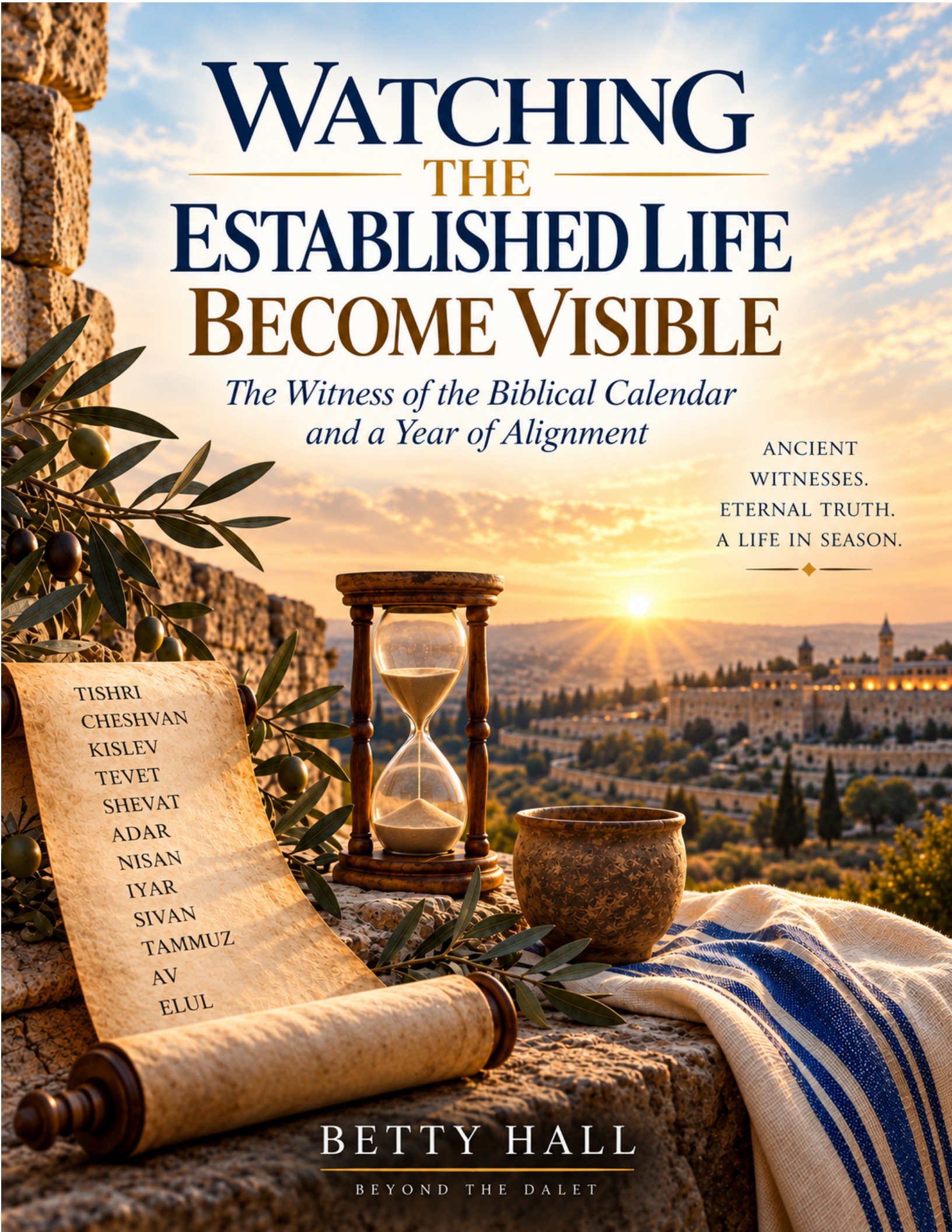
WATCHING THE ESTABLISHED LIFE BECOME VISIBLE

The Witness of the Biblical Calendar and a Year of Alignment

ANCIENT WITNESSES.
ETERNAL TRUTH.
A LIFE IN SEASON.



BETTY HALL

BEYOND THE DALET

WATCHING THE ESTABLISHED LIFE BECOME VISIBLE

The Witness of the Biblical Calendar and a Year of Alignment

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Beyond the Dalet

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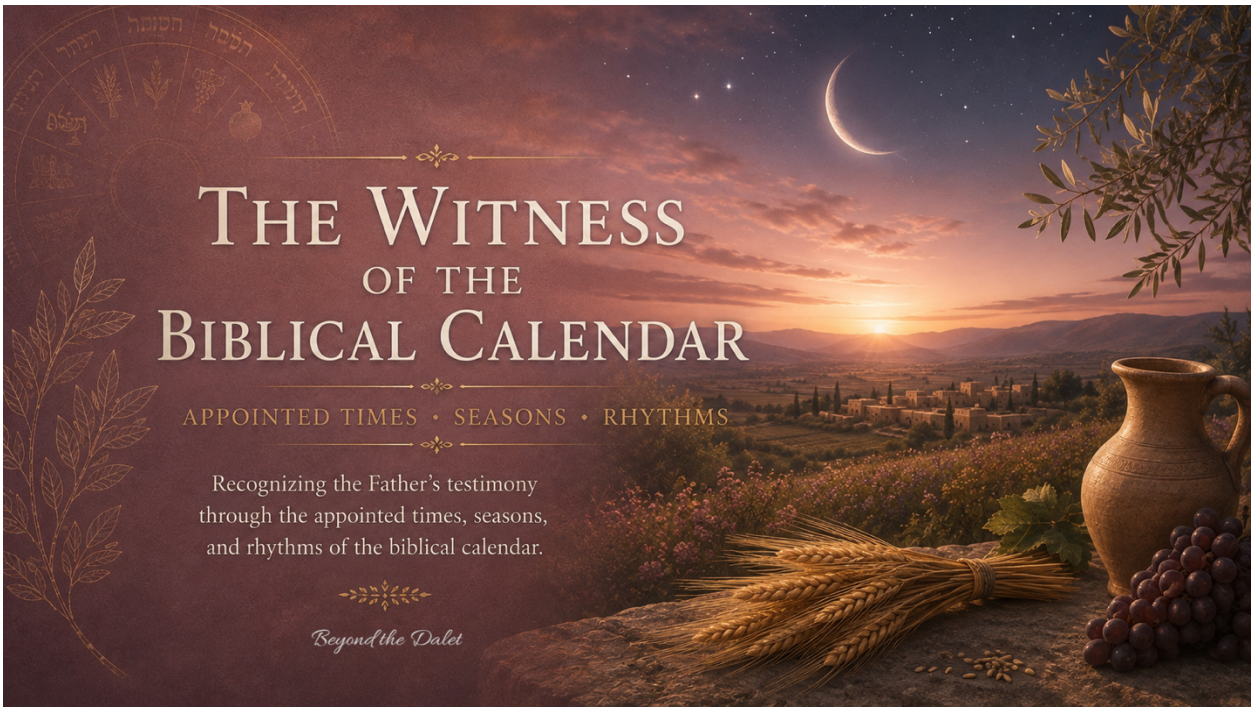

The Witness
of the
Biblical Calendar
APPOINTED TIMES • SEASONS • RHYTHMS
Recognizing the Father's testimony
through the appointed times, seasons,
and rhythms of the biblical calendar.
Beyond the Dalet

Preface–The Journey That Brought Me to 5787

From What Has Been Established

There are times when I look back over the road I have traveled with the Lord and marvel at how one recognition has led to another. Something that seemed so clear at one point becomes the beginning of something I had not yet considered. A passage of Scripture I have read countless times begins speaking with a freshness that causes me to linger. A question rises within me, and before long I find myself following a thread that leads through familiar Scriptures, memories, experiences, and sometimes places I haven't visited in years. And somewhere along the way, I begin to recognize something that was there all along, waiting for me to see it.

That is something of the journey that brought me to the writing of *Watching the Established Life Become Visible*. It began long before I turned my attention to the Hebrew year 5787. By the time I started considering the transition associated with 5786 and 5787, vav to zayin, I had already been walking through a season of profound recognition. It started with an intentional focus on the finished work of Messiah Jesus and what it means if we actually live from what He has accomplished.

I have spent much of my adult life studying the Scriptures, teaching, praying, listening, and learning to recognize the ministry of Holy Spirit. I have had seasons of extraordinary encounters with God, and I have known the quieter seasons. His presence was no less real, even though His work was taking place in ways I could not always recognize at the time.

Over those years, the Scriptures have become a constant companion. No matter how many times I return to their familiar pages, the Word of God continues to encounter me.

There is something wonderful in that. The words remain unchanged, yet as I return to them, they seem to open more fully before me, revealing depths I did not have eyes to see before. A passage I understood in one setting begins speaking into another. Something I saw one way years ago finds it's a new place alongside something I am seeing now in a new way. And occasionally, how those witnesses converge together changes how I understand what might be connected to them. The Hebraic year 5786 was one of those seasons for me.

A Question That Would Not Leave Me Alone

While I was compiling *Foundation Before Platform*, I had been giving considerable attention to the relationship between the life we have received in Christ and the way we sometimes show up within that life. I was considering what it means for our foundation in Christ to be established before anything is built upon it. This brought to mind how the life of Christ is seen through our expression of ministry, service, or responsibility entrusted to His people.

The more I wrote, the more I found myself returning to the same underlying reality. Whatever we do in the name of Christ must proceed from the life we have received in Him. The expression cannot become a substitute for the life itself. The work cannot become the means by which we secure what God has already given. Those recognitions were important to me, but they were also preparing me for something I had not yet fully anticipated.

Alongside that writing, I had been spending time in the book of Hebrews. Hebrews has long been one of those portions of Scripture that draws me back. Its testimony concerning Messiah, His priesthood, His sacrifice, His covenant, and His completed work is extraordinary. Yet during this journey, I began hearing its testimony from a different perspective. I found myself considering the implications of what I already believed. What would it look like if I truly believed what I say I believe about the finished work of Christ?

It is one thing to affirm that Jesus has accomplished our redemption. It is another to allow that accomplished reality to govern the expectations from which we live. I had believed in the finished work of Christ for years. I had taught it, prayed from it, and returned to it throughout my life. But I began noticing how easily the language we use, even when speaking sincerely about the things of God, can suggest that something remains unfinished, as if there is something we have to continue in God's grace and, favor.

I began hearing those assumptions in ways I had not noticed before. Sometimes they appeared in the language of responsibility. Sometimes in the way I spoke about obedience, spiritual growth, or the need to draw near to God. Sometimes they were present in the quiet sense that something depended upon my ability to carry it, sustain it, or bring it into place. And I began asking what those assumptions were actually saying about the work of Christ.

The question was reaching beyond my understanding of Scripture into the way I lived with God. It was affecting the way I thought about the things He had entrusted to me. It was changing the way I approached my writing, and increasingly, the words I chose when writing about the believer's relationship with Him. It had the biggest impact on how I conveyed the prophetic word.

I found myself constantly returning to the testimony of Hebrews. Messiah had offered Himself once for all. He had entered the heavenly sanctuary through His own blood. He had obtained eternal redemption. He had inaugurated a better covenant, established upon better promises. And having accomplished His work, He sat down.

Even though I had read those words many times, I was impacted by what they meant in a way I hadn't been before. He sat down. There is something so wonderfully final about that testimony. The priests of the former covenant stood continually, ministering and offering sacrifices that could never bring the worshiper into the fullness of what God intended. But

Hebrews presents Messiah Jesus as the One whose sacrifice accomplished what those earlier sacrifices could only anticipate.

His sitting down bears witness to the sufficiency of what He has accomplished. And if He has sat down, what does that mean for the way I stand? What does it mean for the way I approach God, for the responsibilities I carry, for the work entrusted to me, and for the assumptions that quietly govern my participation in His purposes?

The other thing that would not leave me was that the gospel is an announcement. It announces what God has accomplished through His Son. It declares the reality of a New Covenant established through Messiah's blood. It bears witness to redemption accomplished, access opened, and a relationship with the Father made possible through Christ Himself.

We receive that announcement by faith. We do not uphold the covenant through our performance. We do not maintain its effectiveness through our consistency. We do not secure our place in Christ by continually demonstrating that we deserve to remain there. The covenant stands because of the One who established it.

The deeper that recognition went the more it altered something within me. I was not discovering a different gospel. I was allowing the gospel I had believed for so long to speak more fully into the way I understood my life with God. And that dynamically changed the way I write.

When the Words Began to Change

I have always loved words. I love the way a particular word can illuminate something that has been waiting just beyond the reach of our understanding. I love following a Hebrew or Greek expression through the Scriptures and discovering how its use in one passage brings something into view in another. I love the way the biblical witnesses gather, sometimes across centuries, until their testimony converges upon Christ.

But during this season, I was deliberately more attentive to the assumptions carried within my own words. I noticed how easily I could write about becoming something that Scripture already declared to be true of those who are in Christ. I noticed the difference between describing a life that proceeds from union with Him and describing a life that is still trying to attain that union. I began listening more carefully to the distinction between what God had accomplished and what Holy Spirit was bringing into expression through His people.

The difference was not always obvious at first. Sometimes it was no more than a phrase that no longer seemed to say what I intended. I would read something I had written and recognize that, although the thought was familiar, the language still carried an assumption I was now questioning. And so, I would return to the Scriptures.

Paul wrote that we have been crucified with Christ. He spoke of our being raised with Him and seated with Him in the heavenly places. He described the believer as having been brought into Christ, clothed with Christ, and made alive together with Him. These are remarkable statements. They speak of something God has accomplished, something into which we have been brought through Messiah. They describe the reality from which the life of faith now proceeds.

I began considering what it would mean to take those statements seriously, not merely as theological affirmations, but as the established reality of my relationship with God. If I have been brought near through the blood of Christ, why would I continue speaking as though nearness remained something I needed to achieve? If I have been made alive together with Him, why would I approach spiritual life as though I were still trying to bring it into existence? If I have been seated with Him, what does that mean for the way I understand the work He has entrusted to me?

These questions were not drawing me away from participation. They were changing my understanding of where participation begins. And that distinction became increasingly important.

I had no desire to become passive. I have spent too many years walking with Holy Spirit to imagine that the finished work of Christ somehow brings an end to His living ministry among us. I have known His leading, His empowerment, His gifts, His correction, and His companionship. I have watched Him move through ordinary people in extraordinary ways, and I have experienced something of that ministry in my own life. The finished work of Messiah does not diminish any of this. It establishes the reality from which it proceeds.

The more I considered that, the more I began recognizing that the life of faith was not a continual effort to accomplish what Christ had already accomplished. It was participation in the life made available through Him.

That recognition affected the way I understood responsibility. It changed how I approached the work before me, how I responded to things I could not control, and how I held what had been entrusted to me. I was learning to hold those things differently. And then, as I continued writing, another work began taking shape.

The Life That Becomes Visible

Life Made Visible[1] grew out of many of the recognitions that had been developing through *Foundation Before Platform* and my journey through Hebrews. I was considering the life we

[1] My new book, Life Made Visible, has not been released at this writing.

receive in Christ, the foundation upon which everything rests, and the distinction between what Christ has already accomplished and what is now ours to express.

Increasingly, my attention turned toward our life in Christ. What does it look like when the life we have received finds expression through us? What does it mean for Holy Spirit to bring that life into view through people who have already been joined to Christ? How does the life of Messiah become recognizable in the ordinary movements of our days, in our relationships, in the way we speak, in the responsibilities we carry, and in what we release?

As I lived with those questions, I became increasingly convinced that whatever is expressed through us should flow from our shared life with Him. The life of Christ is not something we manufacture through our activity. We have received His life, and Holy Spirit continues His ministry within us, bringing that life into manifest expression. There is a difference between trying to produce the evidence of life and allowing the life already in residence to bear its own witness. Even though I know this, or rather have known it, the thought went so far as to redefine the expression of the fruit and gifts of the Spirit. When I thought about the source of expression being Jesus alone rather than the gift, something in me shifted.

It affected the way I thought about ministry. It affected the way I understood spiritual formation differently. It affected the way I approached the gifts and workings of Holy Spirit, and even the way I considered the ordinary responsibilities of daily life.

I was becoming more attentive to the difference between responding to what Holy Spirit was supplying and assuming that something depended upon my ability to make it happen. And somewhere in the midst of these recognitions, the Hebrew year 5786 was drawing to a close and that brought my annual look at that transition. That brough to mind the letter vav associated with 5786 and what it meant to shift to 5787 expressed by zayin would look like.

Holding What Remains Differently

This was all very deeply personal. By the time I was writing about the transition from vav to zayin in July, I had already experienced considerable change in the way I approached my own life and ministry. Some of those changes were difficult to put into words because the outward circumstances had not necessarily changed.

I was still writing. I was still studying the Scriptures. I was still attending to the responsibilities before me and considering the things Holy Spirit had entrusted to my care. But I was holding them differently.

There were things I would once have expressed a certain way without question. They were not necessarily wrong things. Some were good, worthwhile, and even important. But I began recognizing that my sense of responsibility for them was sometimes shaped by an

assumption that something still depended upon me to fulfil it. As if it actually belonged to me to secure the outcome rather than emerging from what Christ had already secured.

That recognition did not immediately tell me what to do with every responsibility. It changed the way I approached them. I could consider what had been entrusted to me without assuming ownership of everything connected with it. I could participate in what Holy Spirit was doing without believing that I had to originate or sustain the life behind it. I could attend to the work before me while remembering that the work itself was never meant to become the foundation upon which my relationship with God rested.

I was understanding the difference between stewardship and ownership in a new way, one that reached beyond words on a page.

The things entrusted to me matter. But they did not belong to me in the way I had sometimes lived as if they did. I was learning to carry them from within the relationship rather than allowing them to define the relationship. And that was changing everything about the way I lived.

It brought a kind of freedom in the ordinary movements of my days. It was not freedom from caring, or from the responsibilities that belong to a life of faith. It was freedom to recognize what was mine to attend to and what remained in the hands of the One who had entrusted it.

Sometimes that meant continuing with something I had already begun. Sometimes it meant waiting. Sometimes it meant allowing a question to remain unanswered until another witness came alongside to speak into it. And sometimes it meant recognizing that I had been carrying something as though its existence depended upon me, when all along I had been invited to participate in what God Himself was supplying.

I was learning to hold what remained differently. And somewhere in the midst of that recognition, the image of gold within the rock began speaking to me.

The Gold Was Already There

I have always been fascinated by the way something can remain hidden in plain sight until the moment we recognize what we are looking at. A stone may appear ordinary until the light catches something within it. What had seemed to be little more than rough rock begins revealing a glimmer that causes us to look again. And we see the gold that was there all along.

The gold did not come into existence because someone recognized it. It did not become gold when the light revealed it. Its presence was not dependent upon our ability to see it. The recognition changed what was visible to us.

That image began testifying in relationship to what I had been recognizing about the finished work of Messiah. What God has established in Christ does not become more complete because we have finally understood it. Our recognition does not add something to His accomplishment. But recognition can profoundly change the way we live.

When something that has always been true begins coming into view, we find ourselves responding to a reality we had not previously recognized in quite the same way. I was seeing something that secured in me in Christ differently. The foundation has not changed. Our capacity to stand upon it has.

That distinction became increasingly important to me. I was not looking for some kind of spiritual achievement. I was learning to recognize more fully what had already been given.

The Woman Who Began Writing Is Still Walking

There is something I want to acknowledge about this journey. The understanding from which I began writing this work has continued developing. When I look back at what I wrote in July concerning vav and zayin, I recognize the truth of what I was seeing. I also recognize how much has unfolded since then.

Some of the words I wrote during that season now carry a depth of personal meaning I could not have fully expressed at the time. The journey through Hebrews had already changed the way I approached the finished work of Christ. *Foundation Before Platform* had drawn my attention toward the life that must precede every expression. *Life Made Visible* had begun exploring what it means for that received life to become recognizable through us.

And as I continued following the witnesses of 5787, those recognitions kept finding their way into places I had not anticipated. My perspective was changing. Not because the truth was changing, but because I was continuing to recognize what had been there all along. And I find that rather wonderful.

I have walked with the Lord for many years, and still there are mornings when a familiar passage of Scripture seems to open before me with a freshness that causes me to stop and linger. There are moments when something I recognized decades ago finds its place alongside something that is bringing new insight. And there are times when I look back upon a season of my life and recognize the faithfulness of God in ways I could not have seen while I was living through it.

The fountain may be the same. But the woman returning to drink from it has traveled a long way. I think that is part of what makes this journey so precious to me.

We are not waiting for the truth of Christ to become more complete. We are learning to recognize more fully the One in whom that truth has already been revealed. And as Holy

Spirit continues His ministry within us, the life we have received finds expression in ways that may surprise us.

I have come to appreciate the difference between discovering something new and recognizing something that has always been true. Sometimes those experiences feel remarkably similar. But the distinction matters. The gold was already there. The foundation was already established. The covenant was already secured. And the life we have received in Christ has not been waiting for us to make it sufficient. What continues unfolding is our recognition of that life and the expression Holy Spirit brings forth through us.

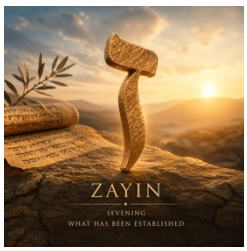
And the more I considered that, the more I wonder what might become visible as we continue living from the reality of Christ's finished work. What would happen as those old assumptions continue losing their influence over the way I respond? And what might Holy Spirit bring into expression through people who were learning to live from the fullness of what Messiah had accomplished? What would become recognizable in our relationships, our ministry, our ordinary lives, and our participation in the purposes of God?

Betty Hall
October 12, 2026

Introduction–Watching the Established Life Become Visible

From Vav to Zayin

As I began considering the approach of 5787, I found myself returning to something that had been developing through my journey in Hebrews, *Foundation Before Platform*, and *Life Made Visible*. Each of those experiences had brought me into a deeper recognition of what the Father has already accomplished in His Son. And each had left me considering what it means to live from that established reality.



The question that had accompanied me through so much of that journey was still very much alive: What would it look like if I truly believed what I believe about the finished work of Christ?

I had begun to recognize how much of my thinking, responding, and even my sense of responsibility had been shaped by assumptions that did not always agree with what I knew to be true in Him. Holy Spirit had been bringing those things into view, sometimes through the Scriptures, sometimes through ordinary circumstances, and sometimes through moments when I realized I was approaching everything differently than I once would have.

It was within that continuing experience that I began paying attention to the transition from vav to zayin. I had already spent time considering vav, the sixth letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and the significance of its connecting function within the Hebrew language. As a conjunction, vav frequently carries the simple meaning of *and*, joining one word, phrase, or thought to another. That little word *'and'* had given me much to consider as I reflected upon our union with Christ and the difference between living as those who have been joined to Him and living as though we were still attempting to establish that relationship.

Of course, a Hebrew letter does not establish our union with Christ. The Father has accomplished that through His Son. But the witness of vav had helped me recognize something of what was already true. I began considering the difference between being joined and trying to become joined, between receiving what has been established and continuing to live according to assumptions formed when distance was believed to exist.

As 5787 approached, my attention turned toward zayin, the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In Hebrew numeration, zayin carries the value of seven. And seven immediately brought other witnesses into the conversation.

I thought about the seventh day, when God rested from His completed work. I thought about the recurring witness of seven throughout the Scriptures, the appointed times, the sabbatical rhythms, and the relationship between completion and rest. I found myself considering how often Scripture calls our attention to what God has accomplished before inviting us to live within the reality of His provision.

There was something about that movement from six to seven that continued to hold my attention. Vav had helped me consider what was joined and established. Zayin was now inviting me to consider what proceeds from what has already been established.

I was no longer looking for another work that needed to be accomplished before the life of Christ could become visible. I was looking at the life that had already been given and considering how Holy Spirit continues bringing that life into expression.

And as I followed the witness of seven, another thread began to emerge.

Seven, Oath, and Covenant

The relationship between seven and covenant drew my attention to the Hebrew words *sheva*, seven, and *shava*, to swear an oath. Their relationship brought me back to Genesis 21, where Abraham and Abimelech entered into an agreement concerning the well at Beersheba. Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs as a witness to the agreement, and the place received a name associated with both the well of seven and the well of the oath.

I lingered there because the account brought several things together that I had already been considering: seven, oath, witness, and the establishment of something that would remain.

The seven ewe lambs did not create the well. Abraham had already dug it. They stood as a witness concerning what had been established and acknowledged between the two men. The agreement was given a recognizable testimony, something that could be remembered and referred to after the moment itself had passed.

That relationship between an established reality and the witness that makes it recognizable stayed with me.

As I continued considering covenant, my thoughts returned again to the finished work of Messiah Jesus. The New Covenant rests upon His blood, His faithfulness, and His accomplished work. Its security does not depend upon our ability to sustain what He has established. We receive by faith what the Father has accomplished through His Son, and Holy Spirit continues making the reality of that covenant known and lived among His people.

This was the ground upon which I wanted to stand as I approached 5787.

The witness of seven had drawn my attention toward completion, oath, and covenant. But I was not approaching the year as though the number seven could tell me what God was going to do. I was allowing these witnesses to bring familiar Scriptures into conversation with one another, listening for what their testimony might help me recognize concerning Christ.

And the more I considered these things, the more I found myself returning to a simple distinction: what God has established and what becomes recognizable because it has been established.

The Gold Already There

Another witness emerged as I considered the Hebrew word *zahav*, gold. I had been thinking about gold within the rock, about what is present long before anyone recognizes its presence, and about the processes through which what was hidden becomes visible.

That image stayed with me because it gave expression to something I had been recognizing in my own life.

The gold was already there.

Its presence did not begin when someone discovered it. The process of bringing it into view did not create what had been hidden within the rock. What changed was its visibility.

I found myself considering how often I had approached spiritual formation as though the life of Christ were something I needed to produce through sufficient effort, discipline, or understanding. Yet the Scriptures kept drawing my attention toward a different starting

place. The life had already been given. The foundation had already been laid. The covenant had already been established. Holy Spirit was at work within what the Father had accomplished, bringing into expression the life we had received in Christ.

The image of gold helped me consider that distinction without confusing the work of formation with the work of redemption. What the Father has accomplished in Messiah remains complete. What Holy Spirit continues forming within us is the expression of that life in the way we think, respond, love, endure, discern, and live.

I had begun to recognize this in ways that were becoming increasingly personal. Some things I once struggled to hold together no longer seemed to require the same effort. Responsibilities that had once felt like something I had to carry to completion were beginning to look more like things entrusted to my stewardship. I was learning that faithfulness did not require ownership of the outcome.

And sometimes I would look back and recognize that something had changed without my having noticed the moment it happened.

The foundation had not become stronger. My capacity to stand upon it had.

That recognition became an essential part of what I was carrying into 5787. I was beginning to see the difference between trying to establish something and learning to live from what had already been established. And I wondered what other witnesses might help bring that distinction into view as the year unfolded.

Why the Biblical Calendar?

The biblical calendar had long been part of my journey through the Scriptures. The appointed times, the agricultural rhythms, the histories associated with particular seasons, and the relationship between creation and sacred time had given me many opportunities to recognize the Father's testimony concerning His Son.

Genesis tells us that God appointed the lights in the heavens for signs, seasons, days, and years. Israel's appointed times carried remembrance, instruction, and anticipation. The harvests brought their own testimony. The wilderness journeys, the sanctuary, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and the feasts each contributed something to the larger witness unfolding throughout Scripture.

I had come to appreciate the way these witnesses could be heard together. A passage in the Torah might illuminate something in the Prophets. An appointed time might bring a detail in the Gospels into sharper focus. A pattern established in Israel's history might become recognizable again in the apostolic writings. And sometimes a Hebrew word or letter would invite me to linger long enough to notice a connection I had previously overlooked.

As I approached 5787, I began wondering what it might be like to follow the biblical calendar through an entire year while carrying another question with me: What does it

look like when the life the Father has established in Christ becomes increasingly visible in His people?

I was interested in what the witnesses might bring into view as they gathered throughout the year.

The months themselves would give us different places from which to listen. Some would bring us into the intensity of the appointed times. Others would carry us through stretches of ordinary life. We would encounter remembrance and anticipation, wilderness and harvest, hidden growth and visible fruit. We would hear from biblical figures whose experiences continue bearing testimony long after their own journeys ended.

The calendar gives us a way to walk through those witnesses over time.

And I wanted to make room for something else as well. I wanted to allow the Scriptures to speak without requiring every connection to become an immediate conclusion. Sometimes recognition comes quickly. Sometimes a witness remains with us for weeks or months before another passage brings something into view. Sometimes we return to a familiar account and discover that years of walking with God have changed what we are able to recognize within it. I am familiar with that experience. It was part of what had brought me to this book.

The Letters Along the Way

We could not walk through this year if the Hebrew letters did not also accompany us, although their presence requires a little explanation.

In considering 5787, I have drawn attention to zayin because of its numerical value of seven. That is the larger witness I am carrying into the year. Alongside it, I will also consider the traditional associations between individual Hebrew months and letters found in *Sefer Yetzirah*[1], The Book of Formation.

These are two different ways of approaching the letters. The numerical value of zayin provides the connection with the year 5787, while the traditional monthly associations offer additional witnesses to consider as we move through the calendar.

I do not regard those associations as a means of predicting events or determining what God is going to accomplish in a particular month. Neither do I ask a Hebrew letter to establish something that belongs to the testimony of Scripture itself.

The letters invite consideration. Their shapes, names, numerical values, and appearances within Hebrew words can sometimes draw our attention toward relationships worth exploring. Yet their witness has a proper place in standing alongside the Scriptures and is subject to the testimony Scripture gives concerning Messiah.

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[1] *Sefer Yetzirah* (GRA Version)*: The Book of Creation*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1997).

I have found that allowing the letters to contribute their testimony without requiring them to carry more than belongs to them makes room for some meaningful discoveries.

And so, as we move through the months, the letters will occasionally step forward and join the conversation. Sometimes their contribution will be simple. At other times, a word or association may open a longer consideration that leads us through several passages of Scripture. We will give them room to speak, but we will continue listening for the One toward whom their testimony points.

Giving the Witnesses Room to Speak

There is something about allowing the witnesses to gather that has become increasingly important to me.

When Jesus walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He began with Moses and the Prophets and explained the things concerning Himself throughout the Scriptures. Later, He opened the understanding of His disciples so they could comprehend what had been written concerning Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

I return to those accounts often.

The Scriptures had been bearing testimony concerning Him long before those disciples understood what they were hearing. The resurrection had not changed what Moses and the Prophets had written. But the One to whom they testified was now standing before them, opening their understanding and allowing them to recognize what had been present all along.

That is the kind of recognition I want to remain attentive to as we walk through this year.

The witnesses are not competing for our attention. They are contributing to a testimony that finds its fullness in Christ. Each brings something entrusted to it, and as their voices gather, we may begin to recognize relationships that were not apparent when we considered them separately.

I have sometimes imagined this as a gathering of witnesses, each waiting for an opportunity to bring its testimony forward. Moses has something to say. Isaiah has something to add. The appointed times bring their remembrance. The harvests speak through their rhythms. The letters occasionally interrupt with a detail that sends us back into the Scriptures. And before long, what began as a consideration of one passage has become a conversation involving witnesses from across the biblical record.

I enjoy that kind of conversation.

There is room for discovery, for surprise, and sometimes even for a little humor as familiar biblical figures and witnesses seem to step into the discussion. But beneath it all remains the purpose for which we have gathered them.

We are listening for the Father's testimony concerning His Son.

And as that testimony becomes recognizable, the witnesses themselves can quietly step aside. Their purpose is fulfilled in directing our attention toward Christ.

The Year Before Us

As I considered the months of 5787, I began to recognize a broad movement that would allow us to follow this question of alignment through the year.

The first quarter, beginning with Tishri, will bring us into the heart learning alignment. The second will turn our attention toward what had been hidden and was beginning to emerge. The third will draw us more deeply into what Christ has accomplished and what it means to live from His finished work. And the fourth will invite us to consider what had already become visible while awakening anticipation for what we had not yet seen.

I do not consider these movements as a sequence of spiritual achievements or as a timetable by which Holy Spirit is required to do a specific work. They are simply ways of listening to the different witnesses the calendar would bring before us.

Life does not necessarily follow the neat divisions of a written outline. Something encountered in one month might remain with us long after that month had passed. A question raised early in the year might not find its answer until much later. A familiar Scripture might return unexpectedly, carrying a significance we had not recognized the first time.

That possibility was part of what made the journey appealing to me. I wanted to walk through the year with enough room to notice what Holy Spirit might bring to my attention, without requiring every witness to deliver a particular message on a particular schedule.

And I wanted to invite others to walk with me.

You do not necessarily need to have read my earlier work to enter this journey. You do not need to be familiar with the Hebrew calendar or know the Hebrew alphabet. We will encounter those things along the way.

What I hope you will bring is a willingness to linger with the Scriptures, to follow a witness when it leads us into another passage, and to allow understanding to develop as the testimony gathers.

There is no need to hurry through what we encounter. Some passages may invite you to stop and consider something in your own life. Others may awaken a memory or bring a familiar Scripture to mind. And sometimes you may simply enjoy listening as the witnesses bring their testimony together.

The journey that brought me here has already changed me. I expect that the journey ahead will continue to do so. But I am not approaching 5787 in search of another foundation. I am standing upon the One already laid, watching for the life established in Christ to become increasingly recognizable.

The biblical calendar gives us a way to follow that witness through the months. The Scriptures give us the testimony. Holy Spirit continues opening our understanding. And Christ remains the One toward whom every witness leads.

The witnesses are gathering. The year is before us. And I find myself once again looking toward the Scriptures with a sense of anticipation, wondering what I might recognize as their testimony unfolds.

Come, linger with me awhile.

Watching the Established Life Become Visible

The Witness of the Biblical Calendar and a Year of Alignment

> *And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years," — Genesis 1:14 NIV*

The Father's witnesses didn't start speaking when we heard their voice. Long before we learned to recognize them, their testimony was already there. David looked into the heavens and recognized a declaration that had been sounding from the beginning:

> *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… [Psalm 19:1–4 NLT]*

We neither chose them as witnesses nor invented their testimony. The Father does. He hung the lights in the heavens. He established the appointed times. He revealed the pattern of the sanctuary. He gave the manna. He instructed Moses. He spoke through the prophets. He gave His people His Word. He wove His testimony through creation, history, covenant, priesthood, sacrifice, harvest, wilderness, feast, and dwelling. And all along, the Father has been making His Son known.

A witness does not originate the testimony it carries. It receives something and bears it. Creation bears what the Father entrusted to creation. The prophets bear what He entrusted to them. The sanctuary, the priesthood, the sacrifices, the feasts, and the appointed times each hold something before us that did not begin with them and does not end with them. Their voices are distinct because what has been entrusted to each is distinct, but they are not competing voices. They belong to the Father's testimony concerning His Son.

Agreement does not require every witness to say the same thing in the same way. The heavens can declare what only the heavens were appointed to declare. Passover can carry what was entrusted to Passover. The wilderness can bear its witness, and the harvest can bear another. Moses and the prophets can speak with different voices without giving us different testimonies. Their agreement is found in the Son to whom they bear witness.

Jesus said of the Scriptures, *"These are the very Scriptures that testify about Me"* (John 5:39 NIV). That gives us our ground for listening. The calendar gives us a landscape to walk through, but Scripture determines what we see there. We can allow each witness to bear what the Father entrusted to it while listening for the testimony they carry concerning His Son.

The Witness Written into Time

Creation was already bearing witness before there was a sanctuary in the wilderness, a priesthood standing before the altar, or a prophet speaking to Israel. The heavens were

declaring. Day was answering day. Night was answering night. Yet Genesis tells us something more about those lights the Father placed in the heavens. They were given not only for day and night, but *"for signs and for appointed times, and for days and years"* (Genesis 1:14 BLB[1]).

The witness written across creation opens into a witness carried through time.

The lights in the heavens mark days and years, but they also mark appointed times. Within those recurring rhythms, the Father established places of remembrance where His testimony would return again and again. Passover returns. Firstfruits returns. Shavuot returns. The seventh month returns with its witnesses of awakening, atonement, ingathering, and dwelling. Sabbaths return. New moons return. Seedtime and harvest return. The years move forward, but within them the Father has established rhythms that continually bring His people again into the presence of what He has spoken and done.

And now we encounter those witnesses from the other side of the cross. The Lamb has come. The work of redemption has been finished and established in Christ. But we are not only on the other side of the cross. We are also on the other side of the Spirit's outpouring. Holy Spirit has been given, and with Him, power from on high. Pentecost has given us another vantage point from which to behold the testimony—not only as those who recognize what the Father has made known concerning His Son, but as those empowered to bear His witness.

Jesus told His disciples, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses" (Acts 1:8 NASB). The Father's witnesses have been making His Son known from the beginning. Now Holy Spirit empowers a people through whom the life of the Son can itself become visible.

Passover can now be heard from the other side of the cross. Firstfruits can be seen in the light of resurrection. Shavuot can be encountered from the other side of Pentecost. The wilderness, the manna, the water, the priesthood, the sacrifice, and the dwelling can all be heard again from within what Christ has accomplished and established. The testimony was already there. What has changed is the vantage point from which we are able to behold it.

This is why I return to the biblical calendar. The Father has placed witnesses there. Its recurring rhythms give us another opportunity to look again at what has been fulfilled and established in His Son and to recognize dimensions of that reality we may not have seen before.

A Landscape for Beholding

The Witness of the Biblical Calendar invites us to walk within those rhythms and behold. We move through appointed times and ordinary days, remembrance and waiting, seedtime

[1] See //literalbible.com - Berean Literal Bible – in the public domain

and harvest, wilderness and ingathering. The landscape changes as the year unfolds, and different witnesses come into view.

Tishri does not carry the same landscape as Cheshvan. Nisan does not sound like Av. One month may bring us into the intensity of appointed times while another carries us into the quiet in which life continues almost unnoticed. One may bring the witness of harvest while another turns our attention toward roots hidden beneath the ground. We do not need to make them say the same thing in order to listen for where their testimony meets.

And there will be other witnesses standing within those landscapes. The biblical histories associated with the months will speak. The appointed times will speak. The rhythms of creation will speak. The Hebrew letters associated with the months are an added witness alongside them. Sometimes several witnesses will rise in striking agreement. At other times, one may carry something the others do not. We allow each to bear what has been entrusted to it without forcing all of them into a single voice.

That is part of what makes the calendar such a beautiful landscape for watching. We return, but we do not merely repeat. We have walked farther since the last time we stood here. Things once heard may now be recognizable from another place. A Scripture we have known for years may suddenly stand beside another witness and allow us to see something that was there all along. The testimony has not changed. Sometimes our capacity to recognize what it carries has.

We will walk through this year without asking the calendar to tell us what is going to happen. We will allow it to teach us to pay attention. We will listen as the witnesses gather. We will watch for what becomes recognizable when creation, appointed times, biblical history, the months, and the letters are allowed to stand alongside one another without asking any one of them to carry the whole testimony.

The witnesses were speaking before we arrived. They will continue speaking after we have moved through another year. Our invitation is to walk among them with eyes to see and ears to hear, following their testimony toward the Son whom the Father has been making known from the beginning.

And that brings us to 5787.

5787 A Year of Alignment

By now we have already moved through the Feasts of the Lord which have opened 5787—Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, and Simchat Torah. Tishri is almost over, and we will soon approach Rosh Chodesh Cheshvan. Yet most of 5787 is still before us. For the past few months, we have followed the transition from vav to zayin through *Witness of the Letters* and considered what the characteristics associated with zayin may help us recognize in the year ahead. That witness is still unfolding. Yet now I want to bring it alongside the witness of the months themselves.

I have increasingly come to think of 5787 as a year of alignment. But I want to be careful with that word, because alignment can easily sound as though we are attempting to bring ourselves into a position God is waiting for us to achieve. That is not what I mean. The ground beneath this year is not something still waiting to be established. The Father has already established everything concerning life and redemption in His Son. Christ is not becoming complete. His work is not becoming sufficient. The foundation is not still being laid. What the Father accomplished in Christ remains finished, whole, and secure.

Alignment, then, is not our attempt to complete what God began. It is the work of Holy Spirit within us bringing our lived experience increasingly into agreement with what the Father has already established in Christ. There can be a great distance between what is true and what we have learned to live from. We can be redeemed and still think like we are trying to earn what has already been given. We can be joined to Christ and still live as though everything depends upon our ability to hold ourselves together. We can possess His life and still respond from fear, self-protection, striving, or the need to produce something God has already supplied.

Holy Spirit does not answer that distance by establishing another reality. He brings us into the reality that is already ours in Christ. He teaches the heart to rest where the Father has placed it. He brings our seeing into agreement with what God sees, our thinking into agreement with what He has spoken, and our living into agreement with the life we have received. What changes is not the sufficiency of Christ but our capacity to live from His sufficiency.

This is why alignment belongs so naturally beside the witness of zayin. If vav has helped us recognize what God joins and establishes, zayin turns our attention toward the life that comes forth from what has been established. What has been joined begins to bear the evidence of that joining. What has been formed begins to become recognizable. What has been received begins to govern the way we stand, respond, endure, love, discern, and live. The established reality becomes visible.

Perhaps that is the simplest way I know to say what I am watching for in 5787. I am not watching for God to establish another foundation. I am watching for the life established upon that foundation to become increasingly recognizable. I am watching for what has been hidden in Christ to find expression in His people—not because we have finally

managed to produce His life, but because Holy Spirit faithfully reveals the life He has already given.

And that changes the way we approach the year ahead. We are not looking at the months as a sequence of assignments we must successfully complete. We are not attempting to move ourselves through twelve stages of spiritual development. We are watching the Father's witnesses as they call our attention, again and again, to different dimensions of the same established reality. Tishri may teach us to receive and rest. Another month may expose what we have been depending upon. Another may reveal roots that have been growing where no one could see them. Still another may show us that something we once struggled to maintain has quietly become part of the way we live.

That is the kind of visibility I have in mind. Not spectacle. Not spiritual performance. Not evidence that we have arrived. I am speaking of the quiet but unmistakable correspondence between the life of Christ and the life increasingly being expressed through His people. His rest becoming our rest. His sufficiency displacing our striving. His faithfulness becoming the ground beneath our endurance. His love becoming recognizable in the way we encounter one another. His life, already given, becoming visible.

If 5787 is a year of alignment, then perhaps this is what the witnesses are inviting us to watch:

What does it look like when what the Father has already established in His Son increasingly becomes the reality from which His people actually live?

The Witnesses Give Us Something to Watch

The question before us is what alignment with what the Father has already established looks like when it becomes visible in the life of His people. The biblical calendar gives us a landscape in which to carry that question through the year. We will move through months filled with appointed times and months marked mostly by ordinary days. We will encounter remembrance and waiting, hidden growth and visible fruit, wilderness and harvest, receiving and carrying forward. And within each landscape, the Father's witnesses will bring their testimony alongside the life we are actually living.

Standing here at the beginning of 5787, I can already see a broad movement taking shape. Tishri through Kislev draws us toward the heart learning alignment. Tevet through Adar turns our attention toward what has been hidden and is beginning to emerge. Nisan through Sivan brings us into what Christ has accomplished and what it means to live from His finished work. Tammuz through Elul turns our attention toward what Holy Spirit has already made visible while awakening anticipation for what we have not yet seen.

I do not expect life to move through those landscapes as neatly as the words appear on the page. We may walk into one month still carrying something the Father began showing us in another. Something we recognize in Tishri may not become lived reality until much later in the year. What seems hidden in one season may suddenly become recognizable in another,

and sometimes we may have to walk a considerable distance before we can look back and see what was taking shape beneath the surface. The movement gives us somewhere to watch without requiring the year to conform to our expectations.

The Witness of the Monthly Letters

As we walk, another set of witnesses will meet us within the months. Jewish tradition[1] has long associated each month with a Hebrew letter, and I want to allow those letters to bring their witness alongside what we are already hearing. Lamed will meet us in Tishri. Nun will accompany us into the quieter landscape of Cheshvan. Samekh will stand within Kislev. And as the year continues, ayin, tsadi, qof, heh, vav, zayin, chet, tet, and yod will each take their place within the landscape of their month.

There's a small calendar twist waiting for us in 5787: it's a leap year, so Adar shows up twice. 5787 will have both Adar I and Adar II. Adar II doesn't have a different Hebrew letter associated with it. The letter connected with both Adars is qof (ק). So, while we'll pass through two Adars in 5787, I have combined them here into one experience.

The letters will not tell us what a month must mean. We will listen to them alongside Scripture, the appointed times, the biblical histories, and the other witnesses already standing within that month. Sometimes their agreement may be immediately recognizable. At other times, one witness may bring something into view that we had not noticed before. We will allow each to bear what has been entrusted to it and watch for what becomes visible when their testimonies stand together.

That means we do not need to decide beforehand everything lamed will say in Tishri or everything nun will say in Cheshvan. We can enter the month and listen. Tishri may allow us to hear lamed differently when the awakening blast of Yom Teruah, the disciple whose ear the Lord awakens, and Jesus' words concerning ears to hear all begin standing together. Cheshvan may allow us to recognize something in nun that becomes clearer only after the intensity of the appointed times has passed and we find ourselves carrying what we received into ordinary days. The witness becomes richer as we encounter it within the landscape where it has been placed.

And there will be moments when the convergence itself deserves our attention. We will eventually arrive in Sivan with zayin—the letter whose witness we have already been following throughout 5787. But zayin will meet us there within a month already carrying the witnesses of Sinai and Pentecost. By then we will have walked much farther than we have today. We will be able to listen from within everything the preceding months have allowed us to see, and Pentecost will bring us again to the words of Jesus: "you shall be My witnesses."

This is how I want to walk through 5787. Not standing outside the year trying to determine in advance what every month will mean but entering each landscape with what we have

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[1] *Sefer Yetzirah* 5 (GRA Version), in *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1997).

already received and listening as the witnesses gather. We will carry some things forward. We will recognize others only when we arrive. And sometimes what we hear will send us back to look again at something we thought we already understood.

The year is before us. The witnesses are already speaking. We begin where the calendar has brought us: in Tishri, with an awakening sound and the witness of lamed. We do not yet need to know everything the year will show us. We begin by listening.

Watching Through the Year

We carry what we receive with us as we move through the year. Life gathers as we live it. One month does not erase the one before it and crossing into another season does not leave behind everything we have seen, heard, questioned, discovered, or lived along the way. Experiences become part of us. Revelation settles into places we may not immediately recognize. Things we once understood in one way may open more fully after life has carried us farther.

The witnesses begin to feel familiar as they walk beside us. We meet them again in Scripture, in the appointed times, in the stories we have carried for years, and in the recurring rhythms the Father has woven into time. Sometimes an old witness speaks into a new experience. Sometimes something we have lived gives us another place from which to hear a witness we thought we already knew. They come alongside one another, and they come alongside us, bearing the same testimony they have carried all along.

This is part of the beauty of watching while we are living. We do not always know what will matter when we first encounter it. A word may remain with us. A Scripture may keep returning. Something we could not quite name may gather meaning as other experiences and other witnesses come alongside it. Months later, we may recognize that what seemed like an isolated moment belonged to something much larger that had been unfolding through our lives.

And we are not the same people at every place along the way. We have lived more, received more, endured more, seen more. We carry questions that have found answers and questions that are still traveling with us. We carry encounters with God that have become part of the way we know Him. We carry things Holy Spirit has made unmistakably clear and other things we are still learning to recognize. The year gathers all of it without erasing what came before.

As we walk with the witnesses, their testimony becomes part of the landscape through which we are actually living. Sometimes they speak clearly in the moment. Other times it feels like they are waiting for another experience, another Scripture, or another place along the way to bring what they carry more fully into view. As life collects under our feet, so does our capacity to behold. We begin to recognize connections we could not have seen from where we stood before.

And when we find ourselves standing at the beginning of another year, we may discover that the witnesses who have walked beside us were never strangers at all. They were speaking long before we learned to recognize their voices. They have faithfully borne the testimony entrusted to them. And after a year of walking together, they have become familiar to us—more like old friends whose voices we have learned to recognize.

The Year as One Unfolding Witness

As we move into the months of 5787, the witnesses assemble together. The calendar, the appointed times, the biblical histories, the Hebrew letters, and the rhythms of creation will each bring what has been entrusted to them. Sometimes a witness will bring another one back to mind, or something we are living through will give us fresh ears to hear it differently than we have before.

We don't leave what we've received behind; we carry it with us, gathering more as we go.

Though we have already entered Tishri, 5787 is still before us. And we are ready to see what the Father's witnesses will bring alongside the life we are actually living.

5787 Quarter One

The Heart Learning Alignment

The first three months bring us into Tishri, Cheshvan, and Kislev, and each gives us a different vantage point from which to watch the beginning of 5787 unfold. We will encounter the intensity of the appointed times and then move beyond them into quieter territory. We will listen as the months themselves, their appointed times and biblical histories, the rhythms of creation, and the letters lamed, nun, and samekh bring their witnesses alongside the larger witness of zayin. We do not yet need to know everything they will say. We begin by listening.

The witness of zayin remains before us as we enter this first quarter: what God has established is meant to become recognizable in the life that proceeds from it. But visibility does not begin by reaching for something outward. It begins much nearer to the heart, where what has already been given in Christ becomes the reality from which we learn to live. Tishri, Cheshvan, and Kislev allow us to watch that life through three different landscapes—learning, continuing, and being sustained—and to listen for what each witness brings into view.

The letters lamed, nun, and samekh will have something important to say within those landscapes, but they will not speak alone. Tishri opens with the sound of an awakening blast. Cheshvan carries us beyond the intensity of the appointed times into the quiet continuation of ordinary days. Kislev brings us into the witness of dedication and light. As these months unfold, the question is not simply what each one means, but what becomes recognizable when the Father's witnesses are allowed to stand together and bear their testimony.

Tishri — The Awakened Ear

Tishri begins with a sound. Yom Teruah opens the seventh month with the blast of the shofar, a sound that has long carried the language of awakening. There is much that will unfold within Tishri—the solemnity of Yom Kippur, the joy and ingathering of Sukkot, the remembrance of dwelling beneath the provision of God—but before we move through any of it, the month begins by calling us to hear.

That seems an especially fitting place to begin this journey through the biblical year. The Father's witnesses have been speaking all along. Their testimony did not begin when we recognized their voice, and their witness does not depend upon our having understood everything they carried. But what if the testimony is sounding and we do not yet have ears to hear it? Perhaps the awakening blast brings us first to that question: The witnesses have been speaking. But do we have ears to hear them?

Deuteronomy 29 gives us a remarkable place from which to consider that question. Moses stands before a generation carrying the testimony of what God had done before them as well as the witness of what they themselves had experienced in the wilderness. The mighty

acts in Egypt had become testimony carried from one generation to another, while the wilderness generation had its own history of provision, preservation, and the faithfulness of God. Multiple witnesses were already standing together when Moses said, "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear" (Deuteronomy 29:4 NASB).

There is something important in those words that I do not want us to pass over too quickly. *Not yet heard is not necessarily the same as failed to hear.* The testimony can precede our capacity to comprehend everything it carries. God's acts were already part of Israel's story. The testimony had already been preserved and handed forward. Yet Moses could speak of eyes to see and ears to hear as something God gives. The testimony was present before its meaning was fully perceived.

Isaiah brings another witness alongside this one: "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of disciples, so that I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple" (Isaiah 50:4 NASB). The awakening is an awakening of the ear, but the verse does not leave what is heard within the disciple. The awakened ear and the tongue of the disciple belong together. The ear receives, and from what has been heard comes a word capable of sustaining another. Something moves from hearing toward expression.

That becomes especially beautiful when we remember that Tishri is associated with the Hebrew letter lamed. Lamed carries the language of learning and teaching, and from the same Hebrew family comes *talmid*—a disciple, a learner. The awakening blast sounds and standing beside it is the witness of the learner whose ear God awakens to hear. But Isaiah allows us to see something more: the disciple who hears eventually has something to carry. What is received in the awakened ear does not remain without expression.

Jesus brings us still farther. Matthew 13 begins with His call, "He who has ears, let him hear." (ESV) Later He tells His disciples, "Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear." (ESV) He speaks of mysteries of the kingdom that have been granted to them to know, and by the end of the chapter He gives us the remarkable picture of "every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven." (NASB) That scribe, Jesus says, is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old.

The old has not ceased to be treasure because something new has come. The scribe who becomes a disciple of the kingdom is able to bring both forth from the treasury. From within the reality of the kingdom, what has been carried can be heard again. Moses can be heard. The prophets can be heard. The appointed times can be heard. The patterns woven throughout Scripture can be heard. What was already present can become recognizable in ways it had not been recognized before.

This is where the witness of zayin comes alongside what we are hearing in Tishri. Throughout 5787 we are watching for the established life to become visible, but visibility is not limited to what can be seen with the natural eye. Sometimes what becomes visible is what we have been given eyes to see and ears to hear. The testimony was already there.

The treasure was already in the treasury. What the Father established in Christ has not become more established because we have begun to recognize it. Yet an awakened ear allows us to hear from within that established reality and to recognize dimensions of the Father's testimony that may have been present long before we knew how to hear them.

We stand this side of the cross with an extraordinary vantage point from which to listen. The Son has come. The kingdom has drawn near. The mystery once hidden has been revealed, and Holy Spirit has been given. After His resurrection, Jesus could take His disciples back into Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms and open their minds to understand what had been written there all along. The Scriptures had not changed. What had been opened was their understanding.

Perhaps that is where Tishri asks us to stand as we enter 5787. Yom Teruah sounds the awakening blast. Deuteronomy reminds us that ears to hear are given by God. Isaiah shows us the Lord awakening the ear of the disciple—and giving that disciple a tongue capable of carrying what has been heard. Lamed brings its witness of learning and discipleship. Jesus calls those ears blessed when they hear and shows us the kingdom-disciple bringing forth treasure new and old. And zayin invites us to watch as what has already been established becomes recognizable, received, and eventually expressed through the life that proceeds from it.

Lamed (ל): The Awakened Ear of the Disciple

Lamed is traditionally associated with learning, teaching, and instruction. Its very word-family gives us *lamad*, to learn or teach, and *talmid*, the disciple or learner. Isaiah has already brought that witness into the landscape of Tishri through the awakened ear of the disciple. But the disciple is not simply someone who has acquired the ability to hear. A disciple has turned the ear toward someone.

Jesus brings that relationship into focus when He says, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me" (Matthew 11:29 NASB). There is something deeply personal in those words. He does not merely give His disciples truths to learn; He gives them Himself as the One from whom they learn. The awakened ear therefore does more than make us attentive to testimony. It draws us into the posture of the *talmid*, whose life is being shaped through continued attention to the Teacher.

This gives another dimension to the scribe Jesus describes in Matthew 13. He is not simply a scribe who has discovered new information within an old treasury. He is a scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom. From that place, he brings forth things new and old. His relationship to the treasure is now governed by the kingdom into which he has been discipled, and what he carries can be brought forth from within that reality.

That matters as we begin listening to the Father's witnesses. The purpose of awakened hearing is not simply that we become better at recognizing the witnesses. Their testimony is leading us somewhere. Moses speaks. The prophets speak. The appointed times speak. Creation speaks. The letters bring what has been entrusted to them. But the disciple follows their testimony toward the One who says, "Learn from Me."

Lamed therefore stands at the opening of this journey with a fitting witness. The ear has been awakened, but awakened hearing is only the beginning. The disciple listens, learns, receives, and eventually carries what has been heard. As the Father's witnesses begin to gather throughout the year, we enter their testimony as *talmidim*[1]—with ears turned toward the Teacher to whom their testimony has always been leading.

The witnesses have been speaking. As the sound of the shofar opens the year before us, perhaps our first invitation is simply to listen.

Cheshvan — When Faith Becomes Faithfulness

Tishri awakens the ear; Cheshvan trains the ear that has been awakened. Tishri gives us those moments when something becomes unmistakable, and faith rises readily in response. Cheshvan gives what was received in Tishri somewhere to become life. We return to ordinary days carrying what we heard, and through practice the encounter begins becoming something more enduring than the atmosphere in which it occurred.

Most of our lives are lived here. We may experience moments when the presence of God seems almost tangible, when His voice becomes extraordinarily clear, or when something received from Him awakens faith with an intensity that marks us. We need those moments. Tishri and Cheshvan need one another because we were not meant to live without encounter, but neither were we meant to require continual spiritual intensity in order to remain responsive to God. Eventually we come down from the mountain and return to the ordinary rhythms of life.

This is where faith has the opportunity to become faithfulness. Faithfulness is not a lesser, less exciting form of faith. It is faith that has begun to acquire continuity. It is what faith looks like on the tenth ordinary morning, and the hundredth, when there is no trumpet, no conference atmosphere, no extraordinary encounter reinforcing what we know. The awakened ear keeps listening, the trained senses keep recognizing, and the heart continues living from what it received.

Jesus spoke in Matthew 13:52 of the scribe who had been "trained for the kingdom of heaven" (ESV). That brings us directly back to the disciple whose ear was awakened in Tishri. The disciple who has been given ears to hear is also being trained to live from what has been heard. Hebrews gives us another witness: "solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14 NASB). What was awakened becomes trained, and training happens through practice.

There is something profoundly ordinary about practice. It requires repetition. We hear, recognize, respond, and then do it again. The awakened ear learns to recognize the voice of the Shepherd not only when the trumpet sounds, but amid the sounds of ordinary life. What was received in an extraordinary moment begins to become familiar to our senses,

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[1] Talmidim is the Hebrew word for disciples

until hearing and responding are no longer dependent upon recreating the atmosphere in which we first heard.

Yet even here, our faithfulness is not something we manufacture through repetition. His faithfulness is the source of ours. The One who spoke when the atmosphere was charged with His presence remains faithful when the atmosphere grows quiet. Christ has not become less sufficient because the day feels ordinary. What the Father established has not become less established because we cannot feel its reality with the same intensity. We learn faithfulness as we live from His.

That is where nun can enter with its witness of continuing life. The seed does not need the moment of planting to be recreated every morning in order to remain alive. What was received continues beyond the moment in which it was received, and ordinary life gives us the opportunity to recognize that continuance. The extraordinary encounter may have passed, but the life received within it has not ceased.

In Cheshvan, that continuing life itself becomes recognizable as faithfulness. What was received has begun to remain. What was heard has begun to be lived. The extraordinary encounter has entered ordinary life, and something that might have once depended upon the atmosphere for reinforcement is becoming settled within the heart.

This is where the witness of zayin comes alongside Cheshvan. What God has established becomes recognizable in the life that proceeds from it, and in this quieter landscape that life begins to look like faithfulness. Not faithfulness generated by human determination, but faithfulness proceeding from His own. The atmosphere changes. The appointed times pass. Ordinary days return. But the Life continues.

Nun (נ): Continuing Life

Nun is associated with life, seed, offspring, continuation, and emergence. Its ancient pictographic form has been associated with seed, something that carries life within itself before that life has taken visible form. Coming alongside Cheshvan, nun brings our attention to what continues after something has been received. The awakened ear has heard, but hearing is not the end of the story.

Jesus gives us a remarkable picture of this in Mark 4. Again and again, the issue is hearing. The seed is sown, the word is heard, and yet what follows that hearing is not the same in every life. Some receive the word immediately with joy, but because there is no lasting root, what was received does not continue. Others hear, but competing voices and desires eventually crowd the word. Then Jesus speaks of those who “hear the word and accept it and bear fruit” (Mark 4:20 NASB). Something heard has remained long enough for the life within it to become visible.

That brings us directly into the landscape of Cheshvan. There are moments when receiving comes with joy, when faith rises quickly because what we have heard seems unmistakable. We need those moments. But the ordinary days that follow give what was received

somewhere to take root. The question is no longer simply whether we heard, but what happens to what we heard once the atmosphere changes.

Jesus continues, “If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear,” and then adds, “Take care what you listen to” (Mark 4:23–24 NASB). The awakened ear of Tishri has not disappeared from the journey. It is becoming an ear that continues to listen, an ear that through practice can become trained. Hearing is becoming something lived.

This is where nun’s witness of continuing life becomes especially important. Faith has the opportunity to become faithfulness as what was received begins to remain. Faithfulness is not the believer’s attempt to keep a spiritual moment alive long after the moment has passed. Nor is it sustained by repeatedly recreating the atmosphere in which something was first received. His faithfulness is the source of ours. The Life that continues in us proceeds from the One who remains faithful.

Mark 4 then gives us another witness. Jesus speaks of a lamp that is not brought in to remain beneath a basket or under a bed, and of what has been hidden coming to light. The life that has taken root is moving toward manifestation. What is hidden is not necessarily absent, and what is not yet visible is not necessarily inactive. Something can be genuinely present before its presence becomes apparent.

A few verses later, Jesus returns to the seed. The farmer sleeps and rises, night after night and day after day, while the seed sprouts and grows (Mark 4:26–29). The language is wonderfully ordinary. Nothing about those repeated nights and mornings appears spectacular, yet life is continuing beneath the surface. The seed does not need the moment of planting to be recreated in order to remain alive.

This is where nun stands beautifully alongside the witness of zayin. Throughout 5787 we are watching for what the Father has established in Christ to become recognizable in the life that proceeds from it. In Cheshvan, that continuing life begins to become recognizable as faithfulness. What was heard is taking root. What was received is beginning to remain. What was hidden is moving toward expression. The ordinary days have become the place where the Life already given has opportunity to become increasingly visible.

The witnesses of Cheshvan invite us to remain until what we have received becomes the life we live.

Kislev — When the Witnesses Refuse to Be Silent

Kislev arrives as the natural world is moving toward its darkest and most dormant season. The days shorten, the landscape grows quiet, and we might expect the witnesses to grow quiet with it. Even Hanukkah can become so familiar that its testimony is reduced to the gentle glow of the Hanukkiah[1] and an invitation to carry a little light into the darkness. We

[1] Hannukkiah refers to the nine-candlestick candelabra used during the Festival of Lights/Hanukkah

might expect Kislev to sing a quiet little song about letting our light shine. But when the Father's witnesses begin taking their places, this month is anything but quiet.

Hanukkah brings us to dedication, but dedication carries a history. Before the sanctuary was rededicated, it had been desecrated, and behind that history stands Daniel, himself living in exile because Jerusalem and the first Temple had already fallen. From within the consequences of one destruction, Daniel speaks prophetically of another desecration still to come. The Maccabean[1] crisis gives that prophetic language historical form as the sanctuary is profaned, worship is assaulted, and faithful people endure suffering rather than surrender what has been entrusted to them. Some of them die with resurrection already in their mouths, confident that even death cannot have the final word.

The New Testament does not leave those witnesses behind. Hebrews 11 appears to remember those who endured torture "so that they might obtain a better resurrection." (Heb. 11:35 NASB) And centuries after Antiochus, Jesus takes Daniel's language upon His own lips again: "when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet." (Matt. 24:15-16 NASB) What had already entered history had not exhausted the prophetic witness. Another destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple still lay ahead.

But the Temple had already been speaking in Kislev long before the Maccabean rededication. In the ninth month, Kislev, the word of the LORD comes to Zechariah concerning the fasts through which Israel had remembered the destruction of the first Temple. (see Zechariah 7:1) A people standing within restoration are asked to look again at what they have been mourning. Then Zechariah 8 carries the testimony forward: fasts associated with devastation will become occasions of joy, and peoples from many nations will come seeking the LORD. Destruction has spoken, but it will not give the final testimony.

Then Jesus Himself enters the Temple at the Feast of Dedication. John makes a point of telling us, "It was winter." (John 10:23 NASB) Standing within a feast born from desecration and rededication, Jesus points to the works He does in His Father's name and says, "these testify of Me."(John 5:39 NASB) He speaks of sheep who hear His voice, receive eternal life from Him, and cannot be snatched from His hand. The Temple is speaking, history is speaking, the feast is speaking, and standing among all those witnesses is the Son to whom the Father's testimony has been pointing.

Jesus then takes the Temple witness somewhere those standing around Him could not yet have understood: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19-21 NASB) John tells us He was speaking of the temple of His body. Destruction would happen. Death would happen. The body would actually be placed in the grave. Resurrection does not require us to pretend destruction never happened.

And then Resurrection kicks down the door.

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[1] See 1 Maccabees 4:36–59

Resurrection does not wait outside for the circumstances to improve. It does not care what the first Adam caused—perishable, dishonorable, weak, earthy, dead. Resurrection enters after death has already done what death does and declares that death still does not get the final word. "It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." (1 Cor. 15:42-43 NASB) The first Adam became a living person; the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit. Resurrection will not keep quiet.

And resurrection did not finish speaking when Jesus walked out of the tomb. The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead now dwells in us. The immeasurable power at work toward those who believe is the power God exercised when He raised Christ from the dead. We have been raised with Him, and we walk in newness of life—not merely because resurrection has influenced the way we walk, but because resurrection power is present in us through the indwelling Spirit. And resurrection is not finished speaking. We still await the day when the perishable is raised imperishable, the mortal puts on immortality, and those who have borne the image of the earthy bear the image of the heavenly.

Sometimes that Life becomes impossible to overlook. In Acts 3, the risen Christ makes Himself known through His witnesses, and a man who had never walked is suddenly walking, leaping, and praising God. Peter refuses to allow anyone to attribute what they are seeing to his own power or godliness. The witness points beyond itself to Jesus. Resurrection Life has become recognizable in the earth.

And the Temple comes through the door alive. "You are the temple of God.[1]" "We are the temple of the living God.[2]" Peter calls us living stones being built into a spiritual house, and Paul sees us being built together into "a dwelling of God in the Spirit.[3]" The Temple is not merely a historical carrier of testimony. In Christ, it is a present, living witness because the dwelling of God is presently being expressed in a people. The witness has not stopped speaking.

Neither has dedication. Hanukkah remembers a sanctuary recovered from desecration and presented again for the purpose for which it had been set apart. But dedication can no longer remain something that happened to a sanctuary in the second century before Christ. Paul says, "present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God." (Romans 12:1 NASB) The people who have become the dwelling of God present their embodied lives to Him. Dedication has become living testimony.

Perhaps only now are we ready to let the lights of Hanukkah speak. We began with lamps burning in the darkness, but somewhere along the way another fire appeared—tongues as of fire[4] resting upon people filled with Holy Spirit. The Hanukkiah and the tongues of Acts 2 are distinct witnesses, and we need not make Scripture say what it does not say in order to hear them standing alongside one another. The risen and exalted Jesus pours out Holy

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[1] see 1Cor. 3:16-17 NASB
[2] see 2 Cor. 6:16 NASB
[3] See Ephesians 2:22 NASB
[4] See Acts 2:3

Spirit; resurrection power inhabits a people; and the living dwelling of God begins to speak. Peter explains what those gathered in Jerusalem can both "see and hear": the Jesus whom God raised from the dead has poured out the promised Spirit.

Perhaps we have assumed that when a witness speaks, words must necessarily come from its mouth. But the Father has witnesses whose testimony has never depended upon audible speech. Creation speaks by bearing what the Father entrusted to creation. The appointed times speak by carrying their testimony through generations. The Temple speaks through the pattern and history entrusted to it. And now a people inhabited by the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead can speak by bearing visibly the resurrection Life entrusted to them. What has been entrusted has found witnesses capable of bearing it.

Ecclesiastes tells us there is "a time to be silent and a time to speak.[1]" Kislev may look quiet. Creation may be moving toward dormancy, but the Father's testimony is anything but silent. Daniel speaks. Zechariah speaks. History speaks. The Temple speaks. The martyrs speak. Resurrection refuses to stop speaking. The indwelling Spirit bears witness through a people sharing the Life of the Risen One. And over this crowded courtroom Hebrews sounds its warning: "See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking."

Perhaps that is what we dare not take *lightly* in Kislev. The witnesses are not speaking simply because they have something interesting to contribute. They have received something and bear it. And when the Father's witnesses begin to testify, they sound something like the Father whose voice Job heard: "Listen closely to the thunder of His voice." (Job 37:2 NASB) He lets His voice loose beneath the whole heaven; His voice roars; "God thunders wondrously with His voice, doing great things which we do not comprehend."(Job 37:5 NASB)

Creation may look quiet in Kislev. Kislev is anything but quiet.

Samekh (ס): Sustained Continuance

Samekh brings us to the One who upholds. The word carries the sense of sustaining, supporting, causing something to continue—and of supplying whatever is necessary for that continuance. It is easy to picture support as the hand that reaches out when something begins to fall, but samekh takes us deeper than rescue. It turns our attention toward the sustaining power that has been there all along.

Creation knows this witness. Christ "is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17 NASB). Hebrews tells us that He "upholds all things by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3 NASB). Paul stands in Athens and says that God gives to all people "life and breath and all things," and that "in Him we live and move and exist" (Acts 17:25, 28 NASB). The world around us continues because the Creator has not stopped giving what His creation requires. He feeds, waters, gives breath, orders seasons, and sustains life. What continues does so within the active presence and provision of God.

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[1] See Ecc. 3:7b NASB

Perhaps that is something we need to hear when we speak of an established life. Established does not mean self-sustaining. God does not establish His life in us and then step away to see whether we can keep it going. The life we have received remains a received life. The One who is its Source remains its Sustainer.

Samekh therefore turns our attention away from the endurance of the thing being upheld and toward the faithfulness and power of the One doing the upholding. We can look at something that has survived and admire how well it held on. Samekh asks us to look beneath its continuance. Who held it? Who supplied what was needed when its own strength was insufficient? Who remained faithful when everything visible seemed to suggest that the story could not continue? Whatever is necessary for continuance is supplied by the Sustainer.

And Kislev has already brought witnesses into the room who know something about that. They will not allow us to mistake sustaining for being kept from everything that can wound, shake, change, or destroy. The Temple fell. Israel went into exile. The sanctuary was desecrated. Faithful people suffered. Jesus died. Samekh does not testify that nothing will ever fall, change, suffer, disappear from view, or pass through death. It testifies that none of those conditions can exhaust the sustaining faithfulness of God.

We see that most fully in Jesus. The Father's sustaining faithfulness was not defeated by the death of His Son. Death was not avoided; it was passed through. Jesus entered the grave, and for those standing outside the tomb, there could hardly have been a condition that looked more contrary to continuance. Yet resurrection revealed that death had never possessed the authority to determine how the story would end. The sustaining faithfulness of God proved greater than the condition that appeared to contradict continuance.

Creation whispers something of this as Kislev moves us toward winter. The landscape changes. Leaves fall. Visible growth recedes. What was once flourishing can become bare enough to make us wonder where the life went. Yet life does not cease to be life because we can no longer see its evidence in the form we have grown accustomed to seeing. What appears dormant may still be held within the faithfulness of the One who gives seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter their continuing rhythm.

That gives us another way to understand what it means for an established life to become visible. An established life is not necessarily a life whose outward appearance remains uninterrupted. Established does not mean untouched. It does not mean nothing can shake around us, and it certainly does not mean we have become capable of sustaining ourselves. There may be seasons when what God is doing becomes difficult or even impossible to see, while beneath everything we can see, His presence, provision, power, and faithfulness continue supplying what His Life in us requires.

Perhaps sometimes the established life becomes visible simply because, after everything that appeared capable of ending it, the Life is still there. Not because we held ourselves together. Not because we managed to preserve what God gave us. Not because our grip proved strong enough.

Samekh bears another testimony.

The One who established us has been holding us all along.

5787 Quarter Two

Revealing What Was Already There

There is a time to speak, and there is a time to be silent. The first quarter gave us much to hear. By the time Kislev drew to a close, the courtroom was full and the witnesses were anything but quiet. They had spoken of what is received, what is lived, and of the sustaining faithfulness of God that remains greater than every condition that appears to contradict continuance.

Now the room grows quieter. The witnesses who have spoken take their seats, the courtroom clears, and another hearing is about to begin. We carry everything we have heard with us, but we do not yet know what the next witnesses will add to the testimony.

Perhaps that is fitting, because not everything God has established announces itself loudly. Some things are present long before we recognize their significance. They enter our lives quietly, take their place without explanation, and remain there while understanding catches up. Only later do we look again and realize that what has become visible did not begin when we finally saw it.

This is where the second quarter of 5787 finds us: watching for what was already there. We are not searching for something new to make the established life complete. We are learning that there may be more present than we have yet recognized, more already given than we have yet seen, and more of the life of Christ finding expression than we presently know how to name.

And sometimes what we can see on the surface is not giving us the whole picture. Something may be right before our eyes while its significance remains hidden from us. What we see may be real, but it may not yet be all there is to see. This quarter will give us more than one opportunity to discover the difference.

The courtroom is ready again. This time, we may need to look—and listen—a little more closely.

Tevet – Before We Know What It Means

The thunderous reverberations of Kislev have given way to an almost deafening silence. There is something almost painfully ordinary about Tevet. With less than a hush, a young girl steps into the room. We meet her here in the tenth month with only fragments of a story. Her home is in the ancient world of Susa. Her life was shaped by the exile that began

a generation before she was born. We are not told how old she is, how her parents died, or much of anything about the life she has lived before this moment. All we really know is that Mordecai, her uncle, took her in as his own daughter.

> *And it is in the tenth month, the month of Tevet, that Hadassah is brought to King Ahasuerus in the royal palace (see Esther 2:16).*

In many ways we might think we know her. Most of us know her by the end of her story and expect to see her in the month of Adar. We know the name that will be remembered, and it is difficult not to bring everything we know into the room with her. But none of that has happened yet. There is no calling she is nurturing, no promise she is waiting for, no prophetic word she expects to see fulfilled. She is beautiful, but so are the other young women who are a part of her story. Nothing about what we see in Tevet tells us what we have in front of us. Because long before Esther was Esther, Tevet has given us nothing more than the orphan Hadassah.

Even Scripture leaves much of Hadassah unrevealed. We have fragments of a life, and there is a humility required in allowing those fragments to remain fragments. She does not explain herself to us. God does not step into the narrative to explain her either. There is no voice from heaven telling us to pay attention, no prophetic word interpreting what we are seeing. In fact, God will never be mentioned by name amidst her story.

Hadassah simply walks into circumstances that, viewed from the outside, could give us plenty of material for judgment. She is a Jewish girl being drawn into the house of a Gentile king. She gives us no account of her intentions. We do not know what she thinks about what is happening, what it costs her to walk into it, or what faithfulness looks like from inside the life she is currently living. If all we have is what can be seen on the surface, we might believe we know much more about Hadassah than we actually do.

Somewhere in that silence, Tevet's witness begins to confront that uneasy place within us—the place where questions gather before answers have had time to form. We know what it is to stand inside a decision with very little to go on. Maybe there was no clear sign, no full explanation, no certainty about what obedience would look like from here. Maybe we chose a path because it seemed to be the only door open, or because something in us could not turn away from it, even though we could not fully explain why.

And once we are there, the questions begin to rise. Did I choose rightly? Did I miss something? Was this wisdom, or was it only fear dressed up as action? What if I stepped into something I was never prepared to carry? What if the outcome looks nothing like I hoped? We may not know what is yet in front of us. We may not know what God is doing beneath the surface. We may only know that we are here, standing in the middle of a story that has not yet told us what it means. All we really know is that we have fragments.

Or maybe we are not the ones standing inside the unanswered story at all. Maybe we are the ones looking at someone else's life from the outside, seeing only the visible pieces and assuming they tell us enough. We see the circumstance, the decision, the direction things appear to be moving, and before we realize it, we begin supplying the missing details

ourselves. We decide what must have led them there. We imagine what they must have meant. We draw conclusions from fragments and call it discernment. But Tevet asks for a deeper humility than that. It reminds us that what is visible may be true without being complete, and that there may be far more hidden within another person's story than our eyes have been given to see.

A humble and fragmented witness stands before us. Tevet has a witness, but it does not yet tell us where the story is going. It does not resolve the tension or explain the meaning of what we are seeing. It simply lets Hadassah stand before us in the uncertainty of this moment—with everything visible and everything still hidden, with the pieces Scripture gives us and the pieces it withholds. We are allowed to see her, but we are not yet allowed to understand her. And perhaps that is part of Tevet's witness: learning to stand before an unfinished story without demanding that it explain itself too soon.

We are given enough to notice, but not enough to define.

Ayin (ע) When Seeing Is Not Yet Knowing

Ayin enters, and immediately we are asked to look. Not to look harder, not to search for something hidden, but simply to reckon with the eye itself. What do we do with what we see? How quickly do we trust the first impression? How often do we allow what is visible to become the whole story in our minds before wisdom has had time to speak? Ayin does not begin by giving us more to see; it begins by questioning the way we see. It asks whether the eye has become a servant of revelation or a place where our own assumptions quietly take the lead.

Scripture knows how easily the eye can convince us that seeing is knowing. Something is before us, we have seen it with our own eyes, and almost without realizing it, observation becomes interpretation. We decide we know what we are looking at.

Samuel knew that experience. Jesse's sons passed before him, and when Eliab appeared, Samuel thought, *"Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him"* (1 Samuel 16:6 NASB). Eliab's appearance was not an illusion. Samuel saw what was before his eyes and reached beyond what his eyes could actually tell him. The LORD interrupted his conclusion: "*God does not see as man sees, since man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7 NASB). The problem was not Samuel's eyesight. The problem was the confidence he placed in what his eyesight could tell him.

"Every person's way is right in his own eyes, but the LORD examines the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2 NASB). There are things that look right from where we are standing. There are conclusions that seem obvious because of what is presently visible. And yet our eyes have limits. What seems right to us may still be incomplete. What appears obvious may still need to be examined by the Lord, who sees beneath the surface and weighs what our eyes cannot reach. Ayin slows us down here, teaching us not to confuse the confidence of sight with the fullness of truth.

Then Hagar enters the testimony. She is in the wilderness with her son, the water is gone, and she cannot bear to watch him die. God hears the boy, speaks to Hagar, and then *"God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water"* (Genesis 21:19 NIV). The well did not appear when Hagar saw it. The opened eye did not create provision. Something she desperately needed was already there while everything she could presently see told her another story.

Elisha's servant brings the same testimony with even greater force. He wakes to see an army surrounding the city. What he sees is true. The horses are there. The chariots are there. The danger is there. Elisha does not tell him that he has seen incorrectly. He prays, *"LORD, please, open his eyes so that he may see."* And suddenly the servant sees the mountain full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha (2 Kings 6:17 ESV).

The physical sight was only the first look. It was true, but it was not complete.

There are realities that do not become real when we finally see them. The well was already there. The fiery army was already there. David was already the one God had chosen while Samuel was still looking at Eliab. Revelation did not create those realities; it uncovered them. What was eventually revealed had already been present, waiting for the moment when God would open the eye to recognize what had been true all along.

But ayin will not allow us to turn this into another kind of certainty. It does not make us masters of hidden things or judges over what has not yet been revealed. Sometimes our eyes are opened, and sometimes we simply do not know. Sometimes faith sees beyond the first look, and sometimes faith waits with humility because the first look is all we have been given. The testimony of the eye, rightly received, does not make us more confident in our assumptions. It makes us more careful with them.

"For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7 ESV) begins to sound different from here. Faith is not a denial of what the eye can see. It does not pretend the enemy army is imaginary, the wilderness is not dry, or the visible circumstances are not real. Faith does not require us to dismiss the first look. But it does teach us not to enthrone it. Faith refuses to give present sight the final word or allow what is visible to become the full measure of what is true. It leaves room for the God who sees beneath the surface, who knows what has not yet been revealed, and who may already have provision, purpose, or rescue standing where our eyes have not yet been opened to recognize it.

And suddenly Hadassah, who has been standing quietly in Tevet, comes back to mind. We have seen her, but ayin asks whether we are willing to admit that we may not yet know what we have seen.

Shevat — The Rains

Shevat arrives in the middle of the rains. It does not stand at the first softening of the soil, when the early rains begin preparing the ground for seed, and it does not yet stand at the latter rains, when the heavier showers help bring the crop toward maturity. Shevat waits in the middle, in the steady winter rains, where the work is neither beginning nor complete,

but continuing. This is not the dramatic beginning, and it is not yet the visible harvest. What is happening may not look like manifestation at all, but without this saturation, what has been planted cannot mature. This is the necessary middle, the quiet saturation of the ground, the season between promise and fruit, between seed received and harvest revealed.

That makes Shevat a tender witness within 5787. If we are watching for the established life to become visible, Shevat reminds us that visibility depends upon the source of our supply. The life of Christ may be truly present before it becomes outwardly recognizable. Roots may be deepening before fruit appears. Something may be receiving the water it needs long before anyone can point to evidence above the surface. Shevat invites us to honor the unseen work of God's faithfulness—the quiet rains that sustain what He has planted until the appointed time for appearing.

Isaiah heard the rains testify. "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there without watering the earth and making it produce and sprout…" (Isaiah 55:10 NASB). The rains come from heaven carrying what the earth cannot supply for itself. The ground receives them. It opens its mouth and drinks them in.

Then the LORD lent His voice to their testimony: "So will My word be which goes out of My mouth; it will not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the purpose for which I sent it." (Is. 55:11 NASB) Just as the rains do not return without accomplishing what they were sent to do, neither does His word. Both come from Him. Both are sent by Him. And neither depends upon the ground becoming its own source.

There is freedom in just being dust. We do not have to produce the rain. We do not have to hurry it along or determine what it should look like when its work is finished. We receive. Everything we have in Christ has come to us this way. Life received. Grace received. Salvation received. Righteousness received. Holy Spirit received. Gifts received. What has been planted within us has never depended upon our becoming the source of its supply.

But the middle can get messy. Rain has a way of doing that. The clean lines we could see at the beginning blur in wet ground, and what once was easy to identify has become harder to distinguish. The excitement that accompanied the beginning has quieted. Questions may surface that we did not know to ask when the seed was first received. And because we cannot yet see the harvest, we wonder what is happening while the rain is still falling. Yet, Shevat asks us to stay in the rain.

And while we are still standing in the rain, learning to receive what we cannot produce, another witness comes forward—Moses, who knows what it means to stand between

promise and possession. On the first day of the eleventh month, in the fortieth year, he begins to speak. *Eleh ha-d'varim.*[1] These are the words. [see Deut. 1:1]

Forty years lie behind him. The land across the Jordan lies before him. Moses stands in the middle in a way that only Moses can. Behind him is the long wilderness history of manna, thirst, complaint, mercy, discipline, and daily provision. Before him is the land God promised, green with a future Moses can see but will not enter. He is not at the beginning anymore, but neither does he personally stand inside the fulfillment. He stands in the painful middle between the word spoken and the promise possessed.

And still he speaks. *Eleh ha-d'varim.* These are the words. Moses gives Israel the word again from the side of the Jordan where obedience still matters, memory still matters, and the promise is still true even though his own feet will not cross into it. The wilderness has not made the land any less the land of promise. Forty years have not made the word spoken over it less sure. Moses does not need to enter the fulfillment himself in order for God to be faithful. He stands where the promise is visible but not yet possessed, and even there, the rains of Shevat keep testifying: the word that comes from God will not return empty.

Jeremiah brings another witness into Shevat's rain-soaked middle, and it is not loud. It does not arrive as a harvest scene or a tree heavy with visible fruit. It comes as something small enough to overlook: an almond branch *(shaqed[2]).* The first tree to awaken while the rest of the landscape still looks dormant. A quiet witness that something can begin stirring before the season appears ready to announce it.

And the LORD says, "You have seen well, for I am *(shoqed[3])*—watching over My word to perform it." The almond branch does not explain the whole future to Jeremiah. The almond branch turns his attention away from the smallness of the sign and back toward the vigilance of the One who spoke. The branch is not the harvest, but it is a witness: God is watching over His word to perform it."

Proverbs 13:12 brings the voice of one floundering in the messy middle: *"Hope deferred makes the heart sick."* (NASB) Rain can be a mercy, but long waiting can still ache. The ground may be drinking what heaven is sending, and yet the heart may wonder how much longer it can remain open without seeing fruit. Sometimes we have carried words, prayers, promises, and desires through more seasons than we expected. Sometimes the very thing that is sustaining the seed also exposes the tenderness of the soil. Deferred hope is not unbelief. It is the honest ache of waiting in the place between what has been spoken and what has not yet appeared.

Joel's devastated ground brings another sincere witness into Shevat. He remembers "the years that the swarming locust has eaten,[4]" and those words make room for ground that

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[1] LHI- transliteration of Deut 1:1 ffom: Merwe, Christo van der. *The Lexham Hebrew-English Interlinear Bible*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2004.
[2] Hebrew word for almond branch
[3] Hebrew word for watch
[4] See Joel 2:25

has not merely waited but suffered loss while it waited. Rain does not erase that history. It falls upon soil that remembers what was stripped away. It waters places where fruit should have been, where seasons passed with less to show than the heart had hoped, where the promise of increase was met instead by barrenness. And yet the rain still comes. The God who sends the early and latter rains is not repelled by ground bearing the marks of what it has endured. Joel's witness reminds us that restoration does not begin with pretending nothing was lost. It begins with the mercy of God still sending rain to the place that remembers devastation.

Moses can tell the truth about forty years in the wilderness. Proverbs can tell the truth about the sick heart. Joel can tell the truth about the years that were eaten. Jeremiah can place the almond branch before us. But testimony is not the same as verdict. What can be judged from the middle, before the harvest has appeared and before the clouds have cleared? For that, we need to step behind the courtroom and into the Judge's chambers.

Isaiah has already seen the One seated there. The Spirit of the LORD rests upon Him—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, counsel and strength, knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And Isaiah tells us something about His judgment that matters when we are standing in the middle: *"He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor make decisions by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge"* (Isaiah 11:3–4 NASB). The Judge does not render His verdict from outward appearances.

The witnesses may speak from the middle, but the verdict belongs to the One who sees what every witness cannot.

The Judge Himself is righteous. And outside His chambers, the rains are still falling.

We do not know from the middle what everything will look like when the clouds finally clear. Shevat does not ask us to know. It does not require us to name the harvest before it appears or explain the field while it is still being watered. It gives us rain to receive, ground to become, and a Judge whose righteousness is not limited by what can presently be seen.

So we become the ground and drink it in. The middle may be muddy. Our hands may not stay clean. The questions may remain longer than we expected, and hope may need to be awakened again and again. Yet none of this alters the Source of the rain. It still comes from heaven.

And while it falls, Isaiah's testimony remains over us: "So will My word be.[1]" Shevat closes without forcing the middle to explain itself. The clouds have not yet cleared. The harvest is not yet in our hands. But the rain is still falling, and the God who sent it remains faithful. Over the middle, Isaiah's testimony still stands: 'So will My word be.'

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[1] See Is. 55:11

Tsadi (צ): Righteousness Revealed

As we stood in the rain listening to the Father's witnesses give their testimony, it may not have occurred to us that Shevat had brought us directly into the Judge's chambers. But now a slow realization begins to take hold. The chamber is not merely a place where verdicts are rendered. It is the place where righteousness is seated.

We heard Isaiah speak before, but somehow this is different. The atmosphere itself seems to change as his witness rises again: *"I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple."* (Is. 6:1 NASB) And slowly we understand. We are not merely standing before a Judge. We are standing before the throne.

The seraphim are there, calling to one another, *"Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of armies; the whole earth is full of His glory."* (Is. 6:3 NASB) The ground beneath our feet begins to tremble beneath the sound of their voices. A cloud fills the room, and somewhere within the holy haze, John comes alongside Isaiah as another witness. He too has seen the throne, and around it worship that never ceases: *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come."* (Rev. 4:8 NASB)

There are places where no one needs to tell us to bow. Our eyes lower. Our knees give way. Whatever questions we carried into these chambers have become strangely small in the presence of the One seated before us. We thought we needed to know how to judge what was happening in the middle. Now we are before the One whose holiness makes every judgment pure.

Holy.

Holy.

Holy.

We can only worship.

And yet holiness is not the only thing filling the room. The atmosphere is also full of love.

His holiness makes us bow. His love makes us linger.

The presence that brought us to the ground becomes the presence we do not want to leave. There is a sweetness here that belongs to Him alone, an atmosphere that awakens something deeper than thought. His love fills the room until it seems to fill our lungs. We breathe, and for a moment it feels as though we are breathing the air of home.

It makes us homesick.

Not because we want to escape the life we have been given, but because His presence reminds us what we were made for. We know something of the psalmist's invitation now: "Taste and see that the LORD is good." (Ps. 34:8 NASB) His goodness is no longer something we are discussing from outside the room. We are before Him. We are surrounded by Him.

And after all the rains of Shevat have taught us about receiving, perhaps this is receiving in its purest form.

We receive His love.

We receive His goodness.

We receive Him.

And we linger.

Only after we have lingered there does righteousness begin to come into view differently. It is no longer merely a standard by which things are measured or a verdict rendered from the throne. Righteousness is not first an idea to define. It is part of the beauty of the One before whom we have bowed.

Eventually, we dare to lift our eyes.

Slowly.

The Judge before whom we have bowed is not merely righteous in His judgments. Righteousness belongs to Him. Isaiah told us that too: "Righteousness will be the belt around His hips, and faithfulness the belt around His waist." (Is. 11:5 NASB)

And as righteousness begins to fill our vision, one of Scripture's oldest and quietest witnesses steps forward.

At first, we know almost nothing about him. Scripture gives us no long introduction, no genealogy, no history by which to place him among the families and nations of the earth. He is not explained before he appears, and he does not remain long enough for us to become comfortable with him. He simply steps into Abraham's story carrying bread and wine, blessing on his lips, and a name that bears more than the moment seems able to hold.

A king.

A priest.

Melchizedek.

Malki-Tsedek.

King of Righteousness.

And suddenly tsade צ is standing before us.

We could begin with definitions. We could trace צ־ד־ק through *tsedeq*, *tsedaqah*, and *tsaddiq*. There will be time for that. But after what we have just seen, righteousness is no longer merely a word waiting to be studied. We have bowed before the One whose righteousness

is no longer something we can hold at a distance. We have felt the holiness of His throne and the nearness of His love. We have begun to understand that righteousness is not first an abstract standard held somewhere outside of God. It belongs to Him. It is beautiful because He is beautiful. It is true because He is true.

So perhaps, for a little while longer, we simply behold.

Melchizedek stands before Abraham as king of Salem and priest of God Most High. Righteousness is carried in his name. Peace is carried in his kingdom. Bread and wine are in his hands. Blessing is upon his lips. He does not enter the story loudly, but the testimony he carries is immense. Before the priesthood of Levi, before Aaron's garments, before the tabernacle was raised in the wilderness, Scripture lets us see a king-priest standing in righteousness and peace, blessing Abraham in the name of God Most High.

And centuries later, another witness remembers him.

David hears the LORD speak an oath no earthly priesthood could exhaust: "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" (Ps. 110:4 NASB)

Forever.

The word stands over the room like something immovable. We are no longer looking only at a mysterious king-priest who blessed Abraham and disappeared from the page. We are hearing the LORD's sworn testimony concerning a Priest whose order is spoken of as forever. The rains of Shevat are behind us now, but their witness remains: the word that goes out from His mouth will accomplish what He sent it to do. And now that word has come to us as oath. The LORD has sworn, and He will not change His mind.

Then Hebrews takes us back to the ancient king.

King of righteousness.

King of peace.

The titles are simple, but they open slowly. They do not merely describe Melchizedek; they prepare us to recognize the One whose righteousness and peace do not pass away. What appeared briefly in Genesis had been carrying more than the moment could explain. What David heard by oath, Hebrews now unfolds before us. The witness becomes transparent, and through it we begin to see Christ.

The Judge is the King.

The King is righteous.

The King is Priest.

And this Priest does not stand by the strength of lineage, office, or earthly succession. His priesthood rests upon something death cannot interrupt. He has become priest "according to the power of an indestructible life." (Heb 7:16 NASB)

We came into the chambers wondering how anything could be judged from the middle. But the middle brought us before the throne. There we bowed before Holiness. We lingered in Love. And when we finally lifted our eyes, one of the Father's oldest witnesses was standing there, quietly directing our gaze toward the Son.

Tsadi has brought righteousness before us, but righteousness has brought us before a Person.

Christ, the King of Righteousness.

Adar – When the Witnesses Are Revealed

Adar arrives, and we wait for the witnesses to enter the room. We know this month belongs to Esther's story, so perhaps we think we already know who will come through the door. We expect a queen. We expect the crown, the royal robes, the jewels and fine silk. We expect the fragrance of perfume and the beauty that once found favor in the eyes of a king. We expect Esther.

But that is not who walks through the door.

A father does.

Nothing about him looks like the kind of greatness we thought Adar would reveal. There is no crown upon his head, no royal garment announcing favor, no outward sign that honor has been resting quietly upon him all along. He comes with the understated witness of a life given to another's care—the kind of unnoticed faithfulness that checks, watches, provides, remembers, and remains near because love has made vigilance ordinary.

A dad.

But not just any dad.

Her dad.

Before there was a queen named Esther, there was a little girl named Hadassah who had lost her father and mother. And there was Mordecai. Scripture tells us simply that he *"took her as his own daughter."* (Esther 2:7 NIV) Somewhere inside those few words are years the biblical writer never describes for us. Ordinary years. Meals and mornings. Growing pains and laughter. A little girl becoming a young woman beneath the watchful care of a man who not only made room in his life but in his heart to be her father.

When Hadassah was taken into the king's house, that father did what fathers do when their children are somewhere they cannot reach. He stayed as close as he could. *"Every day*

Mordecai walked back and forth in front of the court of the harem to learn how Esther was and how she fared" (Esther 2:11 NASB).

Every day. While Hadassah was inside, Dad was outside. Watching. Listening. Waiting for word that his girl was all right. There is something about a father's vigilance that rarely looks extraordinary while he is doing it. Nobody applauds the dad who checks the doors before going to bed. Nobody awards him a fancy robe because he noticed the tires were worn or stayed awake thinking about something his daughter slept peacefully through. He wanted her to sleep. He didn't want her to have to worry. And he doesn't want her to have hardship. He does not consider these things heroic.

Someone he loves has been entrusted to his care, and watching over that life has become part of who he is. That is the Mordecai Adar brings into the room.

And Mordecai notices something of which neither Esther nor her husband are aware.

Mordecai hears that Bigthan and Teresh are plotting against the king. Hadassah may know nothing about it. A threat is moving beneath the surface of the household in which his daughter now lives, but Mordecai is paying attention. He gets word to Esther. Esther tells the king in Mordecai's name. The matter is investigated and found to be true. The king lives.

Mordecai has his reward. He was not trying to get his name into the chronicles. He was not waiting for a crown, a horse, or a procession through the city. Someone's life was in danger, Mordecai knew about it, and he did what an honorable man does. The fact that his action was recorded mattered later, but the record did not make the action honorable. The honor was already there.

And Adar is going to reveal it. And that matters because another man has been walking through these same halls. Haman also has access to the king. Haman also notices things. Haman also knows how to bring information into the king's presence. But what these two men notice tells us something about what is already in their hearts. Mordecai notices a threat against another man's life. Haman notices a man who will not bow to him.

Mordecai's vigilance moves toward preservation when Haman's wounded pride moves toward destruction. One man sees danger and asks what must be done to protect life. The other experiences offense and begins calculating how many lives must be destroyed to satisfy it. Adar has brought both witnesses into the room. And now their testimony must be weighed.

Haman has already given testimony concerning the Jews. He has told the king about "*a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples,*[1]*"* whose laws are different, whom he presents as a danger to the king's interests. He has constructed a case, secured the king's authority, cast the *pur*, and placed a date upon their destruction.

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[1] Esther 3:8 ESV

Adar. The month we have now entered was once marked on Haman's calendar as the month when the Jews would die. But before we reach that appointed day, what has been hidden begins coming into the light. One night the king cannot sleep. The chronicles are brought out and read before him, and suddenly Mordecai's name is heard again. Nothing new has happened. Mordecai has not performed another courageous act. The book simply bears witness to what was already there.

"What honor or dignity has been bestowed on Mordecai for this?" "Nothing has been done for him." (Esther 6:3 NASB) And perhaps Mordecai would have been perfectly content with that answer. The king was alive. But Haman is standing outside.

And when the king asks him what should be done for the man whom the king desires to honor, Haman's answer reveals something too. He imagines royal robes. The king's horse. Public procession. Proclamation before the people. Haman cannot imagine honor without visibility because Haman cannot imagine that the man the king wishes to honor could be anyone other than himself.

Then the king speaks Mordecai's name. And suddenly the faithful witness and the false witness are standing together in broad daylight.

Mordecai has not become honorable because he is wearing the king's robe. The robe reveals nothing that was not already true. Haman has not become self-serving because he imagined himself wearing it. His answer simply allowed what was already in him to be heard.

This is Adar. Things that were present all along are coming into view. And now another threat has entered the house. This time Mordecai is not protecting one king. An entire people have been marked for destruction. He tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth and ashes, and cries out loudly and bitterly. The scale of the danger has changed, but the heart of the man has not.

Dad is awake again. Only now his little girl is not the only one inside the house. His people are. So once again Mordecai does what he has always done. He notices the danger. He refuses to look away from it. He gets word to the person who has access to the king. Esther. And now, finally, the woman we expected to see when Adar began approaches the door.

We almost have to ask: Is this the same woman?

This is Hadassah, the orphaned girl we met in Tevet, drawn into circumstances we could not yet interpret. This is the young woman whose father paced outside the court because he could not reach her. But when she steps forward now, she does not come only as the girl Mordecai has spent his life protecting.

She has learned something from Dad. Someone else's life is in danger. But Dad cannot walk into the king's presence for her. He cannot make this decision for her, and perhaps that is one of the hardest things a father ever has to accept. The man who has spent his life watching, protecting, and staying near has come to a place where love cannot mean

keeping his daughter from every danger. He can tell her the truth. He can remind her that she belongs to a people whose fate she cannot escape simply because she lives inside the palace. And then he has to trust the woman his little girl has become.

"And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (Est. 4:14 NASB) Mordecai does not seem particularly impressed with royalty for its own sake. We have already seen what he thinks honor looks like. Perhaps he is helping Esther see her position the way he has always lived his own life. What has been placed within your reach is not merely there for you. If you have access to the one who can intervene when life is threatened, then that access has become something you can give.

And Esther receives the word. "*Go, gather all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me."* Something has shifted in her voice. She is no longer simply the daughter receiving instructions from Mordecai. She is giving them. *"I and my attendants also will fast in the same way. And then I will go in to the king, which is not in accordance with the law; and if I perish, I perish."* (Est. 4:16 NASB)

Is this the same woman?

Yes. And now we can see her.

Adar does not need to turn the orphan of Tevet into someone else in order to give us a queen. Perhaps this is what Tevet could not yet show us. We saw Hadassah being carried into circumstances we could not interpret, and we refused to decide who she was from what could be seen on the surface. Now the years have opened something to our sight. The crown has not made Esther courageous. The palace has not made her honorable. Adar is revealing what was already there.

And what is revealed bears a striking resemblance to Dad. Mordecai sees life threatened and acts. Esther sees life threatened and acts. Mordecai uses the access available to him without asking what he will receive in return. Esther will use the access available to her knowing it may cost her everything. Somewhere between the father who paced outside the court and the daughter preparing to enter the inner court, we recognize the same concern for the life of another.

The crown suddenly looks different on her head. Royalty is no longer revealed by silk, jewels, perfume, or proximity to the king. Esther's royalty becomes visible in what she is willing to give herself for. Haman uses his access to the king to enlarge himself and destroy those who offend him. Esther uses hers at risk to herself for the preservation of others. One reaches toward the throne asking what power can do for him. The other approaches the throne asking what her access might make possible for someone else.

But Esther is carrying something into that room that Haman does not know.

Her name may be Esther, but she is Hadassah. She belongs to the people Haman has reduced to *"a certain people."* Her identity has remained concealed since Tevet, but it has never ceased to be true. She was Jewish when she entered the palace. She was Jewish when

the crown was placed upon her head. She was Jewish when Haman persuaded the king to authorize the destruction of her people. What was hidden was there all along.

Then Esther speaks: "We have been sold, I and my people." (Est. 7:4 NASB)

My people.

With those words, something concealed comes fully into the light. Esther does not use the crown to separate herself from the people under sentence. She identifies herself with them. Haman's accusation is no longer about an unnamed people somewhere beyond the palace walls. One of those people is standing before the king. She is his queen.

Now Haman's testimony can be weighed against what has been revealed. Mordecai's faithfulness was already there before the chronicles were opened. Haman's self-interest was already there before his own words exposed it. Esther's identity was already there before she named her people before the king. Adar has not created any of these things. It has brought them into the light.

But bringing something into the light is not the same as dealing with it.

Haman can be exposed. Haman can be removed. The gallows he prepared for Mordecai can become the place of his own death. Yet the decree he set in motion has not disappeared. The thirteenth of Adar is still written on the calendar. The letters have already gone throughout the provinces. An entire people still live beneath the consequence of something that has now been revealed as false.

And perhaps this is where Adar gives its clearest testimony within *Revealing What Was Already There*. Revelation is not merely the moment when we finally see what is true. What comes into the light must be answered. The faithful can be recognized as faithful. The false can be found false. Hidden motives can be exposed, forgotten testimony can be remembered, and concealed identity can finally be spoken aloud. But once the truth is visible, there comes a moment when what has been revealed must be dealt with.

Adar has brought the witnesses into the room. Now that we can see them, the matter before us can no longer remain as it was. Haman has been exposed and executed, but the decree he set in motion has not disappeared. The thirteenth of Adar still arrives. The enemies of the Jews still gather, and the Jews must gather too. But now they have a royal decree that allows them to assemble in their cities, take their stand, and defend their lives. Revelation has not spared them the confrontation.

And something else has changed. Mordecai is no longer the unnoticed man whose faithful act lies quietly recorded in the chronicles. His name has gone throughout the provinces, and *"the man Mordecai became greater and greater*[1]*."* The officials, satraps, governors, and those conducting the king's business assist the Jews because the fear of Mordecai has fallen

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[1] Esther 9:4 NASB

upon them. Honor has come to the man who never seemed to be looking for it, but it has come with substance now. The authority entrusted to him is serving the preservation of the people whose lives are still threatened.

Then Esther comes before the king again.

The first day of fighting in Susa had ended, but Esther does not simply receive the report and begin celebrating. When the king asks what further request she has, she asks that the Jews in Susa be permitted to act again on the fourteenth according to the same decree, and that Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows. The king grants her request. The decree is issued in Susa, and the Jews gather again.

This is not the Esther we could see in Tevet.

She is not standing silently inside circumstances being determined around her. She is looking directly at what remains unfinished and asking that it be completed. There is a steadiness in her now. The woman who once needed Mordecai pacing outside to know whether she was all right has become a woman able to recognize that the danger to her people has not yet been fully answered.

Throughout the provinces, the Jews rest on the fourteenth and make it a day of feasting and rejoicing. In Susa, where the additional day of fighting has been necessary, they rest on the fifteenth. They celebrate when the fighting where they are has actually ended. Rest is not declared while an enemy still remains to be faced.

And then honor takes another form.

Mordecai records what has happened and sends letters to the Jews throughout the provinces, establishing the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as days to be remembered—the days *"when the Jews rid themselves of their enemies, and the month which was turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday.[1]"* They are to be days of feasting and rejoicing, of sending portions to one another and gifts to the poor.

The man who never needed a parade is remembered and honored every year to this day.

And Esther stands with him. The orphaned Hadassah of Tevet is now Queen Esther, and Esther 9 gives weight to her authority: "Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, with Mordecai the Jew, wrote with full authority to confirm this second letter about Purim."

The witnesses have spoken. Adar has brought the faithful and the false into the light, and what was revealed could no longer remain unanswered.

Qof (ק) — Holy Laughter

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[1] Esther 9:22 NASB

An old man in ancient garb walks to the front carrying a scroll that looks older than he does. It isn't really about the man—who could have been Abraham for all we know. It is what he has tucked beneath his arm that has our attention. He opens the scroll to a particular place, and an ancient Jewish tradition is given a voice. The letter qof is put into evidence.

Sefer Yetzirah[1], the Book of Formation, traditionally attributed to Abraham, places the letter qof in Adar and pronounces it "king" over laughter. We do not need to ask the scroll to tell us more than it knows. We simply receive the testimony it has brought into the room.

Laughter might not be the witness you expected. But that seems to be a theme in Adar. But the Sefer Yetzirah has brought a supporting witness. Psalm 2 takes the stand. He can hardly contain himself as he reads: *"He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them"* (Psalm 2:4 NASB). The nations are in an uproar. The peoples are conspiring against the Lord and His anointed. There is nothing imaginary about their opposition. They have gathered. They have counseled together. They have determined what they intend to do.

But above them, Someone is laughing. We can almost hear the laughter from here. And it seems to be contagious because the Qof is rolling with laughter. As if it knows something we don't.

And perhaps it does.

Between snickers and giggles Psalm 2 keeps reading. The kings of the earth have taken their stand. The rulers have gathered together. Their plans sound formidable from where they stand. All this laughter almost seems inappropriate. But apparently, their plans sound very different from where God sits. And that's the point. The One in the heavens does not rise from His throne to answer them. He does not pace. He does not scramble to protect what they are threatening. He sits. And He laughs.

Then, somewhere in the middle of the laughter, He speaks: *"But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain*[2]*."* That seems to send qof into another fit of laughter, as though both the letter and the scroll can hardly bear the joy of what heaven already knows.

The kings of the earth may be conspiring against the LORD and against His Anointed, but God has already installed His King. They are taking counsel about something heaven has already settled. Their conspiracy may be real. Their intentions may be dangerous. Their actions may carry consequences that must eventually be faced. But none of them are seated on the throne.

The King is.

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[1] *Sefer Yetzirah* 5:10 (GRA Version), in *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, trans. Aryeh Kaplan (San Francisco: Weiser Books, 1997).
[2] Psalm 2:6 NASB

That laughter doesn't sound dismissive. It sounds holy. It comes from a throne that has never been threatened, from the One who sees the end from the beginning and is not confused by appearances. The conspirators may not yet know the futility of what they are attempting.

But qof seems to know. And we know. If we aren't careful we may find ourselves laughing with them.

Then we notice Adar has been listening from the other side of the room. It recognizes this laughter. It has heard something like it before.

There was another man who thought he knew how the story would end. Haman had cast the *pur*. The lot had fallen. A date had been selected, the decree had been written, and the king's seal had given it authority throughout the empire. The thirteenth of Adar belonged to him—or at least that is what it must have looked like when the couriers carried the decree into every province. Haman had chosen the day on which an entire people would cease to exist.

And now qof starts laughing again.

Maybe we understand why.

Haman had a date. Heaven had a King.

Haman could cast the lot, but he could not see everything already present in the story into which that lot fell. He did not know the heart of the father sitting at the king's gate. He did not know what was hidden beneath Esther's crown. He did not know that the faithful testimony of Mordecai was already written in the king's chronicles. He did not know that the queen whose husband had signed his decree belonged to the very people he intended to destroy.

Haman knew what he intended to do. But he didn't hear the laughter coming from the throne.

At first with a giggle, Adar joins qof's laughter. We can see the whimsical smirk on Mordecai's face from here. Queen Esther doesn't even try to keep her composure. Before long, the laughter has taken over the courtroom.

Now we may be laughing too.

Purim is laughing, and the laughter we first heard at the throne has reached the feast. We put on colorful hats, pick up noisemakers that could put a New Year's celebration to shame, and we laugh. We dance. We rejoice. The *pur* that once marked the date of destruction has become the name of a feast filled with laughter.

And perhaps that is qof's final surprise. It walked into the room as an ancient letter tucked inside an old scroll and somehow taught us to hear Adar through the sound of laughter. But

the laughter wasn't waiting at the end of the story to see how things would turn out. It was sounding from the throne long before Hadassah was even born.

The King was already seated.

And now neither the scroll, the old man, nor qof seems able to stop laughing.

I think I wet my pants.

5787 Quarter Three

Living From What Has Already Been Accomplished

As we wait to hear from the witnesses that will accompany us through the third quarter of 5787 the jovial sound from the throne can still be heard. His laughter has left us standing in the certainty of what heaven already knows. The King is seated. The decree of death has been answered. Sorrow has been turned into gladness, mourning into a feast, and the plot meant for destruction has become testimony to a throne that was never threatened.

The third quarter turns us toward the life that proceeds from that settled victory. If the laughter of Adar helped us hear what had already been established in heaven, Nisan, Iyar, and Sivan invite us to watch what it looks like to live from what Christ has already accomplished. We are not moving forward to secure redemption, produce provision, or complete the work of God. We are moving forward as those who behold the finished work, remain connected to the One who accomplished it, and receive the Spirit who makes that life visible in us.

Adar has just given us the laughter of the enthroned King because the schemes of His enemies cannot overturn what He has established.

Nisan —The Courtroom

The hour is late, but the room is abuzz. Lamps burn against the darkness, their flames throwing uneven light across the stone walls and the faces of the men gathered there. We hear the rustle of robes brushing against the floor as men shift in their places. Raised voices disappear into whispers, then rise again. There is movement near the doorway as someone is admitted and another voice adds to the proceedings.

We find ourselves along the wall. From here we can see without being noticed. After all, we have no place in what is happening here. We are bystanders, listening as the case accumulates.

A man stands before the council. His hands are bound. Around him are men who have spent their lives studying the oral and written Torah. They know its words. They have argued its meanings. They have guarded its boundaries and taught its requirements. They know what

Moses said about the Sabbath. They know what belongs to the temple. They know what the Law says should happen to a man who blasphemes the name of God. And now the man who has troubled them for so long has finally been put in their hands.

Caiaphas sits at the head of the council in the dignity of his office. Being high priest he is impossible to miss. Dressed in attire that commands respect this man is accustomed to being listened to. The man who has been an affront to everything he stands for stands before him. His eyes are fixed on Jesus as the testimony begins. We see something in his expression that has been there longer than tonight. This is not the first time he has heard the name Jesus of Nazareth. Too much has already happened for that. Too many reports have reached Jerusalem. Too many confrontations have taken place. Tonight the Man Himself is finally standing before him.

A witness remembers hearing Jesus say that He could destroy the temple and raise it again in three days. The words stir the room. Another voice comes forward. He has heard something similar. The temple. Three days. Destroyed and raised again. The details move back and forth among the men, but the offense itself needs little explanation here. This is the house bearing the name of their God. Priests serve there. Sacrifices are offered there. Israel gathers there. And this Galilean has dared to speak of its destruction and of raising it again.

Someone remembers an occurrence in Bethesda. It had happened on the Sabbath. Jesus had told him to pick up his mat and walk. That is what matters in this room. The man had carried his mat through Jerusalem on the Sabbath because Jesus told him to do it, and when Jesus was confronted about what He had done, He had not backed away from it. He had answered, "My Father is working until now, and I am working."

Murmurs of agreement move through the room. Yes. They remember that. The Sabbath had not been incidental to what happened. Jesus knew what day it was. He knew the Law. He knew what was permitted and what was forbidden, and still He commanded him to carry his mat. Then, when challenged, instead of submitting to their correction, He had invoked God as His Father.

A voice comes from somewhere near Caiaphas. "This is why we were seeking all the more to kill Him. He was not only breaking the Sabbath, He was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God."

Heads nod. Another man remembers a different Sabbath, when Jesus and His disciples had passed through the grainfields. His disciples had plucked heads of grain and eaten them. They had challenged Him then. "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath." But Jesus had defended them. He had spoken of David entering the house of God and eating the bread of the Presence. He had spoken of the priests serving in the temple on the Sabbath. And then He had said something they had not forgotten. He said: "The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath." (Matt. 12:8 NIV)

Another murmur rises. The Sabbath belongs to God. God gave it to Israel. God commanded its observance. Yet this Man has behaved as though the Sabbath answers to Him.

Someone else remembers the house in Capernaum. It had been so crowded that four men had opened the roof and lowered a paralytic into the room in front of Jesus. But it is not the lowering of the man through the roof that concerns the council now. It is what Jesus said when the man landed in front of Him. He had the audacity to declare: "Son, your sins are forgiven." (Mark 2:5 NIV) The reaction comes almost immediately from around the room. "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7 NIV)

They had thought the same thing when it happened. Jesus had known it. He had looked at them and asked why they questioned these things in their hearts. Then He had asked which was easier, to say to the paralytic that his sins were forgiven or to tell him to rise, take up his bed, and walk. And then He had made His intention unmistakable: "That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." (Luke 5:24 ESV)

Authority to forgive sins. The phrase thickened the air with anger that had already gathering in the room. And then there was the clincher. Another voice speaks from the crowd of men. "He said, 'I and the Father are one.[1]'" The room erupts in horror of the thought. They remember that too. They had picked up stones when He said it. Jesus had asked them for which of His good works they intended to stone Him, and the answer had been plain. "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone You but for blasphemy, because You, being a man, make Yourself God.[2]" And with that they shout, Blasphemy!

It does not disappear into the murmuring. It settles over the room. Only to have another man add to the tension. He remembers an argument over Abraham. Jesus had told them that Abraham rejoiced that he would see His day. They had looked at the man standing before them, not yet fifty years old, and asked the obvious question. "Have You seen Abraham?" Jesus had answered them with words that had sent their hands toward stones. "Before Abraham was, I am.[3]"

The reaction in the room is even sharper now. We can hear it in the voices around us. Men begin speaking over one another, remembering what they have heard, what they have seen, what has been reported to them. Witnesses from all over Jerusalem were gathered into this one room. Jesus had stepped into territory these men believe belonged only to God. And all the while Caiaphas has been listening.

Disgust made his face look like stone. His eyes move from the men speaking back to Jesus, who has stood silently while His own words have been repeated around Him. As Caiaphas hears it, this is not merely a teacher who has interpreted the Law differently. This Man has claimed authority over the Sabbath. He has claimed authority to forgive sins. He has spoken of God as His own Father. He has said that He and the Father are one. He has taken the words "I am" upon His own lips. And now He stands before the high priest of Israel and says nothing.

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[1] John 10:30
[2] John 10:33
[3] John 8:58

With that Caiaphas rises. And the room quiets. “Have You no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against You?[1]” Jesus remains silent. The silence stretches between them. Caiaphas waits, staring at Him. Jesus does not defend Himself. He does not explain the Sabbath. He does not explain what He meant about the temple. He does not qualify what He said about Abraham or forgiveness or His Father. He simply stands there.

Something in the high priest hardens. He steps closer. “I adjure You by the living God, tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God.[2]” Now Jesus lifts His eyes. “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.[3]”

For an instant, no one says anything. Then Caiaphas reaches for his robes. The fabric tears beneath his hands, and the sound cuts through the room. “Blasphemy!” Whatever disgust had been gathering in his voice is no longer restrained. He turns toward the council. “What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard His blasphemy. What is your judgment?[4]”

The answer comes from around the room. Men who have listened to the testimony, men who know what the Law says concerning blasphemy, men who have now heard Jesus answer the high priest with His own mouth, give their verdict. “He deserves death.”

And for the first time since we took our place along the wall, this room is in full agreement.

The verdict does not end the proceedings. But it certainly changed them. The men who had been sitting in judgment begin to move, and whatever restraint the hearing required seems to leave the room with the verdict. Someone spits in Jesus’ face. Another strikes Him. Someone covers His face and hits Him again. “Prophesy to us, Christ. Who is it that struck You?[5]” Laughter breaks out among the voices that only moments ago had pronounced Him worthy of death. We press against the wall wishing it would somehow open and we could leave. Yet here we are, as they mock this man for the very claim they believe proves His guilt.

But here they know there is a limit to the punishment they can bring. They have judged Him according to their Law, but they cannot carry out the sentence. Rome stands between their verdict and His death. With that the proceedings move and we move with them. Night is giving way to morning as Jesus is led from Caiaphas to the governor. The setting changes, the authority changes, and almost immediately the case changes with it. Blasphemy has brought Jesus to this point, but blasphemy will not move Pilate. Rome does not need to be persuaded that Jesus has offended Israel’s God. Rome needs a reason to regard Him as dangerous.

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[1] Matt. 26:62 ESV
[2] Matt. 26:63 ESV
[3] Matt. 26:64 ESV
[4] See Matt. 26:65-66
[5] Matt. 26:68 ESV

By the time Jesus is standing before Pilate, the accusations have acquired a different sound. "We found this Man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.[1]" King. That word has entered the proceedings before, but here it carries another kind of weight. Before Caiaphas, the question was whether this Man had made Himself equal with God. Before Rome, the question is whether this Man has made Himself a king.

Pilate looks at Jesus. He has undoubtedly had dangerous men brought before him before. Insurrection is something Rome understands. Rival kings are something Rome understands. He looks at the bound Galilean standing before him and asks the question the accusation requires. "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answers, "You have said so.[2]"

The chief priests begin speaking again. One accusation follows another, their voices pressing the case toward Pilate. Jesus has stirred up the people. His teaching has spread from Galilee throughout Judea. Pilate listens to them and then looks back at Jesus. "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?[3]" Jesus gives him no answer. The accusations continue. Jesus remains silent.

Pilate is watching Him now. There is something unsettling about His silence. The men surrounding Jesus are urgently telling the governor why this Man is dangerous, while the Man Himself seems strangely untouched by the urgency. Pilate has asked Him directly whether He is a king, and Jesus has not denied it. Yet He does not plead for His life. He does not answer His accusers. He does not appear to be trying to persuade the man who has the authority to release Him.

Then Pilate hears the word Galilee. Jesus is a Galilean, and Herod happens to be in Jerusalem. For a moment there seems to be a way to move this troublesome case into someone else's hands. Jesus is sent to Herod, and once again we follow.

Herod is delighted to see Him. This is a name he knows. Stories about Jesus have been circulating for some time, and Herod has wanted to see Him. Perhaps now he will finally see one of the signs he has heard about. Questions come quickly. Herod wants answers. He wants something from the Man standing before him. The chief priests and scribes are there too, vehemently accusing Him, but Jesus says nothing.

The silence follows Him from one courtroom into another. Herod's curiosity begins to sour. If Jesus will not perform, there are other ways to make sport of Him. Herod's soldiers join in. They treat Him with contempt. They mock Him. A splendid robe is placed around His shoulders. If He is going to be accused of being a king, then they will dress Him like one. The joke is apparently good enough to send back to Pilate, and Jesus returns wearing the mockery.

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[1] Luke 23:2 ESV
[2] Luke 23:3 ESV
[3] Matt. 27:13 ESV

By now the governor seems less interested in determining what Jesus has done than in finding some way to dispose of the case without condemning Him. He calls together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people. He has examined Jesus. Herod has examined Jesus. Pilate tells them that he has found no guilt in Him deserving death. Herod has sent Him back without such a finding. Pilate offers punishment and release. They do not accept it.

There is another prisoner in Roman custody, a man whose guilt requires no debate. Barabbas has been imprisoned for insurrection and murder. He has done the very sort of thing the accusations against Jesus are meant to suggest. Pilate places the choice before the people. One prisoner can be released. Barabbas or Jesus.

"Barabbas." That answer comes back with startling force. Disbelief seemed to seize his face and, Pilate tries again. "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" "Let Him be crucified!" That word changes the air. Crucified. Until now, death has been a verdict. Suddenly it has a shape. Pilate presses them. "Why? What evil has He done?" The question does not quiet the crowd. It makes them louder. "Let Him be crucified!"[1]

Pilate speaks again, but his voice is losing ground. The chief priests are moving among the people. The crowd is becoming increasingly agitated. What began in the chambers of the high priest has spilled into the governor's court, and the sound of it is swelling around us. "Crucify Him!" Pilate tries to release Him, and another accusation rises above the noise: "If you release this Man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar." And that reaches the judgment seat.

Pilate brings Jesus out and sits down to render judgment. Before him stands the Man who has been accused of making Himself equal with God and of making Himself a king. He has been struck, mocked, moved from one ruler to another, dressed in a robe intended to ridicule the very charge now being used against Him.

Pilate looks at the crowd and then at Jesus. "Behold your King!" "Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!" Pilate answers them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answer. "We have no king but Caesar."[2]

Something about those words makes the moment feel heavier than everything that has preceded them. The men who condemned Jesus for blasphemy before the high priest now stand before the representative of Rome and invoke Caesar to secure His death. Pilate has heard what he needs to hear. The case that began with the Sabbath, forgiveness, the temple, the Father, and the charge of blasphemy has reached Rome's judgment seat as a question of kingship.

Pilate washes his hands before the crowd. He has made his objections. He has asked his questions. He has tried to release Jesus. None of it has changed the sound coming from the

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[1] Matt. 27:21-22 ESV
[2] See John 19:15

people before him. So Barabbas is released, and Jesus is handed over. The soldiers take Him.

There is no courtroom for what happens next. The verdict has already been rendered, and now Rome begins carrying it out. Jesus is taken inside the governor's headquarters, and the soldiers gather around Him. They strip Him and put a scarlet robe over His shoulders. Someone twists thorns together into a crown and presses it onto His head. A reed is placed in His hand. Then they kneel before Him.

"Hail, King of the Jews![1]" The laughter comes easily. They spit on Him. They take the reed from His hand and strike Him on the head with it. Again they kneel. Again they mock the King. The charge that offended the high priest has become entertainment for Rome.

Eventually the robe is removed. His own clothes are put back on Him. The soldiers lead Him away. We follow. And somewhere ahead of us, outside the city, the next witness is waiting.

Outside the city the noise follows Him. The crowd has not dispersed simply because Pilate has finished with the case. Soldiers move around Jesus, keeping the procession moving toward the place where Rome carries out its sentences. The cross has been placed upon Him, but His body has already endured the night. The questioning, the blows, the scourging, the crown pressed into His head have left their testimony before He ever reaches Golgotha. Somewhere along the way His strength gives beneath the weight, and a man named Simon is pulled from the crowd and compelled to carry the cross behind Him. We move with them, unable now to pretend that the verdict we heard inside those rooms was merely words. "He deserves death" has become a procession.

Golgotha rises before us without ceremony. There is nothing sacred about the place from where we stand. Rome has brought men here before. Crosses have stood here before. Soldiers know what to do because they have done it before. The condemned are stripped. Wood is laid out. Iron waits. Everything about the place has the efficiency of something practiced. The cross does not need an introduction. We recognize this witness before it ever speaks.

Jesus is offered wine mixed with gall, but after tasting it He will not drink. The soldiers move Him into position. The hands that touched lepers are stretched across the wood. The hands that broke bread and multiplied it, that reached into blindness and opened eyes, that took children into His arms, are held against the beam. A soldier positions the iron. The hammer rises.

The sound is worse than we expected. Iron strikes iron, and the blow travels through the wood beneath Him. The hammer rises again. Another strike. Then another. There is no argument now, no accusation, no question to answer. Rome is simply carrying out the sentence. His other hand is secured. Then His feet. The soldiers work with the indifference

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[1] John 19:3 ESV

of men doing a familiar job. When they are finished, the cross is raised, and Jesus hangs beneath the charge Pilate has ordered fastened above His head: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Even here the argument continues. The chief priests object to the wording. "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but rather, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.[1]'" Pilate has apparently exhausted his willingness to negotiate. "What I have written I have written.[2]" So the charge remains above Jesus where everyone passing by can read it. The title that helped bring Him before Rome now hangs over the sentence Rome has imposed.

The soldiers settle in beneath Him. His clothing is divided among them. His tunic is seamless, so rather than tear it they cast lots to see who will take it. Around us people come and go. Some stop to watch. Others pass close enough to hurl the accusations of the courtroom back at Him. "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."[3]

The chief priests have come too. The scribes and elders stand with them. They look up at the Man whose claims filled the courtroom only hours ago, and what they see appears to confirm the judgment they rendered. "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him."[4] Another voice calls out, "He trusted in God; let God deliver Him now, if He desires Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"[5]

Their words gather beneath the cross. Son of God. King of Israel. Temple. Save Yourself. Everything we heard in the courtroom is here again, but now the accusations have something they did not have before. They have a crucified man hanging above them.

The cross begins to give its testimony. It does not speak quickly. This witness has hours.

We stand at a distance and watch time pass by the movement of bodies beneath Him and the changing light above us. Breathing has become work. Every breath demands something from a body already torn by scourging and suspended against iron. The soldiers remain at their post. The rulers remain long enough to mock. Women stand nearby watching. His mother is there. There is nowhere comfortable for our eyes to rest.

Jesus speaks from the cross, but He does not answer the accusations being thrown at Him. He sees His mother and the disciple standing near her. "Woman, behold, your son." Then to the disciple, "Behold, your mother.[6]" Even here, while His own body hangs between earth and sky, He sees them.

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[1] John19:21 ESV
[2] John 19:22 ESV
[3] See Matt. 27:40
[4] See Matt. 27:42
[5] See Matt. 27:43
[6] John 19:26 ESV

One of the men crucified beside Him joins the voices below. “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us![1]” But the other rebukes him. He knows what his own cross means. “We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.[2]” Then he turns toward Jesus. “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.”[3]

Kingdom. The word sounds almost absurd here. There is no throne in sight. No army. No palace. Only three crosses and Roman soldiers and a sign identifying the dying Man in the middle as a king. Jesus answers him. “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.[4]” Then noon comes, and the light changes. Darkness creeps over the landscape.

At first we wait for our eyes to adjust, but this is not a passing cloud. The darkness remains. The sun that had watched the procession to Golgotha withdraws its light, and for three hours the cross stands beneath a darkened sky. The voices around us diminish. Even those who came to watch have less to say. Then a cry pierces the darkness. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”[5]

The sound reaches farther than the words. Some standing nearby misunderstand Him and think He is calling Elijah. Someone runs for sour wine, puts it on a reed, and lifts it toward His mouth. “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him.[6]” No one comes.

The hours have done what the nails began. The cross has held Him. Rome has had its way with His body. The Man who stood silently before Caiaphas, who gave Pilate so little answer, who would not perform for Herod, is still there.

Then Jesus says, “I thirst.[7]” The sour wine is lifted to Him. He receives it. Something changes.

We cannot name it from where we stand. His body is still upon the cross. The soldiers are still beneath Him. The darkness still covers the land. But when Jesus speaks again, there is nothing tentative in His voice.

“It is finished.[8]”

The words are not whispered away by exhaustion. They are given.

Then He cries out once more, loudly enough that those standing beneath Him can hear Him clearly. “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.[9]” His head bows. He breathes His last. For the first time since the hammer struck the iron, the cross has nothing more to do.

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[1] See Luke 23:39
[2] Luke 23:41 ESV
[3] Luke 23:42 ESV
[4] Luke 23:43 ESV
[5] See Mark 15:34
[6] Matt. 27:49 ESV
[7] See John 19:28
[8] See John 19:30
[9] See Luke 23:46

The earth shudders beneath our feet. Rocks split. Somewhere in Jerusalem the veil of the temple tears from top to bottom, although we cannot see it from here. Tombs open. The centurion who has been standing opposite Jesus has watched Him die. He has heard the cry. He has felt the ground move beneath him. He looks up at the body hanging on the cross and says what the high priest found intolerable only hours ago. "Truly this was the Son of God.[1]" No one answers him.

The witnesses who condemned Jesus have spoken. Pilate has spoken. Rome has spoken. The cross has now given everything it has to give. And now Jesus hangs motionless.

And somewhere just beyond our sight, another witness is preparing to speak. For a while, nothing happens. Perhaps that is what makes the silence so difficult. We have been listening for hours. Accusations, questions, shouting, mockery, hammers, cries from the cross—every part of this day has had a voice. Now there is only a body hanging beneath a darkened sky. Jesus does not move. His chest does not rise. His head remains bowed. The soldiers have seen enough crucifixions to recognize what we are still trying to take in.

We should have realized Death has been standing nearby from the first nail. He does not rush forward. He has no reason to. He has watched this moment arrive one breath at a time. He knows the difference between a man struggling to breathe and a man who will never breathe again. He has heard the final exhale of kings and beggars, warriors and children, prophets and fools. He has been present at bedsides and battlefields, in palaces and unnamed places where no one was there to mourn. Death knows his work.

Now he takes the stand.

There is no swagger in him at first. Something quieter than that. Something almost reverent in the certainty with which he settles into the witness chair. He looks toward the cross as though he wants to be sure we are looking there too. The body is still hanging exactly where we last saw it.

"I heard Him breathe His last." Death does not hurry to the next sentence. He lets us look. "He gave up His spirit." Another pause. Death seems to taste the strangeness of those words. This was not a life he had to wrestle away. Jesus gave it up. Death knows that too. "He is dead." The words are simple. They do not need embellishment. Death has been called to establish a fact, and he knows this fact better than anyone in the room. Still, he does not leave. As if he has earned the right to savor this one.

Death looks again toward the cross. "They called Him the Son of God." There is the slightest change in his expression. "I heard them." His eyes move over the faces gathered around him. "They called Him the Christ. The King of Israel. He remembers Lazarus. Of course he does. That had been an unpleasant interruption. Four days in the grave, and then a voice

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[1] Matt. 27:54 ESV

outside the tomb had called the dead man by name. Death had lost that one for the time being.

But Lazarus is not standing before us now. Jesus is. And Jesus is dead. Perhaps that is why Death lingers over the moment. Lazarus had been called out of a tomb by this Man. Jairus's daughter had opened her eyes when this Man took her by the hand. A widow outside Nain had received her son back because this Man had spoken to the dead and the dead had obeyed Him. Death has encountered this voice before.

But the voice is silent now. Death looks almost amused by the reversal. The One who interrupted funerals has had His own. The One who told dead men to rise hangs lifeless on a Roman cross. Death sits back. "I have Him." The words come more slowly than the others. He enjoys them.

For generations Death has received everyone eventually. Abraham died. Isaac died. Jacob died. Moses climbed a mountain and never came down. David died and was buried. Prophets who spoke of things they would never live to see eventually joined the generations before them. Whatever else distinguished them in life, Death had always had the last word. And now Jesus of Nazareth has joined them.

Death is still sitting there when the soldiers return their attention to the bodies. The day is ending, and the Jews do not want bodies remaining on the crosses during the Sabbath. Legs can be broken. Death can be hurried along. The soldiers break the legs of the first man. Then the other. They come to Jesus. Death watches them. The soldier looks at the body and stops. There is no need. He is already dead. Death almost seems to smile.

Still, Rome will make certain. A spear is driven into Jesus' side, and immediately blood and water flow out. The soldier who thrust the spear has added his own testimony to Death's. No breath. No movement. No need to break His legs.

Death finally rises from the witness chair. He has said what he came to say. Jesus is dead. Even Pilate requires confirmation before releasing the body, and the centurion gives it. Joseph of Arimathea comes for Him. Nicodemus comes too, bringing myrrh and aloes. Together they take the body down, wrap it in linen with the spices, and carry it into a nearby garden where there is a new tomb. The women watch where He is laid. A great stone is rolled across the entrance. Later the chief priests remember something Jesus had said while He was still alive. "After three days I will rise." They go to Pilate. A guard is given. The stone is sealed. Rome takes its position outside.

Then the Grave takes the stand. He is offended that he was even summoned to these proceedings. "Yes, I received Him." He glances toward Death, "Joseph of Arimathea brought Him. Nicodemus was there. The women saw where He was laid. There should be no confusion about the location and no question about the body. Jesus of Nazareth is in the tomb."

The Grave settles more comfortably into the chair. "As is the custom, a great stone was rolled across the entrance." He pauses, apparently enjoying the thoroughness of his

evidence. “And if that wasn’t enough, the Romans fastened a seal and posted guards outside.” A faint smile crosses his face. “He was dead when I got Him. He ain’t goin’ anywhere.”

The Grave looks around the room with satisfied delight, but his eyes can’t seem to settle. For the first time since taking the stand, something distracts him from his own testimony. He looks toward the doorway and then around the room again. He glances toward Death. Death shrugs. Apparently, another witness was expected. Death has testified to Jesus’ death. The Grave has testified to receiving His body. But there should be one more voice here, one more witness capable of completing their testimony concerning what happens when the living become the dead. Hades has not answered the summons.

Whatever has delayed Hades is apparently not important enough to interrupt this moment. He gathers his composure and continues. “As I was saying, the stone was sealed. The guards were posted. I have the body.” He settles back into the chair. “There is nowhere for Him to go.” The Grave is unrelenting in his gloating, and I finally look away.

An old man in ancient garb stands quietly in the corner. I hadn’t noticed when he entered. Maybe he was there all along. Something about him intrigues me. He could be some old prophet, but he carries no scroll. And it doesn’t seem as if he is here to testify. He is simply standing there, apparently unconcerned by anything the Grave is saying. As the Grave continues his testimony, his voice begins to drift into the background. The old man looks directly at me. Without moving his head, he lifts his gaze upward. What could he possibly mean? I glance upward and then back at him. His eyes rise again.

I can still hear the Grave explaining the security of the tomb. “Roman guards. A Roman seal. And that stone isn’t something a couple of fishermen are going to—” I think I feel a faint vibration beneath my feet. It is probably nothing. I imagined it. The Grave pauses for a moment and then continues. “As I was saying, the stone has been—” The earth moves again. This time no one mistakes it.

The Grave grips the arms of the chair. Death looks toward the floor. A murmur passes through the courtroom, but the old man in the corner does not seem remotely surprised. His eyes are still lifted. Then something interrupts the proceedings. At first I think someone has entered the courtroom, but whatever has happened seems to reach the Grave before the rest of us understand it. He stops and turns his head slightly, as though listening to something coming from very far away.

“What?” His expression changes. “What do you mean?” Death looks at him, but the Grave lifts one hand as if to silence everyone while he listens. “No. Hades was supposed to be here.” Another pause. “What happened down there?”

Whatever answer comes back wipes the last trace of smugness from his face. “He did what?” Death is on his feet now. The Grave stares at him. “Don’t look at me. I had the body.” He listens again, his confusion giving way to something closer to alarm. “What do you mean He came through?” There is another silence, and suddenly the absence of Hades is no longer a curiosity. The Grave’s eyes widen. “The keys?”

Eyebrows raised Death takes a step toward him. In his most commanding voice, he directs his attention solely to the grave, “What keys?” The Grave barely seems to hear him. “You’re telling me he took the keys of Death and Hades, and—” He stops in total disbelief. This must be a joke. A bad one. But whatever he hears next is apparently worse. “Took Hades prisoner?” He was shrieking at this point, though I don’t think he realized how frantic he had become. For the first time, Death looks genuinely confused.

The Grave is no longer testifying. He is trying to understand a report that has just destroyed the testimony he had just given. “That can’t be right. He was dead when I got Him.” He looks toward Death for confirmation. “You said He was dead.” Death answers without hesitation. “He was.” The Grave looks bewildered. “I put Him in the tomb.” Death can only stare back at him. The two were in this conversation alone. No longer mindful of the crowd gathered in the courtroom it nearly came to blows.

The Grave turns again toward whatever unseen communication has reached him. “Then how the hell did He get the keys in the first place?” The earth moves beneath us again, but by now I am hardly watching the Grave. I am looking up. The old man is still standing in the corner, his face undisturbed, his eyes fixed somewhere beyond the room we have occupied for so long. And this time, when I follow his gaze, I do not look back.

Something is there.

At first, I cannot tell whether a cloud is descending into the courtroom or whether the courtroom itself is somehow being drawn into it. I can still hear the confusion behind me as Death demands an explanation the Grave cannot give. Yet the room no longer feels solid in the way it did moments ago. Its edges have begun to blur. The ceiling seems farther away than it should be, and through the gathering cloud I become aware of an immensity that could never have been contained within this room.

The old man remains perfectly still. He has not joined the commotion. He has not looked toward Death or the Grave even once. Whatever has captured his attention has been there all along. I begin to realize he was not telling me to look up because something was about to arrive, but that something was already there. The earth trembles again, and the cloud opens. A throne emerges through it.

There is no procession announcing its arrival. No one carries it in. No herald to declare a King has entered the courtroom. The throne does not descend because it has been summoned by the proceedings below. It simply becomes visible, and the moment I see it, I know that I am not watching a throne being established. I am seeing one that already was.

The Ancient of Days is seated. The courtroom above us stretches beyond anything my eyes can take in. Thousands upon thousands attend Him. Ten thousand times ten thousand stand before Him. Fire proceeds from the throne, and the court sits in judgment. Books are opened. I know this place. I have heard the prophet describe it before, but hearing Daniel speak of it and finding myself staring into it are not the same thing.

I glance toward the old man. For the first time, he smiles as if to confirm my suspicions, it's Daniel. Of course.

I can faintly hear the Grave still demanding to know how Jesus could possibly have obtained keys that belonged to Death and Hades, while Death is becoming increasingly interested in the fact that his name has somehow become attached to a set of keys he did not know were missing. Their voices grow strangely distant. Nothing has happened to them. Nothing has happened to the courtroom in which we have spent this long night and day. Caiaphas was real. Pilate was real. The nails were real. The cross was real. Death was real. The tomb is real. Yet something is happening to my ability to allow any of that to occupy the highest place in the scenario.

I cannot stop looking at it. "The LORD has established His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all.[1]" I have read those words before. That reality is now standing in front of me. Something about the entire trial begins to change without a single piece of testimony being withdrawn. Caiaphas really did condemn Jesus. Pilate really did hand Him over. Rome really did crucify Him. Jesus really did breathe His last. Death had not lied. The Grave had not lied when he said a dead body had been placed inside him. Every witness had testified truthfully from where he stood. But none of them had been standing here.

The throne was established before Caiaphas ever took his seat. The King was ruling while Pilate sat on his judgment seat. The court was already in session when the nails were driven. Heaven had not surrendered its government while Jesus hung on the cross. The Ancient of Days had not risen nervously from His throne when Death received His final breath. He had remained seated.

And suddenly the hilarity of Adar does not seem quite so far away. Not the same laughter. There is nothing amusing about what we have watched. I can still see the torn flesh. I can still hear the hammer. I can still hear Jesus cry from the darkness. Heaven is not laughing at suffering. But as I look at the One seated on the throne, and I could swear I see the beginning of a smirk.

He knows something they don't. Death still doesn't know. The Grave certainly doesn't know. Caiaphas hadn't known. Pilate hadn't known. Herod hadn't known. The soldiers kneeling in mockery before Jesus hadn't known. The rulers of this age had gathered around the Lord of glory and done the very thing they would never have done had they understood what they were doing. They crucified Him. And heaven knew.

The thought has barely formed when another disturbance erupts behind me. Whatever communication the Grave has been receiving has apparently not finished with him. I hear him shouting again, but I do not turn around immediately. The throne has become too real.

Then I hear him scream. "What do you mean He's gone?" And I turn.

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[1] Psalm 103:19 ESV

The Grave is standing now, staring toward the source of whatever news has been reaching him. “What do you mean He’s gone?” His voice cracks across the courtroom. “Gone where?” He listens, but whatever answer comes back only makes things worse. “The stone was sealed. There were guards. I had Him!” Death has forgotten his questions about the keys and is staring at the Grave now. The Grave throws his hands toward him. “Don’t look at me. You gave Him to me dead.”

Another report reaches him. “Where are the guards?” He waits, increasingly frantic. “Then ask them what happened!” Whatever he hears sends him racing away from the witness chair. “An angel? What angel?” He stops. “The stone is what?” The Grave looks toward Death as if this latest development has become his problem too. “They were supposed to be guarding it!”

Death says nothing. There is nothing left for him to certify. He had testified accurately. Jesus died. The Grave had testified accurately. Jesus was buried. Yet the testimony that had seemed so conclusive only moments ago is collapsing around them, not because their evidence was false, but because something has happened since they gave it.

The Grave is listening again. “What do you mean the women are there?” Exasperated, overwhelmed and he is crumbling under the news, he is hysterical. What else could possibly be worse? His eyes narrow as another answer comes. “And what did they find?” The question hangs for only a moment before his face tells us the answer. “Nothing?” He shakes his head violently. “No. Not nothing. I had the body. Where is the body?” His voice climbs higher. “I want to know where the body is!”

Then another message comes. The Grave freezes. “What tombs?” Death slowly turns toward him. The Grave listens, his mouth falling open. Whatever he is hearing has reached farther than the garden tomb. Apparently, the Grave is having trouble throughout the neighborhood. The earthquake that happened at the cross had split rocks and opened tombs. But now, after Jesus has risen, the saints laid to rest in those tombs were now out walking around Jerusalem.

The Grave looks toward Death. Death looks toward the Grave. Neither appears willing to accept responsibility for what is happening. The Grave turns back toward the unseen messenger. “First Hades doesn’t show up, then somebody tells me Jesus has the keys, now His tomb is empty, and you’re telling me the others are starting to walk out too?” He looks around the courtroom as though someone has surely lost control of these proceedings. “What the hell just happened?” And with that, the Grave runs out, still shouting questions at whoever has brought him the news. Death stands motionless for another moment before following him. Whatever confidence accompanied these two witnesses into the courtroom has disappeared with them.

I turn back toward the throne. It has not moved. Everything below it has moved. But the throne has not moved. The throne was never waiting to discover how any of this would end.

The reality of that realm is all I can see. The courtroom below has all but disappeared. I am losing the ability to give it any attention. Caiaphas's judgment seat looks impossibly small. Pilate's authority seems almost absurd from here. Even the cross, for all the terrible reality of what happened upon it, no longer appears as the place where the outcome was decided. The throne was already established.

Suddenly I remember the words Jesus spoke while standing before Caiaphas. At the time they sounded like one more piece of evidence against Him. They were the words that brought the trial to its terrible conclusion. "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."

Caiaphas heard blasphemy. Daniel had seen the courtroom. And now we are standing in it.

The cloud continues to overtake my vision until I can barely see the room beneath it. Daniel is no longer in the corner. Perhaps he has disappeared, or perhaps I simply cannot take my eyes from what he told me to see. The Ancient of Days remains upon His throne. The court is seated. The books are open. Nothing here carries the frantic confusion we have just witnessed below. Heaven is not responding to an emergency. No one is scrambling to recover what was lost. Something begins to dawn on me that makes the smirk I thought I saw undeniable. They never knew.

Herod did not know. Pilate did not know. The chief priests did not know. The rulers did not know. The powers did not know. They believed they were bringing Jesus under their authority, moving Him toward an outcome they had determined. They did not know that the Lamb had been foreknown before the foundation of the world. They did not know that the One standing silent before them could lay down His life and take it up again. They did not know that the cross upon which they intended to display His defeat would become the place where rulers and authorities were disarmed.

If they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Now I fully understand the smirk. It pleased the LORD to crush Him. For the joy set before Him, Jesus endured the cross. Not because suffering was somehow delightful. Not because the Father took pleasure in the agony of His Son. But because neither the cross nor Death nor the Grave had ever possessed the power to overturn what had already been determined in God.

The rulers had rendered their verdict. God had rendered His before the foundation of the world. The cloud fills everything. I can no longer see the earthly courtroom. I cannot see Caiaphas. I cannot see Pilate. The cross is gone from my sight. Death and the Grave have disappeared with their confusion. Even Daniel is gone. The reality into which he directed my attention has overtaken every other reality until I cannot imagine how I ever believed the courtroom below was the greater one.

Only the throne remains. Only now can we see the face of the One who is seated there.

Jesus speaks.

“I am the Resurrection.”

Hei (ה): Beholding What Has Been Revealed

We looked, and we saw Him.

And then He breathed.

Iyar — The Courtyard

Someone has asked the apostolic elders to hear the revelation they have begun to see concerning Jesus. The apostle John has heard enough of this preacher’s teaching to be anxious to hear more. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, come with him to the Jerusalem home of another Mary and her son John Mark, the house where the Assembly gathered to pray when Peter had been arrested some years earlier. On the way, Mary asks John, “You’ve heard them?” “Some,” John says. “And?” Mary Magdalene asks. John thinks about his answer long enough to make Mary smile. “Well?” “They see things.” Mary’s smile deepens. “That could mean almost anything.” “I know.” “And you still wanted me to come.” John looks at her. “I thought you might want to hear what they’re telling others about your Son.” Mary says nothing. She has been pondering things said about her Son for a very long time.

Once we step inside the courtyard, we understand that John was not the only one who wanted to hear this. People have filled the open space of the house, finding places along the walls and beneath the shade wherever they can. Conversations cross the courtyard while the Jerusalem morning moves just beyond it, and somewhere nearby the lingering smoke of the morning sacrifice has left the unmistakable smell of meat cooked over fire. The Temple is close enough to make its presence felt without anyone mentioning it. Peter is already deep in conversation with James.

One group has remained almost entirely to itself since we arrived, and we recognize enough of the conversation around us to understand that some among them are of the circumcision. The questions that have brought them here are not small ones. Word has reached the Assembly that this preacher has been placing Jesus alongside some of the most sacred witnesses Israel has ever known—angels, Moses, Aaron, priesthood, covenant, sacrifice, sanctuary. And apparently, they intend to say it here. In Jerusalem. In the face of the Temple. They had to hear this.

A man behind us leans toward his companion. “I heard they are going to speak about Moses.” His companion doesn’t look pleased. “I heard that too.” “And Melchizedek.” That gets a different reaction. “Melchizedek?” “That’s what I was told.” Now the man looks interested despite himself. Near us, John has apparently heard the same thing. He looks at Mary, who asks, “Did you know about that?” “No.” For the first time, she looks genuinely amused. “This should be interesting.”

The conversations begin to diminish when James stands, although not everyone notices immediately. Peter does. John does. The quiet spreads outward from them until the room

finally gives James its attention. “The person we have gathered to hear asked for this audience.” He looks toward the preacher. “They have not been brought here to answer an accusation. They have asked that what they have received concerning Messiah be heard among the brothers and sisters and weighed among us.” Now the reason for the gathering is unmistakable. James looks around the room. “We will give them that hearing.”

A voice starts somewhere to our left, but James raises a hand before it gets very far.

“Some of you already have questions. I know.” A few people laugh. “Some of you already have objections.” More laughter, although considerably less of it comes from one side of the room. “You will have your opportunity.” His voice becomes firmer. “But they asked us to hear the matter. So hear it. Let them finish. Then we will speak.” That settles it.

James turns. For the first time, every eye in the courtyard settles on the person who requested the hearing. They rise slowly. For a moment they say nothing. Their eyes move across the faces before them, lingering for just a moment on James, then Peter, then John. Beyond them, the brazen altar’s offering still wafts through the Jerusalem air. They have asked for this hearing. Now they have it. “Brothers and sisters…” The courtyard becomes utterly still. “God has always spoken.”

“Brothers and sisters…” The room is utterly still. “God has always spoken.”

The preacher allows the words to hang above the courtyard for a moment before continuing. “He spoke to our fathers through the prophets, in many portions and in many ways. Moses heard Him. David heard Him. Isaiah heard Him. The prophets carried His words to us, and the Scriptures have preserved their testimony. We have not been left without His voice.” Heads nod throughout the gathering. Nothing controversial has been said yet. This is ground everyone here knows.

“But brothers and sisters”—and with declarative emphasis they continue—“but now, God has spoken to us in His Son.[1]” Something changes with that sentence. John leans forward with a quiet, “uh-huh.” Mary’s eyes remain fixed on the preacher. “The One appointed heir of all things, through whom He made the ages. The radiance of His glory. The exact representation of His nature. The One who upholds all things by the word of His power.[2]” The preacher pauses, as though everything they intend to say must begin here. “If you want to know what God has said, consider the Son.”

An amen rises from somewhere near Peter and is joined by several others. The preacher nods but does not hurry. “And when He had made purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.[3]” Their eyes move across the courtyard. “He sat down.” There is another uh-huh from John only louder this time. We do not yet understand why

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[1] See Heb 1:1
[2] See Heb. 1:2
[3] See Heb. 1:3

the preacher has placed such weight on those words, but something in the way they say them tells us they intend to come back for them.

They turn first to the angels. "We know their testimony. Our fathers knew it. The Scriptures are filled with their appearing. They serve at the command of God. They carried His messages. They minister according to His purposes." Considering this is the exact courtyard where Peter showed up after an angel rescued him from prison those words held significance here. But before that reality had time to settle, the preacher continued, "But to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are My Son'?"[1] No one answers. The preacher does not seem to expect them to. "The angels are servants. But the Son is the Son." The hum of agreement passes through the courtyard.

"Therefore," the preacher says, and this time the word lands with unexpected force, "we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.[2]" Their eyes sweep across the gathering. "Do you hear me? God has spoken in His Son. Something has happened among us that cannot be treated as merely another word added to all the words that came before." Their voice softens. "Don't hear something this great and then live as though nothing has happened. Don't drift."

That word quiets the courtyard again. The preacher waits before continuing. "You know," They look directly at Mary, "the Son shared our flesh and blood. He entered what we entered. He tasted death for everyone.[3] And through death He rendered powerless the one who held the power of death.[4]" Mary Magdalene draws a breath.

"He is crowned with glory and honor[5]," the preacher continues, "and the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father. That is why He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.[6]" This time the response comes from all around us. The preacher waits for it, then looks deliberately across the gathering. "Do you understand what I am telling you? The Son who is the radiance of His glory is not ashamed to call us His own. The One seated at the right hand of Majesty has brought us near enough to call us family."

For the first time, Mary looks away from the preacher. Her eyes find John, and neither of them says anything. Perhaps there are some things even she did not expect to hear said about the child she once carried. The preacher has already moved on. "So then, holy brothers and sisters, partakers of a heavenly calling[7], there is something I am asking you to do this morning." They pause and look from one face to another. "Consider Jesus.[8]"

The words are simple enough, but no one mistakes them for a transition. "Consider Jesus," they repeat. "Before we decide what Moses means now, consider Jesus. Before we speak of

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[1] See Heb. 1:5
[2] See Heb. 2:1
[3] See Heb 2:9
[4] See Heb. 2:14
[5] See Heb. 2:9
[6] See Heb. 2:11-12
[7] See Heb. 3:1
[8] See Heb. 3:1

priesthood, consider Jesus. Before we speak of covenant, sacrifice, sanctuary, or anything else our fathers have entrusted to us, consider Jesus. We are not dishonoring their testimony by doing this. We are finally asking what their testimony has been pointing toward."

That brings the first visible uneasiness. The preacher has not said anything against Moses, but several people seem suddenly aware that Moses is about to enter the conversation. "Moses was faithful in all God's house,[1]" they say. The tension eases almost immediately. Heads nod. Someone offers a soft, "Amen." The preacher nods too. "Yes. Faithful. We do not need to diminish Moses in order to see Messiah."

Then they take another step. "But the builder of the house has greater honor than the house.[2]" Peter's eyes begin moving through the courtyard. "Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant, bearing witness to what would be spoken later. But Messiah is faithful as a Son over His house.[3]" One of the men who had been nodding stops. Another lowers his eyes. A glance passes between two men near the wall. Peter notices it, but the preacher has noticed it too.

They do not retreat. "And we are His house.[4]" A few amens answer, but not as many as before. The preacher smiles slightly. "Remember, I asked you to hear me." That releases just enough laughter to loosen the courtyard again. Even James smiles. "I have not brought Moses here to put him on trial. Moses does not need my defense, and Messiah does not need me to diminish Moses in order to reveal His glory. I am asking you to hear Moses."

Now the courtyard is listening differently. "Because Moses knew something about a house. He intimately knew that mountain. He didn't just know about the covenant. He received it. He knew about the blood. He knew the sanctuary was to be built according to the exact pattern he was shown." The preacher glances toward the Jerusalem air beyond the courtyard, as if catching again the aroma of the offering that still lingers there. "And I have begun to wonder whether we have been standing among witnesses without yet hearing everything they have been saying."

That sentence changes the room.

The preacher seems to feel it too. They are no longer merely presenting an argument; we can almost watch the pieces drawing together as they speak. "Moses testified. Aaron testified. The priesthood testifies. The altar testifies. The blood testifies. The sanctuary testifies. None of them are silent." Their eyes return to the people before them. "And if we are willing to consider Jesus while we listen to them, I believe we may finally hear what they have been saying."

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[1] See Heb. 3:5
[2] See Heb. 3:3
[3] See Heb. 3:6
[4] See Heb. 3:6

Someone near the back speaks before remembering James's instruction. "And Melchizedek?" A ripple of laughter moves through the courtyard. James closes his eyes. The preacher smiles. "Oh, we're getting to Melchizedek."

The mention of Melchizedek has awakened another kind of interest. Even some of those who had grown cautious when Moses entered the conversation are leaning forward again. The preacher seems unsurprised. "Yes, Melchizedek. King of Salem. Priest of God Most High. He meets Abraham returning from battle, blesses him, receives a tenth from him, and then disappears from the story almost as suddenly as he entered it. And yet David heard something more.[1]" The preacher looks around the courtyard. "'The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.[2]'"

That name is enough to start the murmuring again. "King and priest," someone says. Another voice adds, "Without genealogy." Someone else offers, "Jubilee." The preacher hears it. So does everyone else. "Deliverance," another says. "Judgment." From somewhere near the wall comes, "The defeat of Belial." Now the courtyard is alive with it. Apparently, the few lines preserved in Genesis have not kept Melchizedek from accumulating quite a reputation.

The preacher lets them talk for a moment. "Yes," they finally say. "Some among us have heard considerably more in Melchizedek's testimony than Moses alone tells us. Jubilee. Release. Judgment. Deliverance from the power of wickedness. Even the debt of iniquity has been drawn into the expectation.[3]" They pause. "I have heard those things too."

Someone near the back cannot resist. "So you are preaching Melchizedek."

The preacher looks directly toward the voice, and something almost playful appears in their expression. "No." They wait until the murmuring stops. "I am not preaching Melchizedek. I'm preaching Jesus."

John is the first one we hear. "Uh-huh!"

The preacher turns back toward the gathering. "Melchizedek has brought his testimony. Let him testify. Moses has brought his testimony. Let him testify. Aaron has brought his. The priesthood has brought its testimony. The altar has brought its testimony. The blood has brought its testimony. I am not asking any of them to leave the courtyard." They glance again toward the smoke hanging faintly over Jerusalem. "I am asking you to consider Jesus while they speak."

They allow the invitation to settle before continuing. "Aaron did not appoint himself. God called him. And the one who serves as high priest does not enter the holy place because he has decided he belongs there. He enters because God has established a priesthood, a

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[1] See Heb. 7:1-3
[2] Psalm 110:4 NASB
[3] See 11Q13, aka Q11Melch, the Melchizedek Document: which presents the biblical figure Melchizedek not merely as an earthly king-priest from Genesis, but as a heavenly, divine judge and redeemer who leads the forces of light against Belial (Satan) at the end of time.

sacrifice, a way of approach.[1]" The preacher looks toward those among the circumcision. "I am not telling you something you do not know. The high priest carries the blood. He enters on behalf of the people. He bears their names before God. He serves within a sanctuary he did not design according to a pattern he did not invent.[2]"

Heads are nodding again. The preacher is back on familiar ground, but we have heard enough now to know they will not remain there long. "And every priest who serves does so knowing another will come after him. Aaron died. His son stood in his place. His son died, and another stood. Generation after generation, priest after priest, sacrifice after sacrifice." They pause. "The priesthood continues because the priests do not."

That lands harder than we expect. Peter lowers his head slightly, listening. The preacher continues. "But David heard God swear concerning another Priest. Not according to Aaron. Not according to a priesthood inherited because one father died and his son took his place. 'You are a priest forever.'" They let the final word stretch just enough to be heard. "Forever changes the question."

A quiet "Amen" comes from John.

"If the Priest remains, who succeeds Him?" No one answers. "If His priesthood does not pass to another, who replaces Him?" Again, silence. "And if the One who holds this priesthood lives by the power of an indestructible life, brothers and sisters, perhaps we are no longer looking at another priest standing in a succession. Perhaps we are looking at the One to whom the succession itself was pointing."

The courtyard has become very still. The preacher begins moving now, no longer content to remain in the place where they first stood. "And what does a priest do? He brings an offering. So if we are going to consider Jesus as Priest, we must ask what He carried when He entered." The smell from the morning offering seems almost to answer them. "Not the blood of another.[3]"

With a catch in her throat, Mary whispers, "His own."

The preacher hears it. You can almost see a tear in their eye as they respond respectfully, "Yes. His own." Their voice strengthens. "Not the blood of goats and calves. Not blood that another creature surrendered while the priest remained alive to carry it. This Priest became both the One who offered and the offering He brought."[4]

An amen breaks from somewhere behind us. Another joins it.

"And where did He take it?" the preacher asks. "Because if we are going to hear the testimony of the priesthood, then we must hear the testimony of the sanctuary too." They

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[1] See Heb. 5:1-4
[2] See He. 8
[3] See Heb. 9:11-14
[4] See Heb. 9:11-14

gesture toward Jerusalem beyond the courtyard. “Moses was shown a pattern on the mountain. What was built below corresponded to something he had been shown above. The sanctuary did not begin with the hands that built it.”

Several heads lift.

The preacher sees it. “You heard me. Moses did not stand on that mountain and invent a dwelling place for God. He was shown something. ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” Their voice slows as though they are following the implications while they speak. “A pattern.”

They say it again. “A pattern.”

John leans forward.

“If there is a pattern…” The preacher stops. Something is happening now, and everyone in the courtyard seems to know it. “Then there is a reality from which the pattern came[1].”

A murmur begins.

“The lampstand was made according to the pattern. The altar according to the pattern. The veil, the holy place, the Most Holy Place—all of it fashioned according to what Moses was shown.” They look beyond the courtyard again, toward the Temple whose service continues while they speak. “Brothers and sisters, what if the sanctuary made with hands has been faithfully testifying to a sanctuary no human hands could make?”

This time the courtyard does not answer immediately. The preacher’s eyes brighten. “A greater and more perfect tabernacle.” “Uh-huh,” John says emphatically. “Not made with hands.” “Amen.” “Not belonging to this creation.” Now the responses multiply. “And into that sanctuary Messiah entered as High Priest.” The preacher’s pace quickens. “Not carrying the blood of goats and calves. He entered through His own blood.” [2] They stop abruptly. “Once.” Someone answers, “Amen.”

“No.” The preacher shakes their head. “Not once.” The courtyard stills. “Once for all.[3]” John is on his feet now. “Uh-huh!” “Having obtained eternal redemption.[4]” The preacher stops. For several seconds they say nothing at all. Then, almost to themselves, “Having obtained.” They look up. “Having obtained.”

Something has caught them in their own words. “Not hoping to obtain it. Not entering to see whether the offering would be accepted. Not returning next year because redemption had expired.” Their voice rises. “Having obtained eternal redemption!”

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[1] See Heb. 10
[2] See Heb. 9:11
[3] See Heb. 9:12
[4] See Heb. 9:12

The ‘amens’ resound with antiphonal echoing throughout the courtyard.

The preacher turns suddenly toward the Jerusalem air. “The priests are standing this morning.” “Yes!” “They stood yesterday.” “Yes!” “And they will stand again tomorrow.” “Amen!” The preacher looks back at the gathering. “Why?”

The answers stop. “Why are they standing?” Nobody speaks. Then the preacher’s eyes widen as though a thread laid down at the beginning of the hearing has suddenly pulled tight. John sees it too. “Oh,” he says. The preacher looks at him. John is already smiling. “You said it before.” Now Peter is looking between them. James leans forward. The preacher remembers. “And when He had made purification for sins…”

John finishes it with them.

“He sat down.[1]”

For a moment the preacher simply stares at John. Then a smile breaks across their face. “He sat down.” John answers immediately, “Uh-huh!” The preacher turns back toward the courtyard. “Every priest stands daily ministering and offering again and again the same sacrifices.”[2] Their hand moves toward Jerusalem. “They are standing this morning. They will stand tomorrow. They will stand because there is another sacrifice to offer, another service to perform, another Day of Atonement to come.” Then their hand drops. “But this Priest, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God.[3]”

The courtyard erupts. John is clapping now. Peter is on his feet. Voices answer from every direction, and for several moments the preacher makes no attempt to speak over them. Mary has covered her mouth with one hand. Mary Magdalene has both hands raised. James, who had been so determined that everyone hear the preacher without interruption, appears to have abandoned any hope of enforcing his own rule.

When the voices finally begin to settle, the preacher is still smiling. “Do you see it?” They wait. “Standing tells us one thing. Sitting tells us something completely different.” Their voice drops. “The priest who stands returns because the testimony continues. But the Son sat down because the work He came to accomplish was finished.” Another amen rises, but the preacher lifts a hand. “Do not misunderstand me. I am not saying the priests standing this morning have ceased to testify. I am saying their standing makes His sitting impossible to miss.”

We can’t help but be attentive now.

The preacher turns toward the air beyond the courtyard again. “The altar is still speaking this morning. The blood is still speaking. The priest is still speaking. The sanctuary is still speaking. None of them has suddenly become false because Messiah has come.” They look

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[1] See Heb. 1:3
[2] See Heb. 10:11
[3] See Heb. 10:12

back at those gathered. “A witness does not become a liar when the One it testified about walks into the room.”

Peter’s head lifts.

The preacher seems to hear their own sentence. “Maybe that is what I have been trying to tell you.” Their pace slows. “Moses was not wrong. Aaron was not wrong. The sanctuary was not wrong. The sacrifices were not wrong. They were telling the truth.” Their eyes move toward Jerusalem. “They are still telling the truth.”

“But about what?” someone asks.

The preacher turns toward the question. “About Him.”

The answer is so immediate that the courtyard responds before they can continue. The preacher waits, then reaches again for Moses. “Remember the pattern. What Moses built was not the source of what he saw. It bore witness to what he saw. The earthly sanctuary has form because there is a heavenly reality. The priest enters because there is a greater Priest. Blood is carried because blood speaks of life given. A veil marks the way into the holy place because access to the presence of God is not a small thing.”

Their voice begins gathering strength again. “But brothers and sisters, if Messiah has entered the greater and more perfect tabernacle, if He has entered through His own blood, if He has obtained eternal redemption, if He has offered one sacrifice for sins for all time and sat down—then what are we looking at when we look at the things that remain before our eyes?”

No one answers. The preacher looks toward the Temple. “A shadow.” There it is. Someone near Peter repeats it quietly. “A shadow.” “Yes.” The preacher turns back, and the excitement is returning to their face. “A shadow of the good things to come.” The courtyard begins to stir. “Do not despise the shadow.” That catches us. “Do not call the shadow worthless because the Reality has appeared. The shadow was telling the truth all along.”

An amen comes from the side of the courtyard that had been noticeably quieter when Moses was discussed. The preacher hears it. “The shadow was telling the truth because there was a Reality casting it.” Now John is standing again. “The blood was speaking.” “Amen!” “The veil was speaking.” “Yes!” “The priest was speaking.” “Amen!” “The altar was speaking.” “Yes!” “The sanctuary was speaking!” “Hallelujah!”

The preacher stretches a hand toward Jerusalem, toward the Temple that is still standing, toward the smoke we can still smell. “And now the One they were speaking about has come!”

The courtyard breaks open again. The preacher lets the praise rise, but this time they do not wait for it to disappear completely. “And if the One they were speaking about has come, then brothers and sisters, something has happened to the way we come to God.” The words begin pulling the room back toward them. “We have confidence to enter the holy place by

the blood of Jesus. A new and living way has been opened for us through the veil.[1]" They pause. "Do you hear what I am saying? The blood that obtained eternal redemption did not leave us standing outside."

John's "Uh-huh" is nearly swallowed by the amens around him. "We have a great Priest over the house of God[2], and He is not waiting for another sacrifice. He is not waiting for another priest to finish what He could not. He has opened the way." The preacher looks around the courtyard. "So draw near." The words come again, stronger. "Draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith. Hold firmly to the confession of our hope.[3] Do not let go of what has been given because something familiar still stands before your eyes."

That last sentence quiets some of the courtyard. The Temple has not gone anywhere. The altar will receive another offering. Priests will continue to stand. The preacher does not ask anyone to pretend otherwise. "And keep gathering like this," they continue, looking around at the people crowded together in Mary's courtyard. "Consider one another. Stir one another toward love and good works. Encourage one another. We are going to need each other to remember what has happened." [4]

Peter nods slowly.

The preacher looks at him, then at James, then across the gathering. Their voice changes. The excitement remains, but something weightier has entered it. "Because there is another mountain we need to talk about." That got their attention.

"Our fathers came to Sinai." No one needs the story explained. "A mountain that could be touched, and yet they were warned not to touch it. Fire. Darkness. Storm. The sound of a trumpet. A voice so terrible that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken." The preacher pauses. "Even Moses trembled." [5]

The courtyard has gone still again. "But brothers and sisters…" John is already smiling. The preacher smiles too. "You have not come to that mountain." A few voices answer. "You have come to Mount Zion.[6]" The courtyard erupts. "You have come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem!"[7] John is on his feet again. Peter joins him. "You have come to myriads of angels gathered in joy!"[8] The preacher laughs now, remembering where they began. "Yes, the angels are still testifying!" That brings laughter and praise together.

"You have come to the Assembly of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven! You have come to God, the Judge of all! To the spirits of the righteous made perfect![9]" Their voice rises over the courtyard. "And you have come to Jesus!" His name releases something

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[1] See Heb. 10:19-20
[2] See Heb. 10:21
[3] See Heb. 10:22
[4] See Heb. 10:25
[5] See Heb. 12:21
[6] See Heb. 12:22
[7] See Heb. 12:22
[8] See Heb. 12:22
[9] See Heb. 12:23

no argument has been able to produce. Mary closes her eyes. Mary Magdalene is weeping openly. Voices rise all around us. "Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant!"[1]

The preacher waits, but only for a moment. "Do you hear the tense, brothers and sisters?" The question catches them. "Not we will come." Silence begins spreading through the courtyard. "Not someday, if we are faithful enough, we may come." The preacher looks deliberately across the gathering. "We have come." That lands deeper than the shouting.

"We have come because He went in. You draw near because He opened the way. We stand in confidence because His blood has spoken. We belong to the Assembly because He is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters. We are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken because the King has already taken His seat."

There it is again. His seat. John laughs softly. The preacher hears him and smiles.

"So do not refuse the One who is speaking."[2] Their voice is quieter now. "Things that can be shaken will be shaken. Things we have depended upon because we could see them may not always remain before our eyes. But we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken."[3]

No one interrupts. "Be grateful. Worship God with reverence and awe. Hold firmly to what you have heard. Draw near. Encourage one another. Keep considering Jesus." The preacher looks around the courtyard one final time. The fire has gone out of neither their eyes nor their message, but they no longer need to raise their voice. "God has spoken in His Son."

We remember how this began. "So pay attention to what you have heard." A pause. "Don't drift." And they sit down.

For a few moments after the preacher sits down, the courtyard does not know what to do with itself. Praise continues in pockets. Conversations break out before others have finished wiping tears from their faces. John remains standing, shaking his head and smiling as though he has just heard words given to experiences he has carried for years. Mary is weeping with joy almost as if she can see Jesus standing in their midst. James makes no attempt to regain control of the gathering. Then Peter stands.

James notices him first. John follows his gaze, and gradually the voices begin to disappear. Peter waits until he can be heard without raising his voice. "When you tell us not to drift, and when you say we must not go back, I want to be certain we have heard you correctly." He glances briefly toward Jerusalem beyond the courtyard before looking again at the preacher. He's thinking of those he knows might take some of this more literally than others. "Are you telling us not to go back to the Temple?"

"No." The answer comes without hesitation. "No, Peter. That is not what I am saying. The Temple is still bearing its witness. The priests are still bearing theirs. I am not telling

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[1] See Heb. 12:24
[2] See Heb. 12:25
[3] See Heb 12:26-28

anyone to stop hearing them. I am saying we cannot go back to living as though their witness has not been fulfilled." Peter says again, "Just to clarify, so you would go back?" "Yes." "To the Temple?" "Yes." "After everything you just said?"

The preacher smiles. "Especially after everything I just said." A little laughter moves through the courtyard, but the preacher continues. "I can watch the priest stand there now and know why he stands. I can see the blood and know what it has been saying. I can see the veil and know that a new and living way has been opened. I can look upon a sanctuary made with hands and know that Messiah has entered the greater and more perfect one not made with hands. And I can watch every sacrifice offered there without asking it to accomplish what Jesus has already accomplished. And I can know that the testimony is speaking even now. And maybe someone who didn't see Messiah there before might now."

Peter holds their gaze for another moment, then nods. "Okay." He sits down.

The courtyard grows quiet again, but this silence is different. No one seems troubled by what has just been clarified. If anything, another question has begun to form beneath it. We have heard what has happened. We have heard what has been accomplished. We have been told where we have come. We have been told to draw near, to hold firmly, to consider Jesus, and above all, not to drift. But the morning is still moving toward afternoon. Tomorrow will come after this one, and another after that.

Peter's concern didn't take long to surface. Someone asks, "How?" The preacher looks toward them. "How do we live from this?" No one laughs. It may be the most important question asked all morning. Another voice adds, "Tomorrow, I mean. When we wake up tomorrow and the priests are standing again, and the Temple is still there, and everything looks exactly as it looked today—how do we live from what you have just told us?" The preacher does not answer immediately. Neither does Peter. Neither does James. Then there is movement at the edge of the courtyard.

A witness we have encountered before steps forward. The Calendar hears his cue to speak, and tucked beneath its arm is a basket of barley.

For a moment he simply stands there. After everything we have just heard, the basket seems almost absurdly ordinary. The Calendar looks down at it, then back at the gathering. "You asked how you live tomorrow." He reaches into the basket and takes a small handful of barley. "Tomorrow is not as complicated as you think."

James looks interested. Peter has learned from his encounter with the sheet and the unclean animals to not underestimate witnesses carrying unusual objects. The Calendar holds up the barley. "You count.[1]"

Someone asks, "Count what?"

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[1] See Lev. 23:15-16

“A day.”

There is a pause. “That’s it?” “For tomorrow? Yes.” The Calendar drops the barley back into the basket. “You already know this. We began counting after Passover. One day. Then another. Then another. You do not arrive at Shavuot all at once. You receive the day you have, and when another comes, you count that one too.”

The preacher is listening now with everyone else and asks, “But they asked how to live from what has already been accomplished.” “I heard them.” The Calendar looks toward the preacher. “And I am answering.” That draws a little laughter.

The Calendar turns back to the gathering. “Pesach does not become less true because another day has come. The lamb does not need to be slain again because you woke up this morning. What happened remains true while the days move forward.”

He reaches into the basket again. “That is what I have been carrying.” The basket clears its throat. Everyone looks at it. The Calendar closes his eyes. Peter looks delighted. “I believe,” the basket says with considerable dignity, “that technically I have been carrying it.” A few people laugh. The Calendar looks down. “We have discussed this.” “Yes. And yet you continue to take all the credit.” Something shifts inside the basket. “Excuse me,” another voice says. “Without us, neither of you has anything to count.”

They all stare at the basket. The Calendar sighs. “The barley.” “Thank you,” says the barley. The basket sounds offended. “You are in my basket.” “And without me you are a storage container.” “You are grain.” “Exactly. Grain being counted.” Peter laughs out loud. Even the preacher has given up trying not to.

The Calendar waits until the silly argument has exhausted itself. “May I continue?” “Please,” James says. “Thank you.” The Calendar reaches into the basket and removes a single measure. “One day.” He reaches again. “And another.” The barley interrupts. “And another.”

The Calendar looks down at it. “What? I’m helping.” A smile moves across the Calendar’s face despite himself. “Yes. And another.” He looks back toward the gathering. “Do you hear it?” No one answers immediately.

“One day and another. What has been received is carried into what comes next. The days do not disconnect you from Pesach. They proceed from it.” With that the preacher leans forward. The Calendar continues. “You asked what happens tomorrow when the priests are standing again and the Temple still looks the same. Tomorrow you remember what is already true. And the next day, you remember what is already true. And when circumstances look nothing like what you expected redemption to look like, you do not ask God to redeem you again. You stand in what He has done.”

That last sentence quiets the laughter.

“Israel walked out of Egypt once,” the Calendar says. “The sea did not reopen behind them every morning so they could cross it again. When they were hungry, Egypt was still behind

them. When they were thirsty, Egypt was still behind them. When they were frightened, Egypt was still behind them. Even when Egypt began to look better in their memory than it ever was when they lived there, Egypt was still behind them."

The preacher whispers it before anyone else does. "Don't drift." The Calendar looks at them. "Exactly." He reaches into the basket once more, but this time he does not immediately continue counting. Something has caught his attention. He turns the barley over slowly in his hand. "You know, there is something else about remembering."

John looks up.

The Calendar looks toward him, then toward Mary. "On the night He was betrayed, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to you." The courtyard has become quiet again. "And He said…"

John answers softly, "Do this in remembrance of Me.[1]"

The Calendar stops. So does everyone else. He looks down at the barley in his hand, and when he speaks again, the playfulness has disappeared from his voice. "In remembrance of Me." The preacher is staring at him now. The Calendar looks back toward the gathering. "What if that is how you count?" No one moves.

"Not counting because you are waiting for God to do something He has not yet done. Not counting because redemption is somewhere ahead of you." He lifts the barley in his hand. "Count in remembrance of Him."

The silence deepens.

"One day—remember Him. Another day—remember what He accomplished. Another day—remember the blood. Another day—remember the opened way. Another day—remember that your High Priest entered once for all. Another day—remember that He obtained eternal redemption. Another day—remember…"

The Calendar looks directly at John. "…He sat down." John does not say "uh-huh" this time. He just stares at him. The preacher is the one who finally speaks. "Then the counting keeps us from drifting."

The Calendar turns toward them.

"Uh-huh."

The Calendar's "Uh-huh" hangs there for a moment. Then the basket shifts. "So," it says, apparently deciding the serious part has gone on long enough, "are we going to finish counting?" The barley answers before the Calendar can. "I thought that was what we were

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[1] Luke 22:19

doing." "We were remembering," the basket corrects. "While counting," says the barley. "Which is what I said." The Calendar looks down at both of them. "One."

"And two," says the barley. The basket groans. "Not again." "And three." "There is an order." "And four." The Calendar is about to intervene when the preacher raises a hand. "Wait." Everyone stops. "What did you just say?" The barley sounds uncertain. "Four?" "No. Before that." "Three?" The entire assembly is wondering if this silliness will end.

"You keep saying *and*." The Calendar looks at the barley. The barley looks at the basket, or at least we assume it does. Then the Calendar smiles. "Yes. I suppose we do."

From somewhere among the gathering, vav clears his throat. The Calendar turns. 'There you are.' The Hebrew letter appears a bit bothered that it has taken this long for them to notice him. He simply steps into what has already been happening. With a bit of swagger, vav says, 'And.'

"One day **and** another," vav continues. "What was accomplished does not disappear when the next day arrives. The next day is joined to it. And the next. And the next." The Calendar still holds the barley in his hand. Vav points toward it. "That is why you do not merely have forty-nine separate days. You accumulate. It's a counting. One day joined to another day, each carrying the remembrance forward."

The preacher adds their two cents, "So remembrance keeps what happened from becoming merely something behind us." Vav nods. "The event is behind you. The reality established through it is not."

The courtyard is quiet again as Vav looks toward John. "He died **and** He rose. He rose **and** He appeared to you. He appeared to you **and** He breathed upon you. The day passed **and** another came. None of what followed required what came before to become true again."

Mary smiles. Vav turns toward the Calendar. "Count." The Calendar lifts one measure of barley. "One day." "And another," says vav. Another measure. "And another." Another. "And another." Someone else chimes in, "The days keep accumulating as they move." "Yes." "And what has been accomplished remains." "Yes." "And remembrance keeps us living from it."

Vav smiles. "Uh-huh."

And now I can hear the whole courtyard doing it. "Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh." John started something he may never be able to stop. "Uh-huh." The Calendar picked it up. "Uh-huh." Vav, naturally, joined himself to it. "Uh-huh." At this point James is probably wondering how a perfectly respectable apostolic hearing turned into this. And Peter is loving every minute of it.

"Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh!"

Sivan – What Becomes Visible

If there is anything I've discovered about engaging with these witnesses is to expect the unexpected. At any moment the walls might give way, the heavens above may open up or the floor drop out. Anything can happen. And probably will. I mean, talking baskets. I feel like I'm in another realm altogether. Well, there's that.

Considering the outbreak at Pentecost who knows what's next. Who might show up to testify in Sivan? After the whole place got overtaken by laughter coming from the throne, I'm almost afraid to ask, at the same time sitting on the edge of my seat for what's next.

I look around, just to get my bearings before this session begins. Where I am? Who's here? And where is here? I'm not really sure. I can't tell by looking around. I can describe what I see but not what this might mean.

The seats are filled. There seem to be people from across the ages. Pricilla, Aquila, Apollos, Polycarp, Ignatius, John Wycliffe, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, John and Charles Wesely, George Whitefield, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, Nikolaus von Zinzendorf, Charles Spurgeon, James McGready, Barton Stone, Charles Finney, Dwight L. Moody, William Booth, Andrew Murray, Evan Roberts, Maria Woodworth-Etter, Alexander Dowie, William Seymour, Aimee Semple McPherson, Smith Wigglesworth, John G. Lake, Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, A.A. Allen, Kathyrn Kuhlman, John Wimber, Reinhard Bonnke. Honestly, I don't know how I know who some of those people are. I mean, Bonnke, Kuhlman, Graham, Roberts, even Wigglesworth and a few others I would know by sight, but Polycarp, come on. It's not like I've seen his picture somewhere. There are more but I can't put a name to a face.

I keep looking around the room, trying to find something that will tell me why these people are here together. There are connections, obviously, but every time I think I have found the one that explains the room, somebody else catches my eye and ruins my theory. I could call this a room full of preachers, but that doesn't quite work. Evangelists? Reformers? Revivalists? Missionaries? Healers? Teachers? Some of them fit several of those descriptions. Some don't fit into any of them.

And that may be the strangest thing about what I'm looking at. I can describe what I see, but I cannot tell you what it means. I know enough about some of these gathered to recognize pieces of their stories. I know something about what happened when they preached, prayed, translated, traveled, laid hands on the sick, confronted the powers of their day, or simply obeyed whatever they believed God had put before them. But knowing their stories still doesn't explain why Sivan has gathered them into the same room.

"What does this mean?"

The words seem to mean something, and they can't leave my mind. Then I remember. Jerusalem. Shavuot. Pentecost. We've heard this story so many times by now it's lost the original impact it had when we first heard it. A rushing wind, tongues of fire and a sound from heaven. Disciples spilling into the streets speaking with the language of heaven. and

Others standing around, Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Egyptians, Romans, Cretans, Arabs, hearing the mighty works of God in their native tongue. They could completely understand what they were hearing, though these Galileans were speaking languages they had never learned. Something extraordinary was happening right in front of them. But they didn't quite know what it meant.[1]

And then someone said those words, "What does this mean?" Acts 2:12

I'm not quite as bothered by the fact that I can't explain the room anymore. Maybe I'm not supposed to know, at least not yet.

So, I wait. Apparently, everyone else is just waiting too. Nobody is moving toward the witness chair. With this many preachers in one room, the fact that no one has attempted to preach yet may qualify as a miracle. But they are all content it seems to wait.

I look around again. Wow, there really are a lot of people here. To pass the time, I start counting. I make it to thirty-seven before somebody shifts in their seat and I lose my place. I start again. Somewhere around sixty I become distracted trying to decide whether I have counted the people standing along the wall. By seventy-something I have counted at least one person twice. Probably Wesley. There are two of them, after all. I give up.

Then, for some reason, I start again. This time the counting itself begins to feel familiar. A room full of people. Waiting. Nobody quite knowing what is about to happen. About one hundred and twenty[2]. I stop counting. Oh. Now Acts has my attention.

Before there were Parthians hearing Galileans speak their language, before Peter stood up, before three thousand people asked what they should do, before anybody accused anybody of being drunk, there was a room full of people doing exactly what we seem to be doing now.

Waiting.

Jesus had told them to.

He had told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for what the Father had promised. They knew a promise had been made. They knew Holy Spirit was coming. Jesus had even told them that they would receive power when Holy Spirit came upon them and that they would be His witnesses to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth.[3]

But knowing what He had said was not the same thing as knowing what was about to happen.

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[1] See Acts 2:1-12
[2] See Acts 1:15
[3] Acts 1:4–8

Everyone in that upper room was familiar with Shavuot. We know a little from what Luke wrote in Acts about that night, but that doesn't seem to stick in our minds when the day of Pentecost had fully come.

Now, I drift off in my own thoughts. I always thought the wording a bit odd until I learned the Jews observed each day from sundown to sundown[1]. I remember the first thought I had was, "Oh, wow that is why Luke says, "When the day of Pentecost had fully come." I smile to myself. "That takes me back." People started coming to mind. I remember talks with my mom after she had watched Zola Levitt on TV. Had to be the 1980's. She was so excited about this great Jewish teacher who was a Messianic believer. I look up for just a moment. OMG, is that Zola sitting over there? Huh. But my thoughts seem to pull me back and now I'm thinking about others that I barely knew but had influenced me, taught me, and introduced me to something about Christ I hadn't known before.

I love learning. I love the presence of God. I remember the first time I went with my Grandfather to a Catholic Charismatic prayer group in Chicago. It was the mid 1970's and the height of the Charismatic Renewal. Not that I knew what that meant at the time. I was in high school. A small room, crammed with people. Almost like today. They are standing around but already in prayer. It's quiet so we enter respectfully and step off to one side. Grandpa bowed his head, so I did the same. It was the first time in my life I actually felt the manifest presence of God. I could feel love. I could feel peace. I could feel hope. I drank it in. It was weighty and at times I almost felt lightheaded.

Then one older woman, grey haired quietly began speaking. Almost under her breath, but you could still hear her, but not enough to make out what she was saying. I tried. But I didn't understand a word she said. I figured she was speaking German, or Swedish, or some other language I didn't understand. But then a few others joined her and the volume slowly got louder until it seemed the whole group was speaking this unknown language. But they weren't all saying the same thing. Grandpa leaned over and whispered in my ear. "They are speaking in tongues." He had prepared me on the ride over. There was a sweetness to it even as their voices were raised. It was almost soothing, like my insides were soaking in a hot bath. That was the day I became addicted to the presence of God.

I hadn't thought about that day in a long time. But before I could continue that thought another one invaded my mind. I was living with my Dad in my last year of high school. I had gone to visit my mom for the weekend. She was living in rural Wisconsin with her second husband and my half-brother John who was about 2 years old at the time. They attended a home church that met in an older couple's home above a bookstore. The pastor of this group was dairy farmer. There were maybe thirty people in all.

After he preached and we had finished up with a few worship songs an older man, much older than the pastor. I found out later it was his dad. He came over to me and asked if he could speak to me. "Sure." He leaned over and whispered to me softly. "While we were in worship, I saw something in the Spirit for you. I saw scars. It was as if your heart was

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[1] See Lev. 23:32

covered with scars. And I saw Jesus put His hands on those scars and one by one they began to disappear." Then he spoke with authority, not loud but declarative, "Jesus is going to heal your heart. Years of pain, hurt and times you thought you would never be okay, Jesus is healing you. It isn't going to be all at once. But He knows the hurt and He is touching those places in your life." And with that he hugged me and slipped back beside his wife. I was numb.

Again, I hadn't thought about that in over fifty years. And he was right. It didn't happen all at once. Healing had begun that day. It didn't prevent life from getting worse at times, but today I can't even remember the scars I carried back then, or even the scars I carried after living with an abusive alcoholic husband. But he was right, Jesus has healed me.

I thought if I looked up I might see him. I didn't. I did see a woman's face I sort of recognized. Oh, wow. I couldn't believe I recognized her. I only met her once. It was at a woman's bible study group I had only started attending, when I lived in a small town in Texas. I was eight months pregnant with my first son. It was October 1982. I had turned away from the Lord for a brief moment a year and a half before this. Almost immediately I had met a man, got involved and married within three months.

It was the February before that I wanted to cry out to God. But I couldn't remember how to pray. I didn't know what to do. Twelve hundred miles away from my family and scared. Then as if my mouth found the words to the daily prayer we prayed with Grandpa at every meal. "God is great. God is good. Thank you for our food. Amen" The words felt almost strange as they formed in my throat. But I forced them out, with great effort. It was almost like something in me was locked up. After I finally got those words out, I spoke them out again, then again, then again. By that time, I was in a heap on the floor. Weeping uncontrollably.

I felt a hand on my back. I sat up but no one was there. Then ever so tenderly Jesus began to speak to my heart. He assured me that He had never left my side and never would. Then my mind went back to that day in Texas, and the woman. I don't know if I ever remembered her name. The pastor's wife, who led our little group had invited her to minister. I was one of maybe half a dozen young married women. I don't know if there was even a dozen in our whole group. Betty Jo had invited her. She brought her specifically to pray for us to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as none of us young woman had that experience yet.

I want to say her name may have been Frances. But who knows. I was hoping that if I stretched out, I would know her like I knew who von Zinzendorf was. But nothing. Yet, that one day changed my life forever. She spoke for a few minutes telling us about the ministry of Holy Spirit and the day of Pentecost. She asked those who wanted to receive the Holy Spirit to stand up in a line shoulder to shoulder. We all did. She reminded us that we would probably start speaking in tongues but even if we didn't that didn't mean that we didn't receive Him. She reminded us that we received Him by faith, the same way we got saved. And with that she made her way down the line. She spoke something over each one and as she laid hands on them they dropped to the floor, slain in the Spirit. I had heard about this but had never actually seen it happen until now. I shot a quick prayer up to Jesus. I was

eight months pregnant and was not comfortable with falling down. I asked if He could do it so I didn't fall I would appreciate it.

And when it was my turn, I didn't fall. At first I wondered if I had received anything because I didn't go down like the others had. Then she looked me in the eye and said, "You got it. Just believe." She instructed me to go off to the side and just be alone with God for a minute. Some of the others were already doing that. I followed her instructions and found a place to kneel down. Almost immediately I started speaking in tongues. I felt like a firehose had gone off within me and I couldn't stop it. I was overwhelmed completely. It was wonderful. It was amazing. This was different than when I got saved. It was different than when I had gotten water baptized. This was unlike anything that had ever happened to me before.

I couldn't really explain it. I couldn't even control it. I left that meeting unable to stop speaking in tongues all day. It just flowed out of me. I remember looking at the clock and realizing it was almost time for my husband to come home from work. The thought occurred to me that he was not going to understand this, and while I thought it was great, he might not. I tried to stop. I couldn't. I held my breath just for a second, and a vision burst out before me. Well, that had never happened before. This was new. And as I would discover, it was only the beginning.

I sat back and opened my eyes. Yep, I'm still here. And like everyone else around me, I'm waiting.

Only now the waiting feels different. Those memories had not drifted in at random. They were not interruptions in the room. They were witnesses. Each one had brought me back to a place where Holy Spirit had made something real to me that I could not have produced for myself. The presence of God in that little prayer room. The prophetic word spoken by a man who knew nothing about me. The grace that found me on the floor when I could barely remember how to pray. The day I received Holy Spirit with power and could not stop speaking in a language I had never learned.

I had not been remembering religious experiences. I had been remembering introductions. Holy Spirit had been introducing me to dimensions of Christ's life I had not yet known how to recognize.

And suddenly the room makes more sense.

We're waiting on Holy Spirit.

That is what the first disciples were doing before Pentecost ever spilled into the streets. They were not waiting for the cross to become more finished. They were not waiting for resurrection to become more true. They were not waiting for Jesus to become more exalted. All of that had already happened. The Lamb had been slain. The grave had been emptied. The Son had ascended. The King was seated.

They were waiting for the Promise of the Father[1].

They were waiting for Holy Spirit to come upon them with power, so that what had been accomplished in Christ would begin to be borne in them. The finished work would not remain only something they believed, proclaimed, or remembered. It would become something visible through their lives.

Maybe now the question is: What happens when what Christ has already accomplished is breathed into a people and begins to speak through their lives?

Zayin (ז): The Visible Expression of What is Completed

Zayin has been standing in this year from the beginning, but now, in Sivan, it feels as though the witness stops waiting politely in the background and walks straight to the front of the room.

Of course it does.

If zayin is the seventh letter, and seven keeps bringing us back to the testimony of completion, then Pentecost is not an interruption in that witness. It may be one of the clearest places where the witness becomes visible. Not because Pentecost completes what Jesus left unfinished. That would be impossible. The Lamb had already been slain. The grave had already been emptied. The Son had already ascended. The King was already seated.

Pentecost does not finish the finished work.

Pentecost fills a people with the Spirit of the One who finished it.

And that changes the way I hear zayin.

The movement into zayin is not merely from six into seven, as though we are turning a page on a calendar and arriving at a number that means "done." It is the movement from what has been established into what can now be expressed. What has been completed in Christ does not remain locked away in heaven as a doctrinal fact we admire from a distance. Holy Spirit brings that completed reality into a people until the life of the Son begins to become recognizable through them.

That is what happened in Jerusalem.

The disciples were not waiting because redemption still needed to be accomplished. They were not gathered in that upper room because the cross had almost worked, or because resurrection needed one more confirming sign, or because Jesus was not yet securely seated at the right hand of the Father. They were waiting because Jesus told them to wait

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[1] See Acts 1:4-8

for the Promise of the Father. They were waiting for power from on high. They were waiting for Holy Spirit to come upon them so they could be His witnesses.[1]

And when He came, what had been accomplished in Christ began to speak through them.

Not theoretically.

Audibly. Visibly. Publicly. In languages they had never learned. In boldness they had not possessed. In witness that spilled out of the room and into the streets until people from the nations began hearing the mighty works of God in their own tongues.[2]

No wonder they asked, "What does this mean?[3]"

Because something completed had become visible.

The work was finished before Pentecost, but when Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, the finished work began to become recognizable in a people. The disciples did not become the source of the testimony. They became living witnesses to Someone else's testimony. They received what the Father had promised, and Holy Spirit bore witness through them to the Son whom the Father had already glorified[4].

That is why zayin belongs here.

Zayin does not ask us to manufacture the life of Christ. It does not hand us a spiritual assignment and tell us to make the finished work look convincing. It stands in Sivan and points to people being filled with Holy Spirit until what Christ has accomplished begins to find expression through their actual lives.

And maybe that is why all those faces in the room have begun to make more sense. Reformers, revivalists, translators, missionaries, preachers, teachers, healers, intercessors, fathers and mothers in the faith—none of them are the point. None of them are the source. But each, in some measure, became a witness. Something of Christ became visible through them because Holy Spirit was still bearing witness to the Son through ordinary human lives.

That does not mean every witness was complete in themselves. It does not mean every vessel carried the testimony without mixture, weakness, blindness, or limitation. Witnesses are not the Christ. They are witnesses. But even through frail people, unfinished people, imperfect people, Holy Spirit has continued making the life of the risen and exalted Jesus recognizable in the earth.

And perhaps that is what I am seeing in this impossible room.

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[1] See Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8
[2] See Acts 2:1-11
[3] Acts 2:12
[4] John 16:13–15; Acts 2:32–36

Not a hall of fame.

A courtroom full of witnesses.

People through whom the finished work kept speaking. People who received something they could not have produced and carried it into their generation. People who, in different languages and different centuries and different measures, bore witness to the same Son.

The Father's testimony concerning His Son did not stop at creation, covenant, sanctuary, feast, prophet, or Scripture. It did not stop when Jesus ascended. Holy Spirit was poured out, and the testimony entered a people. The witnesses did not replace the Son. They bore Him. They made Him visible.

So zayin stands in Sivan leaving us with questions and something to watch. What does it look like when the completed work of Christ is no longer only confessed by a people, but expressed through them? What does it look like when the life already established in Him begins to move through human mouths, human hands, human weakness, human obedience, human history? What does it look like when Holy Spirit fills a people with the life secured in Christ, and the witness stands up?

Maybe that is why we are still waiting. Not because the work is unfinished. Because the Spirit is still making the Finished One visible. Which leaves a wonderfully dangerous question hanging over the room: What happens next?

5787 Quarter Four

Anticipating What Is Yet to Be Seen

The room is still in quiet wait. I don't know about anybody else, but I'm nearly unhinged by the tangible sense of anticipation energizing this silent crowd. Behind me the stillness is broken as someone bursts into song. They aren't shy about it either. This distinctive voice makes me turn instinctively. I expect to see the man in black. It sounds like him, but he isn't singing Ring of Fire[1]. He's singing a chorus I remember from the Charismatic Renewal.

"I found a new way of living. ♪♪ I found a new life Divine. ♪♪ I have the fruit of the Spirit. ♪♪I'm abiding, ♪♪ abiding in the vine…"[2]

It might as well have been at the Grand Ol' Opry and this Johnny Cash, June Carter and Loretta Lynn. But it wasn't. Instead, it was Chet, Tet and Yod. That made me smile. Those

[1] Johnny Cash was famous for singing Ring of Fire, written by June Carter 1963.
[2] From Abiding in the Vine, writer: Unknown, in the public domain.

sound like good country singer names. They were dancing as they meandered toward the front of the room. Evidently, they aren't here for the show. They are the show.

Chet had an old guitar; Tet accompanied with a tambourine and Yod was singing backup. Somehow our chairs had shifted, and we were now sitting in a circle. Some had their eyes closed and hands raised.

This is familiar. Those old Charismatic meetings were just like this. Spontaneous singing. Different from the Awakenings, and the more recent Healing Revival of the 40's and 50's, the Charismatic Renewal may have started among the Catholics, but it drew countless others. They might have been casual to the naked eye, but the anointing was profound. That much I do remember. I had a mentor who said, "You could say, 'Donald Duck' and the anointing would fall. We sat around with a cigarette in one hand, and prophesying." That pretty much summed it up. Incredibly profound manifestation of God's presence among flawed and broken people.

That's what new life brings. Because after Pentecost nothing was the same.

And if that familiar setting taught me anything, it's that it's testimony time. And one by one those assembled would begin to speak.

Tammuz — Holy Spirit Has Been Here

Chet had been leading the group in one familiar chorus after another. The gathering hadn't cleared. I thought they might. But they seem to want to linger. The presence of God is soothing, amazing and full of expectation. And this group knows what comes with testimony time. It seems to open the atmosphere for the miraculous.

Before anyone has a chance to clear their throat, another memory steps forward. This time, I see a building on the north side of Chicago, a place familiar to me not only because I had been there, but because a bit of its history has left its mark on my life.

I arrived late. Not late for service. Late for the story. By the time I walked through the doors in the late 1970s, much of what had shaped that place happened decades before I got there. But whatever that was had left a lingering effect. Grandpa had heard about their worship and wanted to check it out. The air was charged with the presence of God. That alone kept calling me back.

It was one of those places if the walls could talk, what stories could it tell. Fortunately for me I heard those stories from eyewitnesses who sat in those very seats during the healing revival that extended from the late 1940's into the 50's. If this was the afterglow, what must it have been like?

Chicago's Philadelphia Church was my home for over twenty-five years. During that time, I heard stories of what had come before, while gathering stories of my own. I stood beneath the neon sign out front of what used to be an old bank building. The big bold letters declaring: "JESUS SAVES" glowed against the night sky like a beacon on Clark Street. And

inside, you couldn't miss the giant name of JESUS, painted in gold on the wall above the choir loft. It wasn't the sign, or the gold paint impressed me though. It was the presence of God. It was enveloping. It was ministering. And during the years my marriage became abusive and confusing, this place was a haven. It was my lifeline. It became a place of refuge and strength in a time of need.

I remember collapsing into the women's weekly Bible study. It was there that I heard some amazing testimonies that occurred during the Latter Rain Revival. Mae Pearson, Muriel Wellman, Mabel Classon and Margaret Juvonen shared their memories and their lived experiences. Collectively they were a veritable treasure trove of witness to the faithfulness of God and His miraculous power to heal and save. It was in the tiny annex of Philadelphia Church, they stood week after week delivering those testimonies. One name they mentioned with great admiration was Joseph Mattsson-Boze. He pastored Philadelphia Church during those revival years.

At that time, Mattsson-Boze[1] was friends with men who were at the forefront of the revival and had them come to minister on occasion. He started a magazine, *Herald of Faith* which had become a spiritual lifeline for scattered believers, independent preachers, missionaries, and other hungry congregations. What I could only read from yellowed pages, these women experienced first-hand.

I remember one conversation with Mabel who had been in her teens during those years. She carried those remembrances like they were yesterday. The reality had not faded as the years had passed. She had spent a lifetime watching Holy Spirit come into rooms, touch broken people, interrupt ordinary meetings, and make the life of Jesus unmistakably present.

We talked about the transition we were currently experiencing since the height of the Charismatic Renewal, about the presence of God, about the strange mercy of being caught up in something too holy and too human to explain cleanly. I would tell her something I had seen or experienced, and then she would quietly respond with a testimony from those earlier gatherings. It didn't feel like she was trying to outdo my story, more like she was teaching me that there is always more.

Having lived through both streams she knew what my immaturity could not possibly understand. Back then, in arrogant immaturity I thought she was just holding onto the past, trying to recapture what had been. But her words never suggested that. Instead, she would light up whenever she talked about it, as if she knew something I was yet to learn. Mabel carried a living testimony. The testimony of God didn't end when the revival faded. The manifestations changed.

The thought of her reminds me that a move of God is never merely a movement we live in the moment and then move past. Something of God gets deposited in us. Like her, I can now look back over decades of receiving from Holy Spirit. The outward manifestation of His

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[1] For more info on Mattsson-Boze see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Mattsson-Boze

presence might change as seasons come and go, but what we have received remains with us.

With all of this coming to mind, I am finally aware of something. This is my history. This is my life. Carrying first the deposit of Holy Spirit but also carrying forward what others had brought into my life as well. The history, the testimonies, the experiences. Everything I've lived up to this minute has not faded into irretrievable memory. It's the bedrock of my life. It's the fountain that still flows within and through me.

And maybe that is what I had not understood while I was living it. Testimony is not only the story we tell after something happens. It is also what remains in us because something God did happened. The meetings may have ended. The songs may have changed. The people aged, moved, died, or disappeared from the places where I first knew them. But the deposit did not disappear with the atmosphere that carried it.

What Holy Spirit gave became part of me, not just the way I recognized Him. It isn't just the way I have learned to listen. It became how I can sense when His life is in the room. Mabel carried that across decades, and now I can see that the others here have been doing the same. Their testimonies became part of the ground beneath our feet. Whether we realize it or not what they carried was carried forward and in some ways we are living in the afterglow.

Now, I do not mind waiting. After all, I am surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—not distant names preserved in church history, but lives that still seem to be bearing testimony from where they stand. Spurgeon, Dowie, John G. Lake, Mabel, and the others are not here to impress me with what they carried. They are here to remind me that Holy Spirit has always known how to make Christ visible through ordinary people. Their expectation has begun to stir mine again. So, I wait with them, not passively, but with the quiet awareness that something already entrusted is still becoming visible.

And then the door opens.

Nobody gets up.

That seems a little rude.

I turn to see who has come in, and for a moment I just stare. He looks as though he has traveled a very long way, although apparently not nearly as far as some of the people already sitting in this room. He carries a scroll under one arm and seems completely unbothered by the fact that Augustine is sitting a few chairs away from William Seymour and Chet has a guitar.

He looks around the circle as though he knows everybody. Apparently, everybody knows him. Chet just nods in his direction.

"About time," with a little shoulder shuffle, he says.

I almost laugh. “About time for what?”

He looks at me, with a playful eyebrow waggle says, “What happens next.”

Av

I don’t know about you, but I think I’ve lost track of time. I not only don’t know what time it is; I’m not entirely sure what day it is. And how on earth did we get to Av? Then again, maybe that fits. Once Holy Spirit comes on the scene, time seems to move differently. Not because the months no longer matter, but because the life He brings refuses to be managed by our calendars, schedules, or expectations.

There are moments in the Spirit when an hour feels like a minute, and other times when one encounter seems to gather years into itself. It’s as if someone folded them up and tucked them into glory. You come out laughing, crying, staggering, or all three, and Holy Spirit does not appear particularly concerned that you had plans afterward. So, if we have lost track of the month for a moment, perhaps that is not entirely inappropriate. Av has arrived, but I am still trying to catch up with what Holy Spirit has been doing in the room. We have not left the calendar behind; we are learning that the Spirit can fill a moment until it carries more than time can explain.

I notice Tet sets down her tambourine and stands next to the man about to speak.

Softly she begins singing an old Vineyard song: “Change my heart, Oh God[1]” ♪♪

Before she finished the chorus the whole room had joined in. It was gentle. It was sweet. It was humble. It was sincere. And now you could hear a few sniffles. A few wiped their eyes. Heads were bowed. Hearts were open. Each time we repeated that chorus it was as if one part was highlighted, then another. It was a prayer more than a song. It went deep. No one was outwardly crying. There was no laughter. It was somber, sober even. The reality of being moldable, pliable in His hands was going into places I thought were already surrendered. But obviously not as completely as I thought. All I could do was yield. Not to the thought of it. More to the reality that He is God, I am not and I really do want to be more like Him.

It seemed the entire assembly had settled into this place of realizing as much as we love Jesus and we carry His Spirit, we want more of Him, we want to be more like Him.

The last notes fade, but nobody seems ready to move. Tet lowers her head. The man has been standing there the whole time. I had almost forgotten about him. He looks around the room, then down at the scroll in his hands. For a moment I wonder whether he is going to say something. Instead, he opens it. As he does, I see handwritten on the back in simple black ink: The Acts of the Apostles. He begins to read.

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[1] The Christian worship song "Change My Heart, O God" was written by Eddie Espinosa in 1982.

"A man walks into the room. He is carrying money.[1]" That gets our attention. "There is nothing particularly unusual about this. The man belongs here. More importantly, he looks like he knows he belongs here. He has been listening to the apostles' teaching. He has witnessed the signs and wonders, the healings. He has been there for the prayers. He has watched people open their homes and their tables to one another. He has seen people sell their possessions and lay the proceeds at the apostles' feet[2]. Apparently, he has sold something too. He walks toward Peter and lays the money before him."

For just a moment, I think we are about to hear another beautiful testimony. But something feels off. Peter doesn't smile. In fact, something in his face changes. Sadness. I haven't seen that until now. He lets out a sigh as the man continues reading: "Ananias."

Oh. I know this story. I don't know that I want him to keep reading. I thought this was going to be fun. Where is the banter of the talking basket when you need him? But this is somber. This is too sobering.

The man continues: Peter looks pitifully at the man standing before him. There is no triumph in his face. But neither can Peter shrink back in the presence of Holy Spirit.

That statement cut off whatever remained of the tenderness brought through the singing.

He continued: "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men, but to God.""(Acts 5:3-4 NASB)

Nobody moved. Even though we know the story. We know how this goes. We've all thought it at one time or another. What would we have done? Nobody had required this of him. Nobody requires this of us. He could have brought part of it. He did bring part of it. Why be afraid of how it might look to others.

I don't know if he was trying to ease our discomfort or his own when he just kept reading. But it didn't.

My eyes move toward Tet.

A few moments ago, I had been singing with everyone else about being clay in the Potter's hands. I meant it. I still mean it. But now the prayer feels different. The room had been full of people asking God to change our hearts. Acts has brought us a man whose heart has become the testimony.

"Ananias falls."

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[1] See Acts 5:1-11 from here forward through this paraphrased rendition of the testimony from Acts.
[2] See Acts 4:32-37

Whatever breath had remained in the room seems to leave with him.

The man continues reading: "Young men come forward, wrap his body, carry him out,[1]"

No one says anything. Surely that is enough testimony for one afternoon. He doesn't close the scroll.

Three hours pass.

Or perhaps they don't. I have already admitted I have lost track of time in this room.

He continues reading the account[2]: "Then a woman walks in. His wife, knowing nothing of what had happened, came in."

She doesn't know. That may be the most terrible part.

"Sapphira steps into the same room her husband entered, but she does not know how he left it. Peter gives her the opportunity to tell the truth. He asks about the amount. She confirms the lie."

I can feel something inside me recoil.

Not because I am standing at a safe distance from these two people and wondering how they could have done such a thing. Quite the opposite. A few minutes ago I was singing about surrender. I was asking to be changed. I was telling God I wanted to be pliable in His hands.

Now Acts has placed Ananias and Sapphira in the middle of the room and made me look at the difference between surrender and the appearance of surrender.

"Sapphira falls. The young men return. This time no one needs to ask why they have come. When they carry her out," He finally stops.

The room that had been so sweet only a short while ago is sober now. Not frightened of Holy Spirit. Not frightened of God. Just suddenly aware that His presence is not something we can reduce to just the bits we enjoy.

I look around the circle. These are people who knew His power. They knew healing, miracles, prophecy, deliverance, revival, laughter, glory. Some of them had watched entire rooms come undone beneath the presence of God. Some, like me, I'm sure are pondering their own shortcomings.

But nobody is reaching for a song now.

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[1] See Acts 5:6
[2] See Acts 5:7-10

Tet is still standing beside Acts.

And strangely, she has not become less beautiful.

Goodness has not left the room.

I think I had simply forgotten how holy it is.

And somewhere in the circle, someone quietly says:

"I would have despaired…" (Ps. 27:13 NASB 95[1])

Elul — a Hand Extended

Grateful, yes grateful is how I feel now that we've reached the last month of the year. The goodness of the Lord has left me thankful. Soberly thankful. Yet this man with the scroll hasn't left his place. Tet is still there but they are joined by yod. Yod has brought a friend, a familiar friend. Someone to lend their voice it seems. I recognize this face. In this place I didn't expect to see someone who hasn't passed on. I remember the first time I saw him he was music minister at a church in Tinley Park just outside Chicago. They were recording the live album, Up To Zion for Integrity Music[2]. It was electric.

Off to one side a small orchestra starts setting up. After the sobriety of Av we're ready for some get off your feet, foot stomping, hand raising halleluiah praise!! You can imagine my confusion when Tet, Yod and the guy with the Acts scroll are still standing there. The frightening thing is he looks like he's going to keep reading.

Yod puts out his hand[3] as if to signal him to continue. The man simply opens the scroll and reads.

"Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the hour of prayer.[4]"

I glance toward the orchestra. Nobody has moved. Apparently, we are going to have to wait.

"A man lame from birth was being carried in. Every day they placed him near the gate of the Temple called Beautiful, where he could ask for alms from those entering."

I know this story too.

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[1] *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.
[2] Integrity's Hosanna! Music's, Up To Zion 1991, recorded at Midwest Christian Center near Chicago, Illinois, marked Paul Wilbur's debut and helped introduce contemporary Messianic worship music.
[3] The Hebrew letter yod (or *Yud*) directly derives from the common Hebrew word ***yad*** (יָד), which means "hand" or "forearm"
[4] See Acts 3:1-10 for the healing testimony of the beggar at the Gate called Beautiful.

“The man sees Peter and John and does what he does every day. He asks for something. Peter stops. “Look at us.” The man looks up. He is expecting to receive something from them.”

So am I.

“Peter doesn’t reach into his pocket. “I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you.”

There it is again. What I have.

I don’t know why those three words seem to hang in the room, but they do. Maybe because we have spent all this time talking about what was received, what remained, what was carried, what was entrusted. Maybe because I have been sitting among people whose lives became testimony to something they had received. Maybe because somewhere along the way I stopped thinking only about what Holy Spirit might do next and began remembering what He has already given.

“Peter has something. “In the name of Jesus Christ, the Nazarene—walk!” Then Peter reaches out. His right hand takes hold of the man’s hand.”

I look over at yod. Of course. The smallest letter doesn’t appear particularly impressed that I finally noticed.

“Peter pulls. The man rises. Feet and ankles that have never carried his weight suddenly know what they were created to do. He stands. He walks. Then apparently walking isn’t enough because now he is leaping.”

So much for the sobriety of the room.

“He goes into the Temple with Peter and John walking and leaping and praising God.”

I can feel the atmosphere beginning to turn again. A few people around me are smiling. Someone behind me says, “Hallelujah.”

The orchestra looks hopeful.

Not yet.

“The people recognize the man. They know where he used to sit. They know what his legs could not do. Now they are staring at Peter and John as though these two men have suddenly become the most interesting people in Jerusalem. Peter will have none of it. “Why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?””

I smile.

There it is.

He continues, “The hand had something to give, but the hand isn’t the source. Peter doesn’t allow his testimony to stop with himself. He doesn’t allow the miracle to become a monument to Peter. He turns the faces of the crowd away from himself and toward Jesus. Jesus. The One glorified by the Father. The Holy and Righteous One. The Prince of Life. The One God raised from the dead.”

I think he’s taken some poetic license there.

Suddenly the entire year seems to have gotten very small.

Not insignificant. Just small.

The letters are small. The calendar is small. The witnesses are small. I am small. Even this extraordinary room full of apostles, revivalists, preachers, healers, martyrs, ordinary saints, and people whose names history never bothered to remember is small.

Jesus is not.

And yod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, is standing there with his hand still extended.

And that is when he motions to Paul Wilbur and the waiting orchestra. With the blast of the shofar, they burst into song!

“Come let us go up… to house of the God of Jacob… (Is. 2:3 NASB)

With that I hear Paul Wilbur shout – “Come On! Let’s go up!”

And the whole place erupts, we are all on our feet, hands raised, feet stomping.

This. This is what we came here for. This is what it’s all about.

♪♪ Worship God! Halleluiah!!!!! ♪♪

An Invitation to Watch

The witness hasn't ended with the people who came before us. The living are in the room too. And so are you.

The witnesses have given us something to watch as we progress through 5787. We have listened to the calendar, the appointed times, the months, the letters, the biblical histories, and finally to lives through which the testimony continued to be carried. Their voices did not all say the same thing in the same way. They didn't need to. Again and again, their testimony brought us to the Son.

But somewhere along the journey something changed. We were no longer only listening to witnesses.

Holy Spirit had been poured out.

The testimony had entered a people.

The life established in Christ had been given to them, and with the Spirit's outpouring came power from on high. The witnesses of the Father had brought us to the Son, and now the Spirit of the Son was making His life visible through human lives, human hands, human voices, human obedience, and even human weakness.

Perhaps that is what we are watching in 5787.

Not whether the work of Christ will become more complete. Not whether the foundation will become more established. We are watching for what has already been established in Him to become increasingly recognizable through a people who have received His life.

There will be appointed times and ordinary days. There will be moments when His work seems unmistakably visible and others when we may wonder whether anything is happening at all. Some things we may recognize while they are unfolding. Others we may only see when we look back and realize that what has become visible had been taking shape long before we knew how to recognize it.

But we are not watching from outside the testimony anymore.

We are living inside it.

The question we can carry through 5787 is the one the witnesses have been bringing us toward all along: What does His witness look like when the life already given begins to find expression through His people?

The witnesses have spoken.
The living are in the room.
We have entered the year.
Now we watch.

ניסן
nissan
אִיָּר
iyar
סִיוָן
sivan
תַּמּוּז
tammuz
אָב
av
אֱלוּל
elul
תִּשְׁרִי
tishrei
חֶשְׁוָן
cheshvan
כִּסְלֵו
kislev
טֵבֵת
tevet
שְׁבָט
shevat
אֲדָר
adar
5787
A season to align with what the Father has already etablished

WATCHING THE ESTABLISHED LIFE BECOME VISIBLE

The Witness of the Biblical Calendar and a Year of Alignment

The biblical calendar is more than a sequence of dates. It is a landscape of witnesses—months, feasts, letters, and stories—that testify to what God has already established in Messiah and how that life becomes visible in His people.

In *Watching the Established Life Become Visible*, Betty Hall invites you to walk through the year 5787, beginning with Tishri and moving month by month through Elul. Along the way, the witnesses speak: from the awakening of an ear, to beginnings whose meaning is still hidden, to the rains that stir what has been received, to the courtroom, the courtyard, the waiting room, and beyond.

This is not a devotional for a particular season, but a year-long invitation to recognize the Father's witnesses, to see Christ in the fullness of Scripture, and to live from the established life He has given. Each month brings its own testimony, yet together they form a unified witness: what God has established in Christ remains, and what remains is becoming visible.

Betty Hall is the founder of *Beyond the Dalet*, where she writes, teaches, and hosts a podcast called *Along the Way*. Her work flows from a life of walking with God, recognizing Christ through the witness of the Scriptures, and asking what that means for the way His people live. She has a deep love for the biblical calendar, the Feasts, and the unfolding testimony of Scripture. Through her writing and teaching, Betty carries a passion to help others recognize the Father's witnesses until Christ becomes unmistakable.

Ancient witnesses. Eternal truth.
A life in season.

BEYOND THE DALET
Recognizing the Father's Witnesses