us grace was given in proportion to Christ's generous gift. As Scripture says, “When he ascended to the heights he took captives with him, and gave gifts to humanity.” (Regarding this: it says he ascended, but that means he also had previously descended to our lowly world. The one that descended is the same one who also ascended to the highest heaven in order that he could make the whole universe complete.)

The gifts he gave were so that some could be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, with the purpose of preparing God's people for the work of helping others, to help the body of Christ to grow. We grow together until we all reach the state of being one in our trust in and knowledge of the Son of God, completely grown up, measuring up to full maturity in Christ. We shouldn't be little children any more, tossed about and blown along by every passing breeze of doctrine, confused by human trickery, led into error by crafty people who deceitfully scheme. Instead by speaking the truth in love we ought to grow up in everything into Christ, who is our head. It's because of him that the whole body operates, every joint holding it together as each individual part does what it's supposed to, and the whole body grows, building itself up in love.

So let me say this to you—in fact I insist on it in the Lord—that you should no longer live like the foreigners do, in their empty-headed way. In the darkness of their minds they don't understand, and they have been cut off from the life of God because they don't know anything and in their stubbornness they don't want to know. Because they are past caring they abandon themselves to sensuality, and greedily do all kinds of disgusting things.

But that's not what you learned about Christ! Didn't you hear about him? Weren't you taught concerning him? Didn't you learn the truth as it is in Jesus? So get rid of your former lifestyle, that old nature that ruins you through deceptive desires! Let yourselves be remade spiritually and mentally, and put on your new nature that God created so you will be like him, right and holy in the truth.

So reject lies, and tell the truth to each other—for we belong to each other. Don't sin by getting angry; don't let evening come and find you still mad— and don't give the devil any opportunity. Thieves, stop your stealing, and do honest, productive work with your hands, so you'll have something to give to those who need it. Don't use bad language. Speak words that will encourage people as necessary, so that those who listen will be helped. Don't disappoint the Holy Spirit of God that marked you as belonging to him until the day of redemption. Get rid of every kind of bitterness, rage, anger, verbal abuse, and insults, along with all forms of evil. Be kind and compassionate to each other, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

So then, imitate God since you're his much-loved children. Live in love, just as Christ loved you. He gave himself for us, a gift and sacrificial offering to God like a sweet-smelling perfume. Sexual immorality or any kind of indecency or greed should never be mentioned concerning you, as God's people should not be doing such things. Obscene talk, stupid chatter, and coarse jokes are totally inappropriate—instead you should be thanking God. You know it's absolutely sure that no one who is sexually immoral, or commits indecency, or who is greedy, or is an idol-worshiper will inherit anything in the kingdom of Christ and God. Don't let anyone fool you with lying words, for it's because of such things that God's judgment comes upon the children of disobedience. So don't partner with them in this. At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. You are to live as children of light (and the fruit of light is everything that's good and right and true), demonstrating what the Lord really appreciates.

Don't have anything to do with the pointless things that darkness produces—instead expose them. It's shameful even to speak about the things such people do secretly, but when anything is exposed by the light then it's revealed as it is. Light makes everything visible. That's why it's said, “Wake up, those of you who are sleeping, rise up from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” So be careful how you live your life, not foolishly, but wisely, making the best use of opportunities because the days are evil. So don't be ignorant—find out what the Lord's will is. Don't get drunk on wine which will wreck your life, but be filled with the Spirit. Share together with one another, using psalms and hymns and sacred songs, singing and making music to the Lord to express what you feel. Always thank God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each of you should be willing to accept what others tell you to do out of reverence for Christ. Wives, do what your own husbands tell you to do, as you would if the Lord told you. The husband is head of the wife in the same way as Christ is head of the church—his body and its savior. In the same way that the church does what Christ says, wives should do what their husbands tell them in all things. Husbands, you should love your wives in the same way as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. He made it holy, he made it clean by washing in the water of the word, so that he could make the church his own, with no flaw or blemish or any kind of fault, but holy and blameless. Husbands should love their wives just like this, as they love their own bodies. A man who loves his wife loves himself— for no one ever hated his own body, but feeds it and looks after it, just as Christ does for the church, for we are parts of his body. “This is why a man leaves his father and mother, and is joined to his wife, and the two are united in one.” This is a deep hidden truth—but I'm talking about Christ and the church. However, each husband should love his own wife as he does himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

Children, as believers in the Lord, do what your parents tell you, for this is the right thing to do. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment that has a promise attached: “that things may go well for you and you may live a long life on the earth.” Fathers, don't make your children mad, but look after them by disciplining them and instructing them about God. Servants, obey those who are your human masters, with proper respect and awe, doing things from sincere motives as if you were serving Christ. Don't just work well when you're being watched to gain approval, but work like servants of Christ, honestly doing God's will, happily serving as if you were doing it for the Lord, and not for people. You know that whoever does what's good will be rewarded by the Lord, whether that person is a servant or someone who is free. Masters, you should treat your servants the same way. Don't threaten them, remember that the Lord in heaven is both their master and yours, and he treats people the same, without favoritism.

Lastly, stay strong in the Lord, and in his mighty power. Put on all the armor of God so you can withstand all the devil's attacks! We're not fighting against human forces, but against supernatural rulers and powers, the dark lords of this world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. Take every piece of armor God provides so that you may be able to stand your ground in the day of evil and after doing all you can, to find yourself still standing! So stand up, wrap the belt of truth around your waist, tie on the breastplate of justice and the right, and put on the shoes of readiness to share the good news of peace.

Above all, take up the shield of trusting God, by which you'll be able to put out all the devil's flaming arrows. Wear the helmet of salvation, and carry the sword of the Spirit—the Spirit that's the word of God. Always pray in the Spirit as you do all this. Stay awake and keep on praying for all God's people. Pray for me too so that I'll be given the right words to say, and that I'll be able to explain confidently the hidden truths of the good news. I'm an imprisoned ambassador for the sake of the good news, so please pray that I will speak fearlessly, as I should.

Tychicus, our good friend and faithful minister, will give you all my news and explain everything so you'll know how I'm doing. That's why I'm sending him to you —to tell you what's happened to us and to encourage you. Peace to all the Christians there, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, with love and trust in him. Grace to all those who eternally love our Lord Jesus.

Philippians

Epistle to the Philippians

This letter comes from Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's people in Christ Jesus living in Philippi, and to the church leaders and assistants. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. When I think of you I'm so thankful to my God, and I'm always glad to remember all of you in my prayers, because you've been partners with me in spreading the good news right from the beginning up till now. I'm absolutely sure that God who began this good work in you will continue working and bring it to a successful conclusion when Jesus Christ returns.

It's appropriate for me to be thinking this way about all of you because you mean so much to me. Whether I'm in prison or out there making the good news clear, all of you share God's grace together with me. God is my witness as to my great affection for every one of you in the caring love of Christ Jesus.

My prayer is that your love may grow more and more in knowledge and understanding, so that you can work out what's really important. That way you can be genuine and blameless when Christ returns, filled with the fruits of living right that come through Jesus Christ and give glory and praise to God.

I want you to know, my brothers and sisters, that all I've experienced has worked out to move the good news forward! For everyone—including the whole praetorian guard—now knows that I'm in chains for Christ; and because of my chains most of the Christians here have been encouraged to speak God's word boldly and fearlessly! Yes, some speak out of jealousy and rivalry. However, there are those who speak from good motives. They act out of love, because they know that I'm meant to be here to defend the good news. Those others present Christ deceptively because of their selfish ambitions, trying to cause me problems in my imprisonment.

But so what? All I care about is that Christ is presented every which way, whether just pretending or whether from true convictions. That's what makes me happy—and I will go on being happy! Why? Because I'm convinced that through your prayers for me, and through the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out to be my salvation. For it's my strongest hope and expectation not to do anything of which I would be ashamed. Instead it's my bold hope, as always, that even now Christ will be greatly honored through me, whether I live or die.

As far as I'm concerned, living is for Christ, and dying brings gain. But if I'm to go on living here and this would be productive work, then I really don't know what's best to choose! For I'm in a dilemma—I really want to leave and be with Christ, which would be far better, and yet to remain physically here is more important as far as you're concerned. Since I'm absolutely sure of this, I know that I'll stay here, remaining with you all to help you as your trust and delight in God grows, so that when I see you again your praise to Christ Jesus may be even greater because of me.

Just be sure that the way you live your lives corresponds to the good news of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or not I can get to hear how you're doing—that you stand firm in full agreement with one another, spiritually united as you work together for the trusting faith of the good news. Don't let your enemies scare you. By being brave you will demonstrate to them that they will be lost, but that God himself will save you. For you have been given the privilege not only of trusting in Jesus, but suffering for him as well. You're experiencing the same struggle you saw me having—a struggle I still have, as you now know.

So then, if you're encouraged by being in Christ, if you're comforted by his love, if you share together in the Spirit, if you have compassion and sympathy— then make my joy complete by thinking the same way and loving the same way, spiritually united and having one purpose. Don't do anything from a spirit of selfishness or pride, but humbly think of others better than you do of yourself. None of you should be preoccupied about your own things—instead concern yourself with the interests of others too.

The attitude you should have is the same as that of Christ Jesus. Though in his nature he was always God, he wasn't concerned to cling onto his equality with God. Instead he emptied himself, taking the nature of a servant, becoming like a human being. Coming in human form, humbling himself, he submitted himself to death —even death on a cross.

That's why God placed him in the position of greatest honor and power, and gave him the most prestigious name— so that in the name of Jesus everyone should bow in respect, whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth, and all will declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So, my good friends, continue to work towards the goal of salvation with complete reverence and respect for God, following what you were told—not just when I was with you, but even more so now I'm away from you. For it's God who is working within you, creating the will and the ability to do what he wants you to do. Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you'll be sincere, innocent of any wrong. Be God's blameless children living in the middle of a dishonest and corrupt people. Shine among them as lights to the world, holding out to them the word of life. That way I'll have something to be proud of when Christ returns, proving I didn't run around and work for nothing! So even if I pour out my life as a sacrifice and offering so you may trust in God, I'm happy for it, and I'm glad together with all of you, just as you have such joy and are glad with me.

I'm hoping, if that's what the Lord Jesus wants, to send Timothy to you soon. It will cheer me up once I know how you're doing. I don't know anyone who genuinely cares about you as he does. Other people only worry about their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you already know what he's like—just as a child working to help his father, so he's worked with

me to spread the good news. So I hope to send him as soon as I see how I'm doing, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I'll be able to come too. But I thought it was important to send Epaphroditus to you. He's a brother to me, a co-worker and fellow-soldier. He's the one you sent to look after me, and he's been longing to see all of you, worried about you because you'd heard he was sick. He certainly was sick—he nearly died—but God had mercy on him. Not just on him, but on me too, so that I wouldn't have tragedy upon tragedy. That's why I'm so keen to send him, so that when you see him you'll be happy, and I won't have to be so anxious. So welcome him with much happiness in the Lord. Honor people like him, because in working for Christ he nearly died, putting his life on the line to make up for the help you weren't in a position to give me.

To sum up: my dear friends, delight in the Lord! It's not a burden for me to repeat these things to you—it's to keep you safe! Watch out for those dogs! Watch out for those who do evil! Watch out for those mutilators! For it's we who are truly circumcised, worshiping by the Spirit of God, placing our assurance in Christ Jesus. We have no confidence in human abilities— for if there was a way to rely on human nature then I myself could have that confidence! If anyone thinks they have confidence in such human things, then I outdo them: I was circumcised on the eighth day, I'm an Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin, a true Hebrew. Regarding legal observance I'm a Pharisee; as for religious dedication I was a persecutor of the church; while in regard to doing right according to the law I was blameless!

But in whatever way such things gained me anything, I count them as a loss for Christ. Truly, I count everything as loss in exchange for the incredible benefit I've gained through knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. I've thrown away all these things for him, and consider them trash, so that I might gain Christ. I want to be found in him, not being right because of what I've done, or what the law requires, but made right through confidence in Christ, set right by God through trusting in him. I want to really know him, and the power of his resurrection—to take part in his suffering and become like him in his death, so that somehow I might be part of the resurrection from the dead!

Not that I've already got it all, or that I'm already perfect—but I run so that I might win what was won for me by Christ Jesus. My friends, I don't consider that I've already won, but this is my one objective: disregarding what is behind me, I strain forward to what is in front of me. I run towards the finish line to win the prize of God's invitation to heaven through Christ Jesus.

Those of us who are spiritually mature should think like this, and if you think anything different, then God will reveal this to you. We just need to make sure that we follow what we already have understood. My friends, copy my example as others do and take note of the way to behave since you have us as a model.

The way some people live makes them enemies of the cross of Christ—as I've often told you before and repeat again though it pains me so much I want to weep. They will end up being completely lost, these people whose “god” is their physical desires and who are proud of what they should be ashamed of, thinking only about the things of this world. But our homeland is heaven, and we're waiting for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come from there too. He will re-create our defective human bodies so that they will be made like his glorious body using the power by which he brings everything under his control.

So stand firm in the Lord, my dear friends who mean so much to me, who make me so happy! To me you are my crowning achievement! I truly love you and long to see you! Euodia and Syntyche—I urge you to resolve your differences with each other and agree in the Lord. In fact, my faithful fellow-worker, let me ask you to help these women, for they worked together with me to spread the good news—as well as Clement and my other co-workers, whose names are recorded in the book of life.

Always be happy in the Lord—I repeat, Be happy! Everyone should know about your kindness. The Lord will soon be here. Don't worry about anything, but take everything to God in prayer, explaining your requests to him and thanking him for all he does. Then the peace that comes from God, which is better than we can ever imagine, will protect your thoughts and attitudes in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, whatever is true, honorable, right, pure, beautiful, commendable, whatever is truly good and deserves to be praised, think about these kinds of things. Put into practice what you learned and received from me, what you saw me doing and heard me say. Then the God of peace will be with you.

I'm so happy in the Lord that you've at last thought about me again—realizing that you were concerned about me before but you couldn't do anything about it. I'm not talking about my own needs, because I've already learned to be satisfied in whatever situation I find myself. I'm used to having nothing, and I've experienced having plenty too. In every possible situation I've learned the secret of dealing with having plenty and going hungry, of being rich and of living in poverty: I can do anything through him who makes me strong!

Even so it was good of you to share with me during my troubles. You Philippians remember that right at the beginning of sharing the good news, when I left Macedonia, that yours was the only church that helped me financially. Even when I was in Thessalonica you helped me out not once but twice. Not that I'm looking for a donation—I'm looking for your “account” to increase in “profit.” For I have everything, more than I need! I'm thankful to receive from Epaphroditus the things you sent. They're like a sweet-smelling sacrifice that pleases God and that he approves of. My God will fill you with everything you need in accordance with his glorious wealth in Christ Jesus! Glory be to God the Father, forever and ever. Amen. Greet every fellow-believer in Christ Jesus. The Christian brothers and sisters with me send their greetings. All the believers send you greetings, especially those from Caesar's palace. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Colossians

Epistle to the Colossians

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the will of God, and from our brother Timothy. To the believers and trusting Christians at Colossae: May you have grace and peace from God our Father. We are always thankful to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for you, and pray for you. We've heard about your trust in Christ Jesus and your love for all the believers because of the hope prepared for you in heaven. You already heard about this in the good news, the message of truth that came to you just as it has gone throughout the whole world, spreading widely and bringing results. It's done the same for you too, ever since you heard it and realized the true nature of God's grace. Our dear friend and fellow-worker Epaphras, who is a trustworthy minister of Christ on our behalf, taught you about this. He's also made clear to us your love in the Spirit.

Because of this we haven't stopped praying for you from the time we heard about you, asking God to give you understanding of what he wants you to do and to give you every kind of spiritual wisdom and understanding. That way you'll live lives that rightly represent the Lord and please him, producing all kinds of good results and gaining greater knowledge of God. May you be made powerfully strong by his wonderful strength, having great patience and endurance. May you happily praise the Father, who has made it possible for us to share in the inheritance of God's people who live in the light. He rescued us from the tyranny of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, through whom we have been set free and our sins forgiven.

The Son is the visible image of the invisible God. He was before all creation, for everything was created through him—in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, empires, rulers, leaders and authorities—everything was created through him and for him. He existed before everything, and he holds everything together. He is also the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, having the highest position of those raised from the dead, so that he is supreme in everything. God was pleased to have his full nature live in him, and through him brought back everything in the universe to himself, since he made peace through the blood of his cross, through him reconciling all those on the earth and in heaven. You once were alienated from God, enemies in the way you thought and the way you acted, but now he has reconciled you through his dying human body, bringing you into his presence where you stand holy, pure, and faultless. But your trust in him must continue rock-solid and immovable. Don't be shaken from the hope of the good news that you heard, the good news that's been shared throughout the world—that's the work that I Paul have been doing.

I'm happy to have trouble for your sake, for by means of what happens to me physically I'm part of Christ's sufferings that he continues to experience for the sake of his body, the church. I serve the church following the direction God gave me about you, to present fully the word of God to you. This is the mystery that was hidden down through the ages and for many generations, but it's now been revealed to God's people. God wanted to make known to them the glorious wealth of this mystery to the nations: Christ living in you is the glorious hope! We're telling everyone about him, instructing and teaching them in the best way we know how so that we can bring everyone before God fully mature in Christ. That's what I'm working for too, making every effort as I rely on his strength which is powerfully at work in me.

I want you to know how hard I'm working for you, and for those at Laodicea—in fact for all those who haven't met me personally— so that you may be encouraged. May you be bound together in love, experiencing the great benefit of being completely sure in your understanding, for this is what the true knowledge of God brings. May you know the revealed mystery of God, which is Christ! In him you can discover all the rich wisdom and knowledge of God.

I'm telling you this so that no one will fool you by spinning you a tale. Even though I'm not physically there with you, I'm with you in spirit. I'm so happy to see the way you stick together and how firm you are in your trust in Christ. Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, go on following him, grounded in him and built up by him. May your trust in him continue to grow strong, following what you were taught, full of gratitude to God.

Watch out that nobody enslaves you through their philosophy and worthless delusions, following human traditions and concepts of this world, and not following Christ. For the fullness of God's divine nature lives in Christ in bodily form, and you have been made full in him. He is supreme over every ruler and authority.

You were “circumcised” in him but not by human hands. You have been set free from sinful human nature by the “circumcision” Christ performed. You were buried with him in baptism, and you were raised with him through your trust in what God did by raising him from the dead. And even though you were dead because of your sins and being physically “uncircumcised,” he brought you to life together with him. He has forgiven us all our sins. He wiped out the record of our debts according to the Law that was written down against us; he took away this barrier by nailing it to the cross. He stripped away the power of spiritual rulers and authorities, and having publicly revealed what they were truly like, he led them captive behind him in victory.

So don't let anyone criticize you for what you eat or what you drink, or regarding which religious festival, new moon ritual, or ceremonial sabbaths you choose to observe. These are just a shadow of what was to come, for the physical reality is Christ. Don't let anyone cheat you out of your prize by insisting you have to beat yourself, or worship angels. They think they are better than anyone else because of visions they say they've had, and become ridiculously conceited in their

sinful minds. Such people are not connected to the head that directs the body, nourished and joined together through the body's sinews and muscles. As the body is united together it grows the way God wants it to grow.

If you died with Christ to the religious demands that this world insists upon, why would you make yourself subject to such demands as if you were still part of this world? Things like: don't handle that, don't taste that, don't touch that! These commands refer to things that don't last since they're used up, and they're based on man-made requirements and teachings. Such rules may make some kind of sense to those who practice self-centered piety, who are so proud of being humble, and who "mortify the body;" but in reality they don't help at all in dealing with sinful desires.

So if you've been brought back to life with Christ, look for what comes from above, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Fix your mind on what's above, not what's here on earth. You died, and your life is kept safe with Christ in God. When Christ—your life—is revealed, then you will also share in his visible glory.

So kill your worldly nature—sexual sin, immorality, lust, evil desires, greedily wanting to have more—this is the worship of idols. Because of such things, those who disobey experience God's judgment. At one time you lived like that when you behaved in such a way, but now you should get rid of such things as anger, rage, wickedness, abuse, and using obscenities. Don't lie to each other, since you've discarded your old self and what you used to do, and put on your new self that is always being made more like your Creator, understanding better who he really is. In this new situation there's no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, foreigner, barbarian, slave or free, for Christ is everything, and he lives in all of us.

Since you are God's special people, holy and dearly loved, adopt a sympathetic nature that is kind, humble, gentle, and patient. Be patient with one another, forgive others among you if you have grievances against one another. Just as the Lord forgave you, you should do the same. Above all, love one another, which is the perfect bond that will hold you together. May the peace of Christ direct your thinking, because you were called to this by God who makes you one, and thank God for it! Let Christ's message fully live in you. In every wise way teach and instruct one another through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing praises to God in gratitude and sincerity. Whatever you do, whether in word or action, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, praising God the Father through him. You married women, respect your husbands appropriately in the Lord. You married men, love your wives and don't treat them badly. You children, always do what your parents tell you because this is what pleases the Lord. You fathers, don't make your children mad, so they won't feel like giving up. Those of you who are servants, do everything your human masters tell you, not with just an eye to please them, but honestly and sincerely, respecting the Lord. Do whatever you do really well, as if you're doing it for God, and not for people, because you know that the Lord will give you your reward—an inheritance! You're serving Christ the Lord! Whoever does what's wrong will be paid back for the wrong they've done, and God has no favorites.

You masters, treat your servants in a way that is right and fair, recognizing that you too have a Master in heaven. Remember to keep on praying, with an alert and thankful mind! Pray for us too that God may open a door of opportunity to spread the message, to tell about the revealed mystery of Christ—which is the reason I'm here in prison. Pray that I may make it as clear as I should when I speak. Behave wisely with outsiders, making the best use of every opportunity. Always be gracious when you speak. Make sure it's in good taste, and think about how best to answer everyone.

Tychicus will tell you all about what's happening to me. He's a dear brother, a trustworthy minister and co-worker in the Lord. I'm sending him to you for this very reason—so that you'll know how things are with me and this will cheer you up. Onesimus is going with him too, a trusted and dear brother, who's one of you. They'll explain to you everything that's going on here. Aristarchus who's with me here in prison sends his best wishes; likewise Mark, Barnabas' cousin (you've already had instructions to welcome him if he visits you), and Jesus—also called Justus—who are the only Jewish Christians among those working with me here for the kingdom of God, men who have been a great help to me. Epaphras who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends his greetings. He's always passionate in his prayers on your behalf, praying that you'll stand firm as grown-up Christians, totally convinced about everything as God would want. For the record I can tell you that he's done a lot for you, and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. Luke, our dear doctor, and Demas also send their best. Greet the believers that are in Laodicea—Nympha too, and the church that meets in her house. And when this letter has been read to you, make sure it's read to the church in Laodicea too, and that you also read the letter sent to Laodicea. Tell Archippus, "See that you follow through in doing the ministry God gave you."

I, Paul, write my closing greetings with my own hand. Remember I'm in prison. Grace be with you.

1 Thessalonians

First Epistle to the Thessalonians

This letter comes from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May you have grace and peace! We are always thanking God for all of you, never forgetting you in our prayers. We remember you before our God and Father—how you put your trust in him into practice, how you work hard in love, and how you patiently wait in the hope of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, we already know that you are loved by God and are very special to him. The good news we brought to you wasn't just words, but had power too, for the Holy Spirit completely convinced you. In the same way you know what kind of men we are since we demonstrated to you that we were working for your benefit.

You were imitating us and the Lord when you received the message, for despite your troubles you experienced the joy the Holy Spirit gives. So you have become an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Greece! You have broadcast the Lord's message, not only in Macedonia and Greece, but everywhere people have heard of your trust in God—so there's no need for us to tell anybody about it! In fact they talk about what a marvelous welcome you gave us, how you abandoned idols and turned to God, how you serve the true and living God, as you look forward to the coming of his Son from heaven—Jesus, the one God raised from the dead, who will save us from the judgment to come.

Brothers and sisters, you yourselves know what our visit meant to you, and that it wasn't wasted! You'll recall that after having had much trouble and bad treatment at Philippi, with the help of God we still dared to share God's good news with you, despite the opposition we faced. For what we speak about isn't deceptive, or worthless, or fraudulent.

On the contrary, we have God's approval for what we say—he's entrusted us with sharing the good news. We don't set out to please people, but God. He's the one who judges our motives. As you know, we've never used flattering words. Nor were we covering up some greedy, selfish attitude—as God is our witness! We weren't trying to win anybody's praise—not from you, nor anyone else. We could have become a “burden” to you as messengers of Christ, but instead we acted kindly among you, like a mother caring for her own children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not just God's good news, but also our very own selves, because you had become so dear to us.

Don't you remember, brothers and sisters, all our hard work—working day and night so we wouldn't be a burden to any of you as we shared God's good news with you? You yourselves can testify as to how we acted, and God can too—how we treated you believers with a holy attitude, fairly and blamelessly. You know how we cared for every one of you like a father caring for his own children. We encouraged you, comforted you, and shared with you our experience so that you could live as God would want you to live—the God who calls you to his own kingdom and glory.

Another thing: we're always thanking God that when you heard and accepted the word of God, you didn't treat it as some human words, but what it truly is, the word of God. This is what is at work in those of you who trust in him. The experience you brothers and sisters have had imitates that of God's churches that belong to Christ Jesus in Judaea. Just like your fellow Jewish Christians you suffered as they did at the hands of the Jewish leaders who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and chased us out. They don't please God and they are hostile to everyone, trying to prevent us from speaking to the other nations to prevent them from being saved. They're always sinning to the maximum extent, but for them full judgment has arrived!

Brothers and sisters, since we felt as if we'd experienced a family separation because we hadn't seen you for a while (separated physically though not in spirit), we tried even harder to come and see you again face to face because that's what we wanted to do. We really wanted to come and visit you, and I, Paul, tried again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what gives us hope, what makes us happy, what we are really proud of as we stand before our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes back—is having you there too! You are our pride and joy!

So when we couldn't bear it any longer, we decided it would be best for us to stay behind in Athens, and send Timothy on to you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in spreading the good news of Christ. We sent him to strengthen and encourage you in your trust in God so that none of you would be upset by your troubles—for you know we should expect such things. Even while we were with you we kept on warning you that we would suffer persecution soon— and as you well know that is exactly what has happened. This is why, when I couldn't stand it anymore, I sent to find out whether you were still trusting in God. I was concerned that the devil had successfully tempted you and that all our work had been for nothing!

Now Timothy has just returned from visiting you and he has brought us good news of your trust in God and the love you have. He's told us that you still have fond memories of us, longing to see us just as we long to see you. This news really encouraged us while we were suffering troubles ourselves, brothers and sisters, knowing that you continue to hold on to your trust in God. For us life is worth living now because you're standing firm in the Lord! As we go into the presence of our God, how can we ever thank God enough for you because of all the joy you bring to us? Night and day we pray for you as earnestly as possible, hoping to see you again face to face, and to help you continue developing your trust in God. May God our Father and our Lord Jesus make it possible for us to come to see you soon. May the Lord increase your love so it overflows to one another, and to everyone, just as we love you. In this way may the Lord strengthen you so you may stand with minds that are holy and blameless before our God

and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones.

A few more things: Brothers and sisters, we plead with you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to behave in ways that please God, just as we instructed you. Of course you're already doing this, just do it more and more! You remember the instructions we gave you on behalf of the Lord Jesus. What God wants is for you to live holy lives. So stay away from sexual immorality in order that each of you may control yourselves in a way that is holy and respectful, not indulging passionate lust like the heathen who have no knowledge of God. Don't cheat or take advantage of another Christian in these matters, for the Lord is the one who executes justice in all such things, as we've already clearly explained to you, and warned you about. For God did not call us to live impure lives, but holy lives. So anyone who rejects this position isn't just rejecting what a human being is saying; they are rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

We certainly don't need to write and tell you to love fellow-believers, because God teaches you to love one another— and in fact you are demonstrating this love to all the believers throughout Macedonia. Even so we want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, to love more and more. Try to live a quiet life, minding your own business, doing your own work, as we've already explained to you, so that your way of life may be respected by non-Christians and you won't have to rely on anyone to provide what you need.

We don't want you to be confused about what happens when people die, brothers and sisters, so that you won't grieve like others who don't have any hope. Since we're convinced that Jesus died and rose again, we're also sure that God will bring with Jesus those who have died trusting in him. What we're telling you comes from the Lord: Those of us who are alive and still here when the Lord comes certainly won't precede those who have died. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the cry of the archangel, and with the sound of God's trumpet, and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then those of us who are alive and still here will be carried up together with them into the clouds, and we shall meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever! So encourage one another with these words.

Brothers and sisters, we don't need to write anything to you about prophetic times and dates. You yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people talk about peace and security suddenly they will be completely ruined. It will be just like the sudden onset of childbirth, and they certainly won't escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark about this so that you won't be caught by surprise when the Day of Judgment arrives suddenly like a thief. For you are all children of light and children of the day. We don't belong to the night or to darkness. So then we shouldn't be sleeping like everybody else—we should stay awake and keep ourselves clear-headed. For it's during the night that people sleep; and it's at night that they get drunk. But since we belong to the day we should keep our heads clear. We strap on the breastplate of trust and love. We put on the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God hasn't placed us in a position to be punished, but has reserved us for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one who died for us so that whether we're alive or dead we shall live together with him. So encourage and strengthen one another, just as you are doing.

Brothers and sisters, we're asking you to respect those who work with you, who lead you in the Lord and teach you. You should value them highly in love for the work they do. Live in peace with each other. We urge you, brothers and sisters, to warn those who are lazy, encourage those who are anxious, help those who are weak, and be patient with everyone. Make sure none of you pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to one another, and to everyone. Always be full of joy, never stop praying, be thankful in every situation—because this is what God in Christ Jesus wants you to do. Don't hold the Spirit back, don't look down on prophecy, make sure to check everything. Hold on to whatever is good; keep away from every kind of evil.

May the God of peace himself make you completely holy, and may your whole being—body, mind and spirit—be kept blameless for when our Lord Jesus Christ returns. The one who calls you is trustworthy, and he will do this. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all the believers there affectionately. I'm requiring you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the believers. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

2 Thessalonians

Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

This letter comes from Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians who belong to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. May you have grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We keep on thanking God for you, brothers and sisters—we just have to! This is the right thing to do because your trust in God is growing in leaps and bounds, and the love you all have for each other increases more and more.

We speak so proudly of you among the churches of God because of your patient courage and trust in God during all the persecution and trouble you're going through. For this is evidence that God is right in the decisions he makes, and that you deserve the kingdom of God for which you are suffering. Since God does what's right he will deal appropriately with those who cause you trouble. He will free you from your suffering—and us too—when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels, bringing judgment on those who reject God and refuse to accept the good news of our Lord Jesus. They will rightly experience the consequence of eternal loss, separated from the presence of the Lord and his glorious power, on the day when he comes to receive glory from his people, admired by all those who trust in him. This includes you because you were convinced about what we told you.

That's why we continue to pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of what he's called us to do. May God powerfully fulfill every desire you have to do good and every action that comes from trusting him so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be honored by what you do—and in turn you are honored by him through the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Talking about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we're brought together to him, brothers and sisters— please don't become upset or concerned by any spiritual revelation, or message, or letter supposedly from us that makes you think that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, because the Rebellion must come first, and the lawless man be revealed, the one whose end is destruction. He is the enemy of God, and proudly sets himself up over everything that is called God and is worshiped. He even installs himself in God's Temple, claiming to be God. Don't you remember that I told you all this while I was still with you?

Now you know what's keeping him in check, because he will be revealed for what he is at the appropriate time. For the secret ways of lawlessness are already at work; however he who now restrains it will continue to do so until he is out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed, the one whom the Lord Jesus will wipe out, blowing him away, destroying him by the brilliance of his coming. He (the lawless one) comes to do Satan's work, having all kinds of powers, using miracles, and performing amazing but deceptive displays. Using every type of evil trick he deludes those who are on their way to destruction, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Because of this God sends them a convincing delusion so that they put their trust in the lie. As a result everyone who did not trust in the truth will be condemned, for they preferred what is evil.

But we just have to keep on thanking God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you to be saved through the Spirit who makes you right as you trust in the truth. This is what he called you to through the good news we shared with you, so that you could participate in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, brothers and sisters, stand firm, and hold on to what you've been taught, whether by what you were told, or through a letter from us. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God the Father (who through his grace gave us eternal confidence and a trustworthy hope), encourage you and strengthen you so you can say and do everything that is good.

Lastly, brothers and sisters, please pray for us, so that the Lord's message may spread and be truly appreciated, just as it is by you— and that we may be kept safe from immoral and evil men, because not everyone trusts in God. But the Lord is trustworthy and will strengthen you, and protect you from the evil one. We have great confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do what we told you. May the Lord lead you into a deeper understanding of God's love for you and the endurance of Christ.

Now we want to tell you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, not to associate with any believer who can't be bothered to work for their living —those who don't follow the teachings they learned from us. You certainly know that you should follow our example, because while we were with you we weren't lazy, —we didn't eat anyone's food without paying for it. Instead we worked hard day and night so we wouldn't be a burden to any of you. Not that we don't have the right to do so—but we wanted to be an example to you, so that you could copy what we did. Even while we were with you we gave strict instructions that anybody who didn't want to work shouldn't eat. But now we hear that there are some lazy busybodies among you who don't work at all. We're ordering such people, urging them in the Lord Jesus, to settle down and work to pay for their own food.

Brothers and sisters, don't give up doing good. Take note of anyone who doesn't do what we're telling you in this letter, and make sure you don't associate with them, so that they may become embarrassed. Don't consider them enemies, but warn them as a brother or sister.

May the Lord of peace himself grant you peace in every situation in every way. May the Lord be with all of you. Notice the greeting to you from me, Paul, in my own handwriting. This is my signature on every letter I write. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

1 Timothy

First Epistle to Timothy

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus appointed by the authority of God our Savior and Christ Jesus, who is our hope. I'm sending it to you Timothy. You are my true son because of your trust in God. May you have grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

When I was on my way to Macedonia I asked you to stay behind in Ephesus, so that you could speak with those who teach false ideas and insist that they stop. They shouldn't concern themselves with legends and never-ending obsessions about ancestry. Such ideas only lead to pointless debates, instead of understanding God as we trust in him.

The reason why I insist on this is so we may have love that comes from a pure heart, from a clear conscience and sincere trust in God.

Some have deviated from these things, and have ended up talking nonsense. They have ambitions to be teachers of the law, but they have no idea what they're talking about or what they're so boldly announcing!

Now we recognize that the law is good if people use it properly. We also know that law isn't laid down for those who do what is good and right, but for those who are rebellious and ignore the law. It applies to people who have no use for God, who are sinful, who treat nothing as holy and are completely irreligious. It's for those who kill fathers and mothers, for murderers, for those who are sexually immoral, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, false witnesses—and anything else that's opposed to good teachings as determined by the wonderful good news of our blessed God which he entrusted to me.

I'm just so grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord for the strength he's given me, and that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to work for him. Even though I used to insult God, and persecuted and abused God's people, God showed me mercy because of my ignorance and unbelief. Our Lord in his grace filled me to overflowing with trust and love that comes from Christ Jesus.

You can trust this saying that everyone should accept: “Christ Jesus came to this world to save sinners,” and I'm the worst of them. For this reason I was shown mercy—since I'm the worst sinner, Jesus Christ could demonstrate his infinite patience as an example to those who choose to trust in him and gain eternal life.

Honor and glory forever and ever to the eternal King, the immortal, invisible, and only God! Amen.

These are the instructions I want to give to you, Timothy, my son, following the prophecies that brought you this far, so you can fight the good fight! Keep on trusting God and make sure you have a clear conscience. Some have refused to do this and have shipwrecked their trust in God. Hymenaeus and Alexander are such people, and I have “handed them over to Satan” to teach them not to misrepresent God.

First of all, I want to encourage you to pray for everybody: make requests of God, ask on their behalf, and give thanks. Pray like this for kings and all types of leaders so that we may live quiet and peaceful lives, always thinking about God and taking life seriously. This is what is good, and what pleases God our Savior. He wants everyone to be saved, and come to understand what truth really is.

For there is one God, and one mediator of God and mankind—the man Christ Jesus. He gave himself so we could all be won back, demonstrating the evidence at the right time. I was appointed to share this message and be its messenger, a teacher to the foreigners about trusting God and the truth (I'm not lying, I'm telling the truth!)

What I really want is for men everywhere to pray sincerely to God. No anger or arguments! In the same way, women should dress sensibly, modestly, and appropriately. They should be attractive not in their hairstyle or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but by the good things they do—as is appropriate for women who claim to follow God. Women should learn quietly, respecting their place. I don't allow women to be instructors, or to dominate men; let them remain quiet. For Adam was made first, and then Eve. Adam wasn't deceived, but Eve was completely deceived, and she fell into sin. However, women will be saved through becoming mothers, as long as they continue to trust and love, and to live holy, sensible lives.

This is a trustworthy statement: “If someone aspires to be an elder, this is a good work to want to do.” An elder must be above reproach, married to one wife, self-controlled, well-balanced, sensible, hospitable, and able to teach. He should be someone who doesn't get drunk or become violent, but is gentle, and is not argumentative or greedy for money. He must handle his own family well. His children must respect what he tells them to do. (For if a man doesn't know how to manage his own family, how can he manage God's church?) He should not be a new believer, in case he gets so full of himself that he falls under the same condemnation as the devil. People outside the church should also speak well of him so that he won't disgrace himself and fall into the devil's trap.

Similarly deacons should be respected, and not be hypocritical. They should not be addicted to drink, and should not be trying to dishonestly enrich themselves. They must stick to the revealed truth about God, trusting in him with a pure conscience. They should be tried out first, and if they can't be faulted then let them serve as deacons. Their wives should be respected too. They should not slander people with gossip, and they should be self-controlled and trustworthy in all they do. Deacons should be married to one wife, managing their children and their homes well. Those who serve well as deacons gain a good reputation and much confidence in their trust in Christ Jesus.

Even though I hope to see you soon, I'm writing about all this to you so that if I'm delayed you'll know how people should behave themselves in God's house. This is the church of the living God, the support pillar and foundation of the truth. There's no question about it: the revealed truth about God is amazing! He was

made known to us in human form, he was vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, declared to the nations, trusted in by the world, and taken up in glory!

However, the Spirit very clearly explains that in the last times some will abandon their trust in God, and will listen to deceptive spirits and beliefs that come from demons. These hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared, tell people to not marry and not to eat certain foods made by God that should be accepted with thanks by those who trust and know the truth. Everything created by God is good, and nothing should be rejected but should be received with thanks, since it is made sacred by the word of God and by prayer.

If you point out these things to the brothers and sisters you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. You gain strength by trusting in the truth, and in the good teaching you've followed. Reject what is irreligious, and old wives' tales. Make sure your exercise is spiritual — for while physical exercise is useful to some extent, spiritual exercise is much more useful. For "it has promise for the present life, and for the life to come." You can trust this saying that should be accepted by everyone. The reason we work and do the best we can is because our hope is in the living God. He is the Savior of all people, especially of those who trust in him.

This is what you should teach. Tell everyone to follow your instructions. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. Be an example to those who trust in God—in the way you speak, the kind of life you live, in love, in trust, and in purity. Until I get there, make sure you read the Scriptures to the church, and encourage them by your speaking and teaching. Don't neglect the gracious gift you have that was given to you by prophetic inspiration when the church elders laid their hands on you. Think carefully about these things, and dedicate yourself completely to them so that everyone can see the progress you're making. Mind what you're doing and what you're teaching. Keep going with all of this, because as you do so you'll save both yourself and those who listen to you.

Don't rebuke a man who is older than you. Instead, encourage him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, with the highest standards of decency. Help widows who don't have a family. For the Christian responsibility of a widow's children or grandchildren is to do their duty for their own family, and repay their parents by helping them out. This is what pleases God. Now a real widow, having no family, alone and without support, puts her hope in God and prays for help night and day. But a widow who concentrates on pleasing herself is already dead, even though she's still physically alive. Give people these instructions so that they will be above criticism. But those who don't look after their relatives, especially their own family, have denied their beliefs, and are worse than those who don't believe. Only widows over sixty who have been faithful to their husbands should be put on the list. The widow should have a reputation for doing good. Did she bring up children properly? Has she been hospitable? Has she washed the feet of church members? Has she helped those who were in trouble? Has she really tried to do good in every way?

Don't take on widows who are younger, because when their physical desires make them want to remarry they abandon their dedication to Christ. In this they are guilty of breaking their previous commitment. They also get used to a lazy life, just visiting each other in their homes. Not only lazy, but they gossip and meddle, talking about things they shouldn't. So my best advice is that younger widows marry and have children and take care of the home. That way there's no opportunity for criticism from the Enemy. However, some have already gone the way of Satan. Any Christian woman who has widows in the family should help them, so that the church is not burdened with the responsibility, and can help those widows who are truly in need.

Elders who direct the church well should be seen as doubly valuable, particularly those who work in speaking the Word and in teaching. As Scripture says, "Don't muzzle the ox when it's threshing out the grain." Also, "The worker deserves to be paid." Don't entertain any accusation against an elder unless two or three witnesses support it. Censure those who sin in front of everyone as a warning to others as well.

Before God and Christ Jesus, and the holy angels, I instruct you to follow these instructions without bias. Don't do anything from an attitude of favoritism. Don't be in a hurry to lay hands on anyone; and don't get involved in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

Don't just drink water, but use a little bit of wine because of your bad stomach—you're sick so often!

The sins of some people are really obvious, and they are clearly guilty, but the sins of others are not seen until later. Similarly some good works are obvious, and even those that are hidden won't be for long.

All who are bound under slavery should consider their masters worthy of respect, so that God's name and Christian beliefs won't be defamed. Slaves who have Christian masters should not disrespect them because they are brothers. Instead they should serve them even better, because those who are benefiting from their service are fellow-believers they should love. Teach these instructions, and encourage people to follow them.

Those who teach different beliefs, and don't listen to good counsel, particularly the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the true teachings of God, are arrogant and don't understand anything. They're obsessed with speculation and philosophical debates which only lead to jealousy, arguments, malicious gossip and evil suspicions— the constant arguing of people whose minds are totally corrupt and who have lost the truth, thinking that they can profit financially from religion…

But knowing and following God is so incredibly satisfying! For we didn't bring anything into the world, and we can't take anything out with us either. But if we have food and clothes then that's enough for us. Those who are determined to become rich fall into the trap of temptation, following many foolish and damaging impulses. For the desire to be rich leads to many kinds of evil results. Some of those who longed for this have turned away from the truth, and have hurt themselves, experiencing a lot of pain.

But you as a man of God should run away from such things. You should seek to do what is right, practice

true religion, and trust in God. Aim to love, to be patient, and gentle. Fight the good fight as you trust in God. Hold on tightly to the eternal life to which you were called. This is what you promised to do in front of many witnesses.

My charge to you before God the Life-giver, and before Christ Jesus who testified to the good news before Pontius Pilate, is to follow faithfully what you've been told so you will be above criticism until our Lord Jesus Christ appears. At the right time Jesus will be revealed —he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is the only one who is immortal, and lives in unapproachable light. No one has seen him or can see him—honor and eternal power is his! Amen.

Warn those who are rich in the present world not to become proud. Tell them not to place their trust in wealth that is so insecure but in God who so freely gives us everything for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, and to become rich in doing good things, ready to share what they have, and to be generous. In this way they store up treasure that will provide a solid basis for the future, so that they can take hold of true life.

Timothy, take care of what's been given to you. Don't pay any attention to pointless chatter and arguments based on so-called “knowledge.” Some who promote these ideas have wandered away from their trust in God. May grace be with you.

2 Timothy

Second Epistle to Timothy

This letter comes from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus chosen by God, sent to tell about the promise of real life that is in Christ Jesus. I'm sending it to you Timothy, my dear son. May you have grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I'm always thinking of you and I'm so thankful to God, whom I serve as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience. I never forget to mention you in my prayers. I remember how you cried, and I so want to see you! That would make me really happy. I keep in mind your sincere trust in God, the same trust that your grandmother Lois and mother Eunice also had—and I know that same trust continues in you.

That's why I want to remind you to revitalize God's gracious gift to you which you received when I placed my hands on you. God didn't give us a spirit that makes us fearful, but a spirit of power and love and good sense. So don't be ashamed to tell others about our Lord, or be ashamed of me. Instead be ready to share in suffering for the good news as God gives you strength. He is the one who has saved us and called us to live a holy life—not through what we do, but by God's own plan and through his grace. He gave this grace to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, and is now revealed in the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus. He destroyed death, making life and immortality brilliantly clear through the good news. I was appointed speaker, apostle, and teacher of this good news. That's also the reason I'm suffering all this, but I'm not ashamed, because I know whom I've trusted. I'm confident that he can look after what I've entrusted to him until the Day he returns.

You should follow the model of good advice that you learned from me, with an attitude of trust and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the truth that was entrusted to you through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

You already know that everyone from Asia has abandoned me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes. May the Lord be kind to the family of Onesiphorus, because he often took care of me and wasn't embarrassed about me being in prison. When he was in Rome, he took the trouble to search for me, and he found me. May the Lord grant him his blessing in the Day of Judgment. (Timothy, you're very much aware of how much Onesiphorus did for me when he was in Ephesus.)

So then, my son, grow strong in the grace of Christ Jesus. Take what you heard me say in front of many witnesses and share it with those who are trustworthy, who then can teach others as well. Suffer together with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. A soldier on active duty doesn't get caught up in the business of everyday life. He wants to please the one who enlisted him. Similarly athletes who compete in the games don't win a prize if they don't keep to the rules. The farmer that does all the hard work should be the first to benefit from the crop. Think about what I'm telling you. The Lord will help you to understand all this.

Focus your mind on Jesus Christ, a descendant of David, who was raised from the dead. This is my good news, and I'm suffering imprisonment because of it as if I were a criminal—but the word of God is not imprisoned. Despite all this I'm willing to keep on going for the sake of God's people so that they may gain the salvation of Christ Jesus that is eternal glory. This is a trustworthy saying: “If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we keep going, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us. If we are not trustworthy, he is still trustworthy, for he cannot be untrue to himself.”

This is what you should remind people about, telling them before God that they shouldn't have meaningless arguments over words. To do this only harms those who listen.

Make sure you work hard so you can present yourself to God and gain his approval. Be a worker that doesn't need to be embarrassed, using the word of truth correctly. Avoid pointless chatter because people who do this are heading away from God. Their teachings are as destructive as gangrene that destroys healthy flesh. Hymenaeus and Philetus are like this. They have deviated from the truth by saying that the resurrection has already happened, which has ruined some people's trust in God.

But God's solid, trustworthy foundation stone stands firm, with this inscription, “The Lord knows those who belong to him,” and “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord should stay away from all that is evil.” A stately home doesn't just have cups and bowls made of gold and silver. It also has ones made from wood and clay. Some are made for special use; others for more commonplace functions. So if you get rid of what is evil, you will become a cup or bowl that is holy and special, useful to the Lord, ready to do all that's good.

Run away from anything that fires up the desires of youth. Run after what is right and trustworthy, run after love and peace along with those who are true and pure Christians. Avoid foolish and childish debates, for you know they only lead to fights. For the Lord's minister must not fight, but be kind to everyone, able to teach, patient, gently correcting opponents. Perhaps God may help them to come to repent and to understand the truth. In this way they may come to their senses and escape the devil's trap. For he has captured them and made them do whatever he wants.

Be aware that there will be troubled times in the last days. People will love themselves and love money. They will be boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and without God in their lives. Heartless and unforgiving, they'll commit slander and have no self-control. Brutal people who hate what's good, they will betray others and be totally thoughtless. They are absurdly full of themselves, living so much for pleasure that they don't care about loving God. They may give an outward impression of being religious, but they don't actually believe it works. Stay away from these people!

They're the kind of people that slip into homes and take control of vulnerable women who are burdened

down by the guilt of sin and distracted by all kinds of desires. These women are always trying to learn but they're never able to understand the truth!

Just like Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, these teachers also oppose the truth. They are people with corrupted minds whose supposed trust in God is a lie. But they won't get far. Their stupidity will be obvious to everyone, just like that of Jannes and Jambres.

But you know all about my teaching and behavior, and my aim in life. You know my trust in God and my love. You know what I've had to endure— how I've been persecuted and what I've suffered. You know what happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—the troubles I had and how the Lord rescued me from all of them.

Of course it's true that everyone who wants to live a life devoted to God in Christ Jesus will experience persecution, while wicked people and frauds will do well, going from bad to worse, deceiving others and deceiving themselves too. But you must hold onto the things you've learned and are convinced are true. You know who taught you. From your childhood you've known the holy Scriptures which can give you understanding for salvation by trusting in Christ Jesus. All Scripture inspired by God is useful for teaching, for confronting what is wrong, for setting us straight, and for telling us what is right. This is how God provides a thorough preparation for those who work for him to accomplish all that's good.

This is what I instruct you to do before God and Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead when he comes to establish his kingdom. Speak God's word whether it is convenient or not, tell people where they're going wrong, warn them, encourage them. Do this with a great deal of patient teaching.

For the time is coming when people won't bother to listen to true teaching. Instead they will be curious to listen to something different, and will surround themselves with teachers who'll tell them what they want to hear. They will stop listening to the truth and wander off following myths. You need to keep your wits about you at all times. Put up with troubles, do the work of sharing the good news, fulfill your ministry.

For I'm about to be sacrificed—the time of my death is approaching. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept my trust in God. Now there's a prize reserved for me—the crown for a life lived according to what is good and right. The Lord (who is the judge that always does what's right), will give that to me on that Day. And not just to me, but to everyone who longs for his coming.

Please try to come to me as soon as you can. Demas has abandoned me because he loves the things of this world more, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is here with me. Bring Mark with you, because he can help me with my work. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come please bring the cloak I left behind with Carpus in Troas—and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith caused me a lot of trouble—may God judge him for what he did. You watch out for him too, because he was very much against what we were saying.

When it came to my first defense, no one stood up for me—everyone abandoned me. May they not be blamed for this. But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength so that I could declare the whole of the message so that all the foreigners could hear it. I was rescued out of the lion's mouth! The Lord will rescue me from all the evil things done against me, and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. His is the glory forever and ever. Amen. My greetings to Prisca and Aquila, and to Onesiphorus's family. Erastus stayed on in Corinth. I left Trophimus behind in Miletus because he was sick. Please try to come before winter. Eubulus sends his best wishes—and Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters too. The Lord be with you. May his grace be with you all.

Titus

Epistle to Titus

This letter comes from Paul, servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm sent to build up the trust of God's chosen people and to share the knowledge of the truth that leads to lives lived for God. This gives them the hope of eternal life that God (who cannot lie) promised ages ago, but which at the proper time he revealed through his word in the message which I was entrusted to give, following the command of God our Savior. This letter is sent to Titus, my true son through the trust in God we share in common. May you have grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

The reason I left you in Crete was for you to organize what was still needed and to appoint elders in every town, as I told you. An elder must have a good reputation, the husband of one wife, and have children who believe and who are not accused of being wild or disobedient. As a leader for God, a head elder must have a good reputation and not be arrogant. He should not have a quick temper nor get drunk; he shouldn't be violent or greedy for money. He should be hospitable, someone who loves what's good and does what's right. He should be living a life for God, self-controlled, and must be devoted to the trustworthy message as it's taught. In this way he can encourage others through correct teaching, and be able to convince those who disagree.

For there are many rebels around who talk a lot of deceptive nonsense, especially from the circumcision group. Their talking must stop, these people who throw whole families into turmoil, teaching things that aren't right for the sake of making money. As someone of their own people, a prophet, has stated, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts who are lazy, greedy people.” This is a true statement! Consequently give them a good telling-off so that they can have a healthy trust in God, not paying attention to Jewish myths and human commandments from those who deviate from the truth. To those who have clean minds everything is clean, but to those who are corrupt and refuse to trust in God, nothing is clean—both their minds and their consciences are corrupt. They claim to know God, but they prove this is false by what they do. They are detestable and disobedient, worthless for doing anything good.

You, however, must teach what is consistent with healthy beliefs. Older men shouldn't drink; they should be respectable and sensible, with a healthy trust in God, loving and patient. Similarly older women ought to behave in a way that shows they live their lives for God. They shouldn't destroy people's reputations by what they say, and they shouldn't be addicted to wine. They should be teachers of what's good, teaching the young wives to love their husbands and their children. They are to be sensible and pure, working in their homes, doing good and listening to what their husbands tell them. In this way the word of God will not be spoken about badly. Likewise tell the young men to be sensible. You should set an example of doing good in all areas of life: show integrity and seriousness in what you teach, sharing healthy beliefs that can't be criticized. In this way those who are opposed will be ashamed of themselves and won't have anything bad to say about us. Tell servants to always obey their masters. They should try to please them and not talk back to them. They shouldn't steal things for themselves, but show they are completely trustworthy so that they may rightly represent the truth about God our Savior in every way.

For God's grace has been revealed, bringing salvation to everyone. It teaches us to reject a godless way of life with the desires of this world. Instead we should live thoughtful, self-controlled lives that are right before God in the present world as we look for the wonderful hope of the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us, so that he could set us free from all our wickedness, and to make us clean for him—a people who belong to him, keen to do good.

This is what you should be teaching. You have the authority to encourage and to correct as necessary. Don't let anyone look down on you.

Remind them to follow what rulers tell them to do, and to obey authorities. They should always be ready to do what is good. They should not speak badly about anyone, and they should not be argumentative. Tell them to show gentleness and kindness to everyone. For there was a time when we too were foolish and disobedient. We were deceived and slaves to various desires and pleasures. We lived wicked lives full of jealousy, hateful people hating one another.

But when the goodness and love of God our Savior was revealed, he saved us, not because of anything good that we've done, but because of his mercy. He did this through the cleansing of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit, which he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Now that we are set right by his grace we have become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

You can trust what I'm saying, and I want you to emphasize these instructions so that those who trust in God will think seriously about them and continue to do good. They are excellent and helpful for everyone. Avoid pointless discussions, and obsessions about ancestry. Don't get into arguments, and avoid fights over the Jewish laws—they're useless and don't help at all. Warn someone who is divisive once, and then again—after that don't pay them any attention, realizing that they're perverse and sinful and have condemned themselves.

As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, try and come to me at Nicopolis because I'm planning to spend the winter there. Do all you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that they have everything they need. May our people learn the habit of doing good in providing for the daily needs of others. They need to be productive! Everyone here with me sends their greetings. Give our best wishes to those who love us, those who trust in God. May grace be with you all.

Philemon

Epistle to Philemon

This letter is sent from Paul, prisoner of Jesus Christ, and from our brother Timothy, to Philemon, our good friend and co-worker; to our sister Apphia, to Archippus who fights alongside us, and to your house church. May you have grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God for you, remembering you in my prayers, because I hear of your trust in the Lord Jesus and your love for all believers. I pray that you will put the generous nature of your trust in God into action as you recognize all the good things we share in Christ. Your love, my dear brother, has brought me much happiness and encouragement. You have really inspired those of us who believe!

That's why even though I'm brave enough in Christ to order you to do your duty, I would rather ask you this favor out of love. Old Paul, now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, is appealing to you on behalf of Onesimus who became my adopted son during my imprisonment. In the past he was of no use to you, but now he's useful to both you and me! I send him to you with my fondest wishes. I'd have preferred to keep him here with me so that he could have helped me as you would have done while I am in chains for telling the good news. But I decided not to do anything without your permission. I didn't want you to be forced to do good, but to do so willingly. Maybe you lost him for a while so that you could have him back forever! He's not a servant anymore, because he's more than a servant. He's a specially-loved brother, particularly to me, and even more to you, both as a man and as a fellow-believer in the Lord.

So if you consider me as a colleague working together with you for the Lord, welcome him as if you were welcoming me. If he has done you any wrong, or owes you anything, charge it to my account. I Paul am signing this with my own hand: I will repay you. Of course I won't mention what you owe me, including your very self! Yes, brother, I'm expecting this favor from you in the Lord; please make me happy in Christ.

I'm writing about this to you because I'm convinced you'll do as I ask—in fact I know you'll do even more than I've asked! In the meantime please have a room ready for me, for I hope to be able to return to see you soon in answer to your prayers. Epaphras who is here in prison with me sends his greetings, as do my co-workers Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

Hebrews

Epistle to the Hebrews

God, who in the past spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at various times and in many ways, has in these last days spoken to us through his Son. God appointed the Son heir of everything, and made the universe through him. The Son is the radiant glory of God, and the visible expression of his true character. He sustains everything by his powerful command. When he had provided cleansing for sin he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. He was placed much higher than the angels since he received a greater name than them. God never said to any angel, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father,” or “I will be a Father to him, and he will be a Son to me.”

Also, when he brought his firstborn Son into the world, he said, “Let all God's angels worship him.” Regarding the angels, he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire,” but about the Son he says, “Your throne, God, lasts forever and ever, and justice is the ruling scepter of your kingdom. You love what is right, and hate what is lawless. That is why God, your God, has placed you above everyone else by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

“You, Lord, laid the foundations of the earth in the beginning. The heavens are the product of your hands. They will come to an end, but you will continue. They will wear out like clothes do, and you will roll them up like a cloak. Like clothes, they will be changed, but you never change, and your life never ends.” But he never said to any angel, “Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies in subjection under your feet.” What are the angels? They are beings that serve, sent out to help those who will receive salvation.

So we should pay even closer attention to what we've learned so we don't drift away from it. If the message the angels brought was trustworthy, and every sin and disobedient act brings its own consequence, how will we escape if we don't pay attention to this great salvation that the Lord first announced, and then we had confirmed to us by those who heard him. God also testified through signs and miracles, by acts that show his power, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, given as he chose.

It's not angels who will be in charge of the world to come that we're talking about. But as it's been said, “What are human beings that you should worry about them? What is a son of man that you should care about him? You set him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor, and placed him over all your creation. You gave him authority over everything.” Nothing was left out when God gave him authority over everything. However, we see that not everything is subject to his authority yet.

But we see Jesus, for a little while placed a little lower than the angels, through the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor. Through God's grace Jesus experienced death for everyone.

It was appropriate that God, who creates and maintains everything, should bring many of his children to glory, and to completely prepare through suffering the one who leads them to salvation. For both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy belong to the same family. That's why he doesn't hesitate to call them “brothers,” saying “I will announce your name to my brothers; I will praise you among your people when they meet together.” Also: “I will place my trust in him,” and “Here I am, together with the children God has given to me.”

Because the children share flesh and blood in common, he shared in this in the same way so that through death he could destroy the one that had the power of death—the devil— and free everyone who through fear of death were enslaved all their lives.

Of course it's not angels he's concerned about; he's concerned to help the children of Abraham. That's why it was necessary for him to become like his brothers in everything, so that he could become a merciful and trustworthy high priest in the things of God, to forgive his people's sins. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

So, my brothers and sisters who live for God and who share in this heavenly calling, we need to think carefully about Jesus—the one we say is sent by God, and is the High Priest. He was faithful to God in the work he was chosen to do, just like Moses was faithful to God in God's house. But Jesus deserves much greater glory than Moses, in the same way that the builder of a house deserves more credit than the house. Every house has its builder; God is the builder of everything. As a servant, Moses was faithful in God's house. He provided evidence of what would be announced later. But Christ is a son, in charge of God's house. And we are God's house as long as we hold on with confidence to the hope we boast we believe in.

This is why the Holy Spirit says, “If you hear what God is saying to you today, don't have a hard-hearted attitude like the time you rebelled against him, when you tested him in the wilderness. Your fathers put me through it, trying my patience, and they saw the evidence I gave them for forty years.

That generation made me angry and so I said, ‘They're always mistaken in what they think, and they don't know me or what I'm doing.’ So in my frustration I vowed, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

Brothers and sisters, make sure that none of you has an evil mindset that's given up trusting in the God of life. Encourage each other every day while you still have “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and become hard-hearted. For we are partners with Christ as long as we hold on to our confidence in God from beginning to end.

As Scripture says, “If you hear what God is saying to you today, don't have a hard-hearted attitude like the time you rebelled against him.” Who was it that rebelled against God, even though they heard what he said? Wasn't it all those who were led out of Egypt by Moses? Who was God upset with for forty years? Wasn't it those who sinned, those who were buried in the desert? Who was God speaking of when he vowed

they should not enter into his rest? Wasn't it those who disobeyed him? So we see that they were not able to enter because they didn't trust him.

Therefore let's take care to make sure that even though God has given us his promise of entering his rest, none of you miss out! For we've heard the good news just like they did, but it didn't help them because they didn't accept and trust in what they heard. However, those of us who trust in God *have* entered into that rest God mentioned when he said, "In my frustration I vowed, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (This is so even though God's plans were already complete when he created the world.) Regarding the seventh day there's a place in Scripture that says, "God rested on the seventh day from all his work." And as the previous passage stated, "They shall not enter my rest."

God's rest is still there for some to enter, even though those who previously heard the good news failed to enter because of disobedience. So God again sets a day—today—saying a long time later through David as he did before, "If you hear what God is saying to you today, don't have a hard-hearted attitude." For if Joshua had been able to give them rest, God wouldn't have spoken later about another day. So a Sabbath rest remains for God's people. For whoever enters God's rest also rests from what he's doing, just as God did.

As a result we should try hard to enter that rest so nobody falls through following the same bad example of disobedience. For God's word is alive and effective, sharper than any twin-edged sword, so penetrating it separates life and breath, bone joints and their marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the mind. No living being is hidden from his sight; everything is exposed and visible to the one we're accountable to.

Since we have such a great high priest who has ascended to heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us make sure we hold on to what we say we believe. For the high priest we have isn't one who doesn't sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who was tempted in all the ways we are, but did not sin. So we should go confidently to God on his throne of grace so we can receive mercy, and discover grace to help us when we really need it.

Every high priest is chosen from the people and is appointed to work for the people as they relate to God. He presents to God both their gifts and sacrifices for their sins. The high priest understands how ignorant and deluded people feel because he also experiences the same kind of human weaknesses. As a result he has to offer sacrifices for his sins as well as for those of the people. No one can take the position of high priest for himself; he must be chosen by God, just like Aaron was. In just the same way Christ did not honor himself by becoming high priest. It was God who said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father." In another verse, God says, "You are a priest forever, following the order of Melchizedek." Jesus, while he was here in human form, prayed and appealed with loud cries and tears to God, the one who was able to save him from death. Jesus was heard because of his respect for God. Even though he was God's Son, Jesus learned through suffering what obedience really means. When his experience was complete, he became the source of eternal salvation to everyone who does what he says, having been designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

We have much to say about Jesus, and it's hard to explain because you don't seem able to understand! By now you should have had enough time to become teachers, but you need someone to teach you the fundamentals, the first principles of God's word. It's like you need to go back to baby milk instead of solid food! Those who drink baby milk don't have the experience of living the right way—they're just babies. Solid food is for grown-ups—those who by always using their brains have learned to tell the difference between good and evil.

So let's not get stuck on the basic teachings about Christ, but let's progress to a more mature understanding. We don't need to go over again the ideas of repenting from what we used to do, about trusting in God—or teachings about baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. So let's get on with it, as God gives us the opportunity!

It's impossible for those who once understood and experienced God's heavenly gift—who shared in receiving the Holy Spirit, who had known God's good word and the power of the coming age— and then completely abandon God, for them to be brought back to repentance once more. They themselves have crucified the Son of God all over again and publicly humiliated him. Land that has been watered by rain, and produces crops for those who farm it, has God's blessing. But land that only produces weeds and thorns is worthless, and is about to be condemned. In the end all that can be done is to burn it.

But dear friends, we believe better of you and your salvation, even if we talk like this! God wouldn't be so unjust as to forget what you've done and the love you've shown for him by the care you've shown for fellow-believers—something you're still doing. We want each of you to show the same kind of commitment, confident in God's hope until it's fulfilled. Don't be spiritually lazy, but follow the example of those who through trusting in God and patience inherit what God has promised. When God gave his promise to Abraham he could swear by no one greater so he took an oath on himself, saying, "I will definitely bless you, and multiply your descendants." And so, after patiently waiting, Abraham received the promise.

People swear on things that are greater than they are, and when they have some dispute the oath is taken as the final word on the matter. That's why God wanted to demonstrate more clearly to those who would inherit the promise that he would never ever change his mind. So by these two actions that can't be changed, and since it's impossible for God to lie, we can have total confidence, having run for safety to take hold of the hope God presented to us. This hope is our spiritual anchor —it's both certain and reliable, and it takes us past the curtain to the presence of God. That's where Jesus went in on our behalf, because he had become a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God. He met Abraham who was returning from defeating the kings and blessed him. Abraham

gave him a tithe of all that he had won. Melchizedek's name means “king of right” while king of Salem means “king of peace.” We don't have any information about his father or his mother or his family tree. We don't know when he was born or when he died. Like the Son of God he continues as a priest forever.

Think how great this man was for Abraham the patriarch to give him a tithe of what was won in battle. Yes, the sons of Levi who are priests were commanded by the law to receive a tithe from the people, their brothers and sisters, who are descended from Abraham. But Melchizedek who doesn't share their ancestry received tithes from Abraham, and blessed the one who had God's promises. There's no argument that the lesser person is blessed by the one who is greater. In the one case tithes are received by men who die, but in the other by one who is said to be living. So you could say that Levi, the one who receives tithes, has paid tithes through being a descendant of Abraham, for he was yet to be born from his father when Melchizedek met Abraham.

Now if perfection could have been achieved through the priesthood of Levi (for that's how the law was received), what was the need for another priest to come following the order of Melchizedek, and not following the order of Aaron? If the priesthood is changed, then the law needs to be changed too. The one we're talking about comes from a different tribe, a tribe that has never provided priests to serve at the altar. It's clear that our Lord is a descendant of Judah, and Moses said nothing about priests coming from this tribe. What makes it even clearer is when another priest appears who is similar to Melchizedek, and who didn't become a priest by virtue of his human ancestry but by the power of a life that cannot be ended. That's why it says, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

So the previous rule has been set aside because it was powerless and didn't work, (for the law didn't make anything perfect). But now it's been replaced by a better hope by which we can come close to God. This was not without an oath, even though those who become priests do so without an oath. But he became a priest with an oath because God told him, “The Lord has taken a solemn vow and will not change his mind: You are a priest forever.” This is how Jesus became the guarantee of an agreed relationship with God that is so much better.

There have been many priests because death prevented them from being able to continue; but since Jesus lives forever, his priesthood is permanent. As a result he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, living always to plead their case on their behalf.

He is exactly the high priest we need: holy and without fault, pure and separate from sinners, and given a place in the highest heavens. Unlike those human high priests, he doesn't need to offer a daily sacrifice for his sins and then the sins of the people. He did this once, and for everyone, when he offered himself. The law appoints imperfect men as high priests, but God gave his solemn vow after the law, and appointed his Son, perfect forever.

The main point of what we're saying is this: We have just such a high priest who is seated at the right hand of God, who sits in majesty on his throne in heaven. He serves in the sanctuary, the true Tabernacle that was set up by the Lord and not by human beings. Since it's the responsibility of every high priest to offer gifts and sacrifices, this high priest must also have something to offer.

Now if he was here on earth, he wouldn't be a priest at all, because there are already priests to present the offerings that the law requires. The place they serve is a copy, a mere shadow of what is in heaven. That's what God told Moses when he was going to set up the Tabernacle: “Be careful to make everything according to the blueprint you were shown on the mountain.”

But Jesus has been given a far better ministry just as he is the one who mediates a far better agreed relationship between us and God, which is based on much better promises. If that first agreement had been perfect, then a second wouldn't have been necessary. Pointing out their failings, God told his people, “Pay attention, says the Lord, because the days are coming when I will make a new agreement with the people of Israel and Judah. This will not be like the agreement I made with their forefathers when I led them by the hand out of the land of Egypt. For they didn't keep their part of the agreed relationship, so I gave up on them, says the Lord.

The relationship I promise to the house of Israel is this: After that time, says the Lord, I will place my laws inside them, and write them in their minds. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No one will need to teach their neighbor, and no one will need to teach anyone in their family, telling them, ‘You ought to know the Lord.’ For everyone will know me, from the smallest to the greatest. I will be merciful when they do wrong, and I will forget about their sins.”

By saying, “A new agreed relationship,” he makes the first agreement out-of-date. The one that's old and worn out has almost disappeared.

The former system had instructions as to how to worship, and an earthly sanctuary. The first room in the Tabernacle housed the candlestick, the table, and the sacred bread. This was called the Holy Place. Past the second veil in the Tabernacle was the room called the Most Holy Place. This contained the golden altar of incense, the gold-covered “agreement chest.” Inside this were the golden pot containing manna, Aaron's rod that had produced buds, and the stone inscriptions of the agreement. Above this were the glorious angel cherubim covering the place of reconciliation. We can't discuss all of this in detail now.

Once all of this had been set up, the priests would go in regularly to the first room of the Tabernacle to perform their duties. But only the high priest went into the second room, and only once a year. Even then he had to make a sacrifice involving blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins of ignorance.

By this the Holy Spirit indicated that the way into the true Most Holy Place hadn't been revealed while the first Tabernacle still existed. This is an illustration for us in the present, showing us that the gifts and sacrifices that are offered can't make the worshiper's

conscience clear. They're just religious regulations—about food and drink, and various ceremonies involving washing—which were put in place until the time of God's new way of relating to him.

Christ has come as a high priest of all the good experiences we now have. He went into the greater, more complete Tabernacle that wasn't made by human hands—not part of this created world. He didn't enter through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood. He entered once, for all time, into the Most Holy Place, setting us free forever.

For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a cow sprinkled on those who are ritually unclean make the body ceremonially clean, how much more does the blood of Christ—who offered himself in his sinless life to God through the eternal Spirit—clean your consciences from your past sinful lives so you can serve the living God?

This is why he is the mediator of a new agreed relationship. Since a death has occurred to set them free from the sins committed under the first agreed relationship, now those who are called can receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. For a will to be implemented, the person who made it must be dead. A will is only valid when there's been a death—and is never applied while the person who made it is still alive. That's why the first agreement was established with blood.

After Moses had given all the commandments of the law to everyone, he took the blood of calves and goats, and together with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, sprinkled the book itself and all the people. He said to them, “This is the blood of the agreed relationship that God has told you he wants with you.” Moses sprinkled the blood in the same way on the Tabernacle and everything used in worship. According to ceremonial law, almost everything is made clean with blood, and without shedding blood nothing is made ritually free from the stain of sin. So if the copies of what is in heaven needed to be cleansed in this way, the things in heaven needed cleansing by better sacrifices.

For Christ hasn't entered a Most Holy Place constructed by human beings that is only a pattern of the original. He has entered heaven itself, and now appears on our behalf, speaking for us in God's presence. This was not to repeatedly offer himself, like a high priest has to enter the Most Holy Place year after year, offering blood that is not his own. Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. No: just this one time at the end of the present age he came to remove sin by sacrificing himself. Just as human beings die only once, and then are judged, so too for Christ—having been sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people, he will come again, not to deal with sin, but to save those who wait for him.

The law is just a shadow of the good that was to come, and not the actual reality. So it can never through the repeated sacrifices offered year after year make right those who come to worship God. Otherwise wouldn't the sacrifices have stopped being offered? If the worshipers had been made clean once and for all, they wouldn't have had guilty consciences any longer. But in fact those sacrifices remind people of sins year after year, because it's impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to remove sins.

That's why when Christ came into the world he said, “You didn't want sacrifices or offerings, but you did prepare a body for me. Burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin gave you no pleasure. Then I said, ‘God, see I've come to do what you want me to do, just as it says about me in the book.’” As mentioned above, “You didn't want sacrifices or offerings, and burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin gave you no pleasure,” (even though they are offered in accordance with the law's requirements). Then he said, “See, I've come to do what you want.” He gets rid of the first agreement so he can set up the second, through which we all are made holy through Jesus Christ offering his body once and for all time.

Every priest officiates in the services day after day, again and again offering the same sacrifices that can never remove sins. But this Priest, after he had offered for sins a single sacrifice that lasts forever, sat down at God's right hand. Now he waits until all his enemies are conquered, becoming like a footstool for him. For by a single sacrifice he has set right forever those who are being made holy. As the Holy Spirit also tells us, for having said, “This is the agreement that I will make with them later on, says the Lord. I will put my laws inside them, and I will write them in their minds.” Then he adds, “I won't remember their sins and lawlessness anymore.” Once free from such things, sin offerings are no longer needed.

Now we have the confidence, brothers and sisters, to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. Through his life and death, he opened up a brand-new, living way through the veil to God. Since we have such a great priest placed in charge over the house of God, let us come close to God with sincere minds, totally trusting in him. Our minds have been sprinkled to purify them from our evil way of thinking, and our bodies have been washed clean by pure water. So let us hold onto the hope we're telling others about, never hesitating, for God who promised is trustworthy. Let's think about how we can motivate one another to love and to do what is good. We should not give up meeting together, as some have done. In fact we should be encouraging one another, especially as you see the End approaching.

For if we deliberately go on sinning after we've understood the truth, there's no longer any sacrifice for sins. All that's left is fear, expecting the impending judgment and the terrible fire that destroys those who are hostile to God. Someone who rejects the law of Moses is put to death without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse do you think someone will deserve their punishment if they have trampled underfoot the Son of God, if they have disregarded the blood that sealed the agreement and makes us holy, treating it as ordinary and trivial, and have abused the Spirit of grace? We know God, and he said, “I will make sure that justice is done; I will give people what they deserve.” He also said, “The Lord will judge his people.” It's terrifying to come under the power of the living God.

Just remember the past when, after you understood the truth, you experienced a great deal of suffering. Sometimes you were made a spectacle of, being insulted and attacked; at other times you stood in solidarity with those who were suffering. You showed your sympathy for those in prison, and took it cheerfully when your possessions were confiscated, knowing that you have something better coming that will truly last.

So don't lose your confidence in God—it will be richly rewarded. You need to be patient so that having done what God wants, you'll receive what he has promised. “In just a little while he will come, as he said —he won't delay. Those who do what is right will live by trusting in God, and if they draw back from their commitment, I won't be pleased with them.” But we're not the kind of people who draw back and end up being lost. We are those who trust in God to save us.

Now our trust in God is the guarantee of what we hope for, the evidence of what we can't see. People who lived long ago trusted God and this is what gained them God's approval. Through our trust in God we understand that the whole universe was created by God's command, that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen.

By trusting him Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain, and as a result God identified him as someone who lived right. God showed this by accepting his offering. Even though Abel has been dead for a long time, he still speaks to us through what he did. By trusting God Enoch was taken to heaven so he didn't experience death. He couldn't be found on earth because God took him to heaven. Before this happened he was known as someone God was pleased with.

You can't expect God to be pleased with you if you don't trust him! Anyone who comes to God must believe that God exists, and that he rewards those who are searching for him.

Noah trusted God, and was warned by him about things that had never happened before. Because Noah paid serious attention to what God said, he constructed an ark to save his family. By trusting God, Noah showed that the world was wrong, and received the reward of being set right by God.

Through trusting God Abraham obeyed when God called him to go to the land God was going to give him. He left, not knowing where he was going. Trusting in God he lived in the promised land—but as a foreigner, living in tents, together with Isaac and Jacob who shared with him in inheriting the same promise. For Abraham was looking forward to a city built on foundations that last, with God as its builder and maker.

By her trust in God even Sarah herself was given the ability to conceive a child though she was too old, because she trusted God who had made the promise. That is why the descendants of Abraham (who was as good as dead!) became as numerous as the stars of heaven, as countless as the sand of the sea shore.

They all died still trusting in God. Though they didn't receive the things God promised, they were still looking for them as it were from a distance and welcomed them, acknowledging that on this earth they were foreigners, people just passing through.

People who say such things make it clear that they're looking for a country of their own. For if they cared about the country they'd left behind, they could have returned. But they're looking for a better country instead, a heavenly country. That is why God isn't disappointed with them, and is happy to be called their God, for he has built a city for them.

Abraham trusted God when he was tested and offered Isaac to God. Abraham, who had accepted God's promises, was still ready to offer to God his only son, even though he'd been told, “It's through Isaac that your descendants will be counted.” Abraham had thought it through and decided that God could bring Isaac back to life from the dead. In a sense that's what did happen—Abraham received Isaac back from the dead.

Trusting in God, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to what the future would bring. Trusting in God, Jacob as he was dying blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped God, leaning on his staff. Trusting in God, Joseph too, when his own death approached, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites, and gave instructions about what to do with his bones. Trusting in God, Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born. They recognized he was a special child. They weren't afraid to go against what the king had commanded.

Trusting in God, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be known as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. Instead he chose to share in the sufferings of God's people rather than to enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin. He counted the rejection he experienced from following Christ to be of far greater value than the wealth of Egypt—because he was focused on the reward to come.

Trusting in God, he left Egypt and wasn't scared of Pharaoh's anger—he kept going with his eyes fixed on the invisible God. Trusting in God he observed the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, so that the destroying angel would not touch the Israelites. Trusting in God the Israelites crossed the Red Sea as if it were dry land. When the Egyptians attempted to do the same they were drowned. Trusting in God, the Israelites marched around the walls of Jericho for seven days, and the walls fell down. Trusting in God, Rahab the prostitute didn't die with those who rejected God, because she had welcomed the Israelite spies in peace.

What other examples should I give? I don't have time to talk about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; about David, Samuel, and the prophets. Because of their trust in God they conquered kingdoms, did what was good and right, received God's promises, shut the mouths of lions, put out blazing fires, escaped being killed by the sword, were weak but made strong, did mighty deeds in war, and routed enemy armies.

Women were given their dead family members back through resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to compromise and be pardoned, because they wanted to be part of a better resurrection. Yet others suffered insults and whippings; they were put in chains and imprisoned. Some were stoned, cut in pieces, tempted, killed by the sword. Some dressed in sheepskins and goatskins: destitute, oppressed, and mistreated. The world was not worthy to have such

people who wandered in the deserts and mountains, living in caves and holes in the ground.

All of these people, even though they had God's approval, didn't receive what God had promised. God has given us something even better, so that they can't be complete without us.

For that reason, since we are surrounded by such a great crowd of people who gave evidence of their trust in God, let's get rid of everything that holds us back, the seductive sins that trip us up, and let's keep on running the race placed before us. We should keep on looking to Jesus, the one who begins and completes our trust in God. Because of the joy ahead of him Jesus endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God's throne. Think about Jesus who endured such hostility from sinful people so you don't grow tired and become discouraged.

Your resistance so far hasn't cost you blood as you fight against sin. Have you forgotten God's appeal to you when he reasons with you as his children? He says, “My child, don't treat the Lord's discipline lightly, and don't give up when he corrects you either. The Lord disciplines everyone he loves, and he punishes everyone he welcomes as his child.” Be patient as you experience God's discipline because he is treating you as his children. What child doesn't experience a father's discipline? If you are not disciplined (which everyone has experienced), then you are illegitimate and not true children. For if we respected our earthly fathers who disciplined us, shouldn't we even more be subject to the discipline of our spiritual Father which leads to life? They disciplined us for a short while as they thought appropriate, but God does so for our benefit in order that we can share his holy character. When it happens, all discipline seems painful and not something to be happy about. But later on it produces peace in those who have been trained in this way so that they do what is good and right.

So strengthen your feeble hands, and your weak knees! Make straight paths to walk on, so that those who are crippled won't lose their way, but will be healed. Do your best to live in peace with everybody, and look for holiness—if you don't have this you won't see the Lord. Make sure that none of you lack God's grace, in case some cause of bitterness arises to give trouble and end up corrupting many of you. Make sure there's nobody who is sexually immoral, or irreligious, like Esau was. He sold his birthright for a single meal. You remember that even when he wanted to receive the blessing later on he was refused. Even though he really tried, and cried hard, Esau couldn't change what he had done.

You haven't arrived at a physical mountain that can be touched, that burned with fire, to a stormy place of black darkness, where the sound of a trumpet and a voice speaking was heard—and those who heard the voice begged never to hear it speak to them again. For they couldn't take what they were told to do, such as, “Even if a farm animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses himself said, “I'm so scared I'm shaking!”

But you have arrived at Mount Zion, the city of the living God, heavenly Jerusalem, with its thousands and thousands of angels. You have come to the church of the firstborn whose names are written down in heaven, to God, the judge of everyone, and to those good people whose lives are complete. You have come to Jesus, who shares with us the new agreed relationship, to the sprinkled blood that means more than that of Abel. Make sure you don't reject the one who is speaking! If they didn't escape when they rejected God on earth, it is even more certain that we won't escape if we turn away from God who warns us from heaven! Back then God's voice shook the earth, but his promise is now: “One more time I'm going to shake not only the earth, but heaven too.” This expression, “one more time,” indicates that all creation that is shaken is removed so that everything that is not shaken may remain.

Since we're receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have a gracious attitude, so we can serve God in a way that pleases him, with reverence and respect. For “our God is a fire that consumes.”

May love for each other as brothers and sisters always continue! Don't forget to show love for strangers too, because by doing so some have welcomed angels without knowing it. Remember those who are locked up in prison as if you were imprisoned with them. Remember those who are mistreated as if you were physically suffering with them.

Everyone should honor marriage. Husbands and wives should be faithful to each other. God will judge adulterers. Don't love money; be content with what you have. God himself has said, “I'll never let you down; I'll never give up on you.” That's why we can confidently say, “The Lord is the one who helps me, so I won't be afraid. What can anyone do to me?” Remember your leaders who explained God's word to you. Look again at the results of their lives, and imitate their trust in God. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Don't get distracted by different kinds of strange teachings. It's good for the mind to be convinced by grace, not by laws concerning what we eat. Those who followed such laws didn't gain anything. We have an altar that those priests of the Tabernacle have no right to eat from. The carcasses of the animals, whose blood is carried by the high priest into the most holy place as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. In the same way Jesus also died outside the city gate so that he could make God's people holy through his own blood. So let us go out to him, outside the camp, experiencing and sharing in his shame. For we don't have a permanent city to live in here; we're looking for the home that is still to come. So let us through Jesus always offer a sacrifice of praise to God—this means speaking well of God, declaring his character. And don't forget to do what is good, and to share with others what you have, for God is pleased when you make such sacrifices. Follow your leaders, and do what they tell you, for they are watching out for you and are accountable. Act in such a way that they can do this happily—and not with sadness, for that wouldn't help you!

Please pray for us. We're convinced we have acted in good conscience, always wanting to do what's good and right in every situation. I really want you to pray hard so that I can come back to see you soon.

Now may the God of peace who raised our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, from the dead, with the blood of an eternal agreement— may he provide you with all that is good so you can do his will. May he work in us, doing everything that pleases him, through Jesus Christ—glory to him forever and ever. Amen.

I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, to pay attention to what I've written to you in this short letter. You should know that Timothy has been set free. If he gets here soon, I will come with him to see you. Give my greetings to all your leaders, and to all the believers there. The believers here in Italy send their greetings. May God's grace be with all of you. Amen.

James

Epistle of James

This letter comes from James, servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. Best wishes to you!

My friends, think of it as a reason to be supremely happy even when all kinds of troubles come your way, because you know that endurance comes from dealing with challenges to your trust in God. Let your endurance become as strong as possible, so that you will be completely mature, without any shortcomings.

If any of you need wisdom, ask God, who gives generously to everyone without holding back. But when you ask, remember to trust in God—don't have any doubts. Someone who doubts is like the crashing waves of the sea, tossed about and driven by the wind. Nobody like that should think they'll get anything from the Lord— their minds think every which way, and they're unstable in whatever they do.

Believers who are born poor should take pride in the high position they've been given, while the rich should "boast" in the humble position they now have, since they will fade away like flowers in the field. For the sun rises along with the blistering wind and scorches the grass. The flowers fall and their beauty is marred. Everything the rich achieve will fade in just the same way.

Happy is anyone who patiently endures temptation, for when they've proved that they are trustworthy, they will receive the crown of life which God promises to those who love him. Nobody should say when they're tempted, "I'm being tempted by God." For God is not tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. Temptations come from our own evil desires that lead us astray and entrap us. Such desires lead to sin, and sin, when it's fully developed, causes death.

My dear friends, don't be deceived. All that's good, every perfect gift, is from above, and comes down from the Father who made heaven's lights. Unlike them he doesn't change—he doesn't vary or cause shadows. He chose to give us new life through the word of truth, so that out of all his creation we would be very special to him.

Remember this, my dear friends: everyone should be quick to listen but slow to speak, and slow to get angry, because human anger doesn't reflect the good character of God. So get rid of all that's filthy and evil. Humbly accept the word that's been implanted within you—for this is what can save you. But do what the word says—don't just listen to it and delude yourselves. If you just listen to the word, and don't act on it, it's like staring at your own face in a mirror. You see yourself, but then you leave, and immediately forget what you looked like. But if you look to the perfect law of freedom and follow it, not as someone who just listens and then forgets, but as someone who acts on it—then you will be blessed in what you do. If you think you're religious, but don't control what you say, you deceive yourself—your religion is pointless. In the eyes of our God and Father, religion that's pure and genuine is to visit orphans and widows in their suffering, and to keep yourself from being contaminated by the world.

My friends, as trusting believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, you must not show favoritism. Imagine that a man comes into your synagogue wearing gold rings and fine clothes, and then a poor man comes in dressed in rags. If you pay special attention to the well-dressed man, and say, "Please sit here in a seat of honor," while you say to the poor man, "Stand over there, or sit on the floor by my feet," haven't you discriminated and judged with bad motives? Listen, my dear friends: Didn't God choose those who the world considers poor to be rich in their trust in him, and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him? But you've treated the poor shamefully. Isn't it the rich who oppress you and drag you before the courts? Don't they insult the honorable name of the one who called you and to whom you belong?

If you really observe the royal law of Scripture: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," then you do well. But if you show favoritism, you're sinning. The law convicts you as guilty of breaking it. Someone who observes everything in the law but fails in just one part is guilty of breaking it all. God told you not to commit adultery, and he also told you not to kill. So if you don't commit adultery, but you do kill, you've become a lawbreaker. You should speak and act as people who will be judged by the law of freedom. Anyone who doesn't show mercy will be judged without mercy. Yet mercy wins out over judgment!

My friends, what's the good of someone saying they trust in God when they don't do what's good and right? Can such "trust" save them? If a brother or sister doesn't have clothes, or food for the day, and you say to them, "Blessings on you! Stay warm and have a good meal!" and you don't provide what they need to survive, what's the good of that? By itself even your trust-based faith in God is dead and worthless if you don't actually do what's good and right.

Someone may argue, "You have your trust in God; I have my good deeds." Well, show me your trust in God without good deeds, and I will show you my trust in God by my good deeds! You believe that God is one God? That's great—but demons believe in God too, and they're scared of him! You foolish people! Don't you know that trust in God without doing what's right is worthless? Wasn't our father Abraham made right by what he did—by offering his son Isaac on the altar? You notice that his trust in God worked together with what he did, and through what he did his trust in God was made complete. In this way scripture was fulfilled: "Abraham trusted God, and this was considered as him doing right," and he was called the friend of God.

You see that people are made right by what they do, and not just by trusting God. In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute made right by what she did when she looked after the messengers and then sent them away by a different road? Just as the body is dead

without the spirit, trust in God is dead if you don't do what's right.

My friends, not many of you should become teachers, because you know that we who teach will have a heavier responsibility in the judgment. All of us make mistakes in many ways. Anyone who doesn't make mistakes in what they say is truly a good person who can keep the whole body under control. We put bridles into the mouths of horses so that they'll obey us, and we can direct them wherever we want. Look at ships as well: even though they're very big and are driven along by strong winds, they're steered by a very small rudder in the direction the pilot wants to go.

In just the same way the tongue is a very small part of the body, but it makes great boasts! Think how a big forest can be set on fire by a very small flame! And the tongue is a fire! The tongue is a world of evil among the parts of the body. It disgraces all you are as a person, and can burn down the whole of your life, since it is set on fire by Gehenna. People have tamed all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and sea creatures, but no one can tame the tongue—it's an evil thing, hard to control, full of deadly poison. We use the same tongue to bless our Lord and Father, as well as to curse people who are made in God's image— blessings and curses come from the same mouth! Friends, it shouldn't be this way! Does a spring send both sweet and bitter water out of the same opening? My friends, a fig tree can't produce olives, and a vine can't produce figs, any more than a salt water spring can produce fresh water!

Who among you has wisdom and understanding? Let their good lives demonstrate what they do—doing what is right with wise kindness and consideration.

But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, don't boast about it and don't lie against the truth. This kind of “wisdom” doesn't come from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, and demonic. Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition you'll also find confusion and all kinds of evil practices.

However, wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, and it also brings peace. It is kind and open to reason. It is full of mercy and produces good things. It is genuine and not hypocritical. Those who sow peace will harvest the peace of what is truly good and right.

Where do the fights and quarrels you're having come from? Aren't they due to the sensual passions that are in conflict within you? You burn with desire, but don't get what you want. You kill for what you lust after, but don't get what you're looking for. You argue and you fight, but you don't get anything, because you don't pray for it. You pray, but don't receive anything, because you ask with a wrong motive, wanting to spend what you'd receive on your selfish pleasures. You adulterous people! Don't you realize that friendship with the world is hatred towards God? Those who want to be friends of the world make themselves enemies of God.

Do you think Scripture doesn't mean what it says: that the spirit that he put in us is very jealous? But God gives us even more grace, as Scripture says: “God is against those who are arrogant, but gives grace to those who are humble.” So place yourself under God's direction. Confront the devil, and he will run away from you. Come close to God and he will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your way of thinking, you people with divided loyalties. Show some remorse, cry and weep! Turn your laughter into mourning, and your joy to sadness. Be humble before the Lord and he will lift you up.

Friends, don't speak badly of one another. Anyone who criticizes a fellow-believer and condemns them, criticizes and condemns the law. If you condemn the law you're not someone who keeps the law, because you're sitting in judgment of it. There's only one lawgiver and judge—the one who can either save or destroy you—so who are you to judge your neighbor?

Come on now!—you people who say, “Either today or tomorrow we'll go to such-and-such a city, spend a year in business there, and make a profit.” You have no idea what will happen tomorrow! What's your life like? It's just a mist that appears for a little while, and then is gone. What you should say is, “If it's the Lord's will, we'll live like this and plan to do that.” But right now you're caught up in your vain ideas. All this boasting is evil. For it is a sin if you know to do what's right but don't do it.

Come on, you rich people! You should weep and wail for all the problems that are coming your way! Your wealth is ruined, and your clothes have been eaten by moths. Your gold and your silver are corroded, and this corrosion will be evidence against you, eating away your flesh like fire. You hoarded up your wealth in these last days. Look, the wages of your farm workers that you cheated are crying out against you—the cries of the farm workers have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You've enjoyed a life of luxury here on earth, full of self-indulgent pleasure, fattening yourselves up for the day of slaughter! You have condemned and killed the innocent who didn't even resist you.

Friends, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Think of the farmer waiting patiently for the earth's precious harvest as it grows with the early and later rains. You need to be patient too. Stay strong for the Lord's return is near. My friends, don't complain about each other, so you won't be judged. Look, the judge is standing right at the door! Take the prophets as an example, my friends—see how they spoke in the Lord's name as they suffered and waited patiently. Notice that we say that those who endure are blessed. You've heard about the patience of Job, and you've seen how the Lord brought this to a positive conclusion—for the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Above all, my friends, don't swear. Not by heaven, not by earth, and not by any other kind of oath. Just let your yes be yes, and your no be no, so you won't fall under condemnation. Are any of you suffering? You should pray. Are some of you cheerful? You should sing songs of praise. Are any of you sick? You should call for the church elders and have them pray over you, and anoint you with oil in the Lord's name. Such a prayer, trusting in God, will heal those who are sick, and the Lord will make them well. If they've committed sins, they will be forgiven. Admit the wrongs you've done to each other, and pray for one another so that you'll be healed. Earnest prayer from those who live right is very effective. Elijah was a man who had the same human nature as we do. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't

rain, and it didn't rain on the earth for three and a half years. He prayed again—heaven sent rain and the earth gave its harvest.

My friends, if any one of you strays from the truth and someone brings you back, let them know that whoever rescues a sinner from the error of their ways will save them from death, and will gain forgiveness for many sins.

1 Peter

First Epistle of Peter

This letter comes from Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ, and is sent to God's chosen people: exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. You were chosen by God the Father in his wisdom, made holy by the Spirit, so that you might obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. May you have grace and peace more and more!

Praise God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through his great mercy we have been born again and given a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This inheritance is eternal, it never spoils or fades, and it is kept safe in heaven for you. Through your trust in him, God will protect you by his power until salvation arrives—the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last day.

So be glad about this, even though you may be sad for a short while as you endure various trials. These prove that your trust in God is genuine, just as fire is used to prove if gold is genuine—even though that too can be destroyed—and your faith is more valuable than gold! In this way your trust in God will be recognized and you will receive praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ appears.

You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you cannot see him now, you trust in him and you're filled with wonderful, indescribable happiness. Your reward for trusting in him is that you will be saved! It was this salvation that the prophets searched for and investigated when they spoke of the grace that was prepared for you. They tried to find out when and how this would take place, for the Spirit of Christ inside them spoke clearly about Christ's sufferings and glory to come. It was explained to them that they were not doing this for themselves, but for you—since what they spoke about you've now learned from those who shared the good news with you by the Holy Spirit that heaven sent. Even the angels are eager to find out about all this!

Make sure your minds are in gear. Be clear-headed. Fix your hope exclusively on the grace you'll be given when Jesus is revealed. Live like children who do what they're told. Don't allow yourselves to be shaped by your former sinful desires when you didn't know any better. Now you need to be holy in everything you do, just as the one who called you is holy. As Scripture says, “You are to be holy, for I am holy.”

Since you call him Father, and recognize he judges everyone impartially based on what they do, take your time here on earth seriously, respecting him.

You already know that you were not set free from your pointless way of living that you inherited from your forefathers by things that don't have lasting value, like silver or gold. You were set free by the costly blood of Christ, who was like a lamb with no flaw or defect.

He was chosen before the world was created, but he was revealed in these last days for your benefit. Through him you trust in God who raised him from the dead, and glorified him, so that you could have confidence and hope in God. Now that you've dedicated yourselves by following the truth, love each other sincerely like a true family. You've been born again, not the product of a mortal “seed,” but immortal, through the living, eternal word of God. For: “All people are like grass, and all their glory like wildflowers. The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of the Lord remains forever.” This word is the good news that was explained to you.

So give up all the evil things that you do: all your dishonesty, hypocrisy, and jealousy, all the ways you speak badly about others. You should become like newborn babies who only want pure spiritual milk, so you can grow in salvation now you've tasted how good the Lord really is. As you come to him—the living stone that people rejected as useless, but is chosen by God and precious to him— you also become like living stones, being built into a spiritual house. You are a holy priesthood that offers spiritual sacrifices that God welcomes through Jesus Christ. As Scripture says, “See! I'm setting in Zion its main cornerstone, specially-chosen and valuable. Whoever trusts in him will not be disappointed.” He is very valuable to you who do trust. But for those who don't, “The stone the builders rejected that became the main cornerstone” is “The stone that trips you up and the rock that makes you fall.” People stumble over this message because they refuse to accept it—which for them is entirely predictable.

In complete contrast, you are a specially-chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. Consequently you can reveal the wonderful things he's done, calling you out of darkness into his marvelous light. In the past you were nobodies, but now you are God's people. In the past you hadn't received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

My friends, I'm pleading with you as foreigners and strangers in this world not to give in to physical desires that are in conflict with what is spiritual. Be sure to act appropriately when you're with non-Christians, so even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see the good things you do and glorify God when he comes.

Obey human authority for the Lord's sake, whether it is the king as the highest authority, or governors that God appoints to punish those who do evil and to commend those who do good. By doing what is good and right God wants you to silence the ignorant accusations of foolish people. Yes, you are free people! So don't use your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but live as God's servants. Respect everyone. Show your love to the community of believers. Have reverence for God. Respect the king. If you are a servant then submit to your master—not just those who are good and kind, but those who are harsh masters as well. For this is what grace is: to endure life's pain and unfair suffering, keeping your focus on God. However, there's no credit when you're punished for doing something wrong. But if you suffer for doing what is good and right, and you put up with it, then God's grace is with you.

In fact this is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and gave you an example, so

you should follow in his footsteps. He never sinned, he never lied; and when he was badly treated, he didn't retaliate. When he suffered, he didn't threaten to take revenge. He simply placed himself in the hands of the one who always judges rightly. He took the consequences of our sins on himself in his body on the cross, so that we could die to sin and live rightly. “By his wounds you are healed.” At one time you were like sheep who had lost their way, but now you've returned to the Shepherd—the one who watches over you.

Wives, accept your husbands' authority in the same way, so that if some husbands refuse to accept the Word, they may still be won over without words by the way you behave, recognizing your pure and reverent behavior. Don't focus on outward attractiveness—hairstyles, gold jewelry, or fashionable clothes— instead let it come from within, the lasting attractiveness of a gentle and peaceful spirit on the inside. That's what God values. This is how holy women of the past who put their confidence in God made themselves beautiful, yielding to their husbands, like Sarah who obeyed Abraham, and called him “lord.” You are her daughters if you do what's good and right and are not intimidated.

Husbands, in just the same way, be considerate to your wives as you live together with them. Though she may not be as strong as you are, you should honor her since she will inherit equally with you God's gift of life. Make sure to do this so nothing will get in the way of your prayers.

Finally, you should all have the same attitude. Be sympathetic and love each other. Be compassionate, and humble. Don't pay back evil for evil, or retaliate when you're abused, instead you should give a blessing —because that's what you were called to do, so you could gain a blessing yourself. Remember: “Those who want to love life, and to see good days, must refrain from speaking evil, and not tell lies. Turn away from evil and do good; search for peace—run after it! For God sees those who do right, and he hears their prayers, but he opposes those who do evil.”

Who will harm you if you're keen to do good? For even if you suffer for doing what's right, you're still better off. Don't be scared over what people threaten, don't worry about it; just keep your mind focused on Christ as Lord. Always be ready to explain to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have. Do this in a gentle and respectful way. Make sure your conscience is clear, so that if anyone makes accusations against you, they will be embarrassed for speaking badly about the good way you live your life in Christ. It's certainly better to suffer for doing good (if that's what God wants), than to suffer for doing wrong! Jesus died because of sins, once and for all, the one who is completely true and good and right died for those who are bad, so that he could bring you to God. He was put to death in the body, but he came to life in the spirit.

He went to speak to those “imprisoned” that refused to believe, when God patiently waited in the time of Noah while the ark was being built. Only a few—in fact eight people—were saved “through water.” This water symbolizes baptism that now saves you, not by washing off dirt from your body, but as a positive response to God that comes from a clear conscience. It is the resurrection of Jesus Christ that makes your salvation possible. Having ascended to heaven, he stands at God's right hand, with angels, authorities, and powers placed under his control.

Since Christ suffered physically, you must prepare yourselves with the same attitude he had—for those who suffer physically have turned away from sin. You will not live the rest of your lives following human desires, but doing what God wants. In the past you've spent enough time following the ways of the world: immorality, sexual indulgence, drunken orgies, partying, binge drinking, and revolting idol-worship. People think it's strange that you don't join them anymore in this wild and excessive lifestyle, so they curse at you. But they will have to explain what they've done to the one who is ready to judge the living and the dead. That's why the good news was shared with those who've already died— so that although they were rightly judged as far as being sinful human beings is concerned, they could live in the spirit as far as God is concerned.

Everything is coming to an end! So think clearly and stay alert when you pray. Most of all, you should love one another very deeply, for love covers many of the wrong things people do. Show hospitality to one another, and don't complain. Whatever gift you've been given, share it with others among you, as people who wisely demonstrate God's grace in all its different forms. Anyone who speaks should do so as though God is speaking through them. Anyone who wants to help others should do so through the strength that God gives, so that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. May glory and power be his forever and ever. Amen.

My friends, don't be alarmed at the “ordeals of fire” you're having, as if these were unexpected. Be happy to the extent that you share in Christ's suffering, because when he appears in his glory, you will be incredibly happy! If you are cursed in Christ's name, you're blessed, for God's glorious Spirit rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer, or a thief, or a criminal, or as a gossip— but if it's as a Christian, then you don't need to be ashamed. Instead praise God that you're called by that name!

For the time of judgment has come—and it begins with the house of God. If it begins with us, what will be the end of those who reject God's good news? “If it's hard for those who live right to be saved, what will happen to sinners, those who oppose God?” So then those who suffer according to the will of God, the trustworthy Creator, should make sure they are doing good.

I want to encourage the elders among you. I'm also an elder, a witness to Christ's sufferings, and I will share in the glory that is to come. Look after God's flock you have been given to care for, watching over it not because you're forced to, but gladly, as God wants you to. Do this willingly, not looking to make a profit from it. Don't be arrogant, lording it over those who have been put in your care, but be an example to the flock. When the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive a glorious crown that will never fade.

Young people, do what the elders tell you. Indeed all of you should serve one another in humility, because “God is against the proud, but favors the humble.”

Humble yourself before God's powerful hand so that he will lift you up at the appropriate time. Surrender all your worries to him, because he cares for you. Be responsible, and stay alert. The devil, your enemy, is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, trusting in God. Remember that your fellow-believers around the world are going through similar troubles. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace who called you into his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore you, support you, strengthen you, and give you a solid foundation. To him be power forever and ever! Amen.

With the help of Silvanus, whom I consider a trustworthy brother, I send this letter to you. In these few words I've written I want to encourage you and testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in God's grace! The believers here in “Babylon,” chosen together with you, send their greetings to you, as does Mark, my son. Greet each other with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

2 Peter

Second Epistle of Peter

This letter comes from Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who share with us the same priceless trust in our God and Savior Jesus Christ, the one who is truly good and right. May you have ever more grace and peace as you grow in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. Through his divine power we have been given everything that's important to live a God-centered life. This comes through knowing him who called us to himself by his own glory and goodness.

In this way he's given us wonderful, priceless promises. Through these promises you can share in the divine nature, being rid of the corruption caused by this world's evil desires. For this same reason, do everything you can! Add to your trust in God, goodness; add to goodness, knowledge; add to knowledge, self-control; add to self-control, patience; add to patience, reverence; add to reverence, affection for fellow-believers, add to affection for fellow-believers, love.

The more you have these qualities, the more they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For anyone who doesn't have such qualities is short-sighted, or blind. They forget that they've been cleansed from their past sins. So, brothers and sisters, be all the more determined to make sure you are truly “called and chosen.” If you do this, you won't ever fall. You will receive a tremendous welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That's why I always remind you about these things, even though you know them already, and you stand firm in the truth that you possess. But I still think it's a good idea to encourage you by giving you reminders while I live. I know the time when I shall leave this life will be coming soon— our Lord Jesus Christ has made this clear to me. I will do my best so that when I'm gone you will always be able to remember these things.

We didn't follow made-up myths when we told you about the coming in power of our Lord Jesus Christ—we saw his majesty for ourselves. He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice of majestic glory spoke to him and announced, “This is my Son, the one I love, and who truly pleases me.” We ourselves heard this voice speak from heaven when we were with him on the holy mountain.

We also have the confirming word of prophecy that's absolutely trustworthy, and you will benefit from paying close attention to it. It's like a lamp that shines in a dark place until the day dawns, and the morning star shines to illuminate your minds. Most of all you should realize that no prophecy of scripture is a matter for interpretation based on the whims of an individual, for no prophecy originated in human ideas, but prophets spoke for God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

But just as there were false prophets among the people then, there will be false teachers among you. They subtly introduce false and destructive teachings, even denying the Lord who redeemed them, quickly bringing destruction on themselves. Many will follow their immoral perversions, and because of them people will condemn the way of truth. They will greedily exploit you with false tales. However, they are already condemned: their sentence has been hanging over them for a long time, and their destruction won't be postponed. For God didn't even spare the angels when they sinned. He threw them into Tartarus, holding them in dark pits ready for judgment. God didn't spare the ancient world either, but he protected Noah who told people about the God who did right. He was one of the eight who were saved when God sent a flood upon a world of evil people.

God condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to total destruction, burning them to ash, as an example of what will happen to those who live evil lives. But God rescued Lot because he was a good man, sickened by the disgusting immorality of his neighbors. (Lot lived among them, but he did what was good and right. He saw and heard what they did day after day, and their wickedness tormented him.)

As you can see, the Lord is able to rescue from their troubles those who respect him, and to keep the wicked until the day of judgment when their punishment is completed. This is especially so for those who follow their corrupt human desires, and contemptuously disregard authority. Arrogant and proud, they're not even afraid to defame heavenly beings. Angels, on the other hand, even though they are stronger and more powerful, don't disparage them before the Lord.

These people are like mindless beasts, produced like farm animals to be captured and slaughtered. They condemn things they don't know anything about, and just like animals they will be destroyed. They will be paid back in harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of fun is to commit their evil lusts in broad daylight. They are stains and blemishes on your community. They enjoy their deceptive pleasures even while they eat together with you. They're always on the lookout for adulterous relationships—they just can't stop sinning. They seduce the vulnerable; they have trained themselves in greed; they are offspring under a curse. They have abandoned the right path and have gone astray, following the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved to be paid for doing evil. But he was rebuked for his evil actions—a dumb donkey spoke with a human voice and stopped the prophet's foolishness!

People like these are springs without water, mists blown away by the wind. They are destined for blackest darkness—forever. Inflated with their own nonsense, they appeal to sensual desires, luring back into immorality those who have only just escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, even though they themselves are slaves to depravity. “You are a slave to whatever conquers you.” If people manage to escape from the evil influence of the world by knowing the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and then get tangled up in sin again and are defeated, they are worse off than they were in the first place. It would have been better not to have known the right way of truth, than to have known it and then turn away from

the sacred instructions they'd been given. This proverb has come true for them: “The dog has returned to its own vomit, and the washed pig has gone back to rolling in the mud.”

My friends, this is my second letter to you. In both of them I've tried to stir you up and remind you to think clearly with pure minds. Remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and what the Lord and Savior commanded through your apostles. Above all you should know that derisive people will come in the last days, full of mockery and following their own evil desires. “So what happened to this coming he promised?” they ask. “Right from the time our ancestors died, everything's continued as it always has, ever since creation began.” But they deliberately ignore the fact that by God's command the heavens were created long ago. The earth came into existence from the water, and was surrounded by water. It was through water that the world that then existed was destroyed—through being flooded by water. But by means of that same divine command the heavens and the earth that now exist are reserved for destruction by fire at the day of judgment when the wicked will be destroyed.

However, my friends, don't forget this one thing: that for the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord is not delaying the fulfillment of his promise, as some define delay, but he is being very patient with you. He doesn't want anyone to be lost, but everyone to come and repent.

However, the day of the Lord will come, unexpectedly like a thief. The heavens will explode with a thunderous roar, and the elements will be destroyed as they are burned up. The earth and everything in it will vanish. Since everything is going to be destroyed in this way, what kind of people should you be? You should be living lives that are pure, dedicated to God, waiting expectantly and being eager for the coming of the day of God. That day the heavens will catch fire and be destroyed, and the elements will melt in the heat. But as for us, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth that God has promised where everything is good and right.

So, my friends, since you're anticipating these things, make sure you'll be found pure and blameless, and at peace with God. Remember that it is our Lord's patience that gives the opportunity for salvation. That's what our dear brother Paul was explaining to you in all his letters with the wisdom given to him by God. He spoke about these things, though some of what he wrote is certainly hard to understand. Some ignorant and unbalanced people have twisted what he wrote to their own loss—just as they do other scriptures. My friends, since you already know this, make sure that these errors of the wicked don't lead you astray, and you don't fall from your firm position. May you grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May he have glory, both now and forever! Amen.

1 John

First Epistle of John

This letter is about the Word of Life which existed from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our very own eyes and gazed upon, and which our hands have touched. This Life was revealed to us; we saw it and give evidence about it. We are telling you about the one who is Eternal Life, who was with the Father, and who was revealed to us. What we have seen and heard we are now explaining to you, so that you may also share in this friendship together with us—this friendship that is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. We're writing to tell you about this in order to make our happiness complete.

This is the message we received from him and that we declare to you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in him at all. If we claim to share this friendship with him and yet go on living in darkness, we're lying, and not living in the truth. But if we are living in the light, as he is in the light, then we share in this friendship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, makes us clean from every sin.

If we claim to be sinless we only fool ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is trustworthy and right so that he can forgive us our sins and make us clean from all that is not right in us. If we claim we haven't sinned, we turn him into a liar, and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I'm writing this to you so you shouldn't sin. But if anybody should happen to sin, we have someone who defends us before the Father—Jesus Christ, who is truly good and right. Through him our sins are forgiven—and not only our sins, but those of the whole world. We can be sure that we do know him if we follow his commands. Anyone who says, “I know him,” but doesn't do what he says, is a liar. They don't have the truth. But those who follow God's word have his love totally fill their minds. This is how we know that we live in him. Whoever claims to be living in him should behave like Jesus.

My friends, I'm not writing to you giving some new commandment, but an old commandment you've had from the beginning. This old commandment is one you have already heard. But in a sense I am giving you a new commandment. Its truth is revealed in Jesus and in you, for the darkness is coming to an end and the true light is already shining. Those who say they live in the light but hate a fellow Christian still have the darkness inside them. Those who love their fellow Christians live in the light, and don't cause others to sin. Those who hate a fellow Christian are in darkness. They stumble around in the dark, not knowing where they're going because the darkness has blinded them.

Dear friends, I'm writing to you children, for your sins have been forgiven through the name of Jesus. I'm writing to you fathers, for you know him who has existed from the beginning. I'm writing to you young people, for you have defeated the evil one. I write to you little children, for you know the Father. I write to you fathers, for you know him who has existed from the beginning. I write to you young people, for you are strong. The word of God lives in you, and you have defeated the evil one.

Don't be in love with the world, and don't long for the things of this world. If you love the world, you won't have the Father's love in you. For all the things of this world—our sinful desires, wanting everything we see, boasting about what we've accomplished in life— these things don't come from the Father but from the world. The world and its evil desires are coming to an end, but those who do the will of God will live forever.

Dear friends, this is the last hour. As you've heard, the antichrist is coming. Many antichrists have already come. This is how we know this is the last hour. They left us, but they didn't belong with us, for if they did, they would have remained with us. When they left they showed that none of them belonged with us.

But you have been anointed with the Holy Spirit's blessing, and all of you know what's true. I'm not writing because you don't know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar?—anyone who denies that Jesus is the Christ. The antichrist is anyone who denies the Father and the Son. Anyone that denies the Son does not have the Father; anyone who acknowledges the Son has the Father too. As for you, make sure what you heard from the beginning continues to live in you. If what you heard from the beginning lives in you, you will also live in the Son and in the Father. Eternal life—this is what he has promised us!

I'm writing this to warn you against those who want to lead you astray. But the anointing you received from him means the Spirit lives in you, and you don't need to be taught by anyone. The Spirit's anointing teaches you about everything. It is the truth and not a lie. So live in Christ, just as you've been taught!

Now, my dear friends, continue to live in Christ, so that when he appears, we can be confident and not feel ashamed before him at his coming. If you know he is good and right, then you also know that everyone who does what is right has been born of God.

Look at the amazing kind of love the Father has for us! This is why we can be called God's children—for that's who we are! The reason why the people of this world don't recognize us as God's children is because they don't recognize him. My friends, we are already God's children; however what we shall become hasn't been revealed just yet. But we do know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is. All those who have this hope in them make sure they are pure, just as he is pure. All those who sin are lawless, because sin is lawlessness. But of course you know that Jesus came to take away sins, and that there is no sin in him. All those who live in him don't go on sinning; all those who keep on sinning haven't seen him and haven't known him.

Dear friends, don't let anyone fool you: those who do what is right *are* right, in the same way as Jesus is right. Those who sin are of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. That's the reason why

the Son of God came—to destroy what the devil has done. All those who are born of God don't keep on sinning, for God's nature lives in them. They can't keep on sinning because they are born of God. This is how God's children and the devil's children can be distinguished: all those who don't do what's right don't belong to God, nor do those who don't love their fellow Christians.

The message you've heard from the beginning is simply this: we should love one another. We cannot be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one, and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because Cain did what was evil, while his brother did what was right. So don't be surprised, my friends, if this world hates you!

The reason we know that we have changed from death to life is because we love our Christian brothers and sisters. Anyone who doesn't love remains dead. All those who hate their Christian brothers and sisters are murderers, and you know that no murderers have eternal life within them! This is how we know what love is: Jesus laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our Christian brothers and sisters. If one of you is living well in this world and you see your Christian brother or sister in need, but you don't show compassion—how can God's love be living in you? Dear friends, let's not just say we love with words, but show our love in what we do and how we demonstrate the truth. This is how we will know that we belong to the truth, and how we will set our minds at rest before God whenever we think we're in the wrong. God is greater than how we think, and he knows everything.

Dear friends, if we're reassured we're not in the wrong, we can have confidence before God. We'll receive from him whatever we ask him for, because we follow his commands and do what pleases him. This is what he commands: we should trust in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us to do. Those who keep his commands continue to live in him, and he lives in them. We know that he lives in us by the Spirit he has given us.

Dear friends, don't trust every spirit, but put the spirits to the test to find out whether they're from God, for there are many false prophets out there in the world. How can you recognize God's Spirit? Every spirit that accepts Jesus Christ came with a human body is from God; while every spirit that doesn't accept Jesus, that spirit isn't from God. In fact it is the spirit of the antichrist which you heard was coming, and which is already in the world.

But you belong to God, my friends, and you have defeated them, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. They belong to the world, so they speak like people of the world, and the world listens to them. We belong to God and whoever knows God listens to us, while whoever doesn't belong to God doesn't listen to us. This is how we can distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of deception.

Dear friends, let's go on loving one another, for love comes from God. All those who love are born of God and know God. Those who don't love don't know God, for God is love. How was God's love shown to us? God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we could live through him. This is love! It's not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and he sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Friends, if this is the way God loves us, we ought to love one another like this too. No one has ever seen God. However, if we love one another then God lives in us, and his love is fulfilled in us. How can we know that we live in him, and that he lives in us? He's given us the ability to love by his Spirit.

For we are witnesses to what we have seen and testify that the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world. God lives in everyone who declares that Jesus is the Son of God, and they live in God. We have experienced and trusted in the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love, live in God, and God lives in them. This is how love is made complete in us so that we can be confident on judgment day: by the fact that we live just like him in this world. Where there is love there can be no fear. God loves us completely, and this love drives all our fears away. If we do fear, it's because we fear being punished, and this shows that we have not been fully remade by the completeness of God's love.

We love because he loved us first. Anyone who says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, is a liar. Anyone who doesn't love a brother whom they can see, can't love God whom they can't see. This is the command he gave to us: those who love God love their brothers and sisters too.

Whoever trusts that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the father also loves his child. How do we know that we love God's children? When we love God and follow his commands. Loving God means that we follow his commands, and his commands are not hard to bear. Everyone who is born of God defeats the world. The way we gain victory and defeat the world is by trusting God. Who can defeat the world? Only those who trust in Jesus, believing he is the Son of God. He is the one who came through water and blood, Jesus Christ. He did not only come by water, but by water and blood. The Spirit gives evidence to confirm this, for the Spirit is the truth. So there are three that give evidence: the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and all three agree as one.

If we accept the evidence that human witnesses provide, then the evidence that God provides is much more important. The evidence that God provides is his testimony about his Son. Those trusting in the Son of God have accepted and hold on to this evidence. Those who don't trust God make God out to be a liar, because they don't believe the evidence God has given about his Son. The evidence is this: God has given eternal life to us, and we have this life through his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever doesn't have the Son of God doesn't have life. I'm writing to tell those of you who trust in the name of the Son of God so you can be certain you have eternal life. We can be confident that he will listen to us as long as we ask in accordance with his will. If we know that he hears our requests, we can be sure that we will receive what we've asked him for. If you see your Christian brother or sister committing a sin that is not a deadly sin, you ought to pray and God will grant life to the one who's sinned. (But not for a deadly sin. There's a sin that is deadly, and I'm not saying people

should pray about that. Yes, all that is not right is sin, but there's sin that is not deadly.)

We recognize that those who are born of God don't keep on sinning. The Son of God protects them and the devil cannot harm them. We know that we belong to God, and that the world is under the power of the evil one. We also know that the Son of God has come, and has helped us to understand so we can recognize the one who is true. We live in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God, and is eternal life. Dear friends, stay away from idol worship.

2 John

Second Epistle of John

This letter comes from the elder to the chosen lady and her children, whom I love in the truth. Not just from me, but from everyone who knows the truth, because the truth lives in us and will be with us forever. May grace, mercy and peace continue to be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love.

I was delighted to discover that some of your children are following the truth, just as the Father commanded us. Now I'm telling you, dear lady, not as a new instruction, but following what we've understood from the beginning, that we should love one another. This is what love is: we should follow God's commands. The command, just as you heard right from the beginning, is that you should live in love.

I'm telling you this because many deceivers have left and gone out into the world. They don't accept that Jesus Christ has come as a human being. Anyone like this is a deceiver and an antichrist. Be careful that you don't lose what we've worked so hard for, and that you receive all that you should.

All those who become extremists and don't continue to follow the teaching of Christ don't have God with them. Those who continue to follow the teaching of Christ have both the Father and the Son with them. If people come to you and don't show evidence of Christ's teaching, don't take them in, don't welcome them— for if you encourage them you share in their evil work.

I have so many things to tell you that I won't write any more with paper and ink, for I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face. How happy that would make us! Greetings to you from the children of your chosen sister.

3 John

Third Epistle of John

This letter comes from the elder to Gaius, my dear friend, whom I love in the truth. My friend, I pray most of all that you're doing well and are in good physical health, for I know you're doing well spiritually.

I was delighted when some fellow-believers arrived and told me about your commitment to the truth, and how you continue living in the truth. Nothing makes me happier than to hear how my dear friends are following the truth. My friend, you show you are trustworthy in what you're doing by looking after the brothers, even those you don't know. They have spoken well about your love in front of the church. Please be so kind as to send them on their journey in a way that God would appreciate, for they are traveling in his name, not accepting anything from non-believers. We ought to support them so we can share together in the truth.

I did write about this to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves being in charge, refuses to accept our authority. So if I do visit, I will make it clear what he's been doing. He's been making malicious accusations against us. Not satisfied with doing that, he refuses to welcome any other brothers. He won't let anyone else welcome them either, and throws those who do so out of the church.

My friend, don't imitate what is evil, but what is good. Those who do what's good belong to God; those who do evil don't know God.

Everyone speaks well of Demetrius—and the truth does so too! We also speak well of him, and you know we tell the truth. I have so much to say to you, but I don't want to do it in writing with pen and ink. I hope to see you soon so we can talk face to face. May peace be with you! The friends here send their greetings to you. Please personally greet our friends there by name.

Jude

Epistle of Jude

This letter comes from Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and James' brother. I am writing to those who are called and loved by God the Father, and who are kept safe by Jesus Christ: May God's mercy, peace, and love increase in your experience!

My friends, I was already looking forward to writing to you about the salvation that we share. But now I need to write urgently to you and encourage you to vigorously defend the truth about God, given once and for all time to God's holy people. For some people have quietly crept in among you. They were written about and condemned a long time ago, for they are wicked people who pervert God's grace, turning it into a license to immorality, while also denying our Lord and master Jesus Christ.

Even though you already know this, I want to remind you that though the Lord saved his people out of the land of Egypt, later he still destroyed those who disbelieved. Even those angels that were not content with their God-given positions but abandoned their rightful places—he has placed them in eternal chains of darkness until the great Day of Judgment. In just the same way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the towns nearby that pursued immorality and perverted sex are provided as an example of those that experience the punishment of eternal fire.

Likewise these dreamers pollute their bodies, disregard authority, and insult heavenly beings. Even the archangel Michael, when he was arguing with the devil over Moses' body, didn't dare to condemn him with a slanderous insult, but said, “May the Lord rebuke you.” But these people ridicule whatever they don't understand; and what they do understand they instinctively follow like unthinking animals—this is what destroys them. They're in terrible trouble! For they have followed Cain's way. Like Balaam and his delusion, they have abandoned themselves to the profit motive. Like Korah and his rebellion, they have destroyed themselves. These people spoil your fellowship meals, for they are selfish shepherds that don't have the slightest sense of shame—they only take care of themselves. They're clouds blown along by the wind that bring no rain. They're bare trees without fruit—twice dead, pulled out by the roots. They're violent ocean waves, foaming in their own disgrace. They're false stars, doomed forever to utter darkness.

Enoch, seven generations on from Adam, spoke prophetically about these people: “Look! The Lord is coming, together with thousands and thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, to reveal all the wicked things people have done, and all the terrible things hostile sinners have said against him.” Such people are grumblers, always complaining. They follow their own evil desires, speaking boastfully about themselves, and flattering others to get what *they* want.

But you, my dear friends, please remember what you were told by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They explained to you that in the last times mockers would come, following their own wicked desires. They cause divisions; they are worldly people who don't have the Spirit.

But you, my friends, are to build yourselves up through your trust in God. Pray in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves safe in God's love, and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ who brings eternal life. Show kindness to those who doubt. Save those you can by snatching them out of the fire. Show mercy—but with great care, hating even the “clothing” that is contaminated by sinful human nature.

Now to him who can keep you from falling,
and who can bring you into his glorious presence without fault, and with great joy,
to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,
be glory, majesty, power, and authority, before all time, now, and forever.
Amen.

Revelation

Revelation of Jesus Christ

This is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what will happen soon. He sent his angel to reveal it to his servant John who confirmed everything he saw concerning the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Anyone who reads this is blessed, as are those who hear these prophetic words and pay attention to what's written, because the time is near.

This letter comes from John and is sent to the seven churches in the province of Asia. May you have grace and peace from the one who was, who is, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the trustworthy witness, the firstborn from the dead, the ruler of earthly kings. To Jesus who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, who made us into his kingdom, priests to his God and Father —to Jesus be glory and authority for ever and ever. Amen.

Look, he is coming surrounded by clouds, and everybody shall see him, even those who killed him. All the peoples of the earth will weep because of him. May it be so! Amen.

"I am the Beginning and the End," says the All-powerful Lord God, who was, who is, and who is to come.

I am John, your brother who shares with you in the suffering and in the kingdom and in the patient waiting that are our experience in Jesus. I was detained on the island of Patmos for sharing the word of God and the truth as revealed by Jesus. I was filled by the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a loud voice behind me that sounded like a trumpet. It told me, "Write down in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

I turned around to see who was speaking to me. When I turned I saw seven golden candlesticks, and standing among the candlesticks was someone who looked like a Son of man. He was wearing a robe that reached down to his feet with a golden sash across his chest. His hair looked like white wool, and his eyes like flaming fire. His feet looked like polished brass that had been refined in a furnace. His voice sounded like a thundering waterfall.

He was holding seven stars in his right hand, and a sharp double-edged sword came out of his mouth. His face shone like the sun at its brightest. When I saw him I fell down at his feet as if I were dead. But he touched me with his right hand and said, "Don't be afraid, I am the first and the last, the living one. I was dead, but look! Now I am alive for ever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and the grave.

So write down what you've seen—what's happening in the present and what will happen in the future. The meaning of the seven stars that you saw me holding in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches."

"Write this to the angel of the Ephesus church: This is what the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand says, the one who walks among the seven golden candlesticks: I know what you've accomplished, your hard work and perseverance. I know you can't tolerate evil people, and how you investigated those who claimed to be apostles but are not, and discovered they were frauds. I know about your patience, and what you endured for my sake—and that you didn't give up!

But I have something against you: you have neglected your first love. So remember how far you've fallen—repent and go back to what you were doing at first. Otherwise I'll come to you and I will remove your candlestick from where it is—unless you repent. However, you do have this to your credit: you hate the actions of the Nicolaitans, just as I do. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches. I will give to those who are victorious the privilege of eating from the tree of life, which stands in the Paradise of God.

Write this to the angel of the Smyrna church: This is what the first and last says, the one who was dead and came back to life: I know the troubles you are going through, and how poor you are (but you are rich), and the abuse from those who say they are Jews but are not, but belong to Satan's synagogue. Don't be afraid about what you are going to suffer. Yes, the devil will throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Just remain faithful, even if it means death, and I will give you the crown of life! If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches. The second death will not harm those who are victorious.

Write this to the angel of the Pergamum church: This is what the one holding the sharp two-edged sword says: I know you're living where Satan has his throne, and that you have stayed true to me. You have not denied your trust in me, even when my faithful witness Antipas was killed right among you there where Satan lives!

But I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak how to entrap the children of Israel by means of eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual sins. Similarly you also have some who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. So repent, or soon I will come to you and fight against them using the sword of my mouth. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches. I will give the hidden manna to those who are victorious. I will give them a white stone with a new name written on it that nobody knows except those who receive it.

Write this to the angel of the Thyatira church: This is what the Son of God says, the one who has eyes like flaming fire and feet like polished brass. I know what you have accomplished, your love and faithfulness and service and perseverance, and that you are doing more now than when you first believed.

But I have something against you: you are allowing the woman called Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess to teach my followers, leading them astray into

sexual sins, and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent of her sexual sins, but she's not willing to repent. So I'm throwing her into a bed together with her adulterous partners and they will suffer terribly unless they repent of what they have done with her. I will put her children to death. Then all the churches will know that I am the one who examines thoughts and motives. I will repay each of you according to what you've done.

For the rest of you there in Thyatira who don't follow this teaching, who have not learned Satan's 'deep depravities' as they are called, I don't place on you any other burden. I say to you, 'Just hold on to what you have until I come.' I will give authority over the nations to those who are victorious and who do what I say until the end. He will rule the nations with an iron rod, breaking them into pieces like clay pots. In the same way that I received authority from my Father, I will give them the morning star. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches."

"Write this to the angel of the Sardis church: This is what the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars says: I know what you have accomplished, and that you give the appearance of being alive—but in reality you are dead. Wake up, and try to revive what is left that's about to die! For I have discovered that from the perspective of my God, nothing you've done has been finished.

So remind yourselves of how this message came to you, and what you heard. Observe what you were told to do, and repent. If you don't watch out, I'll come unexpectedly like a thief, and you won't know at what time I'll come to you!

But there are some among you in Sardis who have not ruined their clothes, and they will walk with me dressed in white, for they deserve to do so. Those who are victorious will be dressed in white like this. Their names will not be removed from the book of life, and I will speak for them in the presence of my Father and his angels. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches.

Write this to the angel of the Philadelphia church: This is what the one says, the one who is holy and true, who has the key of David. He can open and nobody is able to shut, he can shut, and nobody is able to open: I know what you have accomplished—look, I've opened a door for you that no one can shut. I know that you only have a little strength, but you did what I told you, and you did not deny me. From Satan's synagogue I will bring those who say they are Jews (but are not, they are liars), making them come and worship at your feet, so that they will acknowledge that I love you. Because you have persevered as I told you to, I will take care of you during the testing time that is coming on the whole world when those who live on the earth will be on trial.

I am coming soon! Keep a tight grasp on what you have, so that no one takes your crown. Those who are victorious I will make into pillars in the Temple of my God. They won't ever have to leave. I will write on them the name of my God, the name of the city of my God called New Jerusalem which descends from heaven from my God, and my own new name. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches.

Write this to the angel of the Laodicea church: This is what the Amen says, who is the faithful, true witness, highest ruler of God's creation: I know what you have accomplished—you're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were hot or cold! But because you're lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I'm going to spit you out of my mouth. You say to yourselves, 'I'm rich, I have wealth, and don't need anything.' But you don't know that you are miserable and pitiful and poor and blind and naked. I advise you to buy from me gold refined by fire so you may be rich; and have white clothes so you can be properly dressed and you won't reveal your nakedness and shame; and ointment to put on your eyes so you can see.

Those I love I correct and discipline. So be really sincere, and repent. Look, I'm standing at the door, knocking. If anyone hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me. I will have those who are victorious sit down with me beside my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down beside my Father on his throne. If you have ears, listen to what the Spirit is telling the churches."

After this I saw a door that had been opened in heaven. The voice that I'd heard before, the one that sounded like a trumpet, told me, "Come up here, and I will show you what will happen next."

Immediately I was filled by the Spirit and saw a throne set up in heaven, with someone sitting on the throne. The one sitting there shone like jewels, like jasper and carnelian, and there was a rainbow that circled the throne, shining like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and twenty-four elders were sitting on these thrones, dressed in white and wearing golden crowns on their heads. From the throne lightning flashed and thunder roared. Seven torches blazed in front of the throne—these are the seven Spirits of God. Stretching out in front of the throne was a sea of glass, as clear as crystal. In the center and all around the throne were four living creatures covered in eyes, both front and back. The first creature looked like a lion, the second like a young bull, the third had a human face, and the fourth looked like a flying eagle. The four living creatures each had six wings also covered with eyes. Day and night they never stop saying, "Holy, holy, holy is the All-powerful Lord God, who was, who is, and who is to come."

Whenever the living creatures glorify, honor, and thank the one that sits on the throne, who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him that sits on the throne. They will worship the one who lives for ever and ever, and throw down their crowns before the throne. They say, "Our Lord and our God, you are worthy to be given glory, and honor, and authority, for you created everything. Your will brought Creation into existence."

I saw the one sitting on the throne holding a scroll in his right hand. The scroll was written on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. I saw a powerful angel shouting in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" Nobody in heaven, or on earth, or under the earth was able to open the scroll and read it. I cried many tears because nobody could be found who was worthy to open the book and read

it. One of the elders spoke to me and said, “Don't cry. Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the descendant of David, has won the battle and can open the scroll and its seven seals.”

I saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been killed standing in the center by the throne and the four living creatures, among the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes that are the seven Spirits of God that are sent out to all the earth. He went and took the scroll from the right hand of the one that sat on the throne. When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each of them had a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the believers. They sang a new song, “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slain and with your blood you redeemed for God people from every tribe, language, people, and nation. You made them into a kingdom and priests for our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

As I looked I heard the voices of millions of angels around the throne, together with the living creatures and the elders, shouting loudly together: “The Lamb that was slain is worthy to receive authority, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing.”

Then I heard every creature in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, in the sea—every creature everywhere—replying: “To the one who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb be blessing, honor, glory, and authority, for ever and ever.” The four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

I watched as the Lamb broke open the first of the seven seals. I heard one of the four living creatures shout with a thunderous voice, “Come!” I looked and saw a white horse. Its rider was holding a bow. He was given a crown, and he rode out conquering so that he would be victorious.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” Another horse came out, a red one. Its rider was given a large sword, and the power to take away peace from the earth so that people would slaughter one another.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” I looked and saw a black horse. Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. I heard what seemed to be a voice coming from among the four living creatures that said, “Two pounds of wheat cost a day's wages, and six pounds of barley cost the same. But don't damage the oil or the wine.”

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked and saw a pale horse. The rider was called Death, and Hades followed him. They received authority over a quarter of the earth to kill people by the sword, by famine, by plague, and by wild beasts.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar those who had been killed because of their dedication to the word of God and their faithful witness. They cried out, shouting, “How long, Lord who is holy and true, before you will judge and bring to justice those on earth who spilled our blood?” Each one of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait for a little longer until their number was complete —their fellow-believers and brothers who would be killed like them.

When he opened the sixth seal there was a tremendous earthquake. The sun turned black like hair sackcloth and the whole moon turned red like blood. The stars of heaven fell to earth like unripe figs falling from a fig tree shaken by a windstorm.

The sky disappeared like a scroll rolling up, and all the mountains and islands were moved from where they were. The kings of the earth, the great leaders, the wealthy, the powerful, and all people, slave or free, hid themselves in caves and among the rocks in the mountains. They called on the mountains and the rocks, telling them, “Fall upon us! Hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne, and from the judgment of the Lamb. For the terrible day of their judgment has come, and who can stand against it?”

Then I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth holding back the earth's four winds to prevent any wind from blowing on the earth, or over the sea, or against any tree. I watched another angel rise up from the east, holding the seal of the living God. He shouted in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given the power to damage the earth and the sea, “Don't hurt the earth or the sea or the trees until we have placed a seal on the foreheads of God's true followers!”

I was told the number of those who were sealed: one hundred and forty-four thousand. Those who were sealed came from every tribe of the children of Israel: twelve thousand from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand from the tribe of Reuben, twelve thousand from the tribe of Gad, twelve thousand from the tribe of Asher, twelve thousand from the tribe of Naphtali, twelve thousand from the tribe of Manasseh, twelve thousand from the tribe of Simeon, twelve thousand from the tribe of Levi, twelve thousand from the tribe of Issachar, twelve thousand from the tribe of Zebulun, twelve thousand from the tribe of Joseph, twelve thousand from the tribe of Benjamin.

After this I looked and saw a great crowd that nobody could count, made up of every nation, tribe, people and language. They were standing in front of the throne and the Lamb, dressed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. They gave a loud shout, “Salvation is from our God who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb.”

All the angels surrounding the throne, and the elders and the four living creatures, fell down on their faces before the throne, worshiping God. “Amen!” they said. “Blessing, glory, wisdom, gratitude, honor, power, and strength, be to God for ever and ever. Amen.”

One of the elders spoke to me and asked, “Who are those who are dressed in white robes, and where have they come from?” I replied, “My Lord, you know the answer.” He told me, “These are the ones who have passed through great persecution. They washed their robes, making them white through the blood of the Lamb. That's why they can stand in front of God's throne, and they serve him day and night in his Temple. The one who sits on the throne will protect them with his presence. They will never be hungry ever again, or thirsty; the sun will not beat down on them and they will not suffer scorching heat, because the Lamb who is

at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for around half an hour. I saw the seven angels that stand before God. They were given seven trumpets. Then another angel came and stood at the altar. He had a golden censer and he was given a large quantity of incense to add to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar that stands in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense rose together with the prayers of the saints before God from the hand of the angel. The angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it down upon the earth; there was the sound of thunder, with lightning flashes, and a terrible earthquake. Then the seven angels holding the seven trumpets prepared to blow them.

The first angel blew his trumpet. Hail and fire mixed with blood rained down on the earth. One third of the earth was burned up, one third of the trees were burned up and all the green grass was burned up.

The second angel blew his trumpet. Something looking like a huge mountain of flaming fire was thrown into the sea. One third of the sea turned to blood, and one third of the creatures that lived in the sea died, and one third of all ships were destroyed.

The third angel blew his trumpet. A great star fell from heaven, blazing brightly. It fell on a third of the rivers and springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood, and one third of the water turned bitter, and many people died from drinking the water because it had become poisonous.

The fourth angel blew his trumpet. One third of the sun, moon, and stars were struck so a third of them would be darkened, and a third part of the day would not give light, similarly the night.

I saw and heard an eagle flying in mid-heaven, shouting loudly, "Disaster, disaster, disaster is coming to those who live on the earth because of what is going to happen when the three remaining angels blow their trumpets."

The fifth angel blew his trumpet. I watched a star fall from heaven to earth. The star was given the key to the opening of the Abyss. He opened the entrance to the Abyss, and smoke came up out of the Abyss like the smoke of a huge furnace. The sun and the atmosphere became dark because of the smoke from the Abyss. Locusts came out of the smoke onto the earth, and they were given power like that possessed by scorpions. They were told not to harm the grass or any vegetation or any trees, only those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not allowed to kill, but they could torture these people for five months. The torture was like that of a scorpion when it stings someone.

During that time people will look for death, but won't find it; they will want to die, but death will run away from them! The locusts looked like war-horses. They wore what seemed to be golden crowns on their heads, and their faces looked human. They had long hair like women and had teeth like lions. Their breastplates looked like they were made of iron, and the noise made by their wings sounded like many horses and chariots racing into battle. They had tails like scorpions, complete with stingers. They had the power to hurt people for five months with their tails. Ruling over them as their king was the angel of the Abyss who is called Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. The first Disaster is over, but there are still two more to come.

The sixth angel blew his trumpet. I heard a voice come from the horns of the golden altar that stands in front of God speaking to the sixth angel that had the trumpet: "Release the four angels that are tied up beside the great River Euphrates."

The four angels who had been kept ready for this particular hour, day, month and year were released to kill one third of humanity. I was told the number of the army of soldiers on horseback: it was 200 million.

In my vision I saw the horses and their riders who wore breastplates as red as fire, and dark blue and yellow. The heads of the horses looked like lions, and fire and smoke and sulfur streamed out of their mouths.

One third of humanity was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and smoke and sulfur streaming out of their mouths. The horses' power was in their tails as well as their mouths, for their tails were like serpents' heads that they used to hurt people.

But the rest of humanity who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of what they were doing. They did not stop worshiping demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, and stone—which can't see or hear or walk! They did not repent of their murders, their witchcraft, their sexual sins, or their thefts.

Then I saw another powerful angel descending from heaven, with a cloud wrapped around him and with a rainbow over his head. His face looked like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. He was holding a small scroll that had already been opened. He placed his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land. He gave a great shout, like a lion roaring. When he shouted, the seven thunders responded. When the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write down what they said when I heard a voice from heaven that told me, "Keep under seal what the seven thunders said. Don't write them down." The angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land held up his right hand to heaven. He made a sacred oath by the one who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and everything in them, and the earth and everything in it, and the sea and everything in it. "No more delay!" he said. But at the time when the seventh angel speaks, when he blows his trumpet, then the mystery of God will be completed—the good news he announced through his servants the prophets.

Then I heard again the voice from heaven telling me, "Go and take the scroll that is open in the hand of the angel that stands on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel, and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it up. It will be sour in your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth." I took the little scroll from the angel and ate it up. In my mouth it was as sweet as honey, but it was sour in my stomach. I was told, "You must prophesy again regarding many peoples, nations, languages, and kings."

I was given a measuring rod and told, "Get up and measure the Temple of God, and the altar, and

count those who are worshiping there. Don't measure the court outside the Temple, leave that, because it has been handed over to the nations. They will trample down the holy city for forty-two months.

I will give my two witnesses power, and they will prophesy 1,260 days, dressed in sackcloth." They are the two olive trees and the two candlesticks that stand in front of the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and burns up their enemies. This is how anyone who tries to harm them will be killed. These two witnesses have the power to close the sky so that it will not rain during the time of their prophecy. They also have the power to turn the waters into blood, and to strike the earth with all kinds of plagues, as often as they want. When they finish their testimony, the beast coming from the Abyss will attack them, defeat them, and kill them. Their dead bodies will lie on the open street of the great city, called Sodom and Egypt in spiritual symbolism—also the place where their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days those from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will look at their dead bodies, and will not allow their corpses to be buried. The inhabitants of the earth are delighted they are dead, and celebrate, sending gifts to each other, because these two prophets had been a torment to them. But three and a half days later God's life-giving breath entered them and they stood on their feet. Those who saw this were absolutely terrified. The two witnesses heard a loud voice from heaven telling them, "Come up here!" So they ascended to heaven in a cloud while their enemies watched. At the same time there was a huge earthquake, and one tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second Disaster is over; the third Disaster is about to arrive! The seventh angel blew his trumpet, and loud voices shouted in heaven, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones in God's presence fell down on their faces and worshiped God. They said, "We thank you, Lord God, the All-powerful One, who is and was, because you have taken up your great power and have asserted your rule."

The nations became furious, but your judgment has come, the time when the dead will be judged. This is the time when your servants the prophets and the believers will be given their reward, those who respect your authority, both the weak and the powerful. This is also the time when you will destroy those who destroy the earth.

Then the Temple of God in heaven was opened, and the Ark of the Agreement could be seen inside his Temple. There were lightning flashes, the sound of thunder, an earthquake, and a great hailstorm.

Then an amazing sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant, and she cried out because of her labor pains, groaning as she was giving birth. Another sign appeared in heaven: a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven small crowns on his heads. His tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them down to the earth. The dragon stood right in front of the woman who was giving birth, so that he could eat her child as soon as it was born.

She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all nations with an iron rod. Her son was snatched up to God and his throne. The woman ran away into the desert, where God had prepared a place for her, so that she could be looked after for 1,260 days.

There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought with the dragon. The dragon and his angels fought but he was not strong enough, and they could no longer remain in heaven. The great dragon, the ancient serpent called the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world, was thrown down to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now salvation has come, and power, and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. The Accuser of the believers has been thrown down—the one who accuses them in God's presence day and night. They conquered him through the blood of the Lamb and through their personal testimony—they did not love their lives so much that they were willing to die if necessary.

So celebrate, heaven, and everyone who lives there! Mourn, earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you and is very angry, knowing his time is short."

When the dragon realized he had been thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the wings of a large eagle so she could fly away to a deserted place where she could be looked after for a time, times, and half a time, protected from the serpent.

The serpent spewed water like a river out of his mouth, trying to sweep her away in the flood. The earth came to the woman's aid by opening its mouth and swallowing up the river that the dragon spewed out of his mouth. The dragon was furious with the woman, and went off to attack the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commandments and have the testimony of Jesus.

And the dragon stood on the sea shore. Then I saw a beast rising out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten small crowns on his horns, and had blasphemous names on his heads. The beast I saw looked like a leopard, but his feet looked like those of a bear, and his mouth looked like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power, his throne, and great authority. One of his heads seemed to have suffered a death-blow, but this fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder at the beast, and they worshiped the dragon because he had given his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, asking "Who is like the beast? Who could defeat him?" He was given the ability to make great boasts and speak blasphemies, and he was also given the authority to do this for forty-two months. As soon as he opened his mouth he spoke blasphemies against God, insulting his character, his sanctuary, and those who live in heaven. The beast was given power to attack believers and defeat them, and he was also given authority over every people, tribe, language, and nation. Everybody living

on earth will worship him, those whose names had not been written in the book of life—the book of life that belongs to the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world. If you have ears, listen! Anyone who has to go into captivity will go into captivity; anyone who has to die by the sword will die by the sword. This demonstrates the patient endurance and confidence in God of the believers.

Then I saw another beast, rising up from the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He imposed the same authority as the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and those who live there worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. He performed great miracles, even bringing fire down from heaven to earth while people watched. He deceived those who live on the earth by the miracles he performed on behalf of the beast, ordering the people that they should make an image for the beast who had received the fatal sword wound but came back to life.

He was permitted to breathe life into the image of the beast so that it could speak, ordering anyone who did not worship it put to death. He made everyone, whether weak or powerful, rich or poor, free or slave, receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads. Nobody was permitted to buy or sell except those who had the mark, which was the name of the beast or the number of his name.

Wisdom is needed here. Whoever has understanding should calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. His number is 666.

I looked, and saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. With him were 144,000 who had his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads. I heard a voice from heaven that sounded like rushing water and loud thunder and many harps being played. They sang a new song in front of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders. Nobody could learn the song except the 144,000, those who had been redeemed from the earth. They have not become morally impure by sinning with women; spiritually they are virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were redeemed from humankind as the firstfruits to God and the Lamb. They speak no lies; they are without fault.

Then I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven. He had the eternal good news to announce to those who lived on the earth, to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He cried out in a loud voice, “Give God reverence and glory, for the time of his judgment has come. Worship the one who made heaven and earth and sea and springs of water.”

A second angel followed, calling out, “Babylon the great has collapsed into ruins! She made all the nations drink the wine of her sexual immorality that brings God's furious opposition.”

A third angel followed the first two, and cried out in a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on their forehead or on their hand, they will also drink of the wine of God's furious opposition that is poured undiluted into the cup of his anger, and they will suffer anguish in fire and burning sulfur before the holy angels and the Lamb. The smoke of their anguish ascends for ever and ever. They don't have any relief day or night, those who worship the beast and his image and who receive the mark of his name.” This means the believers must patiently endure, keeping God's commandments and trusting in Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven that told me, “Write this down! Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, because they can rest from their troubles. What they have accomplished will speak for them.”

I looked and I saw a white cloud. Sitting on the cloud was someone that looked like the Son of man, wearing a golden crown on his head and holding a sharp sickle in his hand. Another angel came out of the Temple and shouted in a loud voice to the one sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and start reaping, for it is harvest-time, and earth's harvest is ripe.” The one sitting on the cloud swung his sickle towards the earth, and reaped earth's harvest.

Another angel came out of the Temple in heaven. He also had a sharp sickle. He was followed by an angel coming from the altar that was in charge of the fire, who called in a loud voice to the angel with the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and harvest the bunches of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth and harvested the grapes from the vine, and threw them into the great winepress of God's judgment. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city. Blood flowed out of the winepress to the height of a horse's bridle, and to a distance of 1,600 stadia.

Then I saw another amazing, important sign in heaven. Seven angels held the seven last plagues which complete God's judgment. I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire. Standing beside the sea of glass were those who had defeated the beast and his image and the number of his name. They had harps given to them by God and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb: “What you have done is tremendous and marvelous, Lord God, the All-powerful One. Your ways are right and true, King of the nations. Who would not be in awe of you, Lord? Who would not glorify your name? For only you are holy. All nations will come and worship you because you have demonstrated by your actions that you do what is right!”

After this I looked and the Temple of the “Tent of Witness” was opened. Out of the Temple came the seven angels who held the seven plagues, wearing clean, white linen clothes and golden sashes on their chests. One of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the judgment of God, who lives for ever and ever. The Temple was filled with smoke that came from the glory of God and from his power. Nobody was able to enter the Temple until the seven plagues that came from the seven angels were over.

Then I heard a loud voice coming from the Temple telling the seven angels, “Go and pour out the seven bowls of God's judgment on the earth.”

So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and terrible, painful sores broke out on those who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. The second poured out his bowl on the sea, and

it became like the blood of a corpse and everything living in the sea died. The third poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and the water turned into blood. I heard the angel who had power over the waters declare, “You are truly right, you who are and was, the Holy One, as this judgment demonstrates. These people shed the blood of believers. Now you've given them blood to drink, as they deserve!” I heard a voice from the altar saying, “Yes, Lord God, the All-powerful One, your judgments are right and true!”

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was given the power to scorch people with fire. They were scorched by intense heat, and they cursed the name of God who controlled these plagues. They did not repent and give him glory. The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the beast's throne, and darkness fell over his kingdom. The people bit their tongues because of the pain they felt, and they cursed the God of heaven because of their pain and their sores, but they did not repent and stop what they were doing.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the mighty River Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that a way could be prepared for the kings that come from the east. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs coming out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. These are demonic spirits that perform miracles, going out to gather together all the kings of the whole world for the battle on God the All-powerful One's great day of judgment.

(Pay attention! I will come like a thief. Blessed are those who keep watch, and have their clothes ready so that they don't have to go out naked and be embarrassed.) The evil spirits gathered the kings for battle at a place called Armageddon in Hebrew.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl on the air, and a loud voice came from the Temple, from the throne, shouting out, “It's over!” Lightning flashed and thunder boomed, and a massive earthquake shook the earth. It was the worst earthquake that had ever happened since people lived there. The great city was split into three. The cities of the nations were destroyed. Babylon the great was remembered in God's presence so that she should be given the cup filled with the wine of his hostility.

All the islands vanished, and all the mountains disappeared. Huge hailstones, each one weighing one hundred pounds, rained down from the sky on people. The people cursed God because the plague of hail was so terrible.

One of the seven angels with the seven bowls came and talked with me. “Come here,” he said, “and I will show you the judgment of the infamous prostitute that sits beside many waters. The kings of the earth have committed adultery with her, and those who live on the earth became drunk on the wine of her immorality.” Then he carried me off in the Spirit to a deserted place, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that had seven heads and ten horns and was covered in blasphemous names. The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and wore jewelry made of gold and gems and pearls. She held in her hand a golden cup full of obscene things and her disgusting immorality. A name of mystery was written on her forehead: Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the World's Obscene Things. I saw that the woman was drunk on the blood of believers, and on the blood of martyrs who had died for Jesus. When I saw her, I was totally amazed.

The angel asked me, “Why were you amazed? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and the beast she rode which has seven heads and ten horns. The beast you saw once was, but is not, will soon come up again out of the Abyss, and will then be completely destroyed. Those that live on the earth who don't have their names written in the book of life will be amazed when they see the beast that once was but is not, and yet shall return.

A mind that has understanding is needed here. The seven heads are seven hills where the woman sits, they are seven kings. Five have already fallen, one is reigning now, and the last is still to come—and his reign will be short. The beast that was, and is not, is also an eighth king and belongs to the seven. He too will be completely destroyed.

The ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not begun to reign yet. However, they will be given authority to reign as kings together with the beast for one hour. They have one agreed purpose: to give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will defeat them for he is Lord of lords and King of kings. His followers are called and chosen, and they trust in him.”

The angel went on to explain to me, “The waters that you saw where the prostitute was sitting represent peoples, crowds of people, nations, and languages. The ten horns that you saw and the beast will detest the prostitute, and will take away everything she has and strip her naked, eat her flesh and burn her to ashes.

For God put into their minds to do what he wanted, to have one agreed purpose: to give their kingdom to the beast—and so God's words will be fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city which rules over the kings of the earth.”

After this I saw another angel descending from heaven. He had great power and the earth was lit up by his glory. He shouted out in a powerful voice, “Babylon the great has collapsed into ruins! She has become a place where demons live, the refuge of every unclean spirit, and the roost of every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the wine of her mad sexual immorality. The kings of the earth have committed adultery with her, and the traders of the earth have grown rich from her excessive sensuality.”

Then I heard another voice from heaven calling out, “My people, come out of her, so that you don't participate in her sinful ways, and so that you don't experience her plagues. Her sins have piled up all the way to heaven, and God is very much aware of her wickedness. Give back to her what she gave; repay her double for what she did. In her own cup mix double the trouble she mixed for others. As much as she boasted about herself and indulged her lusts, give her back just as much anguish and sorrow. She told herself, ‘I reign as queen. I am no widow; I will never be in mourning.’ Because of this her plagues will come upon her in just one day: death, mourning, and famine. She will

be completely destroyed by fire, for the Lord God who condemns her has great power.

The kings of the earth who had committed adultery with her and indulged their lusts with her will cry and mourn over her when they see the smoke of the fire that destroys her. Standing off at a distance because they are afraid they will suffer the same agony as her, they say, 'Disaster, disaster has struck Babylon, the great city! In just one hour your sentence of doom was executed!'

The traders of the earth cry and grieve over her, because nobody is buying their goods any more— products made of gold, silver, gems and pearls; fine linen, purple cloth, silk, and scarlet material; all kinds of objects made of scented wood, or from ivory, or expensive woods, or bronze, iron, or marble; shipments of cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and wagons, and slaves and prisoners.

You've lost the sweet pleasures you loved so much; all your luxurious, glittering possessions are gone— you'll never get any of them back. The traders who sold these things and became rich from trading with her will stand at a distance because they are afraid they will suffer the same agony as her. They will cry and grieve, saying, 'Disaster, disaster has hit the great city! She was clothed in fine linen and purple robes, and wore jewelry made of gold and gems and pearls. In just one hour all this wealth was destroyed!' Every sea captain and everyone who travels by sea and every sailor and everyone who earns their living from the sea stood at a distance. As they watched the smoke of the fire that destroys her, they shouted out, 'What city could ever compare to this great city?' They threw dust on their heads, shouting and crying and grieving, 'Disaster, disaster has struck the great city that made every shipowner rich because of her extravagance! In just one hour she was destroyed!'

Celebrate what's happened to her, heaven and believers and apostles and prophets, for God has condemned her as she condemned you."

A powerful angel picked up a rock the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, "With this kind of violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, and will never exist again."

"Never again will anyone hear music in you: the sound of harps, singers, flutes, and trumpets. Never again will craftsmen of any trade work in you. Never again will the sound of a mill be heard in you. Never again will the light of a lamp shine in you. Never again will the voices of bridegroom and bride be heard in you. Your traders led the world. Through your witchcraft all the nations were deceived. In her the blood of prophets and believers was found, and of all those who have been killed on the earth."

After this I heard what sounded like the noise of an enormous crowd in heaven, shouting, "Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power describe our God, because his judgments are true and right, for he has condemned the infamous prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has brought her to justice for her murders of his servants." Again they shouted, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her destruction ascends for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne. "Amen! Hallelujah!" they shouted.

A voice spoke from the throne that said, "Praise our God, everyone who serves him and respects him, from the smallest to the greatest." Then I heard what sounded like the noise of an enormous crowd, like rushing water and loud thunder, shouting, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the All-powerful One, he reigns! Let's celebrate and be glad and give him the glory, because the wedding day of the Lamb has arrived, and his bride has prepared herself." She was given fine linen to wear, white and clean. (Fine linen represents the good works of believers.)

The angel told me, "Write this down: How happy are those who are invited to the Lamb's wedding feast." Then he said to me, "These are God's true words." I fell down at his feet to worship him. He told me, "Don't do that! I am one of God's servants just as you are, and those who accept Jesus' testimony. Worship God, for Jesus' testimony is the prophetic spirit."

I saw heaven was opened. A white horse was standing there. Its rider was called Trustworthy and True. He is right when he judges, and he is right when he makes war. His eyes were like flaming fire. On his head were many crowns. He had a name written on him which no one but he himself knows. He wore a robe covered in blood, and his name is The Word of God.

Heaven's armies were following him, riding on white horses and clothed in fine linen, white and clean. From his mouth came a sharp sword to strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he himself treads the winepress of the All-powerful God's judgment. Written on his robe and on his thigh was the name, King of kings and Lord of lords.

I saw an angel standing in the sun, shouting in a loud voice to all the birds that fly in the sky, "Come and gather together for God's great feast. Here you can eat the flesh of the dead: kings, leaders, and powerful men, as well as that of horses and their riders, the flesh of all people, free and slave, great and small."

I saw the beast and the kings of the earth gathered together to wage war on the one sitting on the horse and his army. The beast was captured, along with the false prophet who performed miracles in his presence (by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped the beast's image). Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. The rest were killed with the sword of the one sitting on the horse—the sword that came out of his mouth. All the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

I saw an angel descending from heaven, holding the key of the Abyss and a large chain in his hand. He seized the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him in chains for one thousand years. The angel threw him into the Abyss and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would no longer be able to deceive the nations until the thousand years were over. After that he has to be set free for a little while.

I saw people sitting on thrones who had been given the responsibility to judge, and those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and for

sharing the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image, nor had they received the mark on their foreheads or their hands. They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years had ended.) Blessed and holy are those who take part in the first resurrection! The second death has no power over them. They will be priests of God, and of Christ, and they will reign with him for one thousand years.

Once the thousand years are over, Satan will be set free from his prison, and will go out to deceive the nations, symbolized by Gog and Magog, to gather them together for battle from the four corners of the world. Their number is as uncountable as sand on the seashore. They marched over the earth on a broad front and encircled the camp of the believers, the beloved city. But fire rained down from heaven and burned them up. The devil, who had deceived them, was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet had also been thrown, and they will suffer in anguish day and night for ever and ever.

Then I saw a large white throne with the one who sits on it. Heaven and earth vanished, and they were never seen again. I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book, the Book of Life, was opened and the dead were judged based on what was written in the books about what they had done. The sea handed over the dead in it, and death and Hades handed over the dead that were in them, and everyone was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The first heaven and the first earth had disappeared, and the sea no longer existed. I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, descending from God out of heaven, prepared like a bride made beautiful for her husband. I heard a loud voice from the throne say, “Now God's home is with human beings and he will live with them. They will be his people. God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will never happen again. There will be no mourning or crying or pain ever again for the former world no longer exists.”

The one who sits on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” He told me, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” Then he said to me, “Everything's done! I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. To anyone who is thirsty I will give the free gift of water from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all these things, and I will be their God and they shall be my children. But anyone who is a coward, who doesn't trust me, who does disgusting things, who is a murderer, who is sexually immoral, who practices witchcraft, who worships idols, who tells lies—their chosen place is in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur. This is the second death.”

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and spoke to me. He told me, “Come with me. I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife.”

He took me in the Spirit to the top of a very high mountain. There he showed me the holy city Jerusalem descending from God out of heaven, shining with the glory of God's presence. The light sparkled like that from a gemstone, a jasper, clear and bright. The city wall was high and thick, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. On the gates were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south, and three on the west. The city wall had twelve foundations, and inscribed on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The angel who spoke to me had a golden measuring rod to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city was square. The length was the same as the width. He measured the city with the rod, it was 12,000 furlongs. The length, width, and height were all the same. He measured the wall and it was 144 cubits thick in human measurements that the angel was using.

The wall was built out of jasper. The city was made of pure gold that looked like glass. The foundations of the city wall were decorated with all kinds of gemstones. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth, chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

The twelve gates were made of pearl, each one made from a single pearl. The main street was made of pure gold, clear like glass. I did not see a temple there, because the Lord God the All-powerful One, and the Lamb, they are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it because the glory of God provides its light—the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory into the city. The gates of the city will never be shut during the day (and there will be no night there). The nations' honor and glory will be brought into the city. Nothing unclean will ever enter into it, or anyone who worships idols, or who is a liar—only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The angel showed me the river of water of life, crystal-clear, flowing out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, right in the middle of the main street of the city. On both sides of the river was the tree of life, producing twelve crops of fruit, one every month. The leaves of the tree were used to heal people from all nations. There will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be there in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night, and they will not need the light of a lamp, or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light. They shall reign for ever and ever.

The angel told me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who gave his Spirit to the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants what is about to happen.”

"I am coming soon! Blessed are those who obey the prophetic words of this book."

I am John who heard and saw all this. When I heard and saw them, I fell down at the feet of the angel who had shown me these things to worship him. He told me, "Don't do that! I am one of God's servants just as you are, together with your brothers the prophets, and those who obey the words of this book. Worship God!"

Then he told me, "Don't seal up the words of prophecy of this book and keep them secret, for the time is near. Whoever doesn't do what is right, let them stay that way. Whoever is impure, let them stay that way. Whoever does what is right, let them stay that way. Whoever is holy, let them stay that way."

"I am coming soon, and I am bringing my reward to give to everybody based on what they've done. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes so that they have the right to the tree of life, and can enter into the city through the gates.

Those outside the city are dogs, those who practice witchcraft, those who are sexually immoral, those who murder, those who worship idols, and all those who love and invent lies.

I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony to share with the churches. I am both the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star."

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." Whoever hears this, say, "Come." Whoever is thirsty, come, and whoever wants to, freely drink of the water of life. I solemnly declare to everyone who hears the prophetic words of this book that if anyone adds to them then God will add to them the plagues described in this book. If anyone takes away the prophetic words of this book, God will take away their share of the tree of life and of the holy city that are described in this book.

He who confirms all this says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen, come, Lord Jesus. May the grace of the Lord Jesus be with the believers. Amen.