

Daily Reader's™ Bible



*The complete
New Living Translation
organized thematically
in 365 readings*





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STORY • TEACHING • WISDOM

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New Living Translation
organized thematically
in 365 readings



Tyndale House Publishers
Carol Stream, Illinois

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Designed and typeset using Bible Serif and Bible Sans by 2K/DENMARK, Højbjerg, Denmark

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ISBN 978-1-4964-4827-9 Hardcover
ISBN 978-1-4964-4828-6 Softcover

Printed in the United States of America

26	25	24	23	22	21	20
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Tyndale House Publishers and Wycliffe Bible Translators share the vision for an understandable, accurate translation of the Bible for every person in the world. Each sale of the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, benefits Wycliffe Bible Translators. Wycliffe is working with partners around the world to accomplish Vision 2025—an initiative to start a Bible translation program in every language group that needs it by the year 2025.

A Note to Readers

The *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, was first published in 1996. It quickly became one of the most popular Bible translations in the English-speaking world. While the NLT's influence was rapidly growing, the Bible Translation Committee determined that an additional investment in scholarly review and text refinement could make it even better. So shortly after its initial publication, the committee began an eight-year process with the purpose of increasing the level of the NLT's precision without sacrificing its easy-to-understand quality. This second-generation text was completed in 2004, with minor changes subsequently introduced in 2007, 2013, and 2015.

The goal of any Bible translation is to convey the meaning and content of the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts as accurately as possible to contemporary readers. The challenge for our translators was to create a text that would communicate as clearly and powerfully to today's readers as the original texts did to readers and listeners in the ancient biblical world. The resulting translation is easy to read and understand, while also accurately communicating the meaning and content of the original biblical texts. The NLT is a general-purpose text especially good for study, devotional reading, and reading aloud in worship services.

We believe that the New Living Translation—which combines the latest biblical scholarship with a clear, dynamic writing style—will communicate God's word powerfully to all who read it. We publish it with the prayer that God will use it to speak his timeless truth to the church and the world in a fresh, new way.

The Publishers

*A full introduction to the NLT can be found at tyndale.com/nlt/process.
A complete list of the translators can be found at tyndale.com/nlt/scholars.*



Welcome to the Daily Reader's Bible

You have in your hands a complete Bible divided into 365 three-part readings. Reading the three passages assigned to each day will lead you through the entire Bible in a year. There are other daily reading Bibles available, but this one will offer you a fresh perspective and new insights through its unique arrangement. Each daily reading is made up of three parts:

THE STORY SECTION

The Scripture portions in the story section are drawn from the narrative portions of the Bible. This includes the Old Testament books of Genesis through Esther and the New Testament books of Matthew through Acts. The first reading each day is designed to draw you into the Bible's story.

This section relates primarily to history, or "His Story" (that is, God's story). The story readings naturally define the structure and overall progression of this reading Bible. The two other daily readings, when possible, are arranged to encourage meaningful reflection on this narrative.

THE TEACHING SECTION

The passages in the teaching section come from the prophetic books of the Old Testament (Isaiah through Malachi, excluding Lamentations) and the letters of the New Testament (Romans through Revelation). These books comment and elaborate on the deeper meaning of the events and instructions recorded in the story section, applying God's truth to new historical situations.

This section explores the significance of these historical events and interprets them in light of the Law and the Promise (the writings of the prophets) and their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ (the writings of the apostles). This second part seeks to reveal and unpack the story of salvation presented in the historical narrative, which reaches its climax and full realization in God's Son, Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah and Redeemer.

THE WISDOM SECTION

The portions in the wisdom section are taken from the Old Testament books traditionally regarded as wisdom writings or books of poetry. These include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Lamentations. In these books we find wisdom related to the challenges and concerns of everyday life and experience.

This section relates to our human responses and interpretations of lived experience and might be described as our story. As part of the Holy Bible, these human wisdom responses are "spirited" responses. They were written by people inspired by God's Spirit, our Advocate, who helps us apply God's truth to our lives.



As the readings were collected for each of the three sections, the choice was made to unify entire books within a single category of readings. For example, although many of the books included in the story section have passages that could be moved into the teaching or wisdom sections, this would have required splitting and splicing the books extensively, yielding a very fragmented arrangement of the Bible.

The teaching and wisdom sections, when possible, are arranged to allow meaningful connections to the story section. The teaching section often brings theological reflection to bear on the story section, while the wisdom section brings

practical wisdom into the picture. So the structure of this Bible highlights numerous connections between different parts of the Bible, allowing Scripture to comment on Scripture at many points.

The length of text chosen for the three sections reflects the kinds of literature represented and the focus required to read them. The story readings are consistently the longest, since narrative literature can be read quickly to gain the big picture. The teaching readings are a bit shorter, since they are reflective and require a deeper focus. The wisdom readings are the shortest of all, since they, as poetry, require a slower, analytical reading for full benefit.

Chronological arrangements of Samuel and Kings with Chronicles and then the four Gospels together would have created extended sections with repetitive reading. For this reason, these groupings have been broken up to allow for variety in the reading and to give multiple views of important events. In the story readings for the Old Testament, Samuel and Kings carry the primary narrative flow and Chronicles appears later to offer a retrospective review. Also, the four Gospel accounts are spread throughout this Bible, with the story readings opening with the Gospel of John and then closing with Luke and Acts. These shifts add variety and richness to the narrative presentation of the Bible, and periodically bring Jesus—the person all Scripture points to—back into view.

Arranging the Books of Story

The books that make up the story readings are arranged in canonical order except for the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and John.

The Gospel of John was chosen as the opening book of the *Daily Reader's Bible* for several reasons. As mentioned above, the four Gospel accounts have been separated to provide natural variation to the story readings, but this decision was also made in order to bring Jesus, the central person of all Scripture, into focus throughout this reading Bible. Of the four Gospels, John is the obvious choice to start with. John begins by revealing the preexistent Son of God, thus describing something that predates even the account of Creation in Genesis.

After opening with John's introduction to Jesus, we go back to the beginning of human history with Genesis, which is naturally followed by Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. These books tell of Israel's forty-year wilderness journey from Egypt, which ends at the edge of the Promised Land. At this point we pause to read the concise Gospel of Mark for another look at the life of Christ before we return to the book of Deuteronomy, which retells Israel's wilderness story.

Deuteronomy leads us naturally into the Old Testament historical books, and we follow these on their chronological course through Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings. Then the Gospel of Matthew is inserted just before the last stretch of Old Testament historical books. This allows us to read this very Jewish Gospel right in the middle of Israel's story. Matthew's account is very closely linked to the Old Testament and its Jewish identity and tradition, allowing readers to make these connections as they read.

After Matthew's Gospel, we resume the story readings with the final narrative books of the Old Testament: Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These books give us a retrospective view of Israel's history from a vantage point after Jerusalem's destruction and the Babylonian exile. This also allows for some separation between the similar accounts given in Samuel/Kings and Chronicles.

Luke's two books, the Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, concludes the historical narrative of this Bible. It is natural to keep these two books together, as they were written by the same author and present the final retelling of Jesus' birth and earthly life, followed by the birth and early years of the Christian church.

Arranging the Teaching Books

The content of each book in the teaching section, with few exceptions, is read through in order, but these books have been arranged in an order that allows them to connect in helpful ways to the story readings described above. Letters

with the same sender and recipient (for example, 1 and 2 Corinthians) are, with the exception of John's letters, read consecutively. Only the three longest prophetic books—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—are split and separated at natural breaking points. This is done partly to give variety to the readings, but also to gain flexibility in matching up with related passages in the story readings, whenever possible.

Arranging the Wisdom Books

The wisdom passages are deliberately arranged with more flexibility. The books of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs are read together in their entirety as their form suggests. But both Proverbs and Psalms are broken up, and their portions are placed where they fit best thematically, historically, and practically. Sections from Proverbs, where there is thematic arrangement from chapter to chapter, are kept together as much as possible. Psalms written by David and Solomon or referencing historical events are, when possible, placed with the story readings dealing with those events or persons. Song of Songs is read together with the books of Hosea and 1 John, as these books also deal with marriage and love. Lamentations is read together with the later parts of Jeremiah, since both are associated with the same author.



For a complete view of this Bible's reading outline and for other help navigating its arrangement, go to the indexes at the back:

- The Daily Reading Plan Index lists the 365 daily readings with the references of their three associated Scripture portions.
- The Index of Bible Passages lists all the Bible readings in their normal canonical order, from Genesis to Revelation, allowing you to quickly locate any Bible passage or book you have in mind.
- The Topical Index helps you locate readings that speak to your personal concerns, like anger, comfort, confession, or courage.



Spending significant time reading Scripture on a regular basis will change your life. Through the Bible's inspired words, God will reach into your life, wherever you happen to be, and help you discover his special calling for your life. God wants us to be connected to him and to live lives filled with joy and meaning. Taking the time to listen to him by reading his Word is a great first step if you are just beginning this exciting and lifelong journey with God, and it's also a vital part of following him faithfully even if you already have been for some time.

As you approach the daily readings, do so expecting that God has something to say. Humbly ask him to reveal his Word and will to you. And as he speaks to you, write down what he shows you about himself, about you, and about what he would like you to do or say. Then follow through on the insights he gives you. The Bible is a rich resource for life that most people spend far too little time drawing upon. Don't let that be true for you. Open these pages on a daily basis, allowing God to speak to you with the guidance of his Holy Spirit.

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17



BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

[JOHN 1:1-2:22]

In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.

God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'"

From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing

after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

This was John's testimony when the Jewish leaders sent priests and Temple assistants from Jerusalem to ask John, "Who are you?" He came right out and said, "I am not the Messiah."

"Well then, who are you?" they asked. "Are you Elijah?" "No," he replied.

"Are you the Prophet we are expecting?"

"No."

"Then who are you? We need an answer for those who sent us. What do you have to say about yourself?"

John replied in the words of the prophet Isaiah:

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the LORD's coming!'"

Then the Pharisees who had been sent asked him, "If you aren't the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?"

John told them, "I baptize with water, but right here in the crowd is someone you do not recognize. Though his ministry follows mine, I'm not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandal."

This encounter took place in Bethany, an area east of the Jordan River, where John was baptizing.

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! The Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, 'A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.' I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel."

Then John testified, "I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God."

The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, "Look! There is the Lamb of God!" When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. "What do you want?" he asked them.

They replied, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

"Come and see," he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means "Christ").

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, "Your name is Simon, son of

John—but you will be called **Cephas**” (which means “Peter”).

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, **“Come, follow me.”** Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter’s hometown.

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, “We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

“Nazareth!” exclaimed Nathanael. “Can anything good come from Nazareth?”

“Come and see for yourself,” Philip replied.

As they approached, Jesus said, **“Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity.”**

“How do you know about me?” Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, **“I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you.”**

Then Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God—the King of Israel!”

Jesus asked him, **“Do you believe this just because I told you I had seen you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this.”** Then he 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, the one who is the stairway between heaven and earth.”**

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the

village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”

“Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. **“My time has not yet come.”**

But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, **“Fill the jars with water.”** When the jars had been filled, he said, **“Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.”** So the servants followed his instructions.

When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”

This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

After the wedding he went to Capernaum for a

few days with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples.

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers’ coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, **“Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace!”**

Then his disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: “Passion for God’s house will consume me.”

But the Jewish leaders demanded, “What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it.”

“All right,” Jesus replied. **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

“What!” they exclaimed. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?” But when Jesus said “this temple,” he meant his own body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said.

I HAVE RETURNED TO SHOW MERCY TO JERUSALEM

[ZECHARIAH 1:1-2:5]

In November of the second year of King Darius’s reign, the LORD gave this message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo:

“I, the LORD, was very angry with your ancestors. Therefore, say to the people, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.’ Don’t be like your ancestors who would not listen or pay attention when the earlier prophets said to them, ‘This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: Turn from your evil ways, and stop all your evil practices.’”

“Where are your ancestors now? They and the prophets are long dead. But everything I said through my servants the prophets happened to your ancestors, just as I said. As a result, they repented and said, ‘We have received what we deserved from the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. He has done what he said he would do.’”

Three months later, on February 15, the LORD sent another message to the prophet Zechariah son of Berekiah and grandson of Iddo.

In a vision during the night, I saw a man sitting on a red horse that was standing among some myrtle trees in a small valley. Behind him were riders on red, brown, and white horses. I asked the angel who was talking with me, "My lord, what do these horses mean?"

"I will show you," the angel replied.

The rider standing among the myrtle trees then explained, "They are the ones the LORD has sent out to patrol the earth."

Then the other riders reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have been patrolling the earth, and the whole earth is at peace."

Upon hearing this, the angel of the LORD prayed this prayer: "O LORD of Heaven's Armies, for seventy years now you have been angry with Jerusalem and the towns of Judah. How long until you again show mercy to them?" And the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me.

Then the angel said to me, "Shout this message for all to hear: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Jerusalem and Mount Zion is passionate and strong. But I am very angry with the other nations that are now enjoying peace and security. I was only a little angry with my people, but the nations inflicted harm on them far beyond my intentions.

"Therefore, this is what the LORD says: I have returned to show mercy to Jerusalem. My Temple will be rebuilt, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, and measurements will be taken for the reconstruction of Jerusalem.'

"Say this also: 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The towns of Israel will again overflow with prosperity, and the LORD will again comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem as his own.'"

Then I looked up and saw four animal horns. "What are these?" I asked the angel who was talking with me.

He replied, "These horns represent the nations that scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem."

Then the LORD showed me four blacksmiths. "What are these men coming to do?" I asked.

The angel replied, "These four horns—these nations—scattered and humbled Judah. Now these blacksmiths have come to terrify those nations and throw them down and destroy them."

When I looked again, I saw a man with a measuring line in his hand. "Where are you going?" I asked.

He replied, "I am going to measure Jerusalem, to see how wide and how long it is."

Then the angel who was with me went to meet a second angel who was coming toward him. The other angel said, "Hurry, and say to that young man, 'Jerusalem will someday be so full of people and livestock that there won't be room enough for everyone! Many will live outside the city walls. Then I, myself, will be a protective wall of fire around Jerusalem, says the LORD. And I will be the glory inside the city!'"

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DELIGHT IN THE LAW

[PSALM 1]

Oh, the joys of those who do not
follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners,
or join in with mockers.

But they delight in the law of the LORD,
meditating on it day and night.
They are like trees planted along the riverbank,
bearing fruit each season.
Their leaves never wither,
and they prosper in all they do.

But not the wicked!
They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind.
They will be condemned at the time of judgment.
Sinners will have no place among the godly.
For the LORD watches over the path of the godly,
but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

THIS IS HOW GOD LOVED THE WORLD

[JOHN 2:23–4:38]

Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew all about people. No one needed to tell him about human nature, for he knew what was in each person's heart.

There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak with Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "we all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus.

"How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."

"How are these things possible?" Nicodemus asked.

Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? I assure you, we tell you what we know and have seen, and yet you won't believe our testimony. But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can

you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ever gone to heaven and returned. But the Son of Man has come down from heaven. And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.

"For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son. And the judgment is based on this fact: God's light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants."

Then Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went into the Judean countryside. Jesus spent some time with them there, baptizing people.

At this time John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon, near Salim, because there was plenty of water there; and people kept coming to him for baptism. (This was before John was thrown into prison.) A debate broke out between John's disciples and a certain Jew over ceremonial cleansing. So John's disciples came to him and said, "Rabbi, the man you met on the other side of the Jordan River, the one

you identified as the Messiah, is also baptizing people. And everybody is going to him instead of coming to us."

John replied, "No one can receive anything unless God gives it from heaven. You yourselves know how plainly I told you, 'I am not the Messiah. I am only here to prepare the way for him.' It is the bridegroom who marries the bride, and the bridegroom's friend is simply glad to stand with him and hear his vows. Therefore, I am filled with joy at his success. He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

"He has come from above and is greater than anyone else. We are of the earth, and we speak of earthly things, but he has come from heaven and is greater than anyone else. He testifies about what he has seen and heard, but how few believe what he tells them! Anyone who accepts his testimony can affirm that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God's words, for God gives him the Spirit without limit. The Father loves his Son and has put everything into his hands. And anyone who believes in God's Son has eternal life. Anyone who doesn't obey the Son will never experience eternal life but remains under God's angry judgment."

Jesus knew the Pharisees had heard that he was baptizing and making more disciples than John (though Jesus himself didn't baptize them—his disciples did). So he left Judea and returned to Galilee.

He had to go through Samaria on the way. Eventually he came to the Samaritan village of Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there; and Jesus, tired

from the long walk, sat wearily beside the well about noon-time. Soon a Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Please give me a drink." He was alone at the time because his disciples had gone into the village to buy some food.

The woman was surprised, for Jews refuse to have anything to do with Samaritans. She said to Jesus, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. Why are you asking me for a drink?"

Jesus replied, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask me, and I would give you living water."

"But sir, you don't have a rope or a bucket," she said, "and this well is very deep. Where would you get this living water? And besides, do you think you're greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us this well? How can you offer better water than he and his sons and his animals enjoyed?"

Jesus replied, "Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life."

"Please, sir," the woman said, "give me this water! Then I'll never be thirsty again, and I won't have to come here to get water."

"Go and get your husband," Jesus told her.

"I don't have a husband," the woman replied.

Jesus said, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!"

"Sir," the woman said, "you must be a prophet. So tell me, why is it that you Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped?"

Jesus replied, "Believe me, dear woman, the time is coming when it will no longer matter whether you worship the Father on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You Samaritans know very little about the one you worship, while we Jews know all about him, for salvation comes through the Jews. But the time is coming—indeed it's here now—when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth."

The woman said, "I know the Messiah is coming—the one who is called Christ. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

Then Jesus told her, "I AM the Messiah!"

Just then his disciples came back. They were shocked to

find him talking to a woman, but none of them had the nerve to ask, "What do you want with her?" or "Why are you talking to her?" The woman left her water jar beside the well and ran back to the village, telling everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?" So the people came streaming from the village to see him.

Meanwhile, the disciples were urging Jesus, "Rabbi, eat something."

But Jesus replied, "I have a kind of food you know nothing about."

"Did someone bring him food while we were gone?" the disciples asked each other.

Then Jesus explained:

"My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work. You know the saying, 'Four months between planting and harvest.' But I say, wake up and look around. The fields are already ripe for harvest. The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! You know the saying, 'One plants and another harvests.' And it's true. I sent you to harvest where you didn't plant; others had already done the work, and now you will get to gather the harvest."

I AM COMING TO LIVE AMONG YOU

[ZECHARIAH 2:6-4:14]

The LORD says, "Come away! Flee from Babylon in the land of the north, for I have scattered you to the four winds. Come away, people of Zion, you who are exiled in Babylon!"

After a period of glory, the LORD of Heaven's Armies sent me against the nations who plundered you. For he said, "Anyone who harms you harms my most precious possession. I will raise my fist to crush them, and their own slaves will plunder them." Then you will know that the LORD of Heaven's Armies has sent me.

The LORD says, "Shout and rejoice, O beautiful Jerusalem, for I am coming to live among you. Many nations will join themselves to the LORD on that day, and they, too, will be my people. I will live among you, and you will know that the LORD of Heaven's Armies sent me to you. The land of Judah will be the LORD's special possession in the holy land, and he will once again choose Jerusalem to be his own city. Be silent before the LORD, all humanity, for he is springing into action from his holy dwelling."

Then the angel showed me Jeshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD. The Accuser, Satan, was there at the angel's right hand, making accusations against Jeshua. And the LORD said to Satan, "I, the LORD, reject your accusations, Satan. Yes, the LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebukes you. This man is like a burning stick that has been snatched from the fire."

Jeshua's clothing was filthy as he stood there before the angel. So the angel said to the others standing there, "Take off his filthy clothes." And turning to Jeshua he said, "See, I have taken away your sins, and now I am giving you these fine new clothes."

Then I said, "They should also place a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean priestly turban on his head and dressed him in new clothes while the angel of the LORD stood by.

Then the angel of the LORD spoke very solemnly to Jeshua and said, "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: If you follow my ways and carefully serve me, then you will be given authority over my Temple and its courtyards. I will let you walk among these others standing here.

"Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Now look at the jewel I have set before Jeshua, a single stone with seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, and I will remove the sins of this land in a single day.

"And on that day, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, each of you will invite your neighbor to sit with you peacefully under your own grapevine and fig tree."

Then the angel who had been talking with me returned and woke me, as though I had been asleep. "What do you see now?" he asked.

I answered, "I see a solid gold lampstand with a bowl of oil on top of it. Around the bowl are seven lamps, each having seven spouts with wicks. And I see two olive trees, one on each side of the bowl." Then I asked the angel, "What are these, my lord? What do they mean?"

"Don't you know?" the angel asked.

"No, my lord," I replied.

Then he said to me, "This is what the LORD says to Zerubbabel: It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. Nothing, not even a mighty mountain, will stand in Zerubbabel's way; it will become a level plain before him! And when Zerubbabel sets the final stone of the Temple in place, the people will shout: 'May God bless it! May God bless it!'"

Then another message came to me from the LORD: "Zerubbabel is the one who laid the foundation of this Temple, and he will complete it. Then you will know that the LORD of Heaven's Armies has sent me. Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand."

(The seven lamps represent the eyes of the LORD that search all around the world.)

Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on each side of the lampstand, and what are the two olive branches that pour out golden oil through two gold tubes?"

"Don't you know?" he asked.

"No, my lord," I replied.

Then he said to me, "They represent the two anointed ones who stand in the court of the Lord of all the earth."

I SET MY KING ON THE THRONE IN JERUSALEM

[PSALM 2]

Why are the nations so angry?

Why do they waste their time with futile plans?

The kings of the earth prepare for battle;
the rulers plot together

against the LORD

and against his anointed one.

"Let us break their chains," they cry,

"and free ourselves from slavery to God."

But the one who rules in heaven laughs.

The Lord scoffs at them.

Then in anger he rebukes them,

terrifying them with his fierce fury.

For the Lord declares, "I have placed my chosen king on the throne
in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain."

The king proclaims the LORD's decree:
"The LORD said to me, 'You are my son.
Today I have become your Father.
Only ask, and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,
the whole earth as your possession.
You will break them with an iron rod
and smash them like clay pots.'"

Now then, you kings, act wisely!
Be warned, you rulers of the earth!
Serve the LORD with reverent fear,
and rejoice with trembling.
Submit to God's royal son, or he will become angry,
and you will be destroyed in the midst of all your activities—
for his anger flares up in an instant.
But what joy for all who take refuge in him!

#003 • JESUS COMES IN HIS FATHER'S NAME

THIS IS INDEED THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

[JOHN 4:39-5:47]

Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, "He told me everything I ever did!" When they came out to see him, they begged him to stay in their village. So he stayed for two days, long enough for many more to hear his message and believe. Then they said to the woman, "Now we believe, not just because of what you told us, but because we have heard him ourselves. Now we know that he is indeed the Savior of the world."

At the end of the two days, Jesus went on to Galilee. He himself had said that a prophet is not honored in his own hometown. Yet the Galileans welcomed him, for they had been in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration and had seen everything he did there.

As he traveled through Galilee, he came to Cana, where he had turned the water into wine. There was a government official in nearby Capernaum whose son was very sick. When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged Jesus to come

to Capernaum to heal his son, who was about to die.

Jesus asked, "**Will you never believe in me unless you see miraculous signs and wonders?**"

The official pleaded, "Lord, please come now before my little boy dies."

Then Jesus told him, "**Go back home. Your son will live!**" And the man believed what Jesus said and started home.

While the man was on his way, some of his servants met him with the news that his son was alive and well. He asked them when the boy had begun to get better, and they replied, "Yesterday afternoon at one o'clock his fever suddenly disappeared!" Then the father realized that that was the very time Jesus had told him, "**Your son will live.**" And he and his entire household believed in Jesus. This was the second miraculous sign Jesus did in Galilee after coming from Judea.

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay

on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, "**Would you like to get well?**"

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me."

Jesus told him, "**Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!**"

Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! The law doesn't allow you to carry that sleeping mat!"

But he replied, "The man who healed me told me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'"

"Who said such a thing as that?" they demanded.

The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "**Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.**" Then the man went and

told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him.

So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.

So Jesus explained, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing. In fact, the Father will show him how to do even greater works than healing this man. Then you will truly be astonished. For just as the Father gives life to those he raises from the dead, so the Son gives life to anyone he wants. In addition, the Father judges no one. Instead, he has given the Son absolute authority to judge, so that everyone will honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son is certainly not honoring the Father who sent him.

“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their

sins, but they have already passed from death into life.

“And I assure you that the time is coming, indeed it’s here now, when the dead will hear my voice—the voice of the Son of God. And those who listen will live. The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son. And he has given him authority to judge everyone because he is the Son of Man. Don’t be so surprised! Indeed, the time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son, and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to experience eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to experience judgment. I can do nothing on my own. I judge as God tells me. Therefore, my judgment is just, because I carry out the will of the one who sent me, not my own will.

“If I were to testify on my own behalf, my testimony would not be valid. But someone else is also testifying about me, and I assure you that everything he says about me is true. In fact, you sent investigators to listen to John the Baptist, and his testimony about me was true. Of course, I have no need of human witnesses, but I say these things so you might be saved. John was like a burning and shining lamp, and you were

excited for a while about his message. But I have a greater witness than John—my teachings and my miracles. The Father gave me these works to accomplish, and they prove that he sent me. And the Father who sent me has testified about me himself. You have never heard his voice or seen him face to face, and you do not have his message in your hearts, because you do not believe me—the one he sent to you.

“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.

“Your approval means nothing to me, because I know you don’t have God’s love within you. For I have come to you in my Father’s name, and you have rejected me. Yet if others come in their own name, you gladly welcome them. No wonder you can’t believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don’t care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God.

“Yet it isn’t I who will accuse you before the Father. Moses will accuse you! Yes, Moses, in whom you put your hopes. If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But since you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?”

HERE IS THE MAN CALLED THE BRANCH

[ZECHARIAH 5:1-6:15]

I looked up again and saw a scroll flying through the air.

“What do you see?” the angel asked.

“I see a flying scroll,” I replied. “It appears to be about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide.”

Then he said to me, “This scroll contains the curse that is going out over the entire land. One side of the scroll says that those who steal will be banished from the land; the other side says that those who swear falsely will be banished from the land. And this is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: I am sending this curse into the house of every thief and into the house of everyone who swears falsely

using my name. And my curse will remain in that house and completely destroy it—even its timbers and stones.”

Then the angel who was talking with me came forward and said, “Look up and see what’s coming.”

“What is it?” I asked.

He replied, “It is a basket for measuring grain, and it’s filled with the sins of everyone throughout the land.”

Then the heavy lead cover was lifted off the basket, and there was a woman sitting inside it. The angel said, “The woman’s name

is Wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and closed the heavy lid again.

Then I looked up and saw two women flying toward us, gliding on the wind. They had wings like a stork, and they picked up the basket and flew into the sky.

"Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel.

He replied, "To the land of Babylonia, where they will build a temple for the basket. And when the temple is ready, they will set the basket there on its pedestal."

Then I looked up again and saw four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains. The first chariot was pulled by red horses, the second by black horses, the third by white horses, and the fourth by powerful dappled-gray horses. "And what are these, my lord?" I asked the angel who was talking with me.

The angel replied, "These are the four spirits of heaven who stand before the Lord of all the earth. They are going out to do his work. The chariot with black horses is going north, the chariot with white horses is going west, and the chariot with dappled-gray horses is going south."

The powerful horses were eager to set out to patrol the earth. And the LORD said, "Go and patrol the earth!" So they left at once on their patrol.

Then the LORD summoned me and said, "Look, those who went north have vented the anger of my Spirit there in the land of the north."

Then I received another message from the LORD: "Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah will bring gifts of silver and gold from the Jews exiled in Babylon. As soon as they arrive, meet them at the home of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Accept their gifts, and make a crown from the silver and gold. Then put the crown on the head of Jeshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest. Tell him, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Here is the man called the Branch. He will branch out from where he is and build the Temple of the LORD. Yes, he will build the Temple of the LORD. Then he will receive royal honor and will rule as king from his throne. He will also serve as priest from his throne, and there will be perfect harmony between his two roles.'

"The crown will be a memorial in the Temple of the LORD to honor those who gave it—Heldai, Tobijah, Jedaiah, and Josiah son of Zephaniah."

People will come from distant lands to rebuild the Temple of the LORD. And when this happens, you will know that my messages have been from the LORD of Heaven's Armies. All this will happen if you carefully obey what the LORD your God says.

O LORD, MY ROCK AND MY REDEEMER

[PSALM 19]

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

The heavens proclaim the glory of God.

The skies display his craftsmanship.

Day after day they continue to speak;
night after night they make him known.

They speak without a sound or word;
their voice is never heard.

Yet their message has gone throughout the earth,
and their words to all the world.

God has made a home in the heavens for the sun.

It bursts forth like a radiant bridegroom after his wedding.

It rejoices like a great athlete eager to run the race.

The sun rises at one end of the heavens
and follows its course to the other end.

Nothing can hide from its heat.

The instructions of the LORD are perfect,
reviving the soul.

The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

The commandments of the LORD are right,
bringing joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are clear,
giving insight for living.
Reverence for the LORD is pure,
lasting forever.
The laws of the LORD are true;
each one is fair.
They are more desirable than gold,
even the finest gold.
They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.
They are a warning to your servant,
a great reward for those who obey them.

How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart?
Cleanse me from these hidden faults.
Keep your servant from deliberate sins!
Don't let them control me.
Then I will be free of guilt
and innocent of great sin.

May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be pleasing to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

#004 • SALVATION AND LIFE FROM ABOVE

I AM THE BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN

[JOHN 6:1-71]

After this, Jesus crossed over to the far side of the Sea of Galilee, also known as the Sea of Tiberias. A huge crowd kept following him wherever he went, because they saw his miraculous signs as he healed the sick. Then Jesus climbed a hill and sat down with his disciples around him. (It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration.) Jesus soon saw a huge crowd of people coming to look for him. Turning to Philip, he asked, **“Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?”** He was testing Philip, for he already knew what he was going to do.

Philip replied, “Even if we worked for months, we wouldn't have enough money to feed them!”

Then Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up. “There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two

fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?”

“Tell everyone to sit down,” Jesus said. So they all sat down on the grassy slopes. (The men alone numbered about 5,000.) Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, **“Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.”** So they picked up the pieces and filled twelve baskets with scraps left by the people who had eaten from the five barley loaves.

When the people saw him do this miraculous sign, they exclaimed, “Surely, he is the Prophet we have been expecting!” When Jesus saw that they were ready to force him to be their king, he slipped away into the hills by himself.

That evening Jesus' disciples went down to the shore to wait for him. But as darkness fell and Jesus still hadn't come back, they got into the boat and headed across the lake toward Capernaum. Soon a gale swept down upon them, and the sea grew very rough. They had rowed three or four miles when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water toward the boat. They were terrified, but he called out to them, **“Don't be afraid. I am here!”** Then they were eager to let him in the boat, and immediately they arrived at their destination!

The next day the crowd that had stayed on the far shore saw that the disciples had taken the only boat, and they realized Jesus had not gone with them. Several boats from Tiberias landed near the place where the Lord

had blessed the bread and the people had eaten. So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went across to Capernaum to look for him. They found him on the other side of the lake and asked, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval."

They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?"

Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent."

They answered, "Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do? After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day."

Jesus replied, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But you haven't believed in me even though you have seen me. However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent

me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day."

Then the people began to murmur in disagreement 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 mother. How can he say, 'I came down from heaven?'"

But Jesus replied, "Stop complaining about what I said. For no one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me, and at the last day I will raise them up. As it is written in the Scriptures, 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. (Not that anyone has ever seen the Father; only I, who was sent from God, have seen him.)

"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes has eternal life. Yes, I am the bread of life! Your ancestors ate manna in the wilderness, but they all died. Anyone who eats the bread from heaven, however, will never die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread, which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh."

Then the people began arguing with each other about what he meant. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they asked.

So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has

eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."

He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?"

Jesus was aware that his disciples were complaining, so he said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what will you think if you see the Son of Man ascend to heaven again? The Spirit alone gives eternal life. Human effort accomplishes nothing. And the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But some of you do not believe me." (For Jesus knew from the beginning which ones didn't believe, and he knew who would betray him.) Then he said, "That is why I said that people can't come to me unless the Father gives them to me."

At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him. Then Jesus turned to the Twelve and asked, "Are you also going to leave?"

Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words that give eternal life. We believe, and we know you are the Holy One of God."

Then Jesus said, "I chose the twelve of you, but one is a devil." He was speaking of Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, one of the Twelve, who would later betray him.

On December 7 of the fourth year of King Darius's reign, another message came to Zechariah from the LORD. The people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regemmelech, along with their attendants, to seek the LORD's favor. They were to ask this question of the prophets and the priests at the Temple of the LORD of Heaven's Armies: "Should we continue to mourn and fast each summer on the anniversary of the Temple's destruction, as we have done for so many years?"

The LORD of Heaven's Armies sent me this message in reply: "Say to all your people and your priests, 'During these seventy years of exile, when you fasted and mourned in the summer and in early autumn, was it really for me that you were fasting? And even now in your holy festivals, aren't you eating and drinking just to please yourselves? Isn't this the same message the LORD proclaimed through the prophets in years past when Jerusalem and the towns of Judah were bustling with people, and the Negev and the foothills of Judah were well populated?'"

Then this message came to Zechariah from the LORD: "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Judge fairly, and show mercy and kindness to one another. Do not oppress widows, orphans, foreigners, and the poor. And do not scheme against each other.

"Your ancestors refused to listen to this message. They stubbornly turned away and put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing. They made their hearts as hard as stone, so they could not hear the instructions or the messages that the LORD of Heaven's Armies had sent them by his Spirit through the earlier prophets. That is why the LORD of Heaven's Armies was so angry with them.

"Since they refused to listen when I called to them, I would not listen when they called to me, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. As with a whirlwind, I scattered them among the distant nations, where they lived as strangers. Their land became so desolate that no one even traveled through it. They turned their pleasant land into a desert."

Then another message came to me from the LORD of Heaven's Armies: "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: My love for Mount Zion is passionate and strong; I am consumed with passion for Jerusalem!

"And now the LORD says: I am returning to Mount Zion, and I will live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City; the

mountain of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will be called the Holy Mountain.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Once again old men and women will walk Jerusalem's streets with their canes and will sit together in the city squares. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls at play.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: All this may seem impossible to you now, a small remnant of God's people. But is it impossible for me? says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: You can be sure that I will rescue my people from the east and from the west. I will bring them home again to live safely in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be faithful and just toward them as their God.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Be strong and finish the task! Ever since the laying of the foundation of the Temple of the LORD of Heaven's Armies, you have heard what the prophets have been saying about completing the building. Before the work on the Temple began, there were no jobs and no money to hire people or animals. No traveler was safe from the enemy, for there were enemies on all sides. I had turned everyone against each other.

"But now I will not treat the remnant of my people as I treated them before, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. For I am planting seeds of peace and prosperity among you. The grapevines will be heavy with fruit. The earth will produce its crops, and the heavens will release the dew. Once more I will cause the remnant in Judah and Israel to inherit these blessings. Among the other nations, Judah and Israel became symbols of a cursed nation. But no longer! Now I will rescue you and make you both a symbol and a source of blessing. So don't be afraid. Be strong, and get on with rebuilding the Temple!

"For this is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: I was determined to punish you when your ancestors angered me, and I did not change my mind, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. But now I am determined to bless Jerusalem and the people of Judah. So don't be afraid. But this is what you must do: Tell the truth to each other. Render verdicts in your courts that are just and that lead to peace. Don't scheme against each other. Stop your love of telling lies that you swear are the truth. I hate all these things, says the LORD."

Here is another message that came to me from the LORD of Heaven's Armies. "This is

what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: The traditional fasts and times of mourning you have kept in early summer, midsummer, autumn, and winter are now ended. They will become festivals of joy and celebration for the people of Judah. So love truth and peace.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: People from nations and cities around the world will travel to Jerusalem. The people of one city will say to the people of another, 'Come with us to Jerusalem to ask the LORD to

bless us. Let's worship the LORD of Heaven's Armies. I'm determined to go.' Many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the LORD of Heaven's Armies and to ask for his blessing.

"This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: In those days ten men from different nations and languages of the world will clutch at the sleeve of one Jew. And they will say, 'Please let us walk with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

THE LORD WILL RESCUE BY HIS MIGHTY POWER

[PSALM 20]

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

In times of trouble, may the LORD answer your cry.

May the name of the God of Jacob keep you safe from all harm.

May he send you help from his sanctuary
and strengthen you from Jerusalem.

May he remember all your gifts
and look favorably on your burnt offerings.

Interlude

May he grant your heart's desires
and make all your plans succeed.

May we shout for joy when we hear of your victory
and raise a victory banner in the name of our God.

May the LORD answer all your prayers.

Now I know that the LORD rescues his anointed king.
He will answer him from his holy heaven
and rescue him by his great power.

Some nations boast of their chariots and horses,
but we boast in the name of the LORD our God.

Those nations will fall down and collapse,
but we will rise up and stand firm.

Give victory to our king, O LORD!
Answer our cry for help.

#005 • A NEW KING IS COMING

CHRIST IS BORN OF THE ROYAL LINE OF DAVID

[JOHN 7:1-52]

After this, Jesus traveled around Galilee. He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death. But soon it was time for the Jewish Festival of Shelters, and Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, where your followers can see your miracles! You can't become famous if you hide like this! If you can do such wonderful things, show

yourself to the world!" For even his brothers didn't believe in him.

Jesus replied, "**Now is not the right time for me to go, but you can go anytime. The world can't hate you, but it does hate me because I accuse it of doing evil. You go on. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet come.**" After saying these things, Jesus remained in Galilee.

But after his brothers left for the festival, Jesus also went, though secretly, staying out of public view. The Jewish leaders tried to find him at the festival and kept asking if anyone had seen him. There was a lot of grumbling about him among the crowds. Some argued, "He's a good man," but others said, "He's nothing but a fraud who deceives the people." But no

one had the courage to speak favorably about him in public, for they were afraid of getting in trouble with the Jewish leaders.

Then, midway through the festival, Jesus went up to the Temple and began to teach. The people were surprised when they heard him. "How does he know so much when he hasn't been trained?" they asked.

So Jesus told them, "My message is not my own; it comes from God who sent me. Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own. Those who speak for themselves want glory only for themselves, but a person who seeks to honor the one who sent him speaks truth, not lies. Moses gave you the law, but none of you obeys it! In fact, you are trying to kill me."

The crowd replied, "You're demon possessed! Who's trying to kill you?"

Jesus replied, "I did one miracle on the Sabbath, and you were amazed. But you work on the Sabbath, too, when you obey Moses' law of circumcision. (Actually, this tradition of circumcision began with the patriarchs, long before the law of Moses.) For if the correct time for circumcising your son falls on the Sabbath, you go ahead and do it so as not to break the law of Moses. So why should you be angry with me for healing a man on the Sabbath? Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly."

Some of the people who lived in Jerusalem started to ask each other, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? But here he is, speaking in public, and they say nothing to him. Could

our leaders possibly believe that he is the Messiah? But how could he be? For we know where this man comes from. When the Messiah comes, he will simply appear; no one will know where he comes from."

While Jesus was teaching in the Temple, he called out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I come from. But I'm not here on my own. The one who sent me is true, and you don't know him. But I know him because I come from him, and he sent me to you." Then the leaders tried to arrest him; but no one laid a hand on him, because his time had not yet come.

Many among the crowds at the Temple believed in him. "After all," they said, "would you expect the Messiah to do more miraculous signs than this man has done?"

When the Pharisees heard that the crowds were whispering such things, they and the leading priests sent Temple guards to arrest Jesus. But Jesus told them, "I will be with you only a little longer. Then I will return to the one who sent me. You will search for me but not find me. And you cannot go where I am going."

The Jewish leaders were puzzled by this statement. "Where is he planning to go?" they asked. "Is he thinking of leaving the country and going to the Jews in other lands? Maybe he will even teach the Greeks! What does he mean when he says, 'You will search for me but not find me,' and 'You cannot go where I am going'?"

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me

may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.)

When the crowds heard him say this, some of them declared, "Surely this man is the Prophet we've been expecting." Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others said, "But he can't be! Will the Messiah come from Galilee? For the Scriptures clearly state that the Messiah will be born of the royal line of David, in Bethlehem, the village where King David was born." So the crowd was divided about him. Some even wanted him arrested, but no one laid a hand on him.

When the Temple guards returned without having arrested Jesus, the leading priests and Pharisees demanded, "Why didn't you bring him in?"

"We have never heard anyone speak like this!" the guards responded.

"Have you been led astray, too?" the Pharisees mocked. "Is there a single one of us rulers or Pharisees who believes in him? This foolish crowd follows him, but they are ignorant of the law. God's curse is on them!"

Then Nicodemus, the leader who had met with Jesus earlier, spoke up. "Is it legal to convict a man before he is given a hearing?" he asked.

They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Search the Scriptures and see for yourself—no prophet ever comes from Galilee!"

O PEOPLE OF JERUSALEM; LOOK, YOUR KING IS COMING

[ZECHARIAH 9:1-17]

This is the message from the LORD against the land of Aram and the city of Damascus, for the

eyes of humanity, including all the tribes of Israel, are on the LORD.

Doom is certain for Hamath,
near Damascus,
and for the cities of Tyre and Sidon,
though they are so clever.
Tyre has built a strong fortress
and has made silver and gold
as plentiful as dust in the streets!
But now the Lord will strip away
Tyre's possessions
and hurl its fortifications into the sea,
and it will be burned to the ground.
The city of Ashkelon will see Tyre fall
and will be filled with fear.
Gaza will shake with terror,
as will Ekron, for their hopes
will be dashed.
Gaza's king will be killed,
and Ashkelon will be deserted.
Foreigners will occupy the city of Ashdod.
I will destroy the pride of
the Philistines.
I will grab the bloody meat
from their mouths
and snatch the detestable
sacrifices from their teeth.
Then the surviving Philistines
will worship our God
and become like a clan in Judah.
The Philistines of Ekron will
join my people,
as the ancient Jebusites once did.
I will guard my Temple
and protect it from invading armies.
I am watching closely to ensure
that no more foreign oppressors
overrun my people's land.

Rejoice, O people of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O people
of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you.
He is righteous and victorious,
yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—
riding on a donkey's colt.
I will remove the battle
chariots from Israel
and the warhorses from Jerusalem.
I will destroy all the weapons
used in battle,

and your king will bring
peace to the nations.
His realm will stretch from sea to sea
and from the Euphrates River
to the ends of the earth.
Because of the covenant I made with you,
sealed with blood,
I will free your prisoners
from death in a waterless dungeon.
Come back to the place of safety,
all you prisoners who still
have hope!
I promise this very day
that I will repay two blessings for
each of your troubles.
Judah is my bow,
and Israel is my arrow.
Jerusalem is my sword,
and like a warrior, I will brandish
it against the Greeks.

The LORD will appear above his people;
his arrows will fly like lightning!
The Sovereign LORD will sound
the ram's horn
and attack like a whirlwind from
the southern desert.
The LORD of Heaven's Armies
will protect his people,
and they will defeat their enemies
by hurling great stones.
They will shout in battle as
though drunk with wine.
They will be filled with
blood like a bowl,
drenched with blood like the
corners of the altar.
On that day the LORD their God
will rescue his people,
just as a shepherd rescues
his sheep.
They will sparkle in his land
like jewels in a crown.
How wonderful and beautiful
they will be!
The young men will thrive
on abundant grain,
and the young women will
flourish on new wine.

HOW THE KING REJOICES IN YOUR STRENGTH

[PSALM 21]

For the choir director: A psalm of David.

How the king rejoices in your strength, O LORD!
He shouts with joy because you give him victory.
For you have given him his heart's desire;
you have withheld nothing he requested.

Interlude

You welcomed him back with success and prosperity.
 You placed a crown of finest gold on his head.
 He asked you to preserve his life,
 and you granted his request.
 The days of his life stretch on forever.
 Your victory brings him great honor,
 and you have clothed him with splendor and majesty.
 You have endowed him with eternal blessings
 and given him the joy of your presence.
 For the king trusts in the LORD.
 The unfailing love of the Most High will keep him from stumbling.

You will capture all your enemies.
 Your strong right hand will seize all who hate you.
 You will throw them in a flaming furnace
 when you appear.
 The LORD will consume them in his anger;
 fire will devour them.
 You will wipe their children from the face of the earth;
 they will never have descendants.
 Although they plot against you,
 their evil schemes will never succeed.
 For they will turn and run
 when they see your arrows aimed at them.
 Rise up, O LORD, in all your power.
 With music and singing we celebrate your mighty acts.

#006 • THE PEOPLE OF GOD HEAR GOD'S WORDS

NEITHER DO I CONDEMN YOU

[JOHN 7:53–8:59]

[The most ancient Greek manuscripts do not include John 7:53–8:11.]

Then the meeting broke up, and everybody went home.

Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but early the next morning he was back again at the Temple. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd.

"Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?"

They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the

dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?"

"No, Lord," she said.
 And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in

darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

The Pharisees replied, "You are making those claims about yourself! Such testimony is not valid."

Jesus told them, "These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don't know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other."

"Where is your father?" they asked.

Jesus answered, "Since you don't know who I am, you don't

know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.” Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come.

Later Jesus said to them again, “I am going away. You will search for me but will die in your sin. You cannot come where I am going.”

The people asked, “Is he planning to commit suicide? What does he mean, ‘You cannot come where I am going?’”

Jesus continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You belong to this world; I do not. That is why I said that you will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I AM who I claim to be, you will die in your sins.”

“Who are you?” they demanded.

Jesus replied, “The one I have always claimed to be. I have much to say about you and much to condemn, but I won’t. For I say only what I have heard from the one who sent me, and he is completely truthful.” But they still didn’t understand that he was talking about his Father.

So Jesus said, “When you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he. I do nothing on my own but say only what the Father taught me. And the one who sent me is with me—he has not deserted me. For I always do what pleases him.” Then many who heard him say these things believed in him.

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, “You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And

you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

“But we are descendants of Abraham,” they said. “We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, ‘You will be set free?’”

Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin. A slave is not a permanent member of the family, but a son is part of the family forever. So if the Son sets you free, you are truly free. Yes, I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there’s no room in your hearts for my message. I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. But you are following the advice of your father.”

“Our father is Abraham!” they declared.

“No,” Jesus replied, “for if you were really the children of Abraham, you would follow his example. Instead, you are trying to kill me because I told you the truth, which I heard from God. Abraham never did such a thing. No, you are imitating your real father.”

They replied, “We aren’t illegitimate children! God himself is our true Father.”

Jesus told them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I have come to you from God. I am not here on my own, but he sent me. Why can’t you understand what I am saying? It’s because you can’t even hear me! For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies. So

when I tell the truth, you just naturally don’t believe me! Which of you can truthfully accuse me of sin? And since I am telling you the truth, why don’t you believe me? Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don’t listen because you don’t belong to God.”

The people retorted, “You Samaritan devil! Didn’t we say all along that you were possessed by a demon?”

“No,” Jesus said, “I have no demon in me. For I honor my Father—and you dishonor me. And though I have no wish to glorify myself, God is going to glorify me. He is the true judge. I tell you the truth, anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!”

The people said, “Now we know you are possessed by a demon. Even Abraham and the prophets died, but you say, ‘Anyone who obeys my teaching will never die!’ Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

Jesus answered, “If I want glory for myself, it doesn’t count. But it is my Father who will glorify me. You say, ‘He is our God,’ but you don’t even know him. I know him. If I said otherwise, I would be as great a liar as you! But I do know him and obey him. Your father Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad.”

The people said, “You aren’t even fifty years old. How can you say you have seen Abraham?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was even born, I AM!” At that point they picked up stones to throw at him. But Jesus was hidden from them and left the Temple.

MY PEOPLE HAVE NO SHEPHERD

[ZECHARIAH 10:1-11:3]

Ask the LORD for rain in the spring,
for he makes the storm clouds.

And he will send showers of rain
so every field becomes a lush pasture.

Household gods give worthless advice,
fortune-tellers predict only lies,
and interpreters of dreams pronounce
falsehoods that give no comfort.
So my people are wandering like lost sheep;
they are attacked because they
have no shepherd.

"My anger burns against your shepherds,
and I will punish these leaders.
For the LORD of Heaven's
Armies has arrived
to look after Judah, his flock.
He will make them strong and glorious,
like a proud warhorse in battle.
From Judah will come the cornerstone,
the tent peg,
the bow for battle,
and all the rulers.
They will be like mighty warriors in battle,
trampling their enemies in the
mud under their feet.
Since the LORD is with them as they fight,
they will overthrow even the
enemy's horsemen.

"I will strengthen Judah and save Israel;
I will restore them because
of my compassion.
It will be as though I had never
rejected them,
for I am the LORD their God, who
will hear their cries.
The people of Israel will become
like mighty warriors,
and their hearts will be made
happy as if by wine.
Their children, too, will see it and be glad;
their hearts will rejoice in the LORD.
When I whistle to them, they
will come running,
for I have redeemed them.

From the few who are left,
they will grow as numerous
as they were before.
Though I have scattered them like
seeds among the nations,
they will still remember me
in distant lands.
They and their children will survive
and return again to Israel.
I will bring them back from Egypt
and gather them from Assyria.
I will resettle them in Gilead
and Lebanon
until there is no more room
for them all.
They will pass safely through
the sea of distress,
for the waves of the sea
will be held back,
and the waters of the Nile will
dry up.
The pride of Assyria will be crushed,
and the rule of Egypt will end.
By my power I will make my
people strong,
and by my authority they will
go wherever they wish.
I, the LORD, have spoken!"
Open your doors, Lebanon,
so that fire may devour your
cedar forests.
Weep, you cypress trees, for all
the ruined cedars;
the most majestic ones have fallen.
Weep, you oaks of Bashan,
for the thick forests have
been cut down.
Listen to the wailing of the shepherds,
for their rich pastures are destroyed.
Hear the young lions roaring,
for their thickets in the Jordan
Valley are ruined.

MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU ABANDONED ME?

[PSALM 22:1-18]

For the choir director: A psalm of David, to be sung to the tune "Doe of the Dawn."

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?
Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.
Our ancestors trusted in you,
and you rescued them.
They cried out to you and were saved.
They trusted in you and were never disgraced.

But I am a worm and not a man.
I am scorned and despised by all!
Everyone who sees me mocks me.
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,
"Is this the one who relies on the LORD?
Then let the LORD save him!
If the LORD loves him so much,
let the LORD rescue him!"

Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb
and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.
I was thrust into your arms at my birth.
You have been my God from the moment I was born.

Do not stay so far from me,
for trouble is near,
and no one else can help me.
My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;
fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!
Like lions they open their jaws against me,
roaring and tearing into their prey.
My life is poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart is like wax,
melting within me.
My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.
You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.
My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;
an evil gang closes in on me.
They have pierced my hands and feet.
I can count all my bones.
My enemies stare at me and gloat.
They divide my garments among themselves
and throw dice for my clothing.

#007 • I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD

THE HIRED HAND DOES NOT CARE FOR THE SHEEP

[JOHN 9:1-10:21]

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. "Rabbi," his disciples asked him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?"

"It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. **"This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. We must quickly carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. The night is coming, and then no one can work. But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world."**

Then he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. He told him, **"Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam"** (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing!

His neighbors and others who knew him as a blind beggar asked each other, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said he was, and others said, "No, he just looks like him!"

But the beggar kept saying, "Yes, I am the same one!"

They asked, "Who healed you? What happened?"

He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!"

"Where is he now?" they asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

Then they took the man who had been blind to the Pharisees, because it was on the Sabbath that Jesus had made the mud and healed him. The

Pharisees asked the man all about it. So he told them, "He put the mud over my eyes, and when I washed it away, I could see!"

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus is not from God, for he is working on the Sabbath." Others said, "But how could an ordinary sinner do such miraculous signs?" So there was a deep division of opinion among them.

Then the Pharisees again questioned the man who had been blind and demanded, "What's your opinion about this man who healed you?"

The man replied, "I think he must be a prophet."

The Jewish leaders still refused to believe the man had been blind and could now see, so they called in his parents. They asked them, "Is this your son? Was he born blind? If so, how can he now see?"

His parents replied, "We know this is our son and that he was born blind, but we don't know how he can see or who healed him. Ask him. He is old enough to speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who had announced that anyone saying Jesus was the Messiah would be expelled from the synagogue. That's why they said, "He is old enough. Ask him."

So for the second time they called in the man who had been blind and told him, "God should get the glory for this, because we know this man Jesus is a sinner."

"I don't know whether he is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!"

"But what did he do?" they asked. "How did he heal you?"

"Look!" the man exclaimed. "I told you once. Didn't you listen? Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?"

Then they cursed him and said, "You are his disciple, but

we are disciples of Moses! We know God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where this man comes from."

"Why, that's very strange!" the man replied. "He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from? We know that God doesn't listen to sinners, but he is ready to hear those who worship him and do his will. Ever since the world began, no one has been able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it."

"You were born a total sinner!" they answered. "Are you trying to teach us?" And they threw him out of the synagogue.

When Jesus heard what had happened, he found the man and asked, "**Do you believe in the Son of Man?**"

The man answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him."

"**You have seen him,**" Jesus said, "**and he is speaking to you!**"

"Yes, Lord, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

Then Jesus told him, "**I entered this world to render judgment—to give sight to the blind and to show those who think they see that they are blind.**"

Some Pharisees who were standing nearby heard him and asked, "Are you saying we're blind?"

"If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "**But you remain guilty because you claim you can see.**"

"I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered

his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice."

Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't understand what he meant, so he explained it to them: "**I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.**"

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep."

"I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd."

"The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."

When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. Some said, "He's demon

possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like

that?" Others said, "This doesn't sound like a man possessed

by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

SORROW AWAITS THE SHEPHERD THAT LEAVES THE FLOCK

[ZECHARIAH 11:4-12:14]

This is what the LORD my God says: "Go and care for the flock that is intended for slaughter. The buyers slaughter their sheep without remorse. The sellers say, 'Praise the LORD! Now I'm rich!' Even the shepherds have no compassion for them. Likewise, I will no longer have pity on the people of the land," says the LORD. "I will let them fall into each other's hands and into the hands of their king. They will turn the land into a wilderness, and I will not rescue them."

So I cared for the flock intended for slaughter—the flock that was oppressed. Then I took two shepherd's staves and named one Favor and the other Union. I got rid of their three evil shepherds in a single month.

But I became impatient with these sheep, and they hated me, too. So I told them, "I won't be your shepherd any longer. If you die, you die. If you are killed, you are killed. And let those who remain devour each other!"

Then I took my staff called Favor and cut it in two, showing that I had revoked the covenant I had made with all the nations. That was the end of my covenant with them. The suffering flock was watching me, and they knew that the LORD was speaking through my actions.

And I said to them, "If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to." So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver.

And the LORD said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the LORD.

Then I took my other staff, Union, and cut it in two, showing that the bond of unity between Judah and Israel was broken.

Then the LORD said to me, "Go again and play the part of a worthless shepherd. This illustrates how I will give this nation a shepherd who will not care for those who are dying, nor look after the young, nor heal the injured, nor feed the healthy. Instead, this shepherd will eat the meat of the fattest sheep and tear off their hooves.

"What sorrow awaits this
worthless shepherd
who abandons the flock!
The sword will cut his arm
and pierce his right eye.
His arm will become useless,
and his right eye completely blind."

This message concerning the fate of Israel came from the LORD: "This message is from the LORD, who stretched out the heavens, laid the foundations of the earth, and formed the human spirit. I will make Jerusalem like an intoxicating drink that makes the nearby nations stagger when they send their armies to besiege Jerusalem and Judah. On that day I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock. All the nations will gather against it to try to move it, but they will only hurt themselves.

"On that day," says the LORD, "I will cause every horse to panic and every rider to lose his nerve. I will watch over the people of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of their enemies. And the clans of Judah will say to themselves, 'The people of Jerusalem have found strength in the LORD of Heaven's Armies, their God.'

"On that day I will make the clans of Judah like a flame that sets a woodpile ablaze or like a burning torch among sheaves of grain. They will burn up all the neighboring nations right and left, while the people living in Jerusalem remain secure.

"The LORD will give victory to the rest of Judah first, before Jerusalem, so that the people of Jerusalem and the royal line of David will not have greater honor than the rest of Judah. On that day the LORD will defend the people of Jerusalem; the weakest among them will be as mighty as King David! And the royal descendants will be like God, like the angel of the LORD who goes before them! For on that day I will begin to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

"Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died. The sorrow and mourning in Jerusalem on that day will be like the great mourning for Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddo.

"All Israel will mourn, each clan by itself, and with the husbands separate from their wives. The clan of David will mourn alone, as will the clan of Nathan, the clan of Levi, and the clan of Shimei. Each of the surviving clans from Judah will mourn separately, and with the husbands separate from their wives."

O LORD, do not stay far away!
 You are my strength; come quickly to my aid!
 Save me from the sword;
 spare my precious life from these dogs.
 Snatch me from the lion's jaws
 and from the horns of these wild oxen.

I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.
 I will praise you among your assembled people.
 Praise the LORD, all you who fear him!
 Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!
 Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!
 For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.
 He has not turned his back on them,
 but has listened to their cries for help.

I will praise you in the great assembly.
 I will fulfill my vows in the presence of those who worship you.
 The poor will eat and be satisfied.
 All who seek the LORD will praise him.
 Their hearts will rejoice with everlasting joy.
 The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him.
 All the families of the nations will bow down before him.
 For royal power belongs to the LORD.
 He rules all the nations.

Let the rich of the earth feast and worship.
 Bow before him, all who are mortal,
 all whose lives will end as dust.
 Our children will also serve him.
 Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord.
 His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born.
 They will hear about everything he has done.

#008 • ONE MAN SHOULD DIE FOR THE PEOPLE

MY SHEEP LISTEN TO MY VOICE, AND I KNOW THEM

[JOHN 10:22-11:57]

It was now winter, and Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of Hanukkah, the Festival of Dedication. He was in the Temple, walking through the section known as Solomon's Colonnade. The people surrounded him and asked, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus replied, "I have already told you, and you don't believe me. The proof is the work I do in my Father's name. But you don't believe me because you are not my sheep. My sheep

listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Once again the people picked up stones to kill him. Jesus said, "At my Father's direction I have done many good works. For which one are you going to stone me?"

They replied, "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God."

Jesus replied, "It is written in your own Scriptures that God said to certain leaders of the people, 'I say, you are gods!' And you know that the Scriptures cannot be altered. So if those people who received God's message were called 'gods,' why do you call it blasphemy when I say, 'I am the Son of God'? After all, the Father set me apart and sent me into the world. Don't

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