

Plot Summary

This story chronicles the adventures of *Steven O'Neill*, his wife *Sarah*, and their friends during the End Times. Judgment has already struck the U.S., and Steve and his friends have reached the vast continent of Asia. Witness the amazing things God will reveal about the coming kingdom of the Beast (or the **Antichrist**), the **Mark of the Beast**, and the **Tribulation** period. This story should keep you fascinated, as a realistic account of the future unfolds in the form of a fictional story.

But, this story is **not just a story**. It contains messages from God and prophecies that actually shall happen. It is written as fiction with fictional characters, but the message of the story is **very real**, and the cataclysmic events, touched on in this story, will actually impact this earth as God's Holy Bible and its prophecies unfold. The world will soon enter a time much like that portrayed in this story. I encourage you to seek God about this to see what He will show you.

Steven's Amazing Adventures, and the Future of the World

By: Justin Brown (a pen name)

Chapter One

"Russian Winter"

Four people hiked down the icy path through the snow. Tall pines rose up on either side, like green fingers poking through a white sea. The northern wind whispered through the trees and ruffled woolen and leather parkas. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. The sound of their footsteps would seem strange to a dweller in the tropics. This thought sometimes flashed across the bearded man's mind as he crunched through the packed snow slightly ahead of the others.

"Steven," a woman's voice came from behind him. "Wait up, please."

The bearded man stopped and turned to see his wife's pale face poking out from her hood. She looked beautiful to him with the snow falling around her and her breath coming out in small clouds of vapor.

“Sarah, honey,” Steven said, “how are you doing?”

“I’m feeling a little tired,” Sarah admitted.

“How are we doing?” a man with brown hair and a clean-shaven face asked. He wore a warm, green parka and black boots. Beside him stood a man with a red beard and a leather parka. “Just a little tired, Jason,” Sarah said.

“Honey,” Steve said, “remember how Father God gave you strength to stay up all night and still hike during the next day?”

“Yes,” Sarah said, nodding, “I do. I get it, Steve. I should ask God for strength.”

“Yes,” Steve said. “He will give you what you need. Remember what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:13? He said: **‘I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.’**”

“You’re right,” Sarah chuckled. “I sometimes forget.” Turning to where she sensed Jesus to be standing, Sarah said, “Dear Jesus, will you give me the strength to keep walking. You know I’ve struggled to believe you sometimes, but I choose to trust you to strengthen me even though you know I’m tired.”

“My daughter,” Jesus said to her spirit and soul, “I am with you and I will never leave you, nor forsake you. Rest in Me. I will give you the strength you need to reach the village. It is only a couple miles from here. I will take good care of you. Rest in Me.”

“Yes Lord Jesus,” Sarah said, “I choose to trust you. Thank you that you will help me.”

The group continued walking and Sarah soon started to walk faster.

“Sarah, you’re picking up speed,” Steve said, excitedly. “Praise God! He’s answered your prayer.”

“Amen. He sure has,” Sarah said, smiling.

Less than forty minutes later, a small village appeared at the base of a mountain. Wispy smoke rose up into the late-evening air from chimneys in small *izba* cottages. Simple wood buildings formed the majority of the town’s structures while graveled streets divided the village up into a rough grid layout. In the distance, standing like massive, limbless trees, three tall smoke stacks rose up out of the forest from a mostly concealed, rundown factory complex. The forest had started to grow up around the complex over the decades since it was closed. The woods were starting to eat up the land that had once belonged to derelict, soviet-era collective farms near the edge of the town.

Passing through the streets, the small group came to an izba, or cabin house, just two blocks from the edge of the village. It was somewhat larger than nearby homes. The red-bearded man stepped from behind Steve and approached the front door of the izba. He knocked three times. There was no answer. He placed his mouth close to the door and spoke somewhat loudly in Russian, “Sergey, it’s me, Alexei. I have some people with me who love the Lord. You can trust them. If you are not sure, seek God.”

“I will,” a man’s muffled voice came weakly through the door.

Half a minute passed. The door was still locked shut. Wind blew along the ground, stirring up powder and sent snow flurries sprinkling against their thick coats. Steve was glad for the coat, but he remembered what Abba Father God had told him regarding staying warm. It was God who ultimately would make sure Steve was safely warm. Still, Steve wondered if the door would remain closed. The temperature was dropping to probably below -10 degrees Fahrenheit. Later that night it would drop even more.

A minute later, a scraping sound came from behind the cabin door. Could it be a gun? The thought flashed in Steve’s mind, but he rejected it. God also promised to protect him from guns and from weapons. Strong angels always maintained a watchful guard around all Christians, and had the power to supernaturally protect believers.

The door swung open and a burly man with a brown, medium-length beard peered out at the bundled up people in the snow. He wore a brown, wooly vest, a green flannel shirt, and tan wool trousers.

“Come in,” he said in Russian, “but make sure you don’t attract attention.”

The group filed into his cabin quickly and the Russian quietly closed and bolted his door. A small fire crackled and popped in a green, pot belly stove and caused a tea kettle to simmer on the stove top. An old couch, with quilts hung over it, rested up against one wall, below a small window. The red-bearded Alexei plopped down into the couch cushions, followed by Jason. A rocking chair occupied a corner of the living room space on which rested a sleepy, brown cat. The cat eyed the strangers with some curiosity before it closed its eyes and rested its head to nap.

“Now,” the Russian host said in Russian, “God showed me that you are His children and that I should trust you. So, I will. You are welcome here as long as you like.”

“Thank you for your hospitality, Mr. ...?” Steve said.

“Oh, forgive me, Steve,” Alexei said. “This is Sergey Ivanov. He is a rural blacksmith. He once was the mayor of this town some years ago.”

“And, this is Steven O’Neill and his wife Sarah,” Alexei motioned toward the couple. Waving toward the red-bearded man, he said, “And, this is Jason Harper.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you,” Sergey said as he shook hands with the married couple, and then the two other men.

“And, of course you know I’m Alexei Khlebov,” Alexei added, grinning.

Sergey chuckled. “Yes, my friend, I’ve known you for some time.”

Motioning toward the steaming kettle, Sergey said, “Does anyone want some tea? I was hoping to hear your reasons for coming to Medvedski.”

Even though Steve never learned the Russian language from anyone, he spoke it fluently and understood it when people spoke Russian to him. Sometimes, however, he didn’t understand signs in

Russian. But, understanding and speaking Russian was a supernatural gift that God had given Steve, Sarah, and Jason, and the people in the book of Acts.

“We have come to warn the people of this village about the judgment that God will have to bring down on Russia, due to its sins against Him,” Steven said.

“What might that judgment be?” Sergey asked, curious.

“There will be great shakings in Russia that will strike its finances and economy,” Steve said. “But, this will also strike the economies of all countries in the entire world. Russia will suffer greatly through the shaking, but it will hold together, but just by a thread.

“Life will be very hard for all who do not call upon Jesus during the difficult times ahead. God has sent us to warn Russians in the rural areas to seek God and make Jesus their personal Lord and Savior. We are a type of missionary that God is calling in these last days.”

“May I ask a question, Sergey?” Sarah asked.

“Sure,” Sergey said.

“Where is your wife?” Sarah asked after a pause.

There was silence as Sergey processed the question and all the emotions that came to him.

Sergey walked over to his bed and sat down on a single-wide mattress with a rustic, wooden frame, which was nestled up against the wall a short distance from the pot belly stove. Some jeans hung over the bed railing. A kitchen area with a small, wooden table; two chairs; and a large ice chest lay a short distance away. Pots and pans hanging from pegs in the walls reflected the white glow of a battery-powered electric lantern that dangled from a hook in the ceiling.

“I had a wife, but she died instantly in a tragic car accident,” Sergey said with some sadness in his voice.

“I feel bad for you. I’m sorry for bringing that up,” Sarah said.

“No, don’t be,” Sergey said, wiping away a tear. “I love to tell my story. After that terrible event, I cried out to God and He heard by cries. I told Him that I needed to know Him and that I couldn’t keep living, unless I had Him close to Me. And, God answered my prayer. I read my late mother’s Bible cover to cover, and became convinced that only Jesus Christ could save me.

“After I trusted in Jesus for salvation and started really seeking Him, I felt peace and joy come to me that I’ve never felt before. I felt that God really did love me, even though I had done many bad things during my life. But, He forgave me.”

“Praise God for His forgiveness and love,” Steve said, smiling, looking upward.

“So, tell me your story,” Sergey said. “How did you get all the way to my little village?”

“Well, that’s a long story,” Steven said as he walked over to the dining room area, which was beside

the kitchen. “May I bring some chairs?” he asked.

“Oh. Of course,” Sergey said. “What was I thinking?” He was about to stand and head for the dining room, but Steve had already grabbed both chairs. Sergey stood and helped Steve bring them into the living room, which had no partition between it and the rest of the lower story, except for the bathroom, which was nestled beside the front door; and the closet, which was across the room from the bathroom.

“Here Sarah,” Steve said, setting one before his wife. She thanked him and both sat down.

“When Russia conquered America, we Russians were shocked,” Sergey said. “We never expected our countries to go to war. But, rumors were starting to spread up to where we live that war was possibly on the horizon. But, a nuclear war was far from my mind. Well, as you know, America was the aggressor. They sent an attack on Russia that provoked Russia like never before, but what my country did to your country was surely destructive.”

“God had told us about the judgment,” Steven said, “years prior to its release, and what would happen, and why. He was calling out to a rebellious people to repent, but they would not repent, no matter how much God called out to them. Then, America’s leaders ordered an attack on Russia to provoke it to wrath.”

“That is when,” Steve continued, “your country launched its full attack on America. But, God had brought Sarah, me, and my parents out of harm’s way, and into a place of safety. From there, He had his angels very move us almost instantly, or translate us, from that temporary place of safety to a base He prepared for us in Eurasia.”

“He had angels carry you from one place to another?” Sergey asked, amazed.

“Yes,” Steve said. “You’ve heard of what God did for Philip in the book of Acts—Acts 8:39-40?”

“He baptized an Ethiopian eunuch,” Sergey responded.

“That’s right. But, how did the eunuch see Philip leave him?” Steve asked.

“God caught up Philip and brought him to Azotus,” Sergey said, remembering, and his eyes widened with excitement. “You are telling me that God did the same for you as He did for Philip?”

“That’s exactly what He did,” Steve said. “In the Bible, God tells us that He never changes. In Malachi 3:6, God tells rebellious Israel: **“For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”** He also said that nothing is impossible to those who believe. Mark 9:23 says: **‘Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.’”**

“That is truly wonderful, but I believe it. Praise God’s Holy Name!” Sergey said, standing up suddenly and clapping his hands, waking the dozing cat. “God does miracles still!”

Looking down at his guests, Sergey smiled. “I believe God will do the same for me if I need to be moved someplace quickly and safely.”

“God did the same for us,” Jason said. “I was in a refuge area that God had led me to. Then, He

spoke to me and told me to be ready to be translated to Eurasia. So, I got together a backpack of stuff and sought God. After about a week had passed, I was in a house and God spoke to me. He said, ‘*Jason, My son.*’ I said, ‘Yes, Abba God?’ He said, ‘*I shall translate you now.*’

“That instant, I and my backpack were instantly moved to a village somewhere in the Eurasian land mass. I couldn’t point to the exactly location. There I saw a village full of new wooden buildings. They appeared to be ancient Chinese in design. As I approached the village, I saw people approaching me. An Asian man asked me where I came from. I said I came from North America. He asked me how I arrived in his continent. I told him God had translated me, and he rejoiced. He told me he had also been translated to the village.

“I asked him what that place was and he told me it was a city of refuge that God had put on the hearts of His people to build. The Asian also said that angelic beings from Heaven had arrived, looking like men, and they assisted the first arrivals in constructing the village waste system and buildings. The angels, who resembled ordinary men, had brought wood and building materials. I asked him why God’s angels would assist men. He told me that the Bible says that angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation. I think that is in Hebrews chapter 1, verse 14.”

“I remember that verse,” Alexei said. “It says: ‘*Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?*’”

“So angels minister by physically assisting us too?” Sergey said, stroking his beard in thought.

“You folks must be hungry,” Sergey said, standing up a few seconds later. “I will fix something for you.”

He walked over to the ice chest in his kitchen and quickly unlatched it with a handle and reached in to pull out a covered cooking pot. Then, he opened a small cabinet and pulled out some ceramic mugs and bowls.

“Would you like tea?” Sergey asked.

“I would, thank you,” Sarah said. A few others agreed.

From a lower drawer in the cabinet, Sergey retrieved spoons. Then, he filled up the mugs with hot water from the kettle and dropped some packets of tea into the mugs. Once done, he brought them to his guests.

“I will now warm up some *ukha*, which is a fish and vegetable soup,” he said as he set the large pot on the stove top. He added a few more large sticks to the fire and closed the firebox door.

Once the soup was heated, the group prayed, ate and conversed for a couple more hours. Then, Jason suggested they have a prayer time.

As he prayed for God to bless Sergey and to guide him in God’s ways, a loud knock came from the front door. Rap. Rap. Rap.

Sergey stood and whispered, “Hurry up and head to the upstairs. There’s a staircase.” He pointed to a

narrow wooden staircase, at the back of the house, that resembled a ladder more than it did a staircase. The four visitors quickly headed up the stairs, while Sergey cleared their dishes from the room and placed them in a pile in his small kitchen sink. The knocking continued. Rap. Rap. Rap.

Then, he walked to the door and waited for the last person to reach the second floor of his two-story izba cabin. He quickly asked God what to do. "My son, go open the door," Abba God's voice spoke to him.

Unlocking the bolt, Sergey opened the door. A man stood outside, bundled up in a leather coat and a furry *ushanka* hat. The ear flaps were down and tied together by small cords. His breath came out in small puffs of vapor.

"Sergey," he said, "it's Kostya. What took you so long to answer the door?"

"Sorry about that delay. What is happening, Kostya?" Sergey said, closing the door behind him to keep the heat indoors.

"I came to warn you that I've heard a powerful snow storm is coming tomorrow," Kostya said. "I also want to tell you that I've heard that you are a Christian, and so I want to ask if you will help me. You see, I am having some relatives stay with me for the winter because their house was burnt down in an accidental fire, and they have nowhere to go. But, I know that you are single, so I wonder if you would mind hosting some of them in your second story?"

"Let me seek God about that," Sergey said before closing his eyes.

Speaking in a quiet whisper, he said, "Father God, what should I do about this predicament? I have guests in my house, but I can't have all these people stay with me right now, can I?"

"My son," Abba God said, "I am with you. You may have the relatives stay with you tonight, for I will translate your guests away before your new guests come. Trust Me. Go ahead and tell the man 'yes,' that you will have his relatives stay at your house in the second floor. I will provide for your food needs. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken."

"I will trust you," Sergey said, swallowing. Turning to Kostya, he said, "You can bring them over now. They are welcome in my home."

Kostya breathed a sigh of relief and shouted, "Thank you, Sergey! You're a true friend in need." He jogged away through the snow, and vanished behind a neighbor's house.

Sergey stepped into his cabin and closed the door. He felt fear grip him. 'What if Kostya's relatives arrive while the four guests are still here?' he thought.

Sergey hurried toward the steep staircase and climbed the wooden steps. He emerged in the second story and found two electric lanterns turned on, hanging from hooks in a long hallway that ran through the upper story. Power outages had cut the power to his home for nearly five hours, keeping it mostly in darkness. There were six doors on either side of the hall leading to five small bedrooms

and one bathroom. He snatched an electric lantern from a hook in the ceiling and tried the first door to his right. Inside sat an empty bed, some cardboard boxes full of bric-a-brac and children's clothes, and papers piled on the bed.

"Alexei," Sergey said, "where are you?"

He knelt to the ground and peered under the bed. No one was underneath. Standing, Sergey hurried toward a closet. The closet was full of cardboard boxes containing his late wife's clothes and clothes that were donations to distribute to poor people. No one was in the closet. Sergey left that bedroom and hurried across to the next closest bedroom. It was also completely empty. He returned to the hall and shouted, "Sergey, Jason, Steven, Sarah, where are you?"

There was no answer. 'That was very strange,' Sergey thought. Then, he heard a loud knock at the front door below. Hurrying, he scurried down the stairs and dashed across the first floor, past the pot belly stove. He paused at the front door to ask if he should open it, and God said, "Yes." Once it was unbolted and open, Sergey peered out into the cold night air.

Standing before him was Kostya Petrov. Behind him, fifteen men, women, and children patiently waited. They were all bundled up and somewhat shivering. Feeling compassion for them, Sergey motioned for them to come.

"Come in," Sergey said. "I have a warm fire and plenty of room." Deep inside, he hoped that the four visitors were gone, like God had told him they'd be.

As the group filed in, he recognized one of the people in the group. It was Vasily Volvakov, a man he had worked with before. Vasily had threatened to beat him up if he mentioned the name of Jesus ever again. But, that was twelve years ago. Now, Vasily's thick brown hair was graying at the temples, and gray stubble covered his face. What was he doing here?

"Vasily," Sergey said after the group had entered his house, "what are you doing here tonight?"

The sixty-year-old man frowned. "I lost my job, Sergey. I was staying with a family kind enough to give me a spare bedroom. You heard Kostya tell you that a house burned down, but actually two houses burned down. My hosts' house was one of them. I thank you for your hospitality."

"You are welcome in my home," Sergey said, stretching out a hand for Vasily to shake.

But, Vasily kept his hand to himself. "I accept your hospitality, but I don't accept your religion. I was born a communist and I shall die a communist."

A tinge of fear struck Sergey in his gut. He saw the older man staring coldly at him, but grinning, nonetheless.

"By the way, Sergey," Vasily said, "it is not too late to renounce your religion. I've heard rumors that the *new* government of the Russian Federation will soon be cracking down on Christians who are not part of the Russian Orthodox Church. There are also rumors that they will soon be offering handsome rewards to anyone who is willing to turn in a non-conformist Christian, such as a Baptist, Methodist, or Pentecostal. Sergey, I recommend that you change your beliefs before they *persuade* you to."

Chapter Two

“Angelic Visitation”

Steven, Sarah (his wife), Alexei, and Jason walked down a footpath through a snow-covered, deciduous forest. Leaves and snow crunched under their boots while a light breeze swayed the upper branches and twigs of the ancient, towering trees, sending myriads of snowflakes down through the winter air. The moon’s solemn face peered through the bare branches. Dark shapes of hunting owls swept across the night sky, flapping their wings noiselessly. A throaty hooting sound echoed through the forest from some distance away as an owl, perched on a branch, warned other owls not to come into its territory. But, despite the cold around them and the dark forest, the group was fairly cheerful.

“I hope Sergey is okay,” Jason said. “We left him shortly after a knock came to his door.”

Just fifteen minutes ago, they had vanished from the second story of Sergey's home only to find themselves in the forest. Invisible angels had picked the four up and taken them, in the blink of an eye, to a forest somewhere in the northern Asia. Philip had been translated, or quickly moved, from the Ethiopian eunuch by the same method in the book of Acts. God had spoken to Alexei and told him that they were going to meet some people that they were to stay with for a short time.

“He will be fine,” Alexei said, grinning. “God is taking care of him.”

A cracking sound came from the forest suddenly, arresting their attention. ‘Is it an animal?’ Steve wondered. ‘Or, could it be a soldier?’

He felt some fear strike his chest at that thought, but he quickly told his Heavenly Father about it, and left the concern with Abba God. God had promised to protect them.

Some more snapping sounds came, and a dark figure emerged from the trees, but was concealed by shadows.

“Hello,” he said in Chinese. “You must be Steven, Sarah, Alexei, and Jason. Am I correct?”

“We are,” Steven said, understanding the language. “Who are you? How do you know us?”

The figure stepped into the moonlight and Steve could see a Chinese man wearing a hooded jacket and thick gloves.

“I don’t know you personally,” the Chinese man said, grinning. “But, God showed me to come to the footpath and that I will see four people, whose names I just said.”

“Praise God!” Steve said, thumping his gloves together. “God told Alexei that we were to meet up with some Christians in these woods.”

“Great is our God! My name is Wang,” he said, in Chinese. “Come, follow me.”

“Just a second,” Steve said, before he closed his eyes and prayed quietly. “Dear Abba Father, what should I do? Can I trust Wang?”

“My son,” Abba God said, kindly, “you can certainly trust Wang. He will guide you to a small encampment of Christians, who have fled from the villages some miles away. I am providing for these people. You will speak to them about the village, which is a city of refuge that you came from. I will then have you teach them from My Word to prepare them for the journey to the city of refuge. I will translate you to that city, but I will need to refine you and these people some more. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Heavenly Father,” Steve said, smiling. He felt peace return to his heart.

“Okay, Wang,” Steve said, in Chinese. “The Lord showed me that I can trust you.”

“Of course you can,” Wang said, grinning. “Come, follow me.”

The Chinese believer led the group into the forest and on a rough course through thickets, narrow, winding animal paths, over dead, fallen trees, and around boulders. Steve was sure that without either the Holy Spirit or Wang to guide him, he would get lost.

At last, they arrived in a small open area that was relatively flat. Some rugged tents appeared here and there. Some rested under bushes. Others sat beside boulders. Some were just a few yards away, and others were more than a dozen yards from Steve. A group of about a dozen people huddled around a fire while a lady was stir-frying some vegetables and meat in a large wok, which rested on some stones.

Many people away from the fire were shivering a little while they waited for their turn to warm themselves at the fireside. Steve could tell that the fire was fairly small for a group that size. There had to be at least twenty-five people huddled together or in groups talking with each other under the frosted trees.

As the four newcomers drew closer, some very dim flashlights turned on and shined toward Steve and his friends. Voices spoke quickly in Chinese: “Who are these people?” “I don’t know. I haven’t seen them before.” “They look like Americans or Europeans.” ‘They must not have been aware,’ Steve thought, ‘that God had given us the ability to understand their language.’ Then, a man and woman came forward from among the others and greeted Steve and his friends.

“Hello,” the Asian man said in Chinese, “you must be the four people Wang spoke of.” He held in his right hand a flashlight which cast a dim beam of light.

“We are indeed,” Steve said in Chinese, bowing slightly toward both of them. The couple bowed in greeting. He had learned that custom since he first arrived in Asia.

“I am Sung-woo and this is my wife, Mi-yeon,” Sung-woo said. “We escaped from Korea. It was a miracle of God how it happened.”

“You said you escaped from Korea?” Sarah asked. “You mean North Korea?”

Sung-woo shook his head and said, “You must have not heard about what happened in the Korean peninsula.”

“No,” Sarah said, shaking her head. “What happened?”

Sung-woo took a deep breath and said, “The North conquered the South and set up an oppressive government over our people. They are beheading Christians who will not bow to the new leader. I have many friends who are in concentration camps right as I speak.

“I tried to warn them that judgment was coming to the Korean peninsula, but they did not take me seriously. They were focused on maintaining their jobs, keeping their bosses happy, and getting their children into the best schools. But, like America, they were focused too much on their own will, and very little on God’s will, and very little on knowing God.

“God showed me and Mi-yeon to leave our house and meet a certain person, who would help us escape from Korea and enter Eurasia before the invasion from the North took place. We had left just days before the North attacked and plunged through the South like a knife through butter. So many were slaughtered, it is unimaginable.”

“I pray for our children every day,” Mi-yeon said, wiping away some tears from her eyes. “They heard our warnings, but they did not want to seek God much. They loved hanging out with their friends at the university and were not taking their walks with God very seriously.”

“That is very sad,” Sarah said, patting the Korean lady on her shoulder. “I could only imagine how you feel. I do not have children because the Lord has not given me any.”

“If you had children, they would be very young,” Mi-yeon said, wiping away a tear. “You appear to be about twenty-eight.”

“I’m actually thirty-four,” Sarah said, grinning. “Steve and I got married three years ago.”

“You seem to be very cheerful,” Mi-yeon said. “You and Steve must be a good team.”

“We are,” Sarah said. “He and I really love each other in spite of our differences, and I’ve learned that we have more similarities than differences.”

Suddenly, a fire flared up from a bush twenty feet from the cooking fire, drawing everyone’s attention. A woman screamed and ran for a bucket of water. Some men ran toward a tent and pulled out some large blankets.

Steve felt a strong urge to speak to the small group. “Stop, everyone,” he shouted. “This fire is from God.”

The people ignored the warning, and a man carried a bucket of snow up to the undulating flames, and threw it toward the burning bush, but the snow hit something invisible and fell to the ground, just a foot from where he threw it. The next moment, a shining being appeared standing just three feet from the man with the bucket. The being resembled an ancient Greek warrior. Instead of the breastplate, skirt, and shin guards of Hellenistic soldiers, this being wore a full suit of armor and a helmet that somewhat resembled the Greek Corinthian helmet, without any helmet plume. He carried a round

metal shield and held a fairly long sword in his right hand.

More of these angelic soldiers appeared around the burning bush and on the edges of the encampment. Glowing skin appeared through their sandals and on their hands and faces. Their hair appeared white because of the bright light that shone from their skin.

The humans gasped and fell down before the angelic hosts, and some fainted.

One of the angels stepped forward and spoke. “Humans, fear not. The Lord your God has appeared in the burning bush to prove you and show you that He cares greatly for you. Stand to your feet and witness the power of God. We are His servants and your brethren sent forth to minister to you.”

The people stood to their feet, with renewed strength from God’s Spirit.

“You see us before you now,” the angel said, “because God wants you to see how He protects and provides for you. Do not fear. We are on your side. We are given an order to protect you at all times. Nothing shall harm you. No bullet, bomb, or weapon can harm you, for the Lord is on your side, because you have put your trust in Him. Now, witness and see that God is with you, and fear not. We will escort you to a place of safety. Fear not.”

With that, the angelic hosts vanished from sight. But, the bush continued to burn, however it was not consumed by the fire. The fire got stronger and brighter and provided warmth and light to all who remained within twenty-five to thirty feet from its flames.

“Praise God,” Steve breathed. “What an awesome miracle you did, Father God. What an awesome miracle...”

After a few moments of contemplative silence passed, many of the people began singing a song of praise. Soon, others joined in. “Praise the Lord, for He is great! Praise His great and awesome Name! He bows the heavens and comes down. The earth smokes and shakes before His power. The mountains skip like rams and the little hills like lambs. Praise God’s great and awesome Name!”

There was more singing, clapping of hands, and shouting. After a while, the people gathered together into a large group. An Asian man stepped forward and faced the people.

“Brothers and Sisters,” he said, smiling radiantly, “isn’t our God great?”

“He is. Praise His Name! Blessed be the Lord our God!” a lady cried.

“Amen, sister,” he said. Turning to the rest of the group, he said, “We are blessed by our great God and Father. It is from Him that we receive blessings and goodness. It is He Who protects us and provides for us. We have nothing to fear regarding the future or the present. Right now, we are safe in God’s hands. We are safe and shall always be safe in God’s almighty hands. Let us now rest in Him and speak often one to another of His great goodness and love.”

Motioning toward Steve and his friends, the man said, “These four visitors God has sent our way will help us prepare for going to a city of refuge. That is what the Lord has shown me.”

“Sergey Speaks”

Sergey plopped some folded blankets and sheets down on a bed in a second-story bedroom, and a woman and her husband thanked him and began spreading them out. He opened the closet door again and drew out pillows, pillow cases, and some sleeping pads. It had been his late wife’s idea to help out orphans and poor people, and provide a place for them to stay. Sergey had saved up some money and used it to purchase a larger house to accommodate the needy people they planned on helping.

But, after his wife passed away in the car accident, Sergey didn’t feel like hosting people at his house. Instead, he closed up the rooms and tried to keep them as dust free as possible. He fought with depression and sought God, with more and more of a desire to know Him better.

After some time, he met a man named Alexei who had a deep love for God. They befriended each other, but Alexei moved away from the local area to start home evangelism in a town about an hour’s drive from Sergey’s village of Medvedski. Alexei then visited Medvedski several times to witness and conduct Bible studies while he rented someone’s basement bedroom.

But, Sergey kept his mouth shut and had no desire to witness to the people of his town. Everyone in Medvedski knew he was the former mayor, and he struggled with the thought that they might reject him if he openly shared his faith.

Now, it seemed that the new Russian government was going to crack down hard on anyone who shared their faith, if their faith was not officially approved by the **new** government. Sergey left the couple to prepare their room. He walked down the hallway to a bathroom at the end of the hall, off to the left. Closing the door, Sergey knelt down on the tile floor. In the dark, he cried out to God and told Him his deep concern.

“My son, Sergey,” Abba God said to his spirit and soul, “I am with you. Be not afraid. You are doing My will in hosting these guests. I shall provide for you and protect you through all trials that come your way. Soon, you will move on from this home, and you will be living in a city of refuge like your previous guests told you about.

“I will translate you there so you will not have to walk all that way. I shall be with you every step of the way, and My angelic hosts shall guard you each step you take. So, rest in Me. Now, I want you to call your new guests down into the lower portion of your house, and share with them a warning about the times ahead. Give them a message I will show you. I will be with you, My son. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Abba,” Sergey said. “I will follow your guidance. Just give me the strength and courage I need, for I can only do it with you.”

“I will, My son,” Abba God said.

With that, Sergey picked himself up, reentered the hall, and said loudly, “Everyone, come down to the living room. I have something I need to share with you.”

At each bedroom door, a man or woman appeared. “What is it?” the closest man to him said from a bedroom entrance.

“I have a message and a prophecy about the future. Come down to the first floor.”

The people left their bedrooms and followed their generous host to the first floor. The parents found their children and brought them together in a group of about fifteen people, including the children. Sergey added some small logs to the pot belly stove to keep the fire going while he waited for the group to gather. Soon, everyone was present and looking at him, except for young children, who were playing with small toys.

“My friends,” Sergey said, “I must tell you I am grateful to help you and assist you during these hard times in which we live, but I am called by my God to warn you of the future and how it will be harder for you to live. There will be natural and supernatural events that will shake this world and all of Russia. Nations will collapse into anarchy and war. Violence will increase.

“The book of Revelation speaks of great famines, great loss of life, fallen angels, wicked creatures, plagues, and pestilences. A man called the Beast will cause all the world to worship him, and if any refuses to worship him, they will be killed. I’m not making this up. The holy scriptures speak of these catastrophic events.

“We cannot be self-reliant. We must turn to God for our salvation. I’m not talking about going to a church or becoming a monk. I’m speaking about turning our lives over to Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for each of us, to save us, if we believe on His Name, and repent, and make Him our personal Savior and Lord.

“This is a personal choice for each one of us. We can either accept His free gift of salvation, paid for by this death and innocent blood, or we can reject Him and His free gift. The choice is up to us. But, I implore you that you make Jesus Christ your personal Savior and Lord, and that you choose to depend on Jesus to help you forsake sin.

“He will help you if you look to Him. There is a cost of being a follower of Christ. But, the reward is infinitely great. Right now, you will be able to experience God first hand, and you will live forever in Heaven, a glorious paradise beyond human words to describe.”

“Excuse me,” a man said. “You mentioned that there will be a cost for following Christ. What is it?”

Sergey replied, “It is nothing compared to His presence now on earth and eternal life. But, the cost is that you willingly deny yourself, be willing to suffer persecution for His sake, and follow where Jesus leads you to go, and what He leads you to do. But, I am telling you, it is worth it.

“God cannot let sinners enter Heaven because sin would corrupt Heaven, and sinners would not be happy there because Heaven is about worshiping God and enjoying His presence, just as it is on earth, for a Christian. But, Heaven will be infinitely better.”

“So, what happens to those who don’t make it to Heaven?” a lady asked.

“The only place one could go when he dies, if he does not know Jesus, is a place called Hell. It is a terrible place that you do not want to go to. There is no peace there and only torment and pain. And,

it is forever. You don't want to go there. So, please don't reject what I say to you."

"I'd like think about it more," a man nearby said.

While Sergey was engaged in conversation with the people, one of the men slipped out a side door near the kitchen. Vasily glanced behind him to see if he was being followed. Seeing no one was present, he walked down the graveled street about a block. Once he was some distance from the house, he pulled out a cell phone from a pocket. It was a low-cost phone that was provided by the government. He dialed a number and waited.

After some time, a voice spoke through his phone: "Hello, this is Alexander."

"Alexander, this is Vasily."

"How are things going for you? I heard you lost your job," Alexander said.

"I did. But, I am staying with a man who is someone you might be interested in, since you work for the Department of Religious Affairs."

"What is his name and who is he?" Alexander asked.

"He is a non-conformist Christian. His name is Sergey Ulanov. I know him from way back. Listen, he just had a witnessing or evangelistic time in his home. A couple families and their friends are staying with Mr. Ulanov since their homes have burnt down. He gave them the Gospel message that Baptists, Methodists, and Pentecostals preach."

A pause lasted for a several seconds on the phone. Then, Alexander said, "Vasily, I need you to do a favor for me."

"I'll do anything for you, my friend," Vasily said eagerly.

Chapter Three

"The Miracle"

The campfire flames danced and wavered over the logs, sending up wispy smoke that rose above the tree tops and dispersed. Flickering shadows fell on the grass from the twenty-plus people and their belongings. Steve stood near the crackling fire and spoke to the group which faced him, huddled by three other campfires. The quivering flames reflected in the glasses of several men and women as they listened to Steve's teaching.

Steve spoke, scanning over the faces, as he held an open Bible in one hand. A large backpack lay a few feet from Steve with an unzipped pouch, where he had stored his Bible. It had been translated to him by an invisible angel just minutes ago.

“When God said, ‘Let there be light’, He was not only speaking of the visible light that you and I can see,” Steve said. “Our Abba Father God was speaking of His spiritual power to reveal Himself to His creation through His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. When Adam, our ancestor, came into existence, he was given a spiritual knowledge about God that Adam had not had to search long and hard to get.

“It was part of the information God had downloaded into Adam’s soul and spirit. So, likewise, we all have knowledge of God that God had created us with. We are not born in total darkness. God gives us light. That is why Jesus Christ is said to be the Light of the world, and why the Gospel of John records, in the first chapter, that Jesus Christ said... Let me read it to you.”

Steve flipped the pages of the Bible to a bookmark in John chapter 1. Then, he said, “John 1: 4 through 5 says: ‘[4] In him was life; and the life was the light of men. [5] And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.’ So, Jesus Christ is the One who gives us life and light. But, the devil and his minions do not comprehend this Light. Speaking of Jesus, John wrote in the Gospel of John 1:9: ‘That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.’ So, Jesus gives light to every person who exists. This light shows us that we are sinners, and that only God can provide the way of eternal life, and only God can cleanse away our sin. He did this by Jesus Christ, our Savior and God.”

“Excuse me,” a man said from just a short distance away.

“Yes,” Steve said.

“My name is Shing. I am an Oroqen born in the Chinese province of Inner Mongolia. I have a question for you,” Shing said. “Why is it that you say God gives light to everyone who comes into this world? Where I came from, the government leaders were sending soldiers into the homes of Christians to confiscate their belongings and to take any Bibles they had. They also stole our property, even though I am not a Christian.

“My brother is a Christian, but they treated both of us roughly and with cruelty because we shared the same house. They beat my brother with clubs because he refused to renounce his faith. But, they stole my valuables, even though I told them I never was a Christian and did not care about Jesus. How could those soldiers have also been given light from Jesus if they behave like they have no conscience and no knowledge of God?”

“Well, Shing,” Steve said, “they have been given the light of Jesus since He created all people and all things, but they had chosen to reject Jesus and to harden their hearts against their own consciences and against God’s Spirit. I have heard of stories of communist soldiers getting saved. We all have a sin nature, as you and I know, but God the Father provided Jesus, God the Son, to take all our sins upon Himself, and to die in our place. It is only by His precious blood that we can be saved from sin.”

“Okay,” Shing said, “I guess that makes sense. It just seems so hard to grasp how people can be so cruel to each other. I have always tried to help people because if I help them, they will help me when I’m in need.”

Suddenly, some loud cracking sounds broke the relative stillness of the night. The sound of branches being snapped came from the woods beyond the light of the fires. Everyone looked toward the forest

for a few seconds of fearful silence before some men and women quickly doused their fire with dirt and ran for cover. Steve stood still and waited. Sarah, standing just a few feet from him, closed her eyes and prayed quietly.

“Oh, Father God,” she whispered, “don’t let us be arrested by soldiers, if those are soldiers. Don’t let them see us. I trust my life into your hands. You kept the guards from seeing Simon Peter when you had an angel escort him out of a heavily-guarded prison. Please keep us from being seen.”

Out from the darkness of the woods came more snapping sounds, but these were less loud. Soon, twenty to thirty figures appeared, walking through the concealing forest shadows. In moments, a few appeared in the light of the burning bush, which miraculously continued to burn. Now, Steve could see that these figures were soldiers carrying lowered machine guns. Sarah placed a hand over her mouth and swallowed hard, but Steve placed an arm around her back and drew her to his side.

She trembled with fear as she watched the soldiers slowly stepping across the small opening in the forest, right past tents and backpacks. The soldiers were walking toward the burning bush, with curiosity and awe displayed on their faces, seeming to ignore the tents scattered here and there. They didn’t seem to notice the group of Asian Christians scattered nearby, huddled behind trees or boulders.

Steve’s legs trembled, but he spoke to his Heavenly Father and gave the fear to Him. Then, a supernatural peace flooded into his soul, while he watched the soldiers.

One of the soldiers nearest the burning bush said in Chinese, “The bush is not being scorched or burned by the flames. This is truly incredible! I can’t believe my eyes.”

The next closest soldier hurried over and drew closer to the bush, while his comrade held back a little. But, he ran into an invisible object and fell to the ground. Standing up, he cried out in terror and ran, leaving his gun behind. As he ran, he said, “This place is cursed! Let’s get out of here.”

“Stop running! You’ll give our position away,” another man snapped at him. “Get your gun and keep searching for those Christians.”

The terrified soldier ignored the order and continued running, glancing back now and again. He tripped on a log and fell, and cursed the forest before scrambling away. His commander ordered him to stop, but he continued running, melting into the woodland shadows.

“If any of you run like that coward did,” the commander said, “I will make sure he gets punished. Keep moving. We need to find that Christian group.”

The soldiers obeyed and kept walking, but suddenly, a bright light appeared. They all dropped to the ground, releasing hold of their weapons, and several cried out in fear. An angelic warrior suddenly appeared, shining with pure, white light. He wore the type of armor and Corinthian-style helmet as the angels Steve had seen earlier. In his large right hand he held a large sword, and his left arm he carried a round shield that was shinier than polished chrome.

The soldiers regained consciousness, and quickly scrambled to their feet, and ran for their lives into various directions. They had left their guns behind. As they ran, some threw their gear bags and helmets to the ground, to be less encumbered in their flight. In a few minutes, the crashing sounds of

the terrified men faded from hearing.

The angel stood at least fourteen feet tall. Add another six feet to his height, and he would reach the top of a two story building. His large, white wings were stretched out from his back, protruding from openings in the back plate of his armor. They resembled white eagle wings, but were larger than fighter aircraft wings. He was larger than the angels Steve had last seen and was very impressive with shining, white hair poking out from under his helmet. The angel briefly surveyed the people below him before he vanished from sight.

Once the angel had vanished, the Christians came out from behind boulders, bushes, and trees, and blinked several times. Some of them pinched themselves to see that they weren't dreaming. A great sense of awe descended on them and no one said a word. Even the children, who had been crying softly, were calm. Peace had fallen upon all in the group.

After almost a minute of silence had passed, a man shouted, "Praise the Lord God for having His angels guard and protect us!"

More voices chimed in, praising God. Some laughed and others cried. Sarah wiped a tear from her face and started laughing. "Steve," she said, "God protected us just like He said He would. The soldiers didn't see us, even though we should clearly be seen in the firelight. That was amazing. Praise God Almighty!"

"Glory to God!" Steve said. "I never should doubt God's love and protection."

"Steve, My son," God's loving voice spoke to his spirit and soul.

"Yes, Abba Father," Steve said, listening to the still small voice that he had learned to trust after seeing that God was faithful to His Holy Bible, and did not contradict the Holy Scriptures.

"My son," God said, "you will now give a message to this group. I will have you speak to them, My son. Many of them are new believers and have little understanding of My ways. Go ahead and speak. I will be with your mouth. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken."

Steve walked to a place where everyone should be able to see him. He spoke loudly, in Chinese: "Attention everyone, will you come over here to listen. God wants me to share a message with you."

The group began coming close to him, one by one. Once they were all present, Steve said:

"God wants us to continue moving north. We will stay overnight here, but shortly after dawn, we will pack up and move out. The Chinese are aware that some Christians have been hiding out in these woods. Some of the people that visit these woods have caught sight of Christians here. So, we need to move on. The soldiers were searching for us and would have either killed or arrested us, had it not been for God supernaturally blinding them and causing them to see a warrior angel who is guarding us.

"But, God shall protect us and keep us safe because He really loves us very much. But, there is a warning I need to share with you. If any of us leave this group and go off on our own, independent of God's leading, he or she will be out of God's region of supreme protection. He or she will still have some protection, but the protection will be less than it is when we walk in God's best will. How we

know God’s best will is by seeking Him and asking Him our questions, and listening to His voice speak to us. God will never contradict His Holy Bible or His Nature. That is a promise we can lay hold of. Now, let’s get some rest.”

Chapter Four

“Blizzard”

Snow flurries swirled around the man as he trudged through the thick powder. He could barely see twenty yards in front of him. His breath came out in small clouds as he walked, one foot in front of the other. The temperature was dropping and the snow was getting deeper, centimeter by centimeter. In a short time, it would be several inches deeper than it was when he first started off on his trek. He needed to find a place to stay and to warm himself up at, but he seemed to be a long way from any village. His feet felt numb, which was a bad sign. Frostbite might set in if he didn’t get his feet warmed soon.

The moon shone through the pine trees and provided some light to his path in the mostly dark woods. It felt like he had been walking through the forest for days, but it had really only been three hours since his car got stuck in the deep snow. His cell phone battery had died and he had no way to charge it. He knew that waiting in the car was not an option because his gas tank was very low on fuel. To make matters worse, a dead tree had fallen over the road, in front of the car, blocking his way. He had not come prepared for a snow storm.

After a few more minutes of walking, the man suddenly plunged up to the waist in snow. He must have reached the ditch at the edge of the road. There was so much snow that he couldn’t tell where the road ended and the forest began. The man had just stepped into a deep patch of snow that had filled up a depression in the ground. He cursed himself for leaving his car and he cursed God, blaming Him for the snow storm. Now, he had to struggle just to pull himself out of the deep snow, but he was starting to feel exhausted from the long walk through deepening snow.

Crawling and kicking, he finally pulled himself out of the hole, but found he was too exhausted to keep walking. Lying on the ground, he cursed his “misfortune” again and slowly breathed. If he stayed out too long in the cold, without moving, he knew he would freeze to death. But, tiredness was starting to overcome him.

Suddenly, a loud, throaty buzzing sound came from the forest road. A light appeared in the distance, casting shadows through the trees dozens of yards away. Then, a green object appeared, racing across the snow. It was a snowmobile. The man picked himself up and, with every ounce of strength he could muster, he waved frantically and shouted.

The snowmobile slowed to a stop and the engine idled, put-putting away. The driver got off and pulled a flashlight from a pocket. He shined it on the exhausted man, keeping the brightest part of the beam away from his face. Then, he reached out a hand.

“Come with me,” the snowmobile driver said, extending his hand to pat the other man on the shoulder.

“My car got stuck down the road,” the exhausted man said. “A tree fell down. I’m freezing. Could you help me?”

“I certainly will,” Sergey said, lifting up his ski goggles. He walked to the back of the machine and opened a tool box. Drawing a folded coat from it, Sergey gave it to the other man, who gratefully took it and put it on over his own coat. Sergey handed him a thermos filled with warm water. After the man was somewhat refreshed, they both mounted the vehicle. Sergey grabbed the handlebar and sent the snowmobile roaring off down the road.

The trees seemed to zip past like a rolling backdrop. Every so often, the snowmobile bumped over small snow drifts and the passenger gripped some handles tighter to keep from falling off. Ten miles later, the forest opened into a large clearing where the village of Medvedski rested. Smoke from hundreds of chimneys rose into the air like the breath of a dragon and blew away on the wind, while the blizzard piled the steep roofs with heaps of white powder. Soon, the snowmobile was buzzing down the snow-covered streets and approaching Sergey’s two-story izba cabin.

Sergey pulled into an opened shed behind his house and parked beside a blue snowmobile. Then, he clicked his flashlight on in the dark shed. He helped the poor man up to the side entrance of his house. Once inside, Sergey filled a metal basin with very warm water and had the man take his shoes off. The wood stove door creaked open and Sergey plopped a couple more logs onto the fire.

God had woken him from sleep to go on an errand in the midst of a snow storm. Sergey had been reluctant, but he knew God’s voice and wanted to obey his Heavenly Father. He had left the izba dwelling less than thirty minutes ago, while all his guests were in their upstairs rooms. Seeing the man in need, he was glad God had him do the errand. The man had looked like he was about to freeze to death.

“Excuse me, sir,” the man said from the couch where he rested and warmed his cold feet.

“Yes,” Sergey said.

“I am very grateful for your hospitality. My name is Nikita Golovin. And, yours?”

“I’m Sergey Ulanov,” Sergey said, extending a hand and Nikita shook it.

“Why did you drive out into the forest on a snowmobile?” Nikita asked. “It seemed as if you somehow knew I was out there.”

“I did not know you were out there,” Sergey said, “but God woke me from sleep and told me to drive out into the forest on my snowmobile. He said that my help was needed.”

“You said God told you to do that errand?” Nikita blinked several times, thinking about what his host had just said.

After a few seconds passed, Nikita looked at Sergey as if he were looking at someone who had just

told him the world was about to end.

“Yes,” Sergey said. “My Heavenly Father cares greatly about you, Nikita. That is why He sent me to rescue you. I had no way of knowing you’d be out there this time of night.”

“You are a very kind man,” Nikita said with tears starting to run down his face. “I was sure I was about to freeze to death out there, but you followed your God’s voice and found me.”

“I don’t feel that I am worthy of being saved,” Nikita said, wiping tears from his eyes. “I was unfaithful to my wife while we were married. I had a child out of wedlock and had another aborted. I’ve slandered my wife behind her back and blamed her for my problems. I even stole from my boss when he wasn’t looking. I’m a terrible person. Why would God have you rescue me?”

Sergey replied: “God has no respect to persons, it says in the book of Romans chapter 2, verse 11. He doesn’t value one person more than another. The second epistle of Peter, chapter 3, verse 9, says that God is “... **not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.**”

“I’ve heard the Gospel before,” Nikita said. “Some years ago, during the ‘90s, a Christian was street preaching and handing out tracts. I took one and kept it with me ever since, but I never took it to heart, until now. I want Jesus to save me. There is no point in going on. Earlier, I was looking forward to when the pub would open to get myself drunk silly. But, now I want to get filled with Jesus. May I pray?”

“Of course,” Sergey said, placing a hand on his shoulder. “I’ll pray for you while you pray.”

“Dear Jesus Christ,” Nikita said, “accept me, this poor sinner, as your son. I have really made a mess of my life. These sins... wash them away by your blood. I ask you to wash me in your blood, and I believe you died for Me and rose from the dead, like your Word says. You are the only true God and the only One who could save me from my many sins. I make you my Lord and Savior, Jesus. Amen.”

“Amen, brother,” Sergey said, smiling, “You are now part of the family of God, and you are my new brother in Christ.”

Nikita opened his eyes and looked up, and a smile slowly spread across his haggard face. Stubble covered his chin, and his dark hair dripped with melting snow. His eyes were somewhat red from lack of sleep. But, Nikita appeared to be full of joy and peace he had never felt before. Suddenly, he pulled his feet from the warm water and splashed droplets of water over the wood floor. He jumped up and down and clapped his hands together, shouting, “Praise God! I’m saved! I’m saved! I’m saved!”

Sergey stood, concerned that his new guest might awake the others sleeping in the bedrooms upstairs. But, he felt God’s guidance to just let Nikita be. The ecstatic man was jumping up and down and singing bits of a hymn he had heard somewhere. Sergey waited to see if anyone would descend the stairs to see his new guest. Finally, Nikita calmed down and plopped down on Sergey’s only couch. A big grin crossed his face – the look of a man who had just learned he was given a billion dollars. But, Nikita had gained something infinitely greater, and Sergey understood the joy he felt.

While their backs were turned to the stairway, a man clutched the railing and watched the Christians below. Vasily Volvakov had heard the noise from his room because he was a light sleeper and had

gone to investigate. While Sergey and Nikita talked, Vasily slowly ascended the steps to the second story and made a mental note of the events below. In the upstairs hallway, he pulled out his cell phone and began composing a text message.

The text read: “Alexander, I have just witnessed another person in Sergey Ulanov’s home, in Medvedski, joining that non-conformist Christian’s cult. Action must be taken soon to put a stop to this radicalization of our people.”

Vasily walked back to his room that he shared with another single man, who slept on the only bed in the small room. Vasily plopped down on a sleeping bag and pulled some blankets over himself. Some hours later, his cell phone vibrated in his pocket.

Waking from sleep, he moaned and sat up. Wiping his eyelids, Vasily blinked a few times before checking his cell phone. He could see that there was a new text message. It read in part: “Sergey, a team will be assembled and ...” His eyes scanned over the message and a grin spread across his drawn face.

“A Walk in the Night”

A tangled web of bushes, boulders, and trees spread out in all directions, and the moonlit night sky hung above. The group of Asian Christians and four Caucasians found themselves surrounded by a dark and eerie woodland that presented all sorts of hiding places for enemy soldiers to watch and wait for their arrival. The group would be totally lost and easy prey for the roving eyes of Chinese soldiers had it not been for God’s presence and angels. And, the forest was so dark and dense that navigating it at nighttime would be impossible without a bright light, but no one in the group had a bright enough flashlight. Most of their batteries were running very low on charge. But, a miracle had happened shortly after Steve and the rest of the group awoke from sleep in the middle of the night.

A rushing sound, like a light breeze, came from the forest near where the burning bush grew. The fire mysteriously had lifted off the bush, leaving it untouched, and had miraculously turned into a whirling shaft of flames, like a miniature tornado, before their eyes. It was about thirty feet tall and produced plenty of light for the group to see up to thirty or forty feet into the dark forest, depending on its density.

God had spoken to Steve and to several of the Chinese men that they needed to follow the pillar of fire because that was God’s light source for them at nighttime. God had also instructed them to pack up their tents, but leave them behind because God had told the people that He would translate the tents and gear, so that they would not have to carry those cumbersome loads with them.

Now, some miles had passed since they had left the encampment with most of their stuff behind. Steve was amazed to see the pillar of fire, or tornado of fire, not set any tree on fire, even though branches and twigs passed through its spiraling flames. Steve realized that God did not intend to burn the forest down. God was just providing light for the group, like the light source He had provided for ancient Israel when they traveled through the wilderness of Mount Sinai in north-western Arabia.

“Steve,” Sarah said.

“Yes, honey?” Steve said, looking at his wife, who walked beside him.

The yellow light from the swirling flames cast a long shadow behind her, which leapt over boulders and logs.

“This is truly amazing what we’ve been seeing. I was thinking about the account in Exodus where the children of Israel saw a pillar of fire at night and a pillar of cloud during the day.”

“I was thinking of the same thing,” Steve said. “It truly *is* amazing what God has been doing for us since we started this journey, even before we were translated to Asia. You were wondering how God would get us out of America, but He surprised you when He told you that He would translate you by way of angels.”

“He sure did,” Sara said. “I was totally bewildered when we vanished from the Cincinnati, Ohio area and appeared in Asia. Whenever I read about Philip in Acts chapter 8, I found it difficult to fully grasp that he had been quickly moved away from the desert, where he had just baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, and had been translated somewhere else. But, after my own experience, I began to accept what was truly humanly impossible as common and ordinary.”

“But,” Steve said, “it is tragic that the people in our area didn’t listen to our warnings and pleadings. We told them that judgment was coming because of America’s great rebellion against God, but no one seemed to listen. Most people just ignored us and continued doing what they had always been doing, living life and seeking after their own will, instead of Abba God’s will, which is always good and is always fulfilling.”

Sarah nodded, sighing. “I left behind all my relatives and friends because they just didn’t want to see things the way they were. They always said that I was just naïve and foolish to get married to you and leave my job at the clinic. But, they didn’t even want to admit that the economy was collapsing, and that war with Russia was becoming more and more likely, from the perspective of the secular world. God had already told us these things would happen.”

“That is right,” Steve said, pursing his lips. “I feel bad every time I think of the people who just didn’t listen to us, who just wanted to act like things would improve. But, they didn’t. Things got worse. Eventually, America struck Russia to provoke its wrath. Then, you know the rest.”

Sarah nodded, frowning. “I just wish they had listened to the signs of judgment and our warnings. But, they preferred to trust in themselves, which is what led to their tragic end.”

“Excuse me,” a lady’s voice said from behind them.

The couple turned to see Mi-yeon, the Korean lady they had met earlier. Her husband was approaching from behind.

“Mi-yeon,” Sarah said.

“I happened to overhear your conversation,” Mi-yeon said. “You reminded me of how I had encountered similar opposition and ambivalence among my friends and family.”

“You did too?” Sarah said.

“Yes,” Mi-yeon said. “They seemed to have no concern about what I was concerned about. I saw South Korea’s economy hitting hard times and the shaky situation in the North. I warned them, but they said that the North would never dare invade the South, especially since the U.S. was helping to protect South Korea.”

Sung-woo, her husband, approached and greeted them with a brief ‘hello.’ Steve and Sarah echoed the greeting and returned their attention to his wife.

Mi-yeon continued, saying, “But, when your country was struck by nukes, its military was knocked down, and the South became very chaotic. People fought to get a hold of extra canned goods and freeze-dry food. People looked very worried everywhere I went. At that time, martial law was declared, and the government prevented anyone from leaving the country. Then, the Lord showed my husband and me that we were to meet someone who would help us to escape and reach a place of safety.”

“Mind if I join in?” Sung-woo asked his wife.

“No. Go ahead,” Mi-yeon said.

“After we escaped Korea and arrived in China,” Sung-woo said, “we had to trust the Lord to get us through China and up to the northern parts of that country. Along the way, soldiers stopped us to ask for our identification, and to ask us about ourselves, but God gave us the exact words to say, and kept them from even recognizing that we were not Chinese.”

“You didn’t lie to them, did you?” Sarah asked.

“Oh no,” Mi-yeon said, shaking her head. “No. God would not bless us for lying. No. When the police or soldiers would ask us for our identification, we looked to God what to say. He would put on our hearts to say that our citizenship was in Heaven. The police would nod and ask where we were headed. God had us tell them that we were on a journey to Heaven, because we really are.”

Steve and Sarah looked at each other, amazed.

“That is what it means to be a Christian,” Mi-yeon said. “We walk the narrow way to Heaven, trusting in Jesus all the way, and not in our own works. We were telling them the truth.”

“I, I know you were telling the truth, but the soldiers just accepted your answers? They didn’t detain you?” Steve said, blinking several times.

“No,” Sung-woo said, chuckling. “The police didn’t seem to understand that we were Korean Christians who were passing through their country. They just let us move on.”

“That is amazing,” Sarah said, shaking her head in awe of God’s power and wisdom.

“It gets even better,” Sung-woo said. “We heard God tell us to take a train bound for the north. So, we did, even though we had no money.”

“How did that work out? No money. Was that a high-speed train?” Steve asked.

“It was one of the mag-lev trains,” Sung-woo said. “When we got to the station, we got in line to buy tickets, trusting God to provide the money somehow. A man directly in front of us purchased three tickets. He handed two to my wife and me, saying that he wanted to do something nice for people. He appeared to be a wealthy businessman or something like that. He also handed us a good amount of money, telling us that he had once been very poor and wanted to do something to help foreigners out on that particular day.”

“So, he knew you were foreigners,” Sarah said. “But, the soldiers didn’t know that.”

“They might have suspected we were not from that province of China, but I don’t think they knew we were foreigners,” the Korean man replied, grinning.

“So,” Mi-yeon continued the narrative for her husband, “we arrived at a northern city, and God led us to a truck driver who was willing to take us with him up north. We paid him some money, and he took us up to a smaller town.”

“There,” Mi-yeon said, “we were led to some Christians who were hiding from the police. They were going to move out into the wilderness and were getting some backpacks together. They were in need of money, and we had plenty left over from our generous benefactor. We had enough money to buy some backpacks and supplies for ourselves and for some of the Christians in the group. Then, we set out on our expedition.”

“And, all the money had been spent well,” Sung-woo added.

“That is an amazing story you experienced,” Sarah said.

“But, it’s not just a story,” Mi-yeon said, excitedly. “We saw God come through in amazing ways to provide for our needs, since we had no Chinese currency and had left all our money behind, since it would do us no good outside South Korea.”

“I believe you,” Steve said. “It reminds me how Jesus provided for the disciples and the multitudes at the Sea of Galilee by multiplying bread and fish.”

“How so?” Mi-yeon said.

“Well,” Steve said, “the disciples didn’t have enough food for all those thousands of people gathered by the Sea of Galilee. So, Jesus took the loaves and fish and broke them in pieces, but the bread and fish continued to be multiplied so that all the people could eat, be well fed, and have baskets of fragments left over. You did not have enough food or money for your travels in China, but God provided for you all along the way, and gave you extra to help out your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. He even provided for the soldiers and police to not understand that you were Christians.”

“Amen. We serve an awesome God,” Sung-woo said, turning his attention to the fiery pillar that slowly moved ahead of the group and lit up the forest around them with its supernatural flames.

Chapter Five

“The Concern”

While the huge piles of snow and blizzard conditions lasted, Sergey began teaching the people in his home from the Bible. He gave a Bible to each adult and to each child who was old enough to read. As some days passed, several more people committed their lives to Jesus and trusted in Him only for salvation. While he taught them, Sergey noticed that Vasily remained in his bedroom and never wanted to hear the Bible being read. He had told Sergey that he wasn't feeling well, but when Sergey offered to pray for his physical healing, Vasily muttered, "I don't need your prayers. I will improve in time."

After four days had passed since the group of fifteen had arrived at his izba cabin, most of the guests had trusted in Jesus for salvation. Sergey was amazed at the results of his teaching and prayers. He thanked God every time he thought about the new believers.

One night, after a group Bible study time, and after the families had retired for the night, a man came down the stairs and approached Sergey, who was sitting on the side of his bed. The man had short, dark hair and appeared to be in his thirties.

"Sergey," the man said.

"Yes, Ivan?"

"I want to talk to you about something," Ivan said quietly.

"What is it?" Sergey leaned forward, glancing at the stairway briefly.

"My roommate, Vasily, says he is sick and can't come down for the Bible study, but I think he is faking it. He doesn't cough or act sick until it is time to have a Bible study or eat dinner as a group. Then, he makes a show of coughing and acting tired. He asks me to bring cheese and sausages up to him for lunch and dinner, but he never eats it in my presence. I don't think we can trust him."

After they had talked a little longer, Ivan left and returned up the stairs.

Sitting on the bed, Sergey knitted his brows, in thought. 'What should I do about Vasily?' he thought to himself. 'Should I confront him about his strange conduct? Lord, Jesus, what should I do?'

"My son, Sergey," Jesus said to his spirit and soul, "I am with you. I love you very much, even more than you can know. But, I will show you what to do about this man. Go to him and tell him that you are praying for him, and that you want him to feel welcome in your home. Give him a gift of ten rubles, an apple, and a meat sandwich. Then, wait for his response. If he says to you that he is not interested, just leave the gift with him, and leave. I will guide you in what to do. Trust Me. And, I the Lord your God have spoken."

‘Thanks, Lord Jesus. I will do that. It is only possible through you,’ Sergey said in his thoughts.

Sergey stood to his feet and stretched. Out of the corner of his eye he saw someone descending the stairs. He turned to see that it was Ivan. As Ivan reached the halfway point on the staircase, Sergey said, “Ivan, God has shown me what to do about Vasily.”

“What did God show you?” Ivan asked.

“I will treat him with kindness,” Sergey replied, “and that will cause Vasily to question his intentions.”

“But, Sergey,” Ivan said, “what if Vasily seeks to do harm to you and to us?”

“There is no need to fear, Ivan. Abba Father God will take care of us. Let us just seek to know God and follow His voice.”

Ivan nodded, in thought. After a pause, he said, “It is hard to walk this walk of faith.”

“But,” Sergey said, “it is easy when we depend on God for the power and wisdom we need. And, it is easy when we realize that God is our Abba Father. He is for us, and loves us very much. Get some sleep, Ivan. I will speak with Vasily tomorrow.”

Vasily's Story

While the others were eating breakfast, Sergey climbed the stairs to the second floor, carrying a sandwich on a plate, an apple, and ten rubles, which had gained in value after U.S. had collapsed. Walking down the hallway, he fought with an inner fear that his gift would be rejected. *‘It will amount to nothing, Sergey,’* a nagging thought said. *‘You’re wasting your time.’* But, Sergey decided to give that fear to God and trust that God knows what He is doing.

He knocked on the door to Vasily’s room. There was no response. He knocked again. Finally, the door opened and a sullen face stared at him. “What do you want, Sergey?” Vasily said coldly.

“I want you to feel welcome in my home, Vasily. It is not often that I have guests. Will you accept this gift as a token of kindness.” Saying that, he extended the food and cash to Vasily.

But, Vasily held up a hand and shook his head. “Sergey, I cannot accept your offer because... I think you are just trying to buy my friendship.”

“I care about you, Vasily,” Sergey said with warmth in his voice. “Please accept this gift. I am not trying to buy anything from you.”

Vasily shook his head. “You are just playing the old trick of bating your hook. I know what people are like, Sergey. You want me to become a Christian so you can get me to join your side. What’s in it for me, anyways? A concentration camp? Hard labor? Losing my family and friends? I don’t think your religion is worth it. I’ve got enough problems to think about. I don’t need to add more to my

plate. Let your God save other souls. I'm willing to die knowing that I am not anyone's slave."

"What do you mean?" Sergey asked.

"I'm not a slave to any religion, Sergey," Vasily said. "Religion is about slavery. But, having no religion makes you a free man."

"Knowing God as your Abba Father and best Friend is not slavery," Sergey said. "It is a very good friendship."

"Then," Vasily said, "why do Christians suffer for their faith? Right now in this country and in other nations many Christians are suffering in concentration camps and prisons. In America, there are thousands of concentration camps full of Christians. They have nothing to show for their faith. They are miserable souls. But, I am free."

"God allows difficult things to happen to call out to His people, if they are turning their hearts away from Him. God does not desire His people suffer, but if they turn away from Him, He will do what it takes to call out to them to repent and seek His will, and His way, and to follow His guiding hand."

Vasily was taken aback. He squinted at Sergey as if he has said that the world was going to blow up one minute from then.

"You are saying that God allows Christians to go into concentration camps because they are turning away from Him?"

"Not all Christians in concentration camps," Sergey said, "were turning away from God, but God has shown me that almost all the ones in America were turning away from God prior to entering the camps. Some of the ones in the camps did not follow God's voice because they were being a little self-reliant. Others didn't listen to God's call to flee and go where He sends them. But, God gives them grace through their experiences, and will certainly deliver them if they call upon Him and trust Him to deliver them."

"How will your God deliver them?" Vasily asked.

"In the book of Acts, chapter 12, God delivered Simon Peter from a prison," Sergey said, with some excitement in his voice. "He was to be executed the next day. Angels unlocked his shackles and opened prison doors so he could walk out, unharmed. They also kept the guards asleep."

"Interesting," Vasily said.

"So," Sergey continued, "God can and will do similar things to cause Christians to be able to escape from prisons and concentration camps today. In Hebrews chapter 13, verse 8, God says through His Word: '**Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.**' That is because God never changes. What He did back in the Bible's Old and New Testament books, He certainly does today."

"So, if I became a Christian, and if I was put in a camp, God would deliver Me?" Vasily said.

Sergey replied: "God will deliver you if you seek Him, and trust Him, and depend only on Him. David wrote in [Psalms 18](#) how he cried out to God for deliverance from evil men, and David

describes, poetically, how God actually delivered him from them and figuratively drew him out of deep water. God really did deliver David from his problems, but David's problems didn't actually involve drowning in deep water. But, if you were drowning, God would certainly rescue you, if you call out to Him."

"You are an interesting man, Sergey. But, I can't accept your religion."

"Why can't you?" Sergey asked.

"My father was a very religious man," Vasily said. "He strictly followed the Russian Orthodox faith, but he didn't seem to have any peace. He always gave us a list of things we should not do before he allowed us to go to college or before we went to a friend's house. The list was very long and arduous. But, it wasn't as bad as the list he gave us to follow when I and my siblings were growing up. Back then, he would expect us to recite his made up family rules."

Vasily paused and lowered his eyes to the floor.

"He expected us to be impeccably dressed and always answer 'yes, sir' if we were addressing him. When we went to college, I found out later, he paid our roommates to report to him on our behavior. One time when I stayed out late at a bar, my roommate secretly told him about it. When I visited him on a weekend, he yelled at me and gave me a stern lecture about drinking, and threatened to see that I get expelled from the school if I visited a bar ever again. He knew the president of the college from earlier days. One time, when I was a boy, he spanked me because I had forgotten to wear my shirt tucked in."

"That is sad," Sergey said, starting to feel compassion for his guest.

"So, if God is like that," Vasily said, "I want nothing to do with him. I don't want to know a God that treats His children with cruelty and strictness."

"I feel for you, Vasily," Sergey said. "That is very sad what you went through. But, I can tell you that God is not like any man. God's Word says in Numbers 23:19 that God is not a man. Psalm 103:8 says that God is merciful, and gracious, and slow to anger. Psalm 103:11 says that God's mercy toward those who fear (or respect) Him is higher than the Heaven is above the earth — Heaven is where His throne is."

Sergey paused to let the words sink in, but Vasily just grunted and folded his arms.

"Vasily, a verse that I look at often is Psalm 107:6. It says that when God's people cried to Him in distress, He delivered them. Psalm 63:3 says of God: '**Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.**' And, 2 Corinthians 1:3 says that God is '**...the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;**'"

"I don't need to hear all this stuff. Just leave me alone," Vasily said, reaching for the bedroom door.

Sergey backed up into the hallway, and Vasily closed it slowly but firmly.

Standing in the hallway still holding the food and money, Sergey felt downcast and discouraged. It seemed that his gift and conversation with Vasily had been to no purpose.

“My son, Sergey,” Jesus said to his soul and spirit, “why are you downcast? You have done well. Vasily is thinking about what you told him. Don’t feel discouraged. Give these feelings to Me. I will take them. Rest, My son. You have caused him to think about Christianity and about Me. I will now tell you that very soon you will need to get the group together and tell them that they will need to prepare to leave the house because it will no longer be safe here.

“The Russian government knows that you are witnessing to these new Christians. They have sent a team to a forward post to be ready to come and arrest you once the snow is plowed away. That will happen tomorrow. They will arrive by nightfall to arrest you and the others. So, follow My instructions, and you will be safe. If you have to leave some behind, if they are unwilling to come, I will be with them and will keep calling out to them. Now, go, My son. And, I will always be with you to guide you, and provide for you, and protect you. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken, because I and the Father are One.”

“But,” Sergey said, “Lord Jesus, where will I take these people? I only have a car with four seats and two snowmobiles. There are fifteen people. Well, they have some older cars, but where would we go and how would we get there?”

“Just leave those details to Me and I will bless you, My son,” Jesus said.

“Okay, Lord. I will trust them to you. You will not fail us. Just please don’t let those soldiers arrive here before we can get loaded up in the cars to head out. But, I choose to give you these fears I’ve been feeling.”

Saying that, Sergey felt peace enter into his heart and the assurance that everything will work out.

“Break In”

Bang! A loud thump came from the first floor, waking Vasily from his slumber. He groaned and stood to his feet, squinting. Bang! The thump was followed by a splintering crack. Vasily saw his cell phone lying on the bedroom floor. Picking it up, he read the time. It was 11:02 P.M. Bang. Crack. The sound of wood shattering came from below. Vasily winced and hurried to the staircase, wondering who it could be. He quickly descended the stairs to the first floor, but his jaw dropped when he saw the scene before him.

The front door had been smashed open by way of a metal, hand-held battering ram, shaped like a cylinder with handles. A team of soldiers had broken through and were scanning the room with their machine guns.

“Raise your hands!” a soldier ordered.

Reluctantly, he raised his hands.

Then, Vasily remembered the text message and earlier phone call he had made some time ago. The team sent to arrest the Christians had arrived sooner than Vasily thought possible. What Sergey had

told Vasily about God did not leave his mind as he had settled into his sleeping bag two hours ago.

Waking from sleep, being groggy and tired, Vasily had forgotten that a team of soldiers was on its way to arrest the Christians. He hadn't thought that they would arrive this soon due to bad weather some days earlier.

A soldier shoved him to his knees and shouted, "Get on the ground!"

As he fell to the ground, a new thought struck Vasily. His roommate wasn't in the bedroom on the single bed and Sergey was nowhere to be seen in the house. Surely, the people would have woken by now, having heard the loud thumping sounds and the splintering crack of the door breaking open. Sergey would probably be terrified to see the soldiers in his home and probably would try to hide in a bedroom since the house was likely surrounded by soldiers.

From the ground, Vasily exclaimed, "I'm not a Christian. I was the man who reported on these Christians."

But, the soldiers did not listen to him. One remained behind to guard him while several hurried carefully up the staircase and into the second story. Room by room, they cleared the building until they had reached all five bedroom, the closets, and one bathroom. After a short time, the soldiers descended the staircase and looked at Vasily coldly. He was still forced to lie on the ground, face down.

"Stand up, Christian," a soldier ordered gruffly.

"I'm not a Christian!" Vasily said angrily as he stood to his feet.

A soldier slapped him across the face, stinging him. "You will not speak that way to us."

Pain shot up his cheek.

Another said, "Where did you hide the other Christians?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Vasily said. "I called a friend at the Department of Religious Affairs to report these Christians to him. His name is Alexander Lukov. I can confirm that I am telling the truth."

"Sure you are. Stand against that wall," a soldier ordered.

Another shoved him up against the wall while a different soldier snapped handcuffs around his wrists.

"You don't believe me? I am friends with Alexander Lukov!" Vasily screamed.

"Come with us," a soldier said, shoving him forward.

Vasily, protesting and screaming, was shoved out into the snow. He fell face first into a pile of white powder. Coughing and spitting snow from his mouth, he cursed the soldiers and cursed God. A soldier slapped him in the face and ordered him to be silent. But, he wouldn't stop cussing at them.

Then, a soldier drew out a truncheon and clubbed him over the back of the head. Vasily fell to the ground unconscious. The soldiers dragged him up to a six-wheeled military truck with a canvas top, and hauled him into the truck bed. Others loaded into two other six-wheeled trucks. With a guttural roar, the diesel engines revved up and the trucks roared off through the recently plowed streets.

The few cars and trucks on the streets pulled over to let the small convoy pass through. A few hours later, they arrived at a small military base in a pine forest and quickly passed through the guarded entrance.

Vasily, who had come to during the drive to the base, was ushered into a small jail on the base designed for misbehaving soldiers. Sitting in the cinderblock cell on a hard, metal seat, he screamed at and cursed the men who brought him there and at God for allowing it to happen. But, they had already left the prison and were handling the paperwork to admit a civilian into a military prison. This would be a temporary holding place.

Breathing hard and sputtering with saliva dripping from his lips, Vasily calmed himself down, and wiped his lips with the back of his hand. He did not understand how the people had left the building while he was still asleep. Surely, he should have heard people talking. He should have heard doors shutting.

‘How did Sergey know that I had reported his evangelism?’ Vasily thought.

Time passed. Vasily paced his cell, thinking about what Sergey had told him. God would deliver him from trials, according to Sergey, but only if he became a follower of Christ. ‘But, why would the soldiers arrest me and blame me for the Christians’ escape?’ he thought, feeling confused and troubled.

A soldier approached the iron bars that constituted his cell door. “You are now permitted to speak for twenty minutes on a phone.”

‘Great,’ Vasily thought, ‘now I can get this misunderstanding straightened out.’

In the room designated for making phone calls, Vasily dialed a number. He waited for the party on the other end to answer. After several rings, a voice said, “Hello, this is Alexander.”

“Alexander,” Vasily said, “you remember me?”

“Who is this?”

“Surely, you remember who I am?” Vasily said, coyly.

“I don’t recognize your voice. Who are you?”

“This is Vasily Volvakov, your old friend.”

A long pause followed. After some long seconds passed, Alexander said: “According to our information, you are considered to be a mole, who is secretly working for the Christian underground.”

“What?” Vasily gasped. “I, a mole?”

“That’s what our information says,” Alexander said coldly. “It is now believed that you assist Christians in escaping capture by sending our soldiers on wasteful missions while the Christians escape. Last year, you told me that you knew of non-conformist Christians meeting in a basement every Sunday.

“When we sent a team to apprehend them, no one was to be found. The person who owned the building had no knowledge that the basement was being rented out by non-conformist Christians. While our teams were busy with that diversion, we learned that a sizeable group of Christians had been seen driving in some vans toward the wilderness up north. They were known to be Christians because they stopped at a gas station and some of them were seen carrying King James Bibles.

“They escaped because you provided a diversion for our teams. At that time, we were not entire sure you actually assisted those Christians, but now that it has happened a second time, we know that you did assist both groups of Christians. You sent Sergey and his friends away, before we could arrive, while you planned to get a reward for supposedly ‘notifying’ us of their illegal, Christian activities. You are a traitor to your country and a two-faced fraud.”

“What? This is outrageous,” Vasily sputtered, trying to grasp what he was being charged with.

“Tomorrow, you will be shipped to an internment camp to reeducate you,” Alexander said before ending the call abruptly.

Chapter Six

“The Chase”

Wind blew through the trees, sending clouds of snowflakes rushing through the trees and sparkling through the air before the snowflakes vaporized in mid-flight. A group of Christians walked behind the pillar of fire, which resembled a small tornado of spinning flames. The thick snow coating the ground melted directly below the column of fire, in a wide swath, leaving green grass and rocks behind.

The forest was well lit up for many yards in all directions by the awesome spectacle. The Chinese and Asian Christians spoke with each other, laughing, and talking excitedly as they gazed at the miracle before them.

In a few minutes, the forest floor began to get steep, descending toward a narrow canyon. God’s pillar of fire moved down the slope, back and forth, in slow switchbacks and a gradual incline to make the going easier for the people following the spinning flames down the slope.

Burbling and rushing sounds came from the bottom of the canyon. In moments, Steve saw its source.

A swift river flowed in cold, eddying torrents, frothing as it splashed around rocks and logs. Steve felt some fear tug at his heart. How were they to get across this freezing river in the middle of winter?

But, the pillar of fire moved on ahead.

“My son,” Abba God said to Steve, “I am with you. I love you very much. You see an obstacle that seems impossible to safely cross, but watch what I will do.”

The pillar of fire came to a stop before the edge of the water and rested, spiraling around and around. Before long, the front part of the group reached the rocky bank and stopped. People in the back of the line stopped chatting with each other and stood still, looking down into what appeared to be a huge, cold obstacle below.

“What are we going to do, Steve?” Sarah said, worried. She stood behind him a few paces.

“Go ahead, My son, and speak,” Abba God’s gentle voice spoke to Steve’s spirit. “I will give you the words to tell this group.”

“Yes, Father God,” Steve said.

“Steve?” Sarah said.

“God has shown me something, Sarah,” Steve told his wife.

Then, he called out to the whole group in a loud voice. “We have come to a huge obstacle that is humanly impossible to safely pass over, but Our Father God has spoken to me and shown me to watch what He will do.”

Suddenly, rustling sounds came from the bushes higher up the canyon and bright flashlights shined through the forest. The beams swept over the trees until they rested on the group of Christians below. Several Christian women covered their mouths to prevent themselves from screaming. Others gasped.

“Soldiers! We’re trapped!” a man near Steve exclaimed, daring to speak above a whisper.

Helmeted men carrying bullpup light machine guns appeared in the light of the fire tornado. They paused for several seconds as they beheld the spectacle below. Then, a man came through the trees and pointed excitedly toward the group of Christians in the canyon below.

“Kill those people!” he shouted into his helmet microphone. “They are Christians.”

“Commander,” a soldier with a scar near his right eyebrow said, “what about that tornado of fire?”

The commander hardened his features and snapped, “I gave you an order. Kill the Christians! We don’t have the resources to arrest them. So, kill them. Now!”

The soldier nearest him hesitated, but a burst of machine gun fire erupted from the woods twenty feet from him.

Muzzle fire flashed from several machine guns in orange bursts, sending hundreds of rounds toward the innocent people below.

Steve watched in shock as he witnessed the orange bursts flash from the forest above, followed immediately by the loud '*burp*' of machine gun fire. Unless a miracle happened, no one would make it out of the canyon alive.

Sarah and many women screamed. Men cried out in terror. But, none of the people fell over. No bullets struck their targets.

The commander spoke in his two-way radio helmet microphone and ordered the men to sneak up on the Christians. 'My men are good shots,' he thought. 'I don't understand how they missed their targets. Now, there will be no escape for those troublesome Christians.'

Suddenly, the river began parting before the pillar of fire as it moved forward into the water. The miracle stunned many of the soldiers, who stopped their movement and gazed at the sight below. Some dropped their rifles, surprised, as they gazed, dumbfounded, at the river parting into two halves. One half drained away downriver.

The Christians were moving out, walking behind the pillar of fire on dry riverbed. A wall of water, ten feet high, rose up on one side of them. Every second that passed, the wall of water somehow remained ten feet high, even though it should have continued to grow in height with water descending from upstream. The other side of the river was washing downstream, leaving the riverbed exposed. Some fish were flopping on the round rocks downstream.

A few Christians ignored the soldiers up the hill behind them and hurried over to pick up the fish. It was an easy catch.

"Kill them," the commander shouted to his troops again. This time, he cued his helmet mike.

"Sir, I, I can't understand what is happening," said the soldier with the scar above his right eye. "What we're seeing is impossible. How can we shoot these people?"

The commander pulled out a pistol and pointed it at the soldier. "If you don't obey my order this moment, I will shoot you in the shoulder. Then, I will shoot you in the other shoulder."

The soldier trembled and lifted his gun to a firing position, aiming toward the Christians below.

"Now, kill them!" the commander shouted.

Machine guns erupted to the left and right, blasting hundreds of rounds toward the Christians as they walked across the riverbed. But, none of the shells were hitting their marks, even though the soldiers were now a short distance from the river bank.

"Use your grenades!" the commander roared into his helmet mike.

Several grenades flew through the air, but they landed and bounced off the smooth river rocks, without exploding. If they had thrown mere sticks, the effect would have been the same.

The commander cued his helmet mike again and screamed, with spittle flying from his lips, “Kill them! Don’t let them escape.”

He drew a knife from a sheath and ran toward the retreating Christians that were now close to the other bank of the river. A dozen soldiers followed, drawing their combat knives. A Christian lady, looking back, screamed, seeing the soldiers with drawn blades.

The commander was so intent on killing the Christians, that he didn’t notice that the soldier with the scar above his eye had still not pulled his trigger, and had not budged from his spot. The gun was lying on the ground and he was staring in shock at the strange sight before him. His machine gun was still on the safety mode.

His commander rushed toward a Christian trailing behind the main group. The drawn knife blade was only ten yards from a woman carrying a three-year-old boy. In moments, he would cover that distance and have another victim.

But, an invisible object slammed into his body and knocked him to the ground. The knife fell to the rocks, and bounced before it dropped into a gap between two large river stones. He stood up and cursed. Then, he pulled out his pistol to aim it at the woman’s back. His finger lined up on the trigger, as he had her in his sights, and he fired. Blam!

He knew he was a good pistol shot. He never missed his target. The shot had been perfectly lined up. ‘The woman will drop down dead before my eyes,’ he thought. But, she didn’t. She continued walking quickly, holding her little one, who strangely seemed peaceful.

The man fired several more rounds, but none of them hit their target. Snatching a rock from the riverbed, the commander ran forward, seeking to kill the Christians any way he could, but he didn’t seem to notice soldiers to his left firing their machine guns and not hitting any of their targets, even at close range. Then, he tripped on something and fell to the ground. He bruised his knee, but he picked himself up and cursed. The lady was now on the bank of the river and was heading into the forest. The other Christians were already disappearing into the trees.

He turned to either side and noticed that his men were also fallen to the ground, rubbing their knees and shins. Many cursed and gritted their teeth. One had fallen into a boulder and had lost consciousness.

“What are you doing?” the commander shouted. “Kill them. Chase them down!”

“Sir, look!” a soldier shouted, pointing to the water wall upstream.

The wall of water was shaking and trembling. Suddenly, it roared forward like water rushing through a bursting dam. The flood of water slammed into the shocked soldiers, instantly shoving them into the boulders, knocking them unconscious, and breaking some bones. Unconscious and underwater, many drowned and their bodies washed downstream. But, some survived and pulled themselves to the shore hundreds of feet downstream.

Freezing and dripping with icy-cold water, the survivors stared at the river, thinking about the miracles they had just witnessed. Their machine guns had not injured any of the people fleeing from

them. The river had miraculously parted for the escaping Christians, and then collapsed in on the pursuers. The grenades, which were all live and ready to explode, behaved as if they were all duds. These survivors were amazed.

Hundreds of feet away, the Chinese soldier, who had refused to shoot the Christians, took his helmet off, knelt on the snow, and looked up to the stars above. "God," he said, "you do exist. I once thought you didn't. I want what those Christians have. I want their Savior to save me. I don't want my old life anymore. I want what they have. I heard one of their people tell me the Gospel three years ago. I thought he was crazy. But, now I know he isn't. Now, I want my sins forgiven. Please save me through Jesus and His blood. I believe He died for me and rose from the dead. Take me and make me your child."

"My son, Shang," God's still small voice spoke to his spirit and soul, "I am with you. I have heard your prayer. You are now my son through the adoption of Jesus Christ and through His precious blood. You must now go to the edge of the river and wait. You will see My mighty power at work."

"This really is you, God," Shang said. "I'll do that."

Shang stood up and picked up his bullpup machine gun and helmet. He put on the helmet and carried the bullpup more out of habit than out of a desire for protection. Reaching the river bank, he waited. No other soldiers were around. Some had remained on the hill. But, those ones had retreated back through the forest, probably afraid of the fiery pillar. A number of soldiers had pursued the Christians through the river, only to die from drowning when it collapsed and washed them away.

Suddenly, a gurgling sound came from the river. Then, one side mounted up as the river again split in two. The downstream water fled away, leaving bare a riverbed. It was Shang's turn to cross the river and see if he could meet up with the other Christians.

Chapter Seven

"The Reunion and the Surprise"

Sergey found himself in a forest. Wind was blowing through the trees, sending clouds of snowflakes fluttering through the air. A rushing sound of a rapidly flowing river came from some distance behind him. Just moments ago he had been translated, or quickly moved, by invisible angels from his Russian izba cabin in the town of Medvedski.

Men and women dressed in warm winter clothing stood on either side of him in the forest. Many wore ushankas with the ear flaps down. Some children had cried out in surprise and adults gasped, shocked by what had just happened to them. One minute they were asleep in bed, and the next second, they were wearing warm clothing and boots, standing in a snow-covered forest somewhere in the northern hemisphere. They had been somehow woken from sleep during their translation. Now, blinking, they gazed at their completely new surroundings, wondering if they were dreaming.

Several men and women pinched themselves and shook their heads, baffled.

“Sergey,” Ivan said from behind.

Turning to his new friend, Sergey said, “What is it, Ivan?”

Ivan appeared baffled. “Where are we? Are we dreaming?”

Sergey smiled and laughed. “God told me He would do this. I had no idea what it would be like, but here we are.”

“What did He tell you, Sergey?” Ivan said.

“God had not actually said He was going to take us instantly away,” Sergey said, “but He sent me some guests before you arrived. They had told me about how God had instantly transported them from one place to another. They said it was called translation.

“They reminded me of the account in the book of Acts, chapter 8, about Philip being instantly caught away from the Ethiopian eunuch, who was in the desert. Philip, the Bible says, was found near the town of Azotus, in Israel. God had told me to leave the details of our travel to Him. I did and now God had done a miracle of Biblical proportions. Praise His awesome Name!”

Ivan left Sergey and began excitedly speaking loudly about how God had translated them and quickly moved them from the izba cabin to this forest. Eyes opened wide at hearing him speak.

Then, a lady said to Ivan, “So, where are we now?”

He shrugged his shoulders and said, “I have no clue. Only God knows.”

Suddenly, an orange light came from the forest. Everyone turned toward its direction. Then, flames could be seen through the trees.

“Is that a camp fire?” a man asked.

The light source drew closer, passing through the trees, casting long shadows in all directions from its bright center. As it drew closer, Sergey and the other men, women, and children realized they were seeing a supernatural fire. It was a pillar of fire rotating around and around, but slowly. It was moving toward them, lighting up the forest for fifty feet in all directions. Owls roosting in high branches took off and flew from the light, quietly beating the air with their wings.

A rushing sound filled the air and the tree branches were stirred a little as the column of fire approached them. Men and woman gasped, but they didn’t run, because the fear that rose up in them calmed down as a spiritual peace reached every heart. This was truly a miracle of God, the new Russian Christians realized.

“Dear Abba God,” Sergey said to his Heavenly Father, “what is this I am seeing?”

“My son,” Abba God said, “what you are seeing is a pillar of fire similar to what Moses in the book of Exodus beheld. This is My light to guide you by night. By day, you will see a pillar of cloud, for I

am the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now, speak to the group and give them a message that I will put into your mouth. And, I the LORD your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Praise your Holy Name,” Sergey said.

He turned to the group, which was gazing at the spiraling column of fire that was slowly approaching them.

“Brothers and Sisters,” Sergey said loudly, drawing their attention, “what you are seeing before you is a pillar of fire like what Moses and the children of Israel saw in the book of Exodus. God is doing for us what He did for them since we are venturing out into the wilderness, and away from the spiritual Egypt that we all came from. I feel that very soon we will see the time of Tribulation that the book of Revelation speaks of happening in our world. God is leading us out to a place of safety. I feel God is showing me that we will meet up with a group of Christians in these woods. So, do not fear. God will take good care of us.”

Once Sergey finished speaking, a powerful and loving voice spoke audibly from the column of fire:

“My children, this is the Lord your God. I love you very much. I am here in your midst and even in your hearts, but you hear My voice speaking to you so that you may know that I really do exist, and that nothing shall harm you because you are following Me. I shall protect you and provide for you now and in the future.

“A group of Chinese soldiers are looking for Christians in these forests, but I shall keep you safe from them, so that they shall not harm you. Right now you are in China, in a northern region of China. You will soon meet up with a group of Chinese and Asian Christians. Some are from North Korea and others are from The Philippines. Some are from Mongolia and others are from Tibet and Thailand. Some are from central Asia. You will see more people being translated into your group and into this new group shortly, for great persecution is starting to arise on My Church.

“Also, very soon, the kingdom of the Beast shall arise and shall lead the whole world into apostasy and wickedness like you could never imagine possible. They shall cause men, and women, and children that are old enough to receive a mark in their right hand or forehead, so that they can buy or sell. Not everyone in the whole world will be confronted with the mark system, but all who dwell in villages and towns that are not far from major roads and infrastructure will have to receive the mark, or die for My Name’s sake. I shall be with those who chose Me. I shall deliver them. Now, rest all My little ones. I shall take good care of you, My lambs. And, I the LORD your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

The group dropped to their knees and worshiped God, knowing that He was not the column of fire, but He made the fire to light their way. After several minutes of praying and worshiping God, Sergey spoke.

“Brothers and sisters,” Sergey said, “I believe it is time for us to intercede for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are suffering around the world. That is what I feel God putting on My heart.”

The people stood one by one. Some remained bowing and praying quietly.

They formed a circle. Mothers gathered their children into the midst of the circle. Ivan started

praying. He interceded for the Christians in concentration camps in Siberia. Then, a Russian lady prayed for the Christians in South Korea, who likely were being interred in concentration camps run by the North Koreans, who had conquered the South. More prayers went up for Christians in African countries and in the Middle East, where persecution was increasing.

It might have been several hours since Ivan had first prayed, but the time felt like it was only a few minutes as God's Spirit guided the people in praying. From time to time, some would leave to drink from water bottles that had miraculously been brought with them. After some more minutes of praying had passed, they remained silent, and a peace settled over the group deeper than before.

Then, the thumping sound came from the night sky about a quarter of a mile away. Sergey listened to it for a few seconds before he realized that he was hearing helicopter rotors beating the air hundreds of feet in the air. Sergey had the instinct to move away from the river, but he didn't see the pillar of fire moving, and he realized that God had said earlier that He would protect them from harm.

The thwacking drone of helicopter rotors grew louder. Then, the pillar of fire began to move back into the forest, away from the river. The group picked up their water bottles and followed the fiery column deeper into the woods. As they walked behind it, Sergey felt fear that the Chinese soldiers would "*fast rope*" down static lines from the "chopper" and would be on top of them at any moment. But, he also felt God's peace settle into his heart as he began to give the fears to God.

The snow melted and the ground miraculously dried under the pillar of fire so they would not have to walk through thick snow. As they walked, many looked back toward the direction of the river, feeling that at any moment Chinese soldiers, which could have dropped from a helicopter, would break the woodland calm and fire upon them. The loud rotors continued to beat the air, drawing closer to the group in the forest below. Sergey knew that the Chinese and Russian militaries had sophisticated equipment for detecting body heat and sounds through forest canopies.

After a while, they stopped. Then, a thought occurred to Sergey: 'The Chinese military must be searching for someone. It can't be us Russian Christians. We were just translated here. So, who could it be?'

Fifteen minutes passed. The thumping of the helicopter blades faded into the distance. Then, as the group walked forward behind the fiery pillar, Sergey saw a baffling sight. Fire appeared through the trees scores of feet away. It was partially concealed by the undergrowth and trees, but no smoke seemed to rise from it. 'Could Chinese soldiers have decided to set the forest on fire to see if they could kill or scare out whoever they had been searching for?' Sergey wondered.

Then, the fire seemed to grow in size. Before long, Sergey could see people walking some distance from the fire. As the pillar of fire leading the Russians was approaching the distant fire, it became more distinct, and the distant fire soon resolved into a column. Sergey's mouth dropped as it dawned on him that it was another pillar of fire. The people following the distant pillar of fire started waving their hands, excitedly.

In less than a minute, the two groups came together, and the two pillars of fire did something Sergey never imagined possible. Both approached each other and merged to form one column of fire, causing the tree tops to rustle with a light breeze. The calm rushing sound of the whirling fire grew louder for a few seconds as the two pillars merged into one. People gasped, in awe, at the sight. Then, the two groups greeted each other.

“Wei,” an Asian man said in Mandarin Chinese, as he approached Sergey.

“I don’t understand,” Sergey said in Russian.

The Asian man said some more things. Two seconds later, something happened to Sergey’s comprehension and he began to understand what this Asian man was saying.

“Hello, I am Wang Tan,” the man said in Chinese. “You appear to be from another country. Do you know where you are?”

“Oh,” Sergey said, blinking twice. He didn’t fathom how he could understand this Chinese man. “I am Sergey Ulanov. I come from Russia. I understand we are in China, correct?”

“Yes, you are in China,” Wang said, smiling. “Just about a week ago, God translated some Americans and a Russian to our group.”

Sergey glanced to the left and saw Chinese Christians talking with the Russian believers. They seemed to enjoy each other’s company.

“God had protected us,” Wang said, “from a force of Chinese soldiers that had sought to kill us, and He miraculously parted a river for us to cross.”

“Say that again,” Sergey said.

“God miraculously parted a river so we could escape the Chinese soldiers. He also kept them from following us across because the icy water crashed over them while they were partway through.”

“Wow,” Sergey said aloud, blinking. ‘What and awesome God we serve,’ he thought.

“Since, then,” Wang said, “the Chinese have been scouring these woods with their helicopters and with teams of soldiers, but they haven’t seen us. One Chinese soldier surprised us when he came through the woods and entered our camp. He set his gun and helmet down and told us that he had become a Christian and would like to join our group. We sought God about it and God told us that he is a new Christian and that we could trust him.”

“Why did he want to become a Christian?” Sergey asked.

“I wanted to become a Christian,” a man’s voice said from behind Sergey, “because God had revealed Himself in such a powerful way with miracles and love.”

Sergey turned around quickly to see a man wearing the uniform of a Chinese soldier, a thick, camouflage jacket with insignia, a green stocking cap, fatigues, and black boots.

“Sorry to interrupt your conversation, Wang, but I happened to overhear the last part about my coming to your group.”

The man bowed slightly toward Sergey, in greeting. Sergey awkwardly glanced at Wang.

“Oh,” Wang said, “we bow slightly to show respect. It is an Asian greeting.”

Then, the former soldier extended a hand and Sergey shook it, bowing slightly toward him.

“I am Hong Yi,” the former soldier said.

“I am Sergey Ulanov,” Sergey said. “So, why did you decide to become a Christian?”

“I saw a river part,” Hong said, “and a pillar of fire moving through it. I saw that our machine guns, grenades, and knives were of no use to fight against God and His people. I refused to fire on the Christians, even though my commander gave the order repeatedly.

“Sadly, I think he drowned when the river returned back to its normal state and crashed into the soldiers who were foolish enough to go down into the dry riverbed. They ignored the wall of water on the upstream side. Even so, I think that some might have escaped drowning. But, I don’t know if they survived the cold, though.”

Sergey let out a low whistle. “That is a miracle I’d like to see. It is amazing that people would pursue Christians when they know that God is doing a miracle to open a river.”

“Some people are very hardened, like my former commander was,” Hong said, lowering his eyes.

“Your former commander reminds me of Pharaoh from the book of Exodus,” Sergey said.

“Exodus?” Hong said. “I am not familiar with that book. It must be in the Bible.”

“It is,” Sergey said. “The king of Egypt, simply called Pharaoh, kept the children of Israel working as slaves. Eventually, when they turned their hearts more toward God, God sent Moses, an Israelite, to bring them out of Egypt. God performed mighty miracles in Egypt, such as causing water to actually turn to blood, and darkness to descend over the land for a long period of time. But, the Israelites actually had light in their dwellings.

“After ten plagues passed, and the last plague being the death of the firstborn Egyptians, Pharaoh let them go from Egypt. But, while the children of Israel were still journeying through the desert, which is in the “Sinai Peninsula,” they came to what is now called the Gulf of Aqaba. It is the east finger of the Red Sea.”

“How do they know that?” Hong asked.

Sergey said: “Archaeologist Ron Wyatt discovered chariot wheels crusted in coral on the bottom of the sea, along a flat path through the sea floor. He and his sons got underwater footage of them. This underwater path extended from the “Sinai Peninsula” across the Gulf of Aqaba to the Arabian Peninsula. In the Arabian Peninsula, Ron and his sons, and other people to come later, discovered archeological sites identifying the real Mount Sinai or Mount Horeb.”

“Very fascinating,” Hong said, genuinely interested. “What happened to Moses?”

“So, the children of Israel reached the east finger of the Red Sea, but had no way to get across. Pharaoh had decided he wanted them back to be his slaves again. He sent chariots to capture or kill

them, but God placed a thick cloud between the Egyptians and the children of Israel. Then, God opened the east finger of the Red Sea, parting the water so the Israelites could cross. The cloud lifted when the children of Israel were mostly across. Then, Pharaoh and his chariots charged in after them. But, their wheels came off in the mud because God sent angels to slow the chariots down.

“Then, when all the Israelites were across, God caused the high walls of the sea to crash together, paralyzing and drowning the Egyptians. Over thousands of years since then, coral crusted over the chariot wheels, preserving their spokes and circular shapes. One wheel Ron Wyatt saw was free of coral and made of gold. Since the wood had rotted away, Ron chose not to move it, believing it could break from being very fragile.”

“I would like to read Exodus,” Hong said, excitedly.

Hong and Sergey talked a little longer before Hong excused himself. Once the Chinese man had left, a voice called out to Sergey from behind.

“Oh, it’s you, Sergey,” a red-haired, bearded man said from Sergey’s left.

Sergey turned to see Alexei, a Russian friend of Steven.

“Alexei Khlebov,” Sergey said, shaking his hand, “It is good to see you.”

“It’s feels like a month since we last saw each other,” Alexei said. “How did it work out having that large group in your house?”

“I’ll have to tell you all about it soon, but I wonder where Jason, Steven, and Sarah are.”

“Oh,” Alexei said, “they are around here somewhere.”

Just then, a Chinese man spoke loudly to the group. “Attention, everyone, God has told me that He would like us to have a prayer time. We can split up into groups of ten and intercede however God’s Spirit leads. I feel in my spirit that our journey is going to become a little more difficult. But, pray and see what our loving Father God shows you.”

Slowly, groups began forming together. Young mothers took their children with them and had them pray with the adults while they and their husbands held the youngest children in their arms. Five groups formed a few minutes later. Each group was slightly different in size but had about ten people per group.

After about an hour had passed, a thumping sound of helicopter rotors beating the air came faintly in the distance. The Christians continued in prayer for their fellow Christians around the world, for their families, and for their friends. Others prayed that God’s protection would continue and not abate, but Steve understood from God that He would never let down His protection.

Then, as the helicopter sounds grew louder, several people looked up to the night sky, peeking through the trees. Stars appeared, twinkling in the clear night sky. The moon had moved out of sight. But, the throaty hooting of owls had stopped suddenly.

The thumping of the helicopter blades was louder than before. Now, Steve could see a dark shape

coming through the night sky. Its lights had been shut off, but the sound was undeniably revealing that it was much closer than other helicopters had been a while ago.

Hong Yi looked up and gasped. “They must have spotted us. They’re closing in fast.”

Several people gulped, but the Christians closed their eyes and prayed. They had seen God’s deliverance from soldiers days before. Now, it was time to trust God again for a deliverance.

Tree tops ruffled and tossed in the powerful blast of air from the thumping rotors of a dark-green *Changhe Z-18* transport helicopter, which was descending toward a clearing. The side door near the cockpit flew open when the helicopter was just twenty-five feet from the ground. A canvas bag containing one end of a black rope dropped from the door. Then, a soldier equipped with a light backpack and a machine gun, slung over his shoulder, squeezed the line with his hands and feet, and descended the rope quickly. He was followed by other soldiers.

“Should we run?” a Russian man asked his group of ten.

“Dear God, please save us,” a Russian lady cried.

“Yury, there is no where we can go where those soldiers will not try to hunt us down,” Steve said, overhearing him speak. “But, we must not be afraid.”

“Then, what do we do?” Yury, the Russian man, asked fearfully.

“Watch what God will do,” Steve said, feeling God’s Spirit prompting him.

The Chinese soldiers were now on the ground only fifty yards away. But, the foliage was more sparse between the soldiers and the Christians than in other sections of the forest. The Chinese soldiers spread out into groups of three and began combing the forest, heading toward the Christians. ‘Somehow,’ Steve thought, ‘their heat sensors must have detected this large group of people under the dense forest canopy ... and the pillar of fire.’ Steve smiled to himself and shook his head as he realized that their situation was something God was allowing to happen. After all, the pillar of fire would provide a large heat signature on sensitive detection equipment.

Bushes rustled a short distance away, drawing more fearful glances. In moments, the Chinese soldiers had reached the Christians, after scraping through bushes and scanning around trees and boulders. Seeing the Christians, the soldiers coldly raised their bullpup machine guns and prepared to unleash a torrent of fire with less than forty feet separating them from their targets. Then, a fearful thought crossed Sergey’s mind: ‘Would God allow us to die?’

Chapter Eight

“Vasily’s Escape”

Chunk. The shovel cut partway into the hard, cold dirt and Vasily Volvakov groaned as he tossed a small scoop of dirt onto a slowly growing pile of earth, which rested atop some snow. *Chunk.* The shovel again dug into the hard ground, slowly enlarging the ditch. Other men worked hard, digging several feet apart from each other. But, since the ground was cold, their efforts brought little results. As they worked, their breath came out in small clouds of water vapor.

Vasily had been recently processed into the prison system of the *new* Russian Federation. The *new* Russian Federation was being upgraded and modernized throughout its expansive territory, ever since the new oligarchy was established under Vladimir Putin. The *T-14 Armata* tank was being mass produced and sent out to Europe to safeguard Russian military bases throughout the continent.

Vasily thought about Russia’s massive expansion as he begrudgingly dug the ditch, which someone had told him would have to be filled in during the next week.

Once the United States had struck Russia with a nuclear missile, the Kremlin had ordered a massive, coordinated attack on America, which Vasily suspected had been planned out earlier as a contingency plan. China, a partner with Russia, had fired many nukes at the American mainland and Hawaii, destroying American military bases and important infrastructure. Shortly afterward, the remnants of NATO ordered a retaliation on Russia, but the Russian military struck hard and fast at NATO bases throughout Europe and fought, country by country, until they had captured all of Europe. With the help of Belarus, some central Asian countries, and some Russian-speaking military contractors, the Russian Federation plowed quickly through the weakened NATO defenses, capturing or destroying base after base.

Vasily didn’t know if their fall was good or bad for him, now that he was in a concentration camp, working hard in the cold, doing useless tasks. He thought about the European countries, which had comparatively small military power next to their big American brother. They chose the wrong side.

The European countries fell like sand castles, one after another, under the Russian hammer. The years of sanctions against Russia, criticism of Russia, and disregard for Russia’s role among the nations, coupled with America’s provocation and military attack on the Russian Federation, provoked the wrath of the Russian bear. Descending in full force, in union with some South American countries and some central Asian countries, the Russian-Chinese juggernaut plowed into America, raining nuclear weapons on its major cities, and releasing lethal clouds of poison gas over other areas.

Vasily paused to pull off his orange glove and wipe sweat out of his eyes. Even though it was cold, his forehead seemed to sweat under his orange stocking cap, which had been issued to him upon his arrival at the labor camp.

For some reason, which the Americans could not understand fully, their defense systems had failed to knock out the massive attack, and their nuclear submarines had declined to unleash their nuclear missiles due to confusion and disarray among the commanding officers of the submarine fleet and their superiors. That is what Vasily had been told from a reliable source that worked in the Kremlin.

Once the Russians had conquered NATO and vaporized the strategic military bases of important European countries, the countries fell to the Russian coalition and surrendered. They became satellite states that were controlled by puppet governments loyal to the Kremlin. The coalition troops that remained to ensure their success were gradually replaced by new pro-Communist armies made of local residents and Russians living within each puppet state's borders. Powerful countries, like Germany, Poland, France, and Britain had been subdivided into smaller regions and smaller states, which had their own puppet governments. The borders of European nations now looked very different than they had decades ago. So, escaping to Europe was not an option for Vasily.

"Hey," a guard shouted from behind Vasily, "keep digging!" Vasily had paused to wipe his eyes again, but the guard was not going to give him any leisure.

A whip cracked just a couple feet from his back, causing Vasily to flinch. He hadn't been hit for many hours, but he knew what the bullwhip felt like, and it was very painful.

Vasily picked up the shovel and continued to dig at the hard dirt, trying to make it seem he was working hard, but his strength was starting to ebb. In a few more hours, his arms would be too exhausted to keep digging.

"Would you like me to pray for you?" said a young man with blond hair, an orange jump suit, and a light winter jacket. He was digging a few feet away from Vasily and had spoken once the Russian guard had moved on.

Vasily turned and glared at him. "Pray for me? It was your God who put me into this terrible camp. I was trying to get some non-conformist Christians arrested, and the soldiers arrested me. I am no Christian and I don't need your prayers."

The man continued digging, but glanced at Vasily every so often. Another Russian soldier walked by and glanced at their work. Once the guard was gone, the young man said, "I feel bad for you, sir. You were arrested for being a 'Christian' even though you are not one. I was arrested for being a deserter to the Russian army. I was sent to this concentration camp to teach me a lesson for deserting, but I came to Jesus here."

Vasily glanced at him with a questioning look. "Why did you desert the army? It pays well."

"I deserted," the young man said, "because I didn't want to kill people. I had a violent step-father growing up and was sick of seeing violence. He often used to beat me after getting drunk. I ran away from the house at age 14 and lived on the streets, and stayed with whoever would have compassion on me. I was drafted into the army at age 23. But, I refused to fight, so they sent me here. I've been here for about a year."

"So, you are now 24," Vasily said, grunting.

"Yes," the young man said. "My name is Viktor Kozlov."

Vasily just grunted, and sighed. He continued chipping away at the cold dirt. Then, he suddenly groaned and shut his eyes in pain. His back had ached slightly before, but a sharp pain had suddenly shot up his spinal cord. It was worse than any back pain he'd felt before.

Viktor turned toward him with concern on his face, seeing Vasily groan and grit his teeth.

“What’s wrong?” Viktor asked.

“Nothing,” Vasily lied. “Just do your job and leave me alone.”

Vasily tried to act like the pain was gone, but it hadn’t left. He slammed the shovel tip into the dirt, but the pain became even more intense. He dropped the shovel and collapsed to the ground, bending over. It was worse pain than he’d ever felt. He clenched his teeth together and cried through them.

Viktor set his shovel down and ran to Vasily’s side. “I will pray for you, and God will heal you,” Viktor said.

“Will God want to heal a sinner like me?” Vasily said.

“Those who come to Him, God will in no wise cast out,” Viktor said. “That is basically what Jesus said in John 6:37. A Christian gave me that verse on a slip of paper when I was still an unbeliever.”

Vasily gritted his teeth. “Pray for me,” he said through clenched teeth.

Viktor placed his hand on Vasily’s back and said, “Dear God, I release your healing power into this man, in Jesus Christ’s Name. Heal his back and remove the pain.”

In seconds, the pain felt less than before, but it was still shooting through Vasily’s back. “Pray again,” Vasily said. “I feel it weaken a little. Pray again.”

Viktor prayed again and commanded the complete healing to come, in Jesus Christ’s Name. “How is it now?” Viktor asked, glancing around. He was glad to see that the guards were gone.

Vasily groaned. “I feel some pain, but it is much, much better.”

Viktor prayed one more time, and removed his hands from Vasily’s back. “God is telling me that you will be healed very soon.”

Vasily stood to his feet and eyed the young man, wondering who this young man was and why he had risked himself to help an older, grumpy man who had attempted to turn in Christians. And, who was this Jesus who brought him great relief from the pain?

Vasily picked up his shovel and kept chipping away at the dirt, hoping no guards had seen him bent over. He thought about Viktor’s kindness and about God. As he worked, the pain remained minimal, and somehow he had the strength to continue working. After a couple more hours, the soldiers gave the men a break.

“You have twenty minutes,” a soldier said.

The prisoners dropped their shovels and climbed out of the shallow trench, remaining silent while they unscrewed thermos bottles. As he sipped lukewarm water from his thermos, Vasily could see prison barracks on the other side of a razor wire fence. The administration building and the chow hall rested in the middle of a field that separated the barracks buildings into two sections. Vasily’s work

area was surrounded on all sides by a tall, razor-wire-topped chain link fence.

On either side of this enclosed work area were two other work areas also enclosed with tall fences. The one to the east was filled with large rocks which had been piled into the enclosure by a dump truck when Vasily arrived at the labor camp. While being supervised by armed guards, men with sledge hammers broke the rocks into smaller pieces. Other men in the enclosure crushed the smaller pieces with wider hammers.

The enclosure to the west of Vasily's work enclosure was filled with logs from dead trees. Men with dull hand saws, designed for one person, were slowly sawing through the freezing wood. It appeared to be hard and exhausting work. Their arms must be sore, Vasily thought. As he rested his muscles, Vasily felt the cold begin to return to his body. Working with the shovel had kept him warm enough, but the winter temperatures were penetrating through his thin gloves, hat, and jacket, which all were orange to keep him easily visible against the snowy backdrop.

Suddenly, a weak clanging sound reached Vasily's ears. He turned around to see a man climbing the chain link fence which had been behind him. The man was halfway up and quickly ascending. 'He must be crazy,' Vasily thought. 'Why would he attempt an escape in broad daylight?'

The man reached the top of the fence. Guards started running toward him. A guard on a guard tower trained his AK-74M at the escaping prisoner, but he held his fire. The prisoner pulled a wire cutter from a pocket and snipped a coil of the razor wire wrapped around the top of the fence. Then, he cut a barbwire line running through the middle of the razor wire coil. Guards on the ground shouted at him to stop and come down, but he didn't listen.

They cocked their machine guns and aimed them at the prisoner, still ordering him to come down. He ignored them as if they were pointing pellet guns at him. He continued snipping barbwire lines and razor wire until he had opened a gap. Then, the man shoved the wire cutter into a pocket. He quickly descended the fence until he was most of the way down. Then, he dropped, thumping into the snow. But, he didn't get a chance to run any further, for a dog ran over and grabbed him by the arm, pinning him down.

He tried hitting it over the head, but it didn't let up. Another dog arrived and grabbed his other arm, keeping him completely immobilized while Russian soldiers outside the base raced over. They ordered the dogs to let go while they handcuffed him and led him back to the enclosure, toward a well-guarded gate.

"Don't you realize you are touching a general?" the man said, arrogantly.

The guards kept their mouths shut while they escorted him.

'I wonder who he is,' Vasily thought. 'Why would a general in the Russian army be in a prison camp?'

Some time later when the sky was darkening and the clouds displayed reddish highlights of the setting sun's rays, the prisoners sat in the chow hall at specific tables for their work teams. Vasily sipped at his soup and took a bite out of a small bread loaf and listened to the men at his table talk. His seat was not far from another table in which sat a Russian man who was discussing the escape attempt. Curious, Vasily tuned out his table and listened closely to the other table.

“Did you see that general attempt to escape the perimeter fence?” the man said.

“Yes,” a few voices chimed in.

“I happen to know who he is.”

“Tell us, Boris,” another man said as he took a swig of warm water.

“Promise me that you won’t let anyone else know,” Boris said.

“We’ll try to keep a secret,” a man said.

“This general, named Pavel Boykov, refused to take orders from the Kremlin to invade the country of Georgia,” Boris said.

“Why not invade Georgia?” a man with dark brown hair and a rugged face said. “Stalin was a Georgian. They basically are Russian.”

“I think general Boykov has a desire to just have peace,” said Boris. “He wasn’t favorable toward our invasion of America.”

“Why not?” a man near Boris asked.

“General Boykov told me he wants Russia to be smaller than it is now,” Boris said. “Today we have all of Europe from Ireland to Ukraine, going west to east, and from Norway to Italy, going north to south. We also have the country of Georgia and much of the former United States of America. And, many of the central Asian countries are our allies. Over 900 million people are under our country’s control directly or through puppet governments that secretly take orders from the Kremlin.”

“You better be careful what you say,” a man sitting across from Boris said, glancing toward Vasily. “Walls have ears.”

Shortly after dinner, Vasily and the other men were ordered to stand at attention in a large formation. They had to wait their turn to return to their barracks. Prisoners had been assigned to keep an eye on the others and make sure they obeyed soldiers’ orders. Then, a soldier approached the formation of men. He called out a number, which referred to the group number.

“Group 1,” he said, “to you barracks.”

A group of the twenty men broke away from the main body and marched toward their barracks, which had a number 1 above its front door. Two soldiers escorted them.

He paused ten seconds before he said, “Group 2, go.”

A second group moved out toward their barracks, under escort. After a minute had passed, Vasily’s group, number 9, was called. He looked forward to feeling the hard pad of his bunk and the thick blanket keeping him warm during the cold winter night. ‘That blanket is the one nice thing about this base, but most of life at this camp is drudgery and toil,’ Vasily thought.

Entering the long, narrow building with the 9 placard above, Vasily headed toward his bunk bed and slipped under the covers. Bright light from a bare light bulb in the ceiling caused him to squint and shield his eyes. He wished it would be turned off soon so he could sleep.

Creak. A wooden step protested as another prisoner climbed the small, wooden ladder to the top bunk, and caused it to creak as he rested on the mattress above. Then, he leaned over the top of the bunk bed and peered down at Vasily.

“Did you hear anything about the jail break that was planned tonight?” the man above him said, whispering loud enough for Vasily to hear, seeing no one else was nearby.

“No,” Vasily said, curious. “What jail break?”

“Some of the men in group 9 and group 8 are planning on escaping this pit. They feel that if they can make it to the woods they will be able to hide and live off the land.”

Vasily frowned. “I would like to join you, but I turn 60 a few months ago. I don’t think I would be up to that. But, you go ahead.”

“I’ve also heard rumors,” said the man, “that they will expect us to work faster and will apply more pressure to us in coming weeks because a new colonel is supposed to arrive and run this base, since the current colonel is being sent to western Europe. You may not survive to your next birthday. So, why don’t you join us?”

“I’ll think about it,” Vasily said. He noticed the man above him was in his thirties and had a scar on his left cheek.

“People your age will not survive long in this camp,” the man said.

Vasily remained silent for some time, thinking about what he should do.

“If I join you,” Vasily said, “I need to know the plan of escape if it will be successful.”

“I’ll tell you once most of others have fallen asleep,” the younger man said. With that, he turned over and rested on the top bunk.

Vasily’s eyelids felt heavy enough to sleep before the lights were turned off. So, he rolled over on his left side, pull his blanket over his face, and began to drift into a deep sleep.

Some hours later, a dim flashlight suddenly turned on, shining on Vasily’s closed eyelids. The orange glow woke him from sleep, for he was somewhat of a light sleeper. A voice whispered from behind the bright, round flashlight reflector: “Don’t speak loudly. We will be planning our escape in the bathroom area. So, walk softly and try not to make any sounds.”

Then, the man who woke him tiptoed off down a corridor that ran the length of the barracks, between the bunk beds.

Vasily got out of bed, still wearing his orange jumpsuit. Quietly walking to reduce sound, he headed

down the walkway. A few snores could be heard coming from men throughout the long room. Pushing through a door at the end, he entered the bathroom and shower area. The large room was lit by two light bulbs in the ceiling, which could not be turned off or unscrewed because metal cages had been fastened around them and anchored into the ceiling by screws.

A group of seven men talked quietly among themselves in the middle of the hand washing area, which was bordered by private toilet stalls. Someone had set up a small, folding card table and another had spread a map over it, which was a drawing of the prison camp and the nearby forest, made by one of the prisoners. All the men wore orange jumpsuits. Most wore orange hats, gloves, and winter jackets, but some had dark green winter jackets.

The man who woke Vasily, who was his bunk neighbor, approached him and said, "I am your bunk neighbor, Rustem Arefyev. And, I trust that you are called Vasily Volvakov."

"How do you know my name?" Vasily asked, surprised to see that fellow prisoners were aware of him.

"We have ways to find out, but that is not important," Rustem said. "We need to get out of this misery. So, I want to introduce you to a man who I respect. He is General Pavel Boykov."

A man with dark brown hair, who appeared to be in his early fifties, stepped forward and extended a hand. His face looked somewhat haggard, but rugged. Nonetheless, Pavel's blue eyes and face had not lost the aura of determination and authority that Vasily had seen in other generals. Vasily shook his hand firmly, noticing the general had more calluses than he.

"I am privileged to meet you, general," Vasily said. "And, I would like to assist you in escaping from this terrible pit."

"It is a pleasure to meet another willing comrade," Pavel said.

Then, turning to the other men, he said, "Gentlemen, we will now run through the plan of escape. Then, we will go through a contingency plan."

"Excuse me," Vasily said. "I don't want to interrupt you, sir, but I noticed that you climbed the perimeter fence. Why did you, if I may ask?"

"I did that to create a diversion," Pavel said, "so that some of my comrades could conduct a brief and secret operation, which I will speak of later."

"The dogs grabbed your arms with their teeth," Vasily said. "How are your arms? Are they bleeding?"

"They are fine," Pavel said, "because I wrapped my arms with a thick layer of padding before I climbed the fence."

Pavel returned his attention to the other men. "We are going to escape this base by way of an underground tunnel. I know about this tunnel because I stumbled upon it while searching for a way to escape over the course of the year that I have been here. The entrance was concealed, but I found it while testing the ground with my shovel one day. It must have been built during the days of the

Soviet Union. I had heard stories of tunnel escapes from my comrades when I was a young officer, and now we have a tunnel to escape through.”

“What are the dimensions and length of the tunnel?” a man with dark eyebrows asked.

“The width is about 1.21 meters and the height is about 1.52 meters, or roughly 4 feet by five feet. It is somewhat cramped, but it seems to extend for some distance,” Pavel said. “The trouble was that it didn’t reach the forest. I went to the end of the tunnel and found a small hatch. It opened into a small field a short distance from the base. So, I and some men began extending the tunnel. But, we met another problem.”

Some of the newer members looked at him, curious.

“The ground was full of large boulders and rocks,” Pavel continued, “and it would impossible to go through it, so we took a right turn and tunneled some meters before we decided to open a small hole to the surface. We were able to dig a hole just wide enough to stick a primitive periscope through. It was fashioned from some wood and pieces of a mirror. We found ourselves a short distance from a building which is used to store motorcycles and snowmobiles. There were some skis lying against the side of the building. We did our best to try to plug our small hole with dirt and we built a support structure to hold the dirt in place.

“Now, all we need to do is open that hole wide enough for us to crawl through. Once we are free of the tunnels we can take the snowmobiles into the nearby woods. We can disappear into the forest before the soldiers could find us. I used to spend some time doing bush craft, so I know something about surviving, and my friend Boris Dernov is an expert at surviving. He was a bush craft guide for two summers.”

“What will we do for supplies?” Vasily asked.

“I, Boris, and three others,” said Pavel, “have collected supplies over a period of months of planning. I won’t tell you exactly how we did, but it did involve theft.”

“So, where are the supplies and when do we leave?” Vasily asked.

“We will leave tonight. The supplies are in the tunnel.”

Fifteen minutes later, a figure slowly opened the only door to the barracks. The moon hung in the night sky like a dim lamp, reflecting some of the sun’s rays onto the dark landscape under its cratered face. Many of guard towers were manned, but some were left empty. Searchlights slowly swept over the base and around its perimeter while snow fluttered to the ground in sparkling, tumbling ice crystals. Soon, the footprints of the sleeping prisoners and their work projects were covered with a fresh layer of white powder.

Sure that no one was looking, the figure hurried off into the shadows and made a beeline for a nearby barracks. He reached its side where an old, rusty oil drum sat. The drum had sat on that spot for years without anyone paying attention. The soldiers who manned the base had always seen it, and none had thought to move it, thinking it was a relic from the days of the former Soviet Union.

The figure moved the drum, applying his back muscles and straining a little. It creaked and squeaked

slightly as it scraped against metal. He set the drum down and took a deep breath slowly, to regain oxygen. Below him lay a metal plate about five feet in diameter. He picked up one side, groaning under the weight, and slid it over, shoving snow aside. A shaft with a wooden ladder descended into the ground. In seconds, he entered the hole and began descending into the darkness. His feet touched the bottom several yards down. In a few minutes, another man entered the hole and began descending.

General Pavel Boykov reached the end of the ladder and tested the ground with his left foot before putting all his weight on the tunnel floor. Then, he followed Boris into the darkness. He groped down the tunnel for several yards before he pulled out a flashlight and shined its dim, orange light ahead of him. Boris was standing in the darkness unbuttoning his orange coat. Dropping the coat, he bent down and picked up a green winter jacket and slipped it on.

“Boris,” Pavel said approaching him, “where is our equipment?”

“I have it right here. Shine your flashlight.”

Pavel shined his flashlight around until he spotted a pile of back packs, military coats, boots, and survival tools, such as flint and steel fire starters, hatchets, and small shovels. He, Boris, Rustem, and a couple others had obtained them by bribing guards with cigarettes to look the other way when they stole unused supplies under the cover of night.

The guards which could be bribed were young soldiers that had been drafted into the military and had no real desire to serve their country. Pavel knew that many just wanted to return to the civilian world, raise a family, and live a normal life. Pavel had obtained the cigarettes because of his status as a general and as a smoker.

Pavel pulled out a cigarette and a small matchbox. He lit it up and drew in a breath of harmful tobacco smoke. The glow of his cigarette bobbed up and down in the dark as he pulled off his orange coat and reached for a green winter jacket.

Colonel Dmitry Azarov, the officer in charge of the base, had threatened to remove his cigarette rations and throw him in solitary confinement for three weeks if he ever attempted an escape again. Pavel knew that once the current colonel was replaced by Colonel Artemy Votyakov, Pavel would be shown no mercy. He would probably be expected to work harder than the rest of the men because Colonel Votyakov was known to be a strict, no-nonsense officer.

Creak. Creak. Creak. The sound of someone descending the ladder came from the tunnel entrance. It was Vasily. He coughed, trying to cover his mouth.

“Shh,” Pavel hissed.

Vasily coughed again. “I feel I might have started to get a cold,” the older man said.

“I have some cough medicine here,” Pavel said, stooping to pick up a plastic container.

Several minutes later, the tunnel filled up with five more men. They geared up, changed jackets, and started off down the long, dark tunnel. After some time walking, they paused before the bend in the tunnel that led to the right. Pavel informed them about how to steal the snowmobiles and how to

drive them.

Then, they hurried down the tunnel until they arrived at the end. Pavel moved aside the wooden supports to hold up the small hole and some gallons of dirt plopped down. Working with shovels, the men took turns and dug upward through the dirt around the small shaft that opened into the cold night air. After forty minutes of digging, they had opened a wide enough hole for a man to pass through. Boris opted to go first. Several men lifted him on their shoulders up through the hole. Reaching the opening, Boris looked around to see that all was clear. He was glad to see that the searchlight beams were still far from the tunnel exit, just as they had been when he had looked through the homemade periscope the night before.

Seeing that no soldiers were nearby, Boris pulled himself up through the hole, sending trickles of dirt raining down upon the men below. Some coughed from the dust, but they looked up, wondering if Boris was okay. His face appeared in the entrance and he said, "It is safe to come."

Two more men came through the hole. Then, it was Vasily's turn. Bundled up in a new winter coat, gloves, and a ushanka, Vasily pulled himself through the hole with help from below. The cold winter air stung his face with sub-zero temperatures. Snow flurries fluttered through the air around his face, and some alighted on his nose.

Some yards away, a metal shed with a closed double door awaited action. Some piles of rusty metal junk rested a few feet from the shed, offering more cover. A few boulders, lying about the building, provided cover for one to scuttle over to the shed without being noticed. The fact that the searchlights were far away brought some encouragement to him.

"Over here," a man beside the building motioned for Vasily to hurry over.

His heart beating harder in his chest, Vasily, hurried over to the closest boulder and ducked behind it. Then, casting aside his uncertainty, Vasily darted through the snow to the temporary safety of the shed.

Once Vasily reached the relative safety of the building, he saw Boris standing beside a new snowmobile. A short distance behind it lay two other snowmobiles.

"The keys were left in the ignition," Boris said, gloatingly. "This is the nicest snowmobile I've seen. I can't wait to try it out."

Then, a barking sound in the distance interrupted the still night air. Vasily froze, holding his breath to listen to the night. The barking continued. Suddenly, one of the guard towers trained its searchlight on a patch of ground fifty yards from Vasily's position. Barking sounds started getting closer.

"Hurry," Boris said to Vasily as he gripped the handle bars and hopped onto the snowmobile seat. Vasily sat down behind him and took a hold of some handles attached to the vehicle.

The searchlight swept away from them, but the barking continued. Then, Vasily saw what he hoped never to see. A guard was running toward them shining a bright flashlight mounted on a machine gun. He held a German Shepherd attack dog on a long leash. The dog was straining at its leash, barking in Vasily's direction. Another guard followed, gripping his AK-74M machine gun. Boris started the engine, and the vehicle came to life, producing a throbbing hum. But, Vasily leapt off and

threw himself to the ground, covering his head. It was over. ‘There would be no escape from armed guards,’ he thought.

Boris applied the throttle and roared off through the snow. The soldiers moved out of the way as the machine roared past them. Then, one took aim and fired. A loud roar of machine gun fire cut through the night air. The second guard ran past Vasily and hopped onto a snowmobile. He started it up quickly and raced off in pursuit of Boris.

The German Shepherd barked and strained at its leash, pointing its nose toward Vasily, who was partially hidden in the snow. And, the guard shined his gun-mounted flashlight in Vasily’s direction.

“You,” he said loudly, “stand up slowly with your hands raised.”

Feeling his heart sink, Vasily stood.

The soldier pulled out some handcuffs from his belt and tossed them over to Vasily.

“Put these on,” he ordered.

The roar of the snowmobiles echoed through the forest, fading slowly into the distance. A few gunshots erupted through the trees, causing Vasily to flinch.

Reluctantly, Vasily snapped them on, realizing his escape attempt was over. The Russians would discover the tunnel, and that would be the end of General Pavlev’s hope of escaping. Boris and Pavlev’s plan had failed miserably. Boris might escape, but Vasily didn’t know what would become of the other two men who came through the hole ahead of him.

More soldiers arrived on the scene. A couple soldiers approached the piles of metal junk that rested not far from the metal shed. Then, a soldier shouted, “Stop or we’ll shoot!”

A flashlight beam swept over to the clearing separating the shed from the forest. Two men were running as fast as they could, while two Russian soldiers trained their guns on them and shouted at them to stop. The prisoners had just darted from behind the junk heaps and were making a beeline for the forest.

They did not stop as the guards yelled at them, but kept running, hoping to reach the forest in just a few more seconds. The snow crunching under their boots felt like another obstacle to overcome, and the dark forest with its multitude of hiding places beckoned them.

Then, AK-74M’s roared to life, spraying a withering spread of bullets that cut the men down in their tracks. They fell to the ground, dead. Vasily closed his eyes and felt like crying. This was the end of his hope of escaping, he thought. He felt that he might as well die. But, somewhere deep in his soul, he felt a tug on his heart to live and turn to God.

Chapter Nine

“Vanished”

Chinese soldiers had just landed a fairly short distance from the group of Christians in a wooded area of northern China. The beating din of the rotors of a dark-green *Changhe Z-18* transport helicopter “thwacked” the air some distance above the trees. The Chinese soldiers had fast-roped down from the helicopter and had scanned through the snow-dusted bushes until they spotted the Christians, dressed in their winter coats. Aiming their bullpup machine guns at close range, the Chinese troops placed their fingers over their triggers, ready to fire.

The Christians held each other close and prayed, closing their eyes anticipating what they expected to happen next. “*Burp!*” The machine guns erupted into a loud cacophony of fire, which echoed through the trees. Rapid yellow flashes of machine gun fire burst from the guns, followed immediately by a wall of lead hornets.

Echoes from the shots faded into the woodland as the soldiers ceased firing, one by one. They looked side to side, scanning the trees, baffled. They could not see any dead or wounded people. In fact, no humans were in sight. Only a multitude of snow-covered deciduous and coniferous trees, bushes, and snow-heaped ground reached their vision.

A soldier spoke into his two-way, helmet radio and reported the mysterious disappearance of about 50 people, who they were about to execute. The commander’s voice replied harshly, ordering the soldiers to search the woods immediately. Breaking from their stupor, many soldiers began searching through the bushes and trees, but some remained in a daze, certain that the Christians had only been a stone throw from them, and had not moved since the soldiers first arrived.

After fifteen minutes of beating through the bushes and searching around trees with bright flashlights, the baffled Chinese troops reported their failure to find any Christians. The commander was outraged and told them that if they did not locate those Christians, they would be put into work camps. Hearing that, the troops, fanned out into the forest and started a manhunt. More helicopters were ordered to the forest. But, the dazed soldiers knew that the Christians had vanished in front of their eyes.

“City”

A wooden city spread out before Steve, Sarah, Jason, Sergey, and the group of Asian and Russian Christians. It rested on a hill, surrounded by a forest of pine trees. A forested mountain formed a backdrop behind the city, and the moon’s pale face hung above the mountain like a glowing lamp. Chinese-style wooden buildings rose up into the air three and four stories high illuminated by yellow street lamps. They appeared to be wooden poles with four Chinese lanterns attached to outstretched wooden beams.

“We’re finally back home,” Sarah said to Steve as they beheld the sight.

“I look forward to sleeping in an upholstered bed,” Steve said, yawning.

Among the larger buildings, some smaller structures rested. Many of these were single or double-

story houses and shops. Each house had a small yard or a courtyard.

Sergey turned to Steve and said, “Where are we?”

“It is the city of refuge we told you about,” Steve said, smiling.

Sergey returned his gaze to the wooden city. Throughout it there appeared to be lavatories made out of stone for the sake of convenience. And, stone-paved streets formed a perfect grid layout. Large buildings throughout identified themselves as church buildings by the crosses mounted atop them.

Just seconds ago, Steve and this group had been translated by God’s angels to this amazing sight. They were about to be shot dead by Chinese troops, but they had been whisked away a split second before the burst of machine gun fire erupted from the muzzles. Many people were relieved, but the surprise of being translated had both shocked many and gave them great joy. People a short distance from Sergey talked excitedly and cried, seeing the city before them. Tears filled their eyes as they realized that what God had told them beforehand had now come to pass. It was a miracle that they were standing there alive and in one piece.

Some Asian Christians emerged from the streets on the outskirts and walked down a dirt road toward the new arrivals, who stood outside the city. In a short time they arrived, smiling. A Chinese man wearing a dark brown *changshan* tunic stepped forward and said, “Greetings, brothers and sisters. It is good to see more faces. Come into this city of refuge. You are welcome here. Here, all your needs will be supplied and you will be protected from all harm.”

The Asian Christians greeting them wore traditional Chinese clothing, but their clothing seemed more like Autumn clothing than winter wear. As Sergey looked around, he noticed that no snow appeared on the ground. The trees in the nearby forest were also free of snow. But some miles away from the city, white powder covered the forest and the hills. ‘This is a mystery. It must be a miracle of God,’ Sergey thought.

He was impressed by the lack of snow in this region. Clearly, this was the city of refuge that God had prepared the group for and surprised them with. Sergey could not tell whether this was in Russia, China, Central Asia, North America, or Europe. The mountains and pine forests were common in all those regions.

“What do you think about this, Sergey?” Steve asked his new friend as they followed the group toward the village.

“I am truly amazed. Shocked would be a better word,” Sergey said. “What is this place exactly? And, where is it?”

“It is very shocking to be translated someplace new,” Steve said, “but you get used to it the more God moves you around. This place is in Eurasia, but God does not want me to reveal its exact location. And, this is a city of refuge. It is one of many that God has helped His people build and that God has committed to protect and provide for. It is a safe haven.”

“What do you think, Sergey?” Alexei, the red-bearded Russian said, as he approached them.

“I have wondered if I’m not dreaming,” Sergey said.

“You’re not dreaming,” Alexei said. “Trust me. I felt the same way you do when God translated me to this place.”

The Chinese and other Asian Christians were now in the outskirts of the town. As they entered, people opened shutters in upper floors. Seeing the new arrivals, the townsfolk began singing praises to God. Some people began emerging from their homes carrying flutes, mandolins, and other instruments. As they slowly gathered into a group of seven, the musicians present began playing while two others sang worship songs to the Lord in harmony with the music.

Looking around with a sense of awe and wonder, the new arrivals began clapping their hands, and some even sang with the music. After about twenty minutes had passed, the new arrivals were directed toward two different inns not far from the outskirts of the town. Sergey, Steve, Sarah, Jason, and Alexei entered the closest inn. It had four stories with a balcony on each story.

After a couple minutes of waiting in line, Steve and Sarah now stood before the concierge desk. It was their turn to get a room. They had a house, but they were too tired to walk there. Sergey stood behind them. He noticed that the concierge handed them a key without any transaction taking place.

When it was his turn, the concierge handed him a key with a metal tag dangling from it with a room number, 15. “I would like to know the cost for a room please,” Sergey said. “And, also what currency you accept here.”

The Asian man smiled and chuckled. “Almost every new guest says something like that when they first arrive. This hotel and everything in this city is free. We do not use bartering or any currency.”

“Okay. Thank you,” Sergey said, baffled.

He headed up the stairs to his room on the second story, down a hallway, and up to a wooden door with the number “15” in gold affixed to it. Inside, he plopped down on the bed, avoiding a large ceramic vase with Chinese artwork depicting jagged mountains and clouds. He tossed his shoes beside an ornate wooden dresser and slipped under the white bed covers. On his bed, Sergey prayed some before falling fast asleep.

After breakfast had been eaten the next day in a large dining room downstairs, Sergey stood to his feet and found Steve and Sarah chatting with a Chinese man he’d never seen before. The man excused himself and left just before Sergey approached them.

“Good morning, Steve and Sarah,” the Russian said with a cheerful note in his voice.

“Good morning, Sergey,” they replied, in unison.

“I wonder if you would like to take me through this city,” Sergey said. “I am curious about it.”

“You want to see the sights?” Steve said.

“Yes,” Sergey said. “Yes, I want to see the sights. Let’s go.”

“That sounds good. I’ll just clear my table first and take our dishes to the kitchen,” Steve said.

“Steve,” Sarah said, when Sergey was some distance ahead, “it looks like Sergey is truly dumbfounded at this city of refuge.”

“He will really be amazed,” Steve said, “at the worship that takes place in the Church buildings on the Sabbath.”

“Alone”

It was totally dark inside the stone-walled room. The door had last been shut 24 hours ago and Vasily had seen the last glimpse of light coming from the hallway outside. He had been in the cell for over a day.

He sat on the concrete floor, feeling its cold surface removing heat from his body. Still wearing a coat, hat, and gloves, Vasily shivered, despite the fact that they gave him a thicker jacket for his stay in the cell.

The cell door had been specially designed to close tight, leaving no light visible through gaps. And, the hallway lights outside his cell were dim and separated at distant intervals to minimize light getting into the cells in the solitary confinement building, in the labor camp.

Vasily stood and paced around his cell, thinking about the terrible decisions he had made that brought him to this point. He cursed himself for trying to turn in the Christians, who somehow managed to escape before the Russian soldiers were to arrest them. It was because of his second failure to turn in Christians that the Russian authorities suspected that he was working with Christians, instead of against them. Now, in this “cursed” camp, he had let himself be conned into joining a group of “escape artists,” who had failed to escape the labor camp. Most of them were in isolation cells, spread some distance apart so that there would be no way they could communicate with each other.

He was at the lowest point he’d even been in his life. ‘If God exists, why did He let this happen?’ Vasily thought. But, he knew deep in his heart why. God was calling out to him. He had heard the Gospel, but he had never wanted to know Jesus or trust Him alone for salvation. He had wanted to turn in Christians to get more rations and favor with the Russian government. But, everything he had tried had backfired.

Now, he would be stuck in this solitary confinement cell for three weeks: three weeks of the cold, of boredom, of loneliness, and misery. He would not see the sun or a human face during that time. The only time anything eventful would happen came when a small flap in the door, near the ground, opened twice a day and a hand shoved a plate of food through the opening. The food was a bland and tasteless ‘slop,’ made of a thick soup mixed with lentils. Vasily hated lentils. He was also given three large bottles of water. Some hours ago, they had opened his door and tossed in a folded blanket, a sleeping pad, and a pillow. A toilet tucked behind a partition wall was his only other ‘amenity.’

In the near-total darkness, Vasily looked up and shook his fist at God. “If I ever get out of this miserable camp,” he shouted, “I will hunt down your people and kill every last one of them!”

Then, Vasily plopped down on his hard sleeping pad and tucked the blanket around his body. Resting his head on the hard pillow, he sighed and tried to drift to sleep. But, sleep wouldn't come to his tired body. To Vasily's troubled soul, the pad felt almost as hard as the cement. The pillow felt lumpy and hard. And, the blanket was not long enough for his length, even though he was less than 6 feet in height.

He tossed and turned for nearly an hour before he leaned up and stared at the cold darkness before him. The shapes of hideous beings strangely began to appear in his imagination. Serpents with sharp teeth and dragons with glowing, yellow eyes seemed to stare at him from the surrounding darkness. He tried to get them out of his mind and picture what it would be like to escape this horrible place. But, the more he tried to get the ghoulish creatures out of his mind, the harder it became to forget about them.

After a few minutes of this, he shouted, "Stop it! Stop it! Leave me alone."

But, the fearful mental pictures or hallucinations continued along with the sense that something very evil was lurking around him. Vasily suddenly felt his skin itch. It seemed that insects were now crawling over his body. He tried to crush them or flick them off, but they kept seeming to creep over his skin, when no actual insects were present. To make matters worse, his head started to throb with a migraine headache. He cursed and tried to think about happy memories to get his mind off the bizarre and troubling afflictions. He thought of childhood memories of fishing with his uncle along with other happy memories of the past, but they didn't last. The unbearable pain in his head kept him from enjoying the reminiscence.

"God, help me," Vasily screamed after two hours of this had passed. "Make it stop!"

But, the headache continued and the feeling of insects crawling over his skin didn't let up.

Breathing hard after shouting loudly, Vasily sat up in bed and said, desperately, "Please make it stop. Please. I was wrong to want to kill Christians. I was wrong to hate you, but please make this stop. Please."

The headache began to leave and an evil presence standing beside him faded away. Then, the feeling of insects crawling over his skin assuaged or lessened. In a short time, the feeling was gone and Vasily was back to normal. He sighed and dropped back onto his bed.

He was asleep for five hours before a loud, high-pitch ringing sound filled his ears, and the throbbing pain of his migraine headache returned. He sat up in bed and cursed the pain. But, he stopped himself and looked up into the darkness, blinking his weary eyes. "God, please make this stop. I will not seek after your people. I will not kill them or turn them in. But, please make this stop."

The pain and loud ringing in his ears continued, and it began to increase a little. Tears came to his eyes. 'Why does this have to happen to me?' he thought. 'I am a good person. Why me?' But, thoughts came to his mind of his sins and all the times he lied to people, when he slandered his neighbors and friends, when he cheated people out of money, and when he took God's Name in vain or treated God with disrespect.

Then, it dawned on Vasily that the pain and torment he was suffering was nothing compared to Hell. And, he began to realize that the sins he had done were not insignificant in God's sight. He felt that

God was calling out to him and calling on him to repent and turn to Jesus Christ, the One whom he had scoffed at, mocked, and blasphemed so much.

“God,” Vasily said, after some moments of deep thought. “I have treated you and your people poorly. I have hated your Bible and your people, and I want to tell you that I am sorry. I did wrong. I did many wrong things in my life, but I thought you’d overlook that. Now, I feel that you can’t overlook my sin. That is why you are allowing me to go through this misery. So, I ask you to please accept me.

“Please accept this miserable wretch and forgive me for my sins. I trust that Jesus died for sinners like me. I trust that He is your Only Begotten Son. Please accept my apology and forgive me for all my sins, and cleanse them from me by the blood of Christ. I guess that is my prayer of repentance. I heard someone teach me about repentance, but I never really wanted to repent until now. Take me, God, and save this wretch.”

The headache remained for half a minute before it faded away and was completely gone. And, the ringing in his ears stopped.

Vasily heard himself gasp. “It really works. The pain is gone. And, I’m saved. Father God saved me through Jesus Christ. I’m saved!”

He leapt to his feet and began dancing around his cell hollering, “I’m saved!”

After some time of rejoicing, Vasily settled down and felt a special peace descend into his soul like no peace he had ever felt before. Joy that had warmth and life to it settled into his heart. He had truly done something different than he’d ever done—something he never thought he’d do. He had become a believer in Jesus Christ, and he was enjoying every moment of it.

Chapter Ten

“The Market”

“Tell me, Steven, what is the reason this town is so happy and that the weather is warm in the winter?” Sergey said.

They were in a large market place square filled with carts heaped with food, which included apples, oranges, peaches, dates, and wheat. Men and women stocked wooden carts with fresh produce and others moved from cart to cart and selected fruit and other foods, without paying a penny or any denomination of currency. It was a market where food was neither bought nor sold. It was just given away.

“God is the Light of the world,” Steven said, “and He is the source of Light in this village. It is He who provides warmth to this city of refuge and who makes sure that plenty of food is available without much work being done to get it.”

Steven reached over and picked up an apple from a fruit cart under the second-story balcony of a

four-story wooden building. Each story had a balcony and railing with an intricate Chinese design formed of wood-framed rectangles arranged in vertical and horizontal positions. Bright, vibrant banners hung from protruding poles in the upper stories, which displayed portions of Bible verses in Chinese. The bright fabric slowly flapped and ruffled in a light breeze, making it seem they had come alive.

“Food grows three times faster in this village and in the land nearby than elsewhere in Eurasia,” said Steve. “Even when the days are shorter and the sunlight is less bright, produce and wheat will still grow at the same rate because God has blessed this ground to provide for His children.”

Horses neighed nearby as they were detached from the food carts and brought to a park half a block away to graze on green grass. The park was surrounded by buildings but it contained young trees, water fountains, food troughs supplied with oats, and a stable in one corner. A high wooden fence surrounded the perimeter to keep the *equines* contained.

“The people are happy, Sergey,” said Steve, “because God gives us joy and because the people here have gone through trials preparing them for coming to this city. Spiritual and emotional dross was removed from their lives, and they came forth shining, and resembling Jesus Christ in their behavior and lives, more and more.”

Children laughed and giggled, running through the streets and city square, playing a game of tag. People moved from cart to cart, placing food into woven baskets, which dangled from their arms, and chatted with each other as they “shopped.” Few remained to attend the carts, Sergey noticed. ‘They must be engaged in collecting fruit and vegetables from other carts,’ he thought.

“I noticed that no one is buying the food,” Sergey said, glancing left and right. “So, does this city of refuge have no money or system of bartering?”

“In the book of Acts, chapter 2, the new believers in Jerusalem had all things in common, related to material possessions and food,” Steve said. “They sold their possessions and gave to those who had need, the scripture says. Here, I learned quickly that you do not buy anything. People get all their needs met by God and by ways God chooses to bless people.”

Sergey looked a little baffled, so Steve said, “For instance, when I first arrived, God blessed me with a fruitful garden. I overheard my neighbor speaking about making a strawberry dish. I happened to have a large patch of strawberry plants in my garden. I gave her a basket of freshly picked strawberries as a gift one day. She knew that I regularly take pears from her pear cart, but she has access to my garden to take as much of my produce as she needs.”

Sergey glanced left and right, wondering if they were being watched. He felt like someone was watching him.

“I have been busy traveling,” Steve said, “and ministering where Abba Father God sends me, so I haven’t had time to tend the garden, but I have allowed my neighbor to tend it for me in exchange for the produce.”

“Excuse me,” Sergey said, glancing to the left and right. “I feel like I must say something.”

“What’s that?”

“I think we’re being watched,” Sergey said as he began scanning the crowds.

Suddenly, a hand landed on his shoulder from behind, and Sergey jumped. Whirling around, he came face to face with Alexei Khlebov, the red-haired Russian.

“You started me, Alexei,” Sergey said, drawing a deep breath.

“You need not worry, Sergey,” Alexei said, chuckling. “You are among friends. Almost all the people here are Christians and love Jesus. There are no enemy spies or soldiers in this group, for God is protecting us from all sides and within.”

“And, no enemy soldiers will be able to find this place or enter it if they did,” Steve said.

“How so?” Sergey said, stepping away from a doorway to let an elderly Chinese man walk past him.

“In 2 Kings 6,” Steve said, “God blinded the eyes of Syrian soldiers who were seeking to take Elisha. They could not see, and Elisha himself led them deep into Israel’s interior before he prayed that God would open their eyes to see where they were. They were shocked and scared to see that they were far away from the safety of their army. Then, he encouraged the king of Israel to treat them well and feed them. Those particular soldiers returned to their own land and did not attack Israel. In the same way, God has shown the people here that He is protecting them from all harm, and that He shall blind eyes that needed to be blinded to keep His children safe.”

“So, why would God provide cities of refuge for His people?” Sergey asked, curious about the utopia he saw around him.

“Well Sergey,” Alexei said, entering into the conversation, “God loves His children and desires that many will be alive during the course of the end times to minister to new believers that join them, and to intercede for the nations that God shall have to punish. He shall have to punish the nations for their hardness of heart and rebellion against Him, but God continues to call out to them because He has great compassion and mercy.”

A Mongolian boy ran past them, giggling, being chased by a Vietnamese boy who was stretching out his hand to tag his friend.

“God has shown us,” Alexei continued, “that persecution shall get more intense, and that He will lead people to cities of refuge. The Antichrist that Revelation speaks of will come into power to deceive the whole world, and to lead them to kill Christians. He will require people to receive a special mark in their right hand or forehead, without which, they will not be able to buy or sell. Also, iniquity will increase greatly, but God will deliver His own from the wickedness of the world.”

“But, is there any scripture for the cities of refuge?” Sergey asked, stepping aside for a Chinese lady to enter the four-story wood building behind him.

“Yes,” Alexei said. “Deuteronomy chapter 19 and Numbers chapter 35 speak of cities in Israel that were to be set aside for those who accidentally killed people. Terrible accidents sometimes happen, and people may get unintentionally killed. God showed Moses that certain cities were to be set aside for the innocent to flee to after having accidentally killed someone. Since their relatives and the court

at that time could not use forensics to prove whether or not the accidental killer was truly innocent or not, the cities of refuge had been provided as safe havens. No harm could be done to the accidental killer if he or she stayed at a city of refuge. After the death of the high priest, the accidental killer was allowed to go free. The law would punish any who tried to kill him.”

“How does that relate to a city of refuge during the end times?” Sergey said. “The Christians here are not accidental killers, of course.”

“The Christians here are not killers,” Steve said, holding a partially eaten apple. “That is true, but the principle of fleeing to a place of safety is the same. The innocent man who accidentally killed his neighbor flees to a place of safety. We are innocent because of the blood of Jesus and because we have chosen to forsake sin, but evil people will seek to kill us, and we need to go where God sends us to go to. If we don’t go where God sends us to go, we will die before God wants us to leave this earth. God has a calling for each one of us that requires us to live long enough on this planet to fulfill all His best purposes for our lives.”

Sergey nodded, but frowned, watching a couple leading a donkey which pulled another cart into the market square. Piles of carrots, squash, cucumbers, and potatoes were heaped atop the cart so high that it seemed they might tumbled off the sides.

“What’s the matter, Sergey?” Alexei said.

“I left a village back in Russia, Sergey said. “I haven’t witnessed very much to the people. Some don’t even know that I am a Christian. I feel that I can’t just stay here. I’m a single man and I never had children.”

“God doesn’t just have us stay here,” Steve said.

Sergey squinted at him. “What?”

“God translates us to various places around the world, from time to time,” Steve said. “This is a place of rest and a retreat for Sarah and me. After we rest here for a couple months, we are translated to different places to minister to people God leads us to. The same happens for many other residents of this city.”

“I want to ask God to take me back to Russia and back to Medvedski,” Sergey said. “I believe that God’s mission for me is not done there.”

“You feel God leading you that way?” Alexei said.

Sergey nodded.

Footsteps approached on the stone pavement. Steve turned to see his lovely wife wearing a Chinese-style dress and outfit.

“I happened to overhear a little of your conversation,” Sarah said as she approached, carrying a woven basket of fruit and vegetables. “May I ask what you are talking about?”

“Well, Sarah, I feel that God would like me to go back to Medvedski, Russia,” Sergey said. “And, I

want to seek Him about that to see if that is actually His will.”

“That is a bold decision to make, Sergey,” Sarah said. She looked at Steve and reached out to him with her hand, which he took in his. “But, Steve and I also felt— You tell him, honey.”

“I was just about to, Sarah, darling,” Steve said. “God has shown us that we were to return to Medvedski as well.”

An elephant trumpeted from Sergey’s left, startling him. He turned to see a large Asian elephant with a small structure strapped to his strong back. A group of four people sitting in the structure watched the goings on below while a man sat near the elephant’s head, guiding it along.

“I didn’t know elephants roamed this town,” the Sergey said.

“The elephants,” Steve said, “are used for hauling large loads and for enjoying a good view of the streets. God brought them here with the people.”

“I hope you will be able to see the park, Sergey, before you leave,” Alexei chimed in.

“What park?” the older Russian said.

“Come with me,” Alexei said. “I’ll show you.”

“That would be interesting. Let’s go,” Sergey said, desiring to see a new sight. But, as he turned to walk with Alexei, he stopped himself. “I forgot about Steve and Sarah. Would you both like to come?”

Steve looked at Sarah and she said, “Oh, that would be nice.”

“We’ll join you,” Steve added.

“Meeting in the Park”

Half an hour later, after passing through streets lined with traditional-styled Chinese dwellings, the group reached a park filled with Asian Pear trees and other fruit trees, flowering trees, red-leafed Japanese maples, and manicured flower gardens which were very beautiful to Alexei’s eyes. A miniature waterfall cascaded down a small cliff, with a ten-foot drop, into a pond filled with colorful *koi* fish that caused the pond to appear alive with moving colors. Large round stones had been decoratively placed as stepping stones across a stream that flowed out of the pond and through the manicured garden.

The gurgling sound of the stream rushing over rocks had a soothing effect on Sergey’s nerves. He sat down on a bench and watched the fish circling and zigzagging through the water. Alexei met a talkative Chinese man near the pond and struck up a conversation some distance away. Steve and Sarah then told Sergey they were going to go on a little walk and would be back at the pond about fourteen minutes later. Holding hands, the couple strolled down a path, vanishing into the flowering

trees, which Sergey knew could not possibly be flowering during the winter in the northern hemisphere.

“Excuse me, sir,” a man said in Chinese from a few feet behind him.

Sergey turned to see a Chinese man in his early seventies, about ten years older than Sergey, standing behind him. A long white beard flowed down his chest, giving him the appearance of a Biblical patriarch. He wore a light blue *changshan* tunic, the hem of which rested about a foot above the ground. Grey trousers and black, leather shoes appeared underneath.

“Yes?” Sergey said.

“You must be one of the new arrivals to *The Mountain of Peace*,” the white-haired man replied.

“Yes, I just arrived last night,” Sergey said. “But, why do you call it such a name?”

Seeing Sergey’s confused face, the Chinese man said, “That is the name I and the other elders have chosen for this town because this town is a place of peace and harmony. It is one of many cities of refuge that God has set up throughout the world. This one is within Eurasia.” The man looked around at the park briefly, watching hawfinches and Asian brown flycatchers flutter from tree to tree, perching briefly before hopping off to another branch. Then, he said, “I hope you are enjoying your stay so far.”

“I am, but I look forward to doing God’s next assignment for me,” Sergey said.

“What would that be?”

“I came from the village of Medvedski in eastern Russia,” Sergey said, “and I feel that God is calling me to go back and witness to the people there. Even though the Russian government is hunting down Christians, I feel I must go. I haven’t witnessed to the people there that much, and they need to be saved.”

“I will pray for you,” said the white-haired man, “that your journey will be prosperous and that the ears of those who hear you will be opened, and their eyes will no longer be shut to the Gospel.”

“I appreciate it,” Sergey said, with a smile beginning to form on his face.

“By the way, I am Guang Yan,” Guang said, bowing slightly.

“I am Sergey Ulanov,” Sergey said, standing, not sure if he should return the greeting. He wasn’t used to the Asian custom of bowing slightly.

Then, Guang stretched out his right hand, and they shook hands.

“You mentioned,” said Sergey, “that you and other elders named this town. How did this town get started, for it seems to have too many people to be off the radar of the Eurasian governments.”

“The population of this town is about fifty-thousand,” Guang said. “Each day it grows by about fifty people. God brought me and other families here by way of translation. We were instantly taken here.

Men who were good with construction had also arrived with us. I knew some of them from our underground church in China. We found building materials, tools, and men who looked Chinese and appeared very strong. These men informed us that they were sent from God to help us construct a town for us to live in. These strong men began building a sewage system using strange machinery we had never seen before.”

“What was the machinery like?” Sergey asked.

“I cannot describe it. It is beyond anything I have ever heard about or seen. That strange technology does exist in our day and age, but these men made use of it as if it were commonplace. While they built a sewage system, they built no water system because God told us He would perform miracles to continually give us clean drinking water like the widow’s jar of oil that didn’t run out during the famine of 1 Kings chapter 17.”

“So, what is your supply of water? A well?” Sergey asked.

“Each household has a large metal pot of water,” Huang said. “Using a ladle, I fill up my cup or my tea kettle. The water never runs out. I have used that same water container for three years. It never failed to be refilled in the middle of the night, while I and my wife slept. I believe an angel refills it every night or whenever it needs to be refilled.”

“That is amazing,” Sergey said. “So, you were saying that these strong men built your village.”

“They built the sewage system,” Guang said, “and assisted us in constructing buildings and in designing the layout. In reality, it was more likely that we assisted them, for they did most of the work. But, I suspect that these strong men are angels in disguise.”

“Why do you say that?” Sergey said.

“They never seem to get tired or require any breaks, and they are very strong,” Guang said, grinning.

A red squirrel scampered across the grass, past Sergey, and crawled up to an Asian man who was sitting on a park bench. He tossed the critter two almonds. Greedily, the little animal snatched up the first nut and began quickly nibbling it down.

“So, why would people in this village not accept money or bartering?” Sergey asked, returning his attention to the elegantly dressed Chinese man.

“Well,” Guang said, “God provides all our needs. We help each other out. Many of us enjoy working to bless our brothers and sisters. We also spend much time in fellowship with God, meditating on His holy Scripture, and praying as God’s Spirit directs us. We worship Him and have both private and corporate worship times and prayer times throughout each day.”

“Miracles happen on a regular basis,” Guang continued. “I have seen a man born without a leg, who had to move about in a wheel chair, healed and walking on two brand new legs that God gave him. They are not prosthetic imitations. No, they are real flesh and blood legs that God gave him. I’ve seen blind men and women healed. One woman’s eyes were completely white. I saw an iris and retina form in each eye and she could see for the first time in her life.”

“Your worship, prayer, and meditation on God’s Word... are these requirements for miracles to happen?” Sergey asked, amazed at what God was doing.

Guang shook his head, smiling. He said, “No, these are things we do because we enjoy them and we have true fellowship with our Abba Father God, and with Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son. John 17:3 speaks of this fellowship. These things are a delight to us because we have left all to follow Jesus. The miracles happen simply because we believe what God’s Word says about miracles. The Gospel accounts — Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — all show that we can simply ask God for anything that would glorify His Name, and it will happen. Jesus Himself said in John 14:13: ‘**And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.**’”

“I will remember that,” Sergey said, looking at the smiling elder. “I want to look at John 14 now.”

“I will be having a Bible study very soon,” Guang said. “I would be happy to have you join us.”

“I might just stay,” Sergey said. “I have nothing else to do.”

Ten minutes later, young Asian people began approaching the pond, each carrying a white folding chair in one arm and a Bible in the other. As more people arrived, the group swelled to over thirty people. They set up the chairs in a half-circle which was divided into two sections three rows deep. A wide strip of grass separated the sections by about five feet.

In one section sat young men, and in the other sat young women. All wore modest Asian clothing, fitting for their cultures. Some appeared Korean. Others looked Vietnamese. Still others seemed to be Japanese. But, most were Han Chinese. ‘There is no intermingling of genders here, Sergey thought. ‘Perhaps, it was to keep the young people focused on the things of God, so they wouldn’t be distracted or wouldn’t be flirting with each other.’

Guang motioned for Sergey to come, and he followed the Chinese man toward the group of young people. Once Guang reached the group, he motioned toward the Russian and said: “This is Sergey Ulanov, who was translated here yesterday. I would like us to pray for him, for he feels God is calling him to return to Russia to witness to his village in eastern Russia.”

“Also, could you pray for Vasily Volvakov?” Sergey said, half facing the group, and half facing Guang. “He is a man who God showed me had reported me and some other Christians to the *new* Russian government in order to get a reward. I don’t know what became of him, but he must be shocked to see that all the people he reported on have vanished, having been transported away by God’s angels.”

Chapter Eleven

Mark Mzembi

A dark blue motorcycle roared down the highway. Its driver wore a green helmet with a closed visor,

a nylon jacket, and khaki cargo trousers, which ruffled in the constant blast of air. Wind tugged on two backpacks strapped to the Honda Shadow Ace, which powered Mark Mzembi through South Africa. He had recently come from Zimbabwe and was heading toward Johannesburg.

Mark suddenly swerved around a wooden board that had fallen out of a pickup truck some distance ahead, missing it by inches. If he hit the board, the motorcycle might have crashed, possibly killing him or giving him severe injuries, but he trusted God to protect him. He was used to zipping down highways at 80 kilometers per hour* or more on his Honda Shadow Ace. [**Or about 50 mph.*]

A new government had been established in Zimbabwe that was very antagonistic to Christians, which was the main reason Mark Mzembi had left Zimbabwe, the home of his ancestors. Now 32 years old, Mark had lived in Zimbabwe for twelve years and in South Africa for twenty years, moving back and forth between his divorced parents. His dad lived in Johannesburg, while his mother lived in Zimbabwe. He was hoping to meet up with his dad and stay with him while he looked for work in the Johannesburg area.

Mark Mzembi put on some speed and passed a slow farm truck that was hauling produce. Apple-ring acacia trees and baobab trees appeared on either side of the road, scattered throughout a savannah. Above, a blue sky with wispy clouds watched over the landscape.

The leader in this new government began ruling Zimbabwe like a dictator. Joseph Dashimba* had seized power by a coup with the assistance of supporters from two tribes in Zimbabwe and portions of the military. Once in power, he formed a formidable government that was beginning to look more and more like a communistic society. Although Dashimba said he would reinstate elections, he did not show any signs that he would. [**Dashimba is a made-up name. It is not necessarily a real surname.*]

Many miles passed under his tires and the savannah gave way to more fertile land, which soon turned into farmland a few miles further down the road. More trees and green grass were visible at the borders of the farmland than in the savannah some miles away. A small town came into view, nestled among farm fields, populated with many sweet thorn, leadwood, and marula trees. In a few minutes, Mark had entered the town and was looking out for a gas station since the gage indicated he was low on fuel. A decent-looking gas station with a service building soon caught his attention down the road.

Pulling up to a gas pump, he shut the motorcycle off and walked into the cinderblock service building. As he waited in line to pay for two gallons of gas, Mark Mzembi glanced through the window and saw a large, shiny, silver Nissan pickup truck pull up to a gas pump not far from his motorcycle. Mark was somewhat familiar with Nissan trucks and it appeared to be a Nissan Titan. A trailer behind it contained a newer Honda motorcycle strapped to it. The doors flew open and four men stepped out. All the men wore different-colored bandanas on their heads. One had a dark-blue T-shirt with a large, sinister-looking, fire-breathing dragon illustration. The dragon had red eyes and sharp claws, and sat atop a pile of gold.

Something about them gave him a bad feeling. As two of the men approached the service building, they looked at Mark's Shadow Ace and one pointed at it, saying something to his friend that Mark couldn't hear. One wore a green bandana on his head, and the other a dark blue one.

When the two had entered the building, they looked around at the customers, and the one with the

green bandana said, “Does anyone here own that Honda Shadow Ace motorcycle? I will buy it from him for 25,551 rand*.” [**Or about \$2,000 US dollars from the year 2017.*]

The five customers and gas station attendant looked at the men, curiously. Then, Mark spoke up. “That is my motorcycle,” he said, “but I won’t sell it. It was a gift from some relatives.”

“Then, I’ll pay you 28,106 rand* for your motorcycle,” said the man with the green bandana. [**It is roughly \$2,200.*]

“That isn’t a fair price. But, even if it were, I won’t sell it,” Mark said.

“I’ll pay you 28,745 rand,” the man offered, hoping Mark would accept.

“Thank you for the offer, but I won’t sell it. It is worth at least 38,400 rand*, ” Mark said, adamantly. [**Or about \$3,000.*]

The man with the green bandana scowled at him, but said nothing. He left the service building and returned to his comrades outside, while the man with the dark blue bandana paid for their fuel.

Mark went to the men’s room after paying for the gas. When he returned outside, he found his motorcycle missing from its parking space at the pump. Then, his jaw dropped. The men were in the process of strapping the machine onto the motorcycle trailer, beside the other motorbike.

“Hey,” Mark said, angrily. “That’s my motorcycle!”

The man with the dark blue bandana turned toward him, saying, “You didn’t want to sell it, so we’re taking it.”

“I’ll call the police and have you arrested, unless you give it back,” Mark said.

The man laughed. “The police can’t track us down. Many of the police look the other way because we bribe them.”

“Who are you?” Mark said, shaken.

“It’s none of your business,” the man said, spitting on the ground. “If I were you, I’d keep my mouth shut about this. Or, you just might not live to see tomorrow.” He patted a gun-shaped bulge under his belt.

One of the men replaced the gas cap on his truck and put the gas nozzle back in its holder. Then, the men climbed back into their truck. With a rev of the engine, the pickup roared off down the road, and out of sight.

Mark felt his world fall out from beneath him. His nice, dark blue motorcycle was stolen, and the mysterious thieves had threatened to kill him if he reported the matter to the police. ‘How can they afford such a nice pickup truck?’ Mark wondered. ‘And, why did they want to take my motorcycle when they already had a nice one?’

The motorcycle also had all his belongings, such as changes of clothes, some food, cash, and some

tools.

“Mark, My son,” a voice said to his spirit and soul.

Looking up, he said, “Yes, Father God?”

“I am with you,” Abba Father God said, “I know that you lost the motorcycle and your stuff, but I will provide for you. This is a trial for you to seek Me through, but I will deliver you and I will provide for you. Tell me about your concerns, and leave them with Me. I will work all things out for your good.

“You have done well in leaving Zimbabwe, but seek Me about where you should go next. You are still in an area that is not safe, for soon, South Africa will be overrun by terrorists and by gangs that will seek to enslave the people and plunder the country. I am calling out to South Africa, but few of them are wanting to seek Me. Many just want to do their own will and survive. But, I will continue to call out to them. Now, my son, seek Me and I will show you what to do.”

“What should I do, Father God? I feel trapped,” Mark said. “I don’t know where to go from here. All my stuff was in that motorcycle. I only have some cash in my wallet. But, that will be used up soon. What should I do?”

“My son,” Father God said, “I want you to speak to the owner of this gas station and ask him where the nearest hotel or motel is located. He will give you directions. Then, walk there. I will provide the money for your stay at the hotel and for all you need. Trust Me, My son.”

Mark breathed deeply and sighed. “I will trust you, Abba Father. You know best. I just feel like my life is really getting difficult.”

“It is getting difficult,” God said, “because I am refining you and preparing you for the future, Mark. I shall provide for all your needs along the way. Just trust Me. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken.”

Mark nodded. “Okay. Yes, I mean. I’ll do what you show me, Father God.” Then, Mark closed his eyes and breathed deeply again. “I will follow you all the way, Father, because you love me. You are trustworthy. You will meet my needs. Thank you.”

Then, Mark returned to the service building. After getting directions to the closest motel, he walked down the street for several blocks before taking a turn to the right and walking two blocks more. A somewhat run-down motel with an aging sign out front sat beside some apartment buildings. Its sign read “Roadside Lodge” but the letter “e” was missing, leaving behind a faint outline of the letter.

Cracks filled with weeds appeared in some parts of its parking lot. Crossing the pavement to the office area, Mark pulled out his wallet and checked how much money he had. He had 1,290 rand, which was approximately equal to 100 US dollars from the year 2017. But, 2017 was past, and America had been recently conquered by Russia and China, and the dollar had lost its value just prior to the invasion of America by the two new superpowers.

At any rate, the money would only be good for three nights at the average low-budget hotel in South Africa. Plus, he needed money for food and for transportation by bus. Mark stopped in mid-step and

brought these concerns to his Heavenly Father God. Then, he felt peace settle into his heart with the assurance that God would somehow provide for his needs.

As he entered the reception area of the motel, a lady behind the counter looked up and said, “Hello, how may I help you?”

“I’d like a room for one night,” Mark said.

After he completed the transaction, Mark walked across the parking lot to his motel room. Inside, he turned on the air conditioning unit and settled down on the bed. Despite the somewhat rundown appearance of the motel, the room was in decent shape with nice pictures of African savannah and elephants. And, the air conditioner worked properly.

Mark walked over to the TV, and asked God if he should watch a news station. God told him it would be fine.

There were few channels available, but a news channel caught his attention. The news anchor introduced a story about a radical Islamic organization that was spreading rapidly through sub-Saharan Africa. It consisted of former members of Boko Haram and other terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State. Scenes of men, armed to the teeth, carrying green flags bearing Islamic symbols, and holding AK-47s appeared on the screen.

The organization, called the *Muslim Caliphate**, was recruiting extremists from Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Violent clashes have broken out between the Caliphate and various sub-Saharan African nations. [**This particular name is fictional, but this union of terrorists, who shall conquer many African countries, really shall exist in the future, God showed me.*]

Russian-made tanks firing at distant targets appeared on the screen, and smoke spouted from their barrels. The next scene displayed Arab and African militants, wearing camouflage uniforms and scarves around their faces, firing rocket propelled grenades.

African governments were being toppled and overthrown from within by insurgents allied with the Muslim Caliphate and by the external force of militant attacks. Moderate Muslims, under the control of this Caliphate, had to submit to radical Islam or die for being considered ‘infidels’ to the Muslim faith.

Mark Mzembi shook his head, and placed his hand on his chin, in thought. He had remembered hearing something about the Muslim Caliphate terrorist group a year ago, but it was much smaller then than it was now. In one year, they had conquered ten African countries by way of their internal supporters and by way of infiltration of the governments of those countries. They had stirred up revolutions and had seized the countries by political manipulation and by military power. Warlords in those countries had mostly submitted to the Muslim Caliphate, due to monetary “gifts” from the organization.

“My son,” God’s sweet voice spoke to Mark.

“Yes Abba Father,” Mark said, turning the TV off.

“I will show you that you will be going to a city of refuge soon,” Abba God said. “But, I will prepare

you for that. I will guide you all along the way. This city of refuge will be a place where you will stay while Africa descends into chaos and turmoil, and while the persecution of Christians gets intense. It is not My will for the Church to have to suffer extreme persecution, so I shall provide safe havens for them to go to where I will provide for all their needs. I will have you leave this hotel tomorrow and have you meet a fellow Christian man who will take you into his family. He will take care of you, and you will be able to help him. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“The Meeting”

The next day, Mark Mzembi spent time in prayer and in reading from a New Testament pocket Bible he had kept in his right pocket. He left the motel a couple hours later and bought a meat sandwich from small grocery store across the street from the motel. As he chewed the sandwich, Mark heard God’s voice tell him to go to the left and head down an alley. He asked God again to make sure it was God speaking to him. Then, he headed for an alley between two brick buildings, which sat beside a street lined with small business.

A large cardboard box rested up beside one wall of the alley. The square opening faced the opposite wall. Curled up inside, a homeless man resting on his side faced the opposite wall of the alley.

“Go, My son,” God said, “and give him the 650 rand in your wallet, and keep the rest for later.”

“Yes, Abba Father,” Mark said as he approached the homeless man.

A long, curly beard fell down the man’s chest. His T-shirt had several large holes. Mark tapped lightly on the box a few times until the man stirred. His eyes opened slightly and he peered out at the young Zimbabwean man, who looked at him with concern.

“What do you want?” the homeless man said gruffly.

“I want to give something to you,” Mark said, pulling out his wallet.

Seeing the wallet, the man moved out of his box and slowly stood. He wore old tennis shoes, which had some holes.

“I felt that God wanted me to give you this,” Mark said, pulling out the rand notes.

The homeless man’s eyes opened wide at seeing the amount. “This is for me?” he said.

“Yes,” Mark said handing him the 650 rand notes*. [**Or about \$50.*]

A smile spread across the man’s weathered face. “You are very generous. God had you give this to me?”

“Yes,” Mark Mzembi said, feeling God’s Spirit leading him to tell him the Gospel. “He wants you to know that He loves you very much, and that only He can provide for all your needs. He sent Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son, to die for your sins, and mine, and to offer you eternal life through

Jesus Christ's blood, which will cleanse away your sins, if you believe on His Name and on what He did for you."

Feeling led by God, Mark reached into his pocket and pulled out the small New Testament Bible. "This is the New Testament, which contains the Gospel accounts of Jesus Christ and God's inspired *Word* in the form of letters to churches. I encourage you to start with the Gospel of John. That reveals who Jesus is."

The homeless man took the Bible and thanked him.

"By the way, I am Mark," Mark said, reaching out a hand.

The homeless man shook his hand, smiling. "I am Paul. I would like to read that Bible. Where do you come from?"

"I am from Zimbabwe," Mark said.

"Did you hear about the violence that erupted in Zimbabwe today?" Paul said.

"No. I haven't."

"Well, I heard a radio playing and caught a snippet of news. There is a government crackdown on a small militant group operating within the country of Zimbabwe. Thirty people died in the fighting."

"That is terrible. I left Zimbabwe just two days ago. I hope my mother is safe."

"I hope so too," he said.

Leaving the homeless man with the Bible and money, Mark walked out of the alley and back onto the sidewalk. He lifted up a prayer to God for his mother to be delivered from harm and to choose to leave Zimbabwe. She had not wanted to leave the country of her birth, no matter how much Mark had pleaded with her to go with him to South Africa. She could easily take a bus, but Ruth Mzembi found it difficult to leave the only place she called home, and to leave her house and belongings behind. As he thought about his mother, Mark realized he had to just trust her into God's hands. God will provide for her.

Mark wondered what to do next. Cars, trucks, and motorcycles flowed in both directions down the street, moving somewhat slowly at 40 kilometers per hour (or about 25 mph).

"My son," Abba God said, "turn around."

Mark turned around to face the direction he came from. Down the street, he saw the small grocery store where he bought his breakfast. A blue 2017 Nissan NV Passenger van was pulling into a parking place in the nearby lot. Sunlight sparkled off its shiny, chrome bumper, visible even from that distance. The doors opened and two boys and three girls piled out. Some were in their teens and others were just children. The parents came last. Mark noticed that one of the boys and one of the girls were white while the rest of the family was black. 'Perhaps, they are friends of the family,' he thought.

“My son, go over to them and ask if you can speak to the father,” God said.

“Yes, Abba Father,” Mark said, as he began heading back toward the store. “I wonder...do you want me to live with this family?”

“You may stay with them for a short time,” Abba God said. “You can offer to work for the man. He is a farmer and he could use your help. Very soon, events will transpire in South Africa, which will require you to go to a place of refuge where I will lead you to, and where I will provide mightily for you. That is correct, My son.”

“I trust you,” Mark said. But, fear nagged him with the thought that perhaps the man was not who God’s voice had said he was. ‘What if the man didn’t want a farm hand?’ the fear seemed to say. ‘Or, what if the man wasn’t a farmer?’ Mark struggled with the thoughts of fear as he walked. Upon reaching the store, he waited, wondering if he should go in.

“Go in My son, and trust Me, for this man will take you in,” Abba God said. “And, I the Lord your God have spoken.”

Mark gave the fears to God and reached for the door, but it opened before he reached it, and a black man came out. He seemed to be wearing the same clothes as the man who had stepped out of the blue van.

“Excuse me sir,” Mark said. “I was wondering if you are a farmer?”

The man looked at him, slightly puzzled. “Yes, I am,” he said.

“Wow,” Mark said smiling. “That is amazing. God showed me that you are a farmer. I was wondering if you would be willing to hire me to help you with the farm work? I am a Christian and an honest worker.”

The man blinked twice before smiling. “Glory to God,” he said. “God only continues to amaze me with His power. I was actually thinking about hiring someone to help me operate the combines and do other farm work. So, God showed you that I was a farmer? I don’t know you from Adam, but you knew I was a farmer. I Praise God for His sovereignty! I wanted a man I could trust to assist me, and you are that man.”

Returning his attention to Mark, he reached out his hand and said, “I’m Sizwe Mahlangu.”

Shaking his outstretched hand, Mark said, “It’s nice to meet you. I’m Mark Mzembi.”

After about ten minutes of conversing with the farmer, Mark saw the door open and the kids with their mother emerged from the grocery store. The children were eating ice cream sandwiches and talking with each other.

The black lady approached Mark and said hello. To her husband she said, “Who are you visiting with?”

“This is Mark Mzembi,” Sizwe told his wife and some of the kids that were watching. “He’s a Christian like us. I’ve hired him to work for me as a farm hand. We’ll let him stay in our motor

home. He can use the air conditioner to keep cool during the day.”

Glancing at his wife, he said, “And, this is Martha, my wife.”

She nodded and then extended a hand to Mark, and he shook it.

After a little more conversing, they found out that Mark had lost his motor cycle and was homeless due to the trouble in Zimbabwe.

“We will do all we can to make you comfortable at our home,” Martha said graciously.

Soon, they entered the van, and Mark started a new leg of his journey, doing something he had never imagined he’d ever do. He was down to just 300 rand* and was moving to a stranger’s home, hundreds of miles from Johannesburg where he had originally intended to go. He would have to call his dad and explain the situation. Mark sat beside the white boy in the back seat, who appeared to be about eight years old with short, brown hair and blue eyes. [**Or about \$23.*]

After the van was moving and heading toward the street, the boy turned to Mark. Looking up at the 32-year-old Zimbabwean, he said, “My name is James. What’s yours?”

“I’m Mark. How old are you?”

“I’m seven years old,” James said. “You will love our farm. I have five chickens and two dogs. One is a white Labrador and the other is an Australian Shepherd.” Holding up all ten fingers, James said excitedly, “We also have thirty sheep and lots of cows.”

“Wow,” Mark said, smiling at him. “That is a lot of cattle.”

As they drove through the town, Mark noticed a dark blue Honda Shadow Ace motorcycle turn onto the same street and follow the *Nissan NV Passenger* van three car lengths behind. The motorcycle maintained that distance and trailed the van until it reached the countryside.

“What are you looking at?” James asked.

Mark was turned in his seat, peering through the rear window. “I think we’re being followed,” he said.

The boy’s eyes widened. “Someone’s following us? Are they bad guys?”

Mark didn’t respond, but just continued to look behind him at the highway and receding landmarks.

Then, the Shadow Ace turned off onto a gravel road, backed up, and roared off back toward the town they had just left. Mark’s stomach turned when he saw the driver’s strange maneuvers. ‘That has to be my stolen motorcycle!’ he thought to himself. ‘Why were we being followed? Do they somehow know that I am traveling with this family?’ That thought disturbed him.

Chapter Twelve

“Doctrine of Faith”

Under the leafy branches of maples, angelica trees, and oriental beech trees, a group of young Asians was gathered. They sat on folding chairs in a peaceful park that contained brooks, ponds, and manicured gardens. Sergey sat down on a bench nearby and listened to Guang Yan, an elderly Chinese man, teaching from the Bible. Sergey was glad, for the time being, to be in the *The Mountain of Peace Village*, a city of refuge provided by God for the blessing of His children during the last days.

“When God calls you to do a ministry,” Guang said to his audience, “He equips you for it. It is not something you have the power in yourself to do. It is something that God does through you, as you look to Him to guide you. We are not able to do anything of ourselves, for God is the One who gives us the power to do all things that need to be done. In Philippians 4:13, Paul wrote: ‘**I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.**’ He did not write that he could only do some things by God’s power. No, Paul wrote that he could do **all** things through Christ who strengthens him. God is calling us to do what is **humanly** impossible for us to do. **But, it is possible for us to do it through Jesus Christ our Savior, Lord, and God.**

He is calling us to do what is possible only through Him. When we step out in obedience to God and His Word, we will see God, who is the faithful God, come through and do the miraculous. Let’s turn to Deuteronomy chapter 7.”

Guang paused so the young people could turn in their Bibles to the chapter. Pages rustled as they were flipped. In the trees above, finches, olive-backed pipits, and Asian emerald cuckoos chirped cheerfully and hopped through the leafy network of branches and twigs. The group below had prayed for several concerns including those mentioned by Sergey earlier. He was glad to have fellow believers on the same page. But, he felt a desire to take what he was learning and bring it back to Russia, where he had come from.

Once the pages stopped turning, Guang said: “In Deuteronomy 7:9, Moses said: ‘**Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep His commandments to a thousand generations;**’*. When Moses speaks of keeping Father God’s commandments, he is saying that when we obey God’s Word and God’s guidance, we will always see that our faithful, loving Father God will keep His Word, and will bless us. **He will never fail us, nor forsake us.** A scripture verse that many have heard of is Joshua chapter 1, verse 9, which declares that God is with us wherever we go. But, let’s look at Joshua 1:8, the verse above it.”
[* Note: ‘He’ has been capitalized, when referring to God.]

Pages started turning. Sergey, sitting on the bench, wished he had brought a Bible.

Once they had stopped, Guang said, “Joshua 1:8 says, ‘**This book of the law shall...[insert the verse here].’ **When we meditate on God’s Word and obey it, we will prosper and have good success.**** That is the key to success that the world overlooks, I am sad to say. When people refuse to repent, and refuse to seek God, and have no interest in His Word, they become very hardened against God.”

“Then, what they have sown, they begin to reap,” Guang said, with sadness in his eyes as he scanned the small crowd. “Rebellion against God and His ways is the reason America was destroyed a few

years ago.* It is the reason for wars, poverty, famine, pestilence, and suffering. Because many people do not seek God or desire to meditate on His Word and obey His Word, they are suffering from the results of their bad choices, I am grieved to say.”

[Note: Because America has sinned greatly against God, God has shown many people that He will have to destroy America. He has been calling out to it, warning it repeatedly, but few want to truly repent from sin, and trust in Jesus, and put God first in their lives. Many have become brazen in their sins and have not wanted God’s will in their lives. That is why America shall be judged in the near future.]*

“But,” Guang continued, “when people delight in God’s Word, and meditate on it, and obey it, they will have great success and will prosper. A 19th century German pastor, George Müller, chose to trust in God and His Word in a way that most Christians then and now don’t choose to do. He chose to trust what Jesus said in Matthew 6:33—‘**But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**’* George Müller trusted that if he brought his every concern before his faithful Father God, and did God’s will, God would be faithful to His Word, and would provide for all of Müller’s needs. And, he believed God would provide for all his ministry with orphans and other outreaches.”

All eyes were fixed on Guang as he used some hand motions to highlight key points in his message. Many of the young people took notes with pencils on paper while they keenly listened.

Guang continued, saying, “To be certain he was trusting only in God for his needs, George Müller did not tell anyone about his requests, except for those who worked in his ministry, who also followed Müller’s example. They did not share their needs with others, so that they could see God miraculously provide for all their needs. God always came through for them to provide so that all the children had the food, clothing, and materials they needed.

“One time the orphanage didn’t have any food left for the children. Müller didn’t tell the children about it. He simply told them to pray and thank God for the food He would provide. Once they had finished praying, a knock came at the door. They opened to see a baker who came in with many loaves of bread, saying that he couldn’t sleep that night, and felt God show him to bake bread for the orphans because he felt that they didn’t have bread for breakfast.”

Sergey leaned forward, thinking, ‘This is interesting.’ He hadn’t heard about George Müller before.

“Another knock came at the door,” Guang continued. “It was a milkman. His cart had broken down outside the orphanage. Seeing that the milk would spoil, he offered it to the orphanage for free. I personally think they already had condiments for the bread, such as jam or honey. The point is that God will do the same for us as we trust and obey His Word. No matter what time period one lives in, if he or she trusts only in God and His Word, he or she will see it fulfilled on a daily or moment-by-moment basis.”

“The Farm”

The dark blue Nissan 2017 NV Passenger van pulled up before a white, two-story house which sat 154 yards from a white metal barn. Newer Landini tractors and Deutz-Fahr combines were parked under an open-air shed about 50 yards from the nice farm house, which had blue trim and gabled

windows in the second story. Lying below the equator, this South African farm was experiencing the summer heat during the month of January. The wheat harvest would be ready in another month.

The van doors opened and the family disembarked. Mark Mzembi blinked to adjust his eyes to the daylight outside the van and took in his new surroundings. The five children headed toward the house while their parents spoke with each other and gazed at the fields of green wheat which was starting to look more and more yellow.

Having lost a motorcycle and most of his belongings to a group of thieves, who rode around in a newer Nissan pickup, Mark was glad to have a place to stay and a Christian family to give him room and board.

The head of the family, Sizwe Mahlangu, had offered him a place to live and to pay Mark to work with him on the tractors and in other aspects of farming. Though he had never farmed before, Mark had worked in his mother's garden, in Zimbabwe. He knew a little of about growing crops, but not much. The idea of farming was a little out of his comfort zone, Mark admitted to himself, but he wanted to try something new. And, he had nowhere else to go.

“Mark,” Sizwe said, patting him on the back, “would you like to see how to drive a tractor and practice plowing a field?”

“That would be fun,” Mark said, trying to be positive. But, deep inside, he still worried a little about his mom since Zimbabwe had begun to experience chaos after a dictator, Joseph Dashimba,* rose to power. [** Note: The last name is fictional.*]

Sizwe chuckled and started walking with Mark toward a blue Landini 7-215 tractor resting under the metal, open-air shed.

“You’re going to have a lot of fun with this creature,” Sizwe said, motioning toward the shiny machine.

Once they reached the vehicle, Sizwe mounted a step and opened the door, presenting the cab to Mark. He described some of its functions and pointed out the controls for manipulating various hydraulic actions. The Landini tractor had a large, air-conditioned cab, containing a steering wheel and foot pedals, a joystick, control levers, and a “roboshift” transmission. Buttons activated various gear ratios for different purposes.

Once he was through with the introduction, Sizwe said, “So, what do you think? Want to take it for a ride?”

Mark nodded, impressed by the controls.

Sizwe turned on a two-way radio and clipped it to his belt. Then, he told Mark how to power up the rig. The diesel engine roared to life as Mark turned the key. He followed Sizwe's instructions, and the machine moved forward, crunching over gravel as it pulled out of the shed. Soon, it was rolling down a gravel road toward a white barn with a blue, metal roof. A short distance from the barn, to the right, sat a large, white metal building.

“What is that building beside the barn?” Mark asked his host.

“It is a repair shed,” Sizwe said. “That way, I don’t have to work outdoors in bad weather when I do routine repairs or maintenance, such as oil changes.”

“Do you have to repair your tractors often?” Mark asked.

“From time to time they act up or need to be serviced,” Sizwe said. “I can do a lot of the repairs myself, but I find that these computerized systems are beyond my training. I have to hire a specially trained mechanic to work on the equipment.”

As they approached the barn, Sizwe pointed to it and said, “You’re going to go past the barn and you will see a vacant field.”

Mark brought the Landini tractor around the barn and into a dirt field, which was surrounded by a dense wood consisting of Apple-ring acacia trees and other deciduous trees and bushes. Sizwe had Mark pull into the field and stop. Then, he took control of the tractor and Mark left the rig so Sizwe could pull it up before a large tractor plow at the edge of the field. After a few minutes of connecting the plow to the tractor and securing it, they returned to the rig, and Sizwe guided Mark in tilling the soil.

The big machine pulled forward, tearing up the soil with its massive plow attachment. Chunks tumbled to the sides of the plow as dirt was displaced in long, tumbled lines. After they made several trips back and forth along the field, Sizwe’s two-way radio crackled to life.

“Sizwe are you there? Over,” his wife’s voice said from his two-way radio, which was clipped to his belt.

Putting the radio to his mouth, Sizwe pressed the talk button. “Yes, Martha? What is happening in your corner? Over.”

“You need to come and see the news,” Martha said. “Come soon, if you can. Over.”

“What news? Over,” Sizwe said.

“You just have to see it. Over,” she replied.

“The Attack”

Mark and Sizwe stood beside a large, flat screen computer monitor in the Mahlangu’s living room. Martha Mahlangu was seated before the computer in a corner of the large room, a short distance from some couches and a fireplace.

“You have to see this video. It is shocking,” she said before clicking on a news website video.

A South African news anchor faced the camera from behind a shiny news desk in a state-of-the-art TV studio. The three listened closely as he related that several deadly terrorist attacks had simultaneously struck Johannesburg, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, and East London. The destruction

was great throughout each South African city.

Mark let out a low whistle as he watched video footage of the aftermath. Sizwe just shook his head.

Entire buildings were reduced to rubble by powerful explosives secretly placed in them earlier. One of the buildings was a hospital, where hundreds of people likely met their deaths. Another was a food processing plant. The plant collapsed in on itself in an implosion, and hundreds of workers likely died. Rescue workers were just beginning to shifting through the piles of rubble in search for possible survivors.

In Johannesburg, thirty masked men blocked all entrances to a crowded shopping mall and drew machine gun pistols and Uzis from some vans. Ten others lurked on nearby rooftops to shoot at police, SWAT teams, or escaping shoppers. Coordinating their moves, they began gunning down crowds of people in the Johannesburg Central Mall,* which was very busy at the time. [** Note: This particular mall is fictional. But, an attack like this could happen in the near future if terrorists decide to strike South Africa.*]

The assailants tossed many grenades into the crowds, killing 173 and severely wounding 205 shoppers. At least 324 people were reported dead and 650 were severely wounded. The South African agencies responsible for preventing terrorist attacks were searching for the perpetrators of the highly lethal attacks and were baffled how they had not detected the terror threats beforehand.

“Let’s pray and intercede for these people,” Sizwe said after the video clip ended. “Our country is facing some very devastating events. I feel that it will only get stronger as South Africans come to the place where they either decide for or against Jesus Christ. Will they obey Jesus Christ, trust only in Him to save them, and forsake doing their own will? Or will they reject Jesus, and have nothing to do with His actual will?”

With his hands trembling slightly in fear, Mark nodded and said, “We are seeing unusual times for Africa. It reminds me of the troubles America faced before it collapsed.”

“I pray that my relatives go where the Lord sends them,” Martha said with concern in her voice. “They live in Johannesburg.”

“That is where my dad lives,” Mark said, feeling more fear attack him. He hoped his dad was safe.

“Let’s pray then,” Sizwe said, closing his eyes and looking up.

Sizwe began by interceding for the nation of South Africa and for the African continent. He requested that terrorists’ eyes be opened to receive the Gospel and Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. He prayed for Martha’s relatives and for Mark’s dad, for their protection and for Abba Father God to bring them close to Him as they look to God.

Then, Martha prayed, saying similar things and adding prayers for the people suffering under the control of the Muslim Caliphate group, which controlled several African countries. Then, Mark prayed for his dad, his mom, and for his relatives in Zimbabwe and South Africa. After finishing, Sizwe and Martha looked up and praised God for how He would answer their prayers. Sizwe began singing the first stanza of the hymn “It’s Just Like His Great Love”. He finished with the chorus. [Note: [Read it here at this link.](#)]

“Praise God!” Martha said. “I trust He will take care of and keep my relatives safe, and Mark’s dad safe too.”

But, Mark felt fearful that his dad might have been one of the ones killed or injured. He needed to make a phone call soon, he decided. And, he realized, he needed to give the fear to God. After all, the loving Heavenly Father cared about Mark’s family.

Chapter Thirteen

“The Nature of the Antichrist”

“What do you think of Guang Yan?” Steve asked Sergey as they sat underneath the shade of a bamboo umbrella at a circular, mahogany table in Steve’s back yard.

Steven and Sarah’s single-story, two-bedroom house sat on a green patch of land where a small garden flourished. Several Japanese red-leaf maple trees dotted the yard. An electric lawn mower was parked in a small, wooden shed at the corner of the yard beside a white fence.

“He is a nice, godly man,” Sergey said, sipping iced tea. “After hearing his talk, I have determined to trust God and His Word. I could see that the young people in that group, which Guang was teaching, were determined to make the choice to trust God. And, they inspire me.”

Setting the glass of tea down, Sergey said emphatically, “I want to live like the Apostle Paul. I want to trust in God for what is humanly impossible. For, with God, all things are possible, if they are in agreement with His Nature.”

“Amen,” Steve said.

After a pause, Sarah said, “So, Sergey, how do you feel about returning to your village in Russia?”

“I have,” Sergey said, “a little reservation about it, but I want to go because I feel that the people there need to hear the Gospel and see the Gospel demonstrated.”

“God had shown us,” Steve said, “that we were to return there, but we didn’t know exactly when, until God spoke to both me and Sarah while we were having our personal devotional times with Him earlier.”

“When did He show you?” Sergey asked, leaning forward, placing his elbows on the table.

“Tomorrow,” Steve said. “Some time tomorrow we were supposed to be translated back to your village.”

“I will seek God about that,” Sergey said, excitedly. “Excuse me,” he said as he left the table and

walked back into Steve's Chinese-style house through the back door.

"He seems more excited than he's been since arriving here," Sarah said, glancing back at the door.

"He sure is," Steve said. "I think he must have a heart of compassion for the people of Russia, his people."

"But, Steve," Sarah said, "the Russians have outlawed non-conformist Christians."

"Non-conformist?" Steve said, trying to remember what that referred to.

"You know," Sarah said, "they're people who are not Eastern Orthodox or who are not attending Churches that are officially monitored and regulated by the new Russian government."

"That's right," Steve said, remembering. "But, God will protect us."

Leaning forward, he said quietly, "I can see that Sergey cares about his people. I feel led to pray that Sergey will grow more in God's ways and in His Word."

"You want to pray now?" Sarah said.

"That would be good," Steve said.

Together, the couple prayed until Sergey returned outside a few minutes later.

The burly, middle-aged Russia appeared in the doorway. He tugged on a sleeve of his blue flannel shirt to roll it down. Then, he buttoned the cuff. His medium-length brown beard brushed against the shirt collar, bending it slightly at the edge, while he gazed out at the yard and at neighboring houses and gardens. Then, he casually placed a hand in a pocket of his wool trousers.

Sergey cleared his throat and said, "God has shown me that just you two, Jason, Alexei, and I will go. So, I wonder where Jason and Alexei are."

"Let's ask God to bring them over to this house. He will prompt them to come over if they should come," Steve said.

Together, they bowed their heads and prayed for the two men to be directed toward Steve's house. After the prayer, Sarah got up and went into the house. Steve and Sergey talked about light things for a few minutes before Sarah appeared in the doorway holding an apple pie that had been freshly baked and cooled a little. Underneath it were three plates and three forks.

Sergey's eyes perked up. "That looks delicious, Mrs. O'Neill," Sergey said. He remembered hearing someone in the park address Steve and Sarah as Mr. and Mrs. O'Neill.

"It is my favorite dessert to make," Sarah, said smiling as she set the plates and pie down.

As they began dining on the delicious pie, Sergey looked up in thought, holding a piece of pie in his fork. "Not to change the topic, but I wonder when the Antichrist will come and how he'll come."

“That *is* a different topic,” Sarah said, surprised. “What made you think of that?”

“I am thinking about Russia,” Sergey said, “and about the persecution that is intensifying in my country. I just wonder: when will the man of sin come into the world, or is he already here?”

Steve finished swallowing and said, “The Antichrist, God showed me, will come in the appearance of a man, but he will not be 100 percent man, like you or me.”

“What will he be then?” Sergey asked before taking another bite.

“He will be part human and part fallen angel,” Steve said. “The devil comes to kill, steal, and destroy. He has the power to engineer, with genetic technology, a hybrid which is both human and angel. By taking the genetic code of a fallen angel and combining it with DNA from a willing human, the devil has fashioned a creature that is a mixture of fallen angel genetic code and human DNA.”

Sergey opened his eyes, baffled. “You’re saying that the Antichrist will be a hybrid creature, and not a human?”

“That is correct,” Steve said. “The Bible refers to the Antichrist as the Beast in Revelation 13 and throughout the rest of the book of Revelation. Now, since God does not give such beings a spirit, the devil puts demon spirits into the creature to give it a type of ‘life.’”

“But, how could demons have technology? I thought they were spirits,” Sergey said, focusing on Steve, with curiosity.

“Demons are smarter than humans and have influenced them for thousands of years. The Aztecs were influenced by their so-called gods to kill people in many ritual sacrifices. When Cortez and his men arrived in Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire, the Spanish conquistadors were appalled by what they witnessed. Human sacrifice was rampant. At one point, the conquistadors, under Cortez’s leadership, attacked the capital and eventually conquered the entire city and the Aztec civilization.”

“The Aztecs,” Steve continued, “and ancient civilizations in North and South America had technological abilities and astronomical knowledge of the stars that could only have come from fallen angels. An example of the amazing technology these people were familiar with is the Inca fortress of *Saksaywaman*. It is an ancient fortress on the outskirts of Cusco, Peru. Massive stones weighing many tons were cut with laser-like precision and fit in place like a jigsaw puzzle.”

“What?” Sergey said, shaking his head in disbelief.

“Not only that,” Steve said, “but the stones fit so perfectly together that there are no gaps between them. Some have speculated that aliens built the structures at *Saksaywaman*, but I believe that fallen angels were somehow involved in the construction of that fortress complex.

“Angels are inter-dimensional beings. They can move from one set of dimensions to another, or from the second heaven to the first heaven. Revelation chapter 9 speaks of a time when evil creatures that have wings will actually emerge from a pit in the surface of the earth, and will fly out in swarms around the world. And, men will see them. They have the power to sting people with scorpion-like

tails, which will cause suffering to people for a period of 5 months.

“These creatures are described in detail as having heads of men with very long hair and crowns; breastplates of iron, proving that they have the upper bodies of men; lower bodies shaped like horses; and tails similar to scorpion tails. The fallen angel Apollyon is in charge of them, as their leader. The Bible does not teach that alien creatures exist. It only speaks of angels, humans, animals, or satanic hybrids, like the ones seen in Revelation 9:1-12 and Revelation 9:13-21.”

“That is amazing,” Sergey said, setting his fork down. “I did not realize that the creatures of Revelation 9 were literal beings people would see. I thought they might be allegorical representations of military weapons.”

“If they were allegorical,” Steve said, “then they would clearly resemble machines or equipment that looked like actual weapons or military equipment, such as tanks, aircraft, rocket launchers, or soldiers. But, what we read in Revelation clearly describes their appearance in detail. There are no machines, drones, or vehicles on earth that resemble the creatures described in Revelation chapter 9.”

Sergey took another bite of his apple pie slice and thought for a moment. Then, he said, “So, why would God allow fallen angels to assist people in building those ancient structures you spoke of earlier?”

“The Bible says in 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 14: ‘**And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.**’ If the devil can look like an angel of light, then someone must be able to see him as an ‘angel of light’. The Aztecs believed that their god *Quetzalcoatl* would appear as a white man and would come back to them at some point in time. The ancient Hawaiians also believed in a god, named *Lono*, who would return to them. Ship logs from Captain Cook’s crew mention how the Hawaiian natives believed Cook was *Lono*. Returning to the Aztecs... When Cortez and the Spanish with him reached the Aztecs, some of the Aztecs thought he fulfilled the ancient prophecies for the coming of *Quetzalcoatl*.”

“So, the Aztecs must have seen *Quetzalcoatl* appear to them long before Cortez arrived in America,” Sergey said. “And, the Hawaiians must have seen *Lono* appear to them long before Captain Cook reached the islands.”

“That is correct,” Steve said.

“So, who would those gods be in reality? Satan?” Sergey said.

“Either Satan himself or another fallen angel,” Steve replied, before taking a bite of apple pie.

“I guess ancient people would have to see the devil then,” Sergey said. “The devil must then be able to come down and interact with people, and give them advanced technology or scientific knowledge.”

“That is correct,” Steve said. “The Bible warns us in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 8 and 9, saying, ‘[8] **Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: [9] Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.**’”

“Now,” Steve continued, “the devil will only appear to people who give him enough legal permission by their choices. People who take part in sorcery, human sacrifice, and witchcraft can see the devil appear to them, but they are living in bondage and are in danger of eternal damnation.”

“So, the devil will use his advanced technology to make some kind of hybrid creature that will be possessed by evil spirits, and this will be the Antichrist?” Sergey said. “I still don’t understand how God would let this happen. It seems very strange.”

“It is very strange,” Steve said, agreeing, “but this Antichrist being will not have the full characteristics of a man. Revelation chapter 19 says how God will cast him and the False Prophet, who is also described as a beast, into the lake of fire at the end of the tribulation. This will happen before the rest of the wicked would be cast into the lake of fire, in Revelation 20.”

“Okay, that is interesting,” Sergey said, thoughtfully stroking his beard.

“You see,” Steve said, “about a thousand years after the tribulation ends, there will be a judgment before God’s throne. It is often called, ‘The great white throne judgment’. All those who died and went to hell are brought up to the judgment. The record books are opened. All whose names are not found written in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire.”

A light breeze cause branches to sway back and forth in the maple trees.

“But,” Steve continued, “the Antichrist, or Beast, and the False Prophet both were to be cast into the lake of fire long, long before the great white throne judgment happens. They are not human beings, and they will not be given the same judgment as humans are given at the end of the one thousand year rule of Christ on earth. Now, at the end of the thousand year rule, Jesus will destroy this old earth and make a new earth in which we Christians will dwell forever. That is what the Bible teaches. You can read about this new earth in Revelation 21.”

“I would like to study that,” Sergey said. “That is interesting what you’re saying, even though I can’t completely understand it right now, but I will look into it.”

Sarah stood, taking her plate, and said, “That’s pretty mind-blowing isn’t it?”

“It is,” Sergey said. “I would like to talk about this topic more, but I think I’ve heard all I can handle for now. I need to get some exercise. Would you both care to go on a walk with me?”

“That would be fun,” Sarah said.

“I’m up for it,” Steve added.

“The Jungle”

A dense jungle surrounded him on all sides. Stump-tailed macaques and other macaques hooted and shrieked as they climbed through the tree tops high above. The monkeys sometimes could be annoying, the young jungle traveler thought, wishing they would stop their cries. The dense, rainforest vegetation kept him from seeing too far in front of him as Hu Zheng followed an animal

trail through a jungle in Yunnan Province, China. As he walked, carrying a backpack filled with supplies he had saved up for his trip, Hu glanced over his shoulder from time to time. He had prayed and fasted for a couple days before he set out on his journey, leaving everything behind.

Hu pushed aside vines hanging from the branches of towering kapok trees. Wax jambu trees and Malabar-almond trees drew his attention whenever he saw them, but he knew that he would have to wait for the fruit to develop since it was winter and the rainy season was just about to start.

Hu's parents had said he should renounce his faith in the God of the Christians. But, Hu could not do that. He loved Jesus and did not want to forsake His Lord, Savior, and God. His relatives were atheistic communists and his uncle Bo was animist. It was his uncle who had told Hu that if Hu ever thought of becoming a Christian, he would put a curse on him.

Hu reached for a stick which poked out from under the leaves of a large fern plant. Using it, he climbed a steep hill, stepping over dead, fallen trees as he walked.

Hu knew that the blood of Jesus protected him from all curses. But, what concerned Hu was that his dad's sister had threatened to tell the communist authorities of Hu's decision to become a Christian, unless he quickly renounced his faith. He knew that Christians who were arrested were thrown into concentration camps where prisoners were worked to death, unless they renounced their faith, or changed their political beliefs. The camps were just as bad as the concentration camps from the '70s after the Cultural Revolution happened in China, some had told him.

Shortly after his 24th birthday, Hu began fasting and seeking God what he should do. He felt God speak to him and show him to go into the jungle in southern Yunnan. Now, Hu had been traveling through the jungle for two days. He had covered a little less than 40 miles during that time and had faced mosquitoes and snakes. But, when he prayed, trusting God's power and love, the creatures had left him alone.

A snapping sound came from the forest some distance away, causing Hu to turn to the left quickly. 'What is that?' he wondered, gazing into the dense undergrowth, but the jungle was too dense to see through. The bushes a stone's throw from him began to rustle, but Hu couldn't see what was causing the stir. Then, a branch snapped loudly and fear shot through his body. Hu felt he needed to find a place to hide, but if the thing causing the snapping was an animal, like a tiger, it would likely detect him if he were to move now.

Hu froze for a few seconds before he decided to hide in a cluster of bushes. Once he was concealed, he waited. The snapping sounds continued, followed by more rustling in the bushes. At last, the creature making the sounds came into view, partially concealed from Hu's view by his hiding place. A man shoved bushes out of his face and stepped onto the animal trail Hu had just left.

The man carried a backpack, a walking stick, and a map. He wore a blue workers' billed cap and a rain jacket. It was obvious that the man was trying to navigate the jungle, but he appeared to be somewhat new to the task. He stopped, dropped his staff on the ground, and unfolded the map, peering at it for a few minutes before he stooped down and set his backpack on the ground. Opening a pocket, he pulled out a compass and began trying to find his bearings.

Hu listened closely from twenty feet away as the man said, in Chinese, "Dear Heavenly Father, I don't know where to go next. I am lost in this jungle and this map isn't helping me. It doesn't show

where I am. Will you help me to find the way?"

God's loving voice suddenly spoke to Hu: "My son, go over to that man and tell him that you are a Christian, and that you are also escaping from the communist government in China. I will guide you in what to do. That man is a Christian who is escaping from China. Do not fear. I will be with you. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken."

"Yes, Abba Father," Hu said as he started to push through the bushes.

The man looked up suddenly and turned toward Hu, with fear on his face. "Who are you?" he said.

"I am a Christian, and you are a Christian too, I understand," Hu said.

"How did you know? Are you a spy?" the man asked, anxiously, standing.

"No, I am a Christian," Hu said. "And, God told me that you are one too. You can trust me. I am escaping from China and going where God sends me."

The man closed his eyes briefly and appeared to be praying. After a few moments, he opened his eyes again. "God has confirmed to me that you are a Christian indeed," he said. "So, I will trust you. You are escaping from the communists?"

"Yes," Hu said. "My aunt threatened to report me to the authorities if I did not renounce my faith, but I could not. I sought God what to do and He led me to flee into the jungle. I have traveled for two days. How long have you been journeying?"

"I have been here for three days," the man said, "but I started traveling from northern Yunnan after I felt God showing me to go into the jungle. God had told me the government was going to start thoroughly searching through Yunnan towns and cities for any Christians that could be found. So, here I am."

"Do you have any family such as a wife or children?" Hu asked, noticing that the man appeared to be in his late thirties or early forties.

"I left my wife behind," the man said, "because she did not want to come, and she is not a Christian. My son and daughter are young and have not yet made Jesus their personal Savior and Lord. But, I had to leave because I knew I would be taken from them unless I left."

"That is sad," Hu said. "But obeying God's call is far better than compromising with the world."

"You are right, my brother," the man said, smiling briefly. Then, after hesitating a moment, he bowed slightly toward Hu. "I am Cheng Yuan," Cheng said.

Hu responded by bowing slightly before he said, "I am Hu Zheng."

"Did you know if other Christians are out in the jungle, hiding away from the communists?" Cheng asked.

"I don't know," Hu said, "but I assume there are many that have gone into hiding in the jungles. I

have heard that in some villages dozens of people are being arrested for being Christians, and are disappearing.”

“I pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ will listen to the Lord’s call and will go to places of safety,” Cheng said before he pulled out the map and pointed at the colored sheet. “I wonder where we are in this jungle.”

Hu stepped up to the map and scrutinized it for a while. Then, he said, “I cannot tell you where we are because I found this animal trail yesterday and have no map or compass with me. I am just going where God shows me or where he puts on my heart. But, I trust that He is leading us because God said in His Word, in John chapter 16, verse 13, that the Holy Spirit will guide us in all truth.”

“Do you remember the exact words?” Cheng said.

“Yes,” Hu said, squinting in thought. “It says, ‘**Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.**’”

“That is very comforting. The Holy Spirit does lead me. But, I want to listen to his voice better,” Cheng said as he closed his eyes to think and remember scripture verses he had memorized.

Rainforest birds chirped and peeped from high branches in kapok trees. Distant monkeys shrieked and hooted, and their calls echoed through the forest. In the distance, dark grey clouds began to approach, floating over the tree tops, threatening to unload their water payloads on Hu and Cheng. Hu noticed that the atmosphere felt like it would feel before a downpour, where sheets of rain would drop from the sky. Hu was concerned his gear would be soaked, including his Bible, which he had placed at the bottom of the backpack.

“Dear Father God,” Hu prayed, closing his eyes, “I ask that you will prevent the rain from soaking us. I know that you kept the fleece dry, and the ground wet, when Gideon asked, so he could be sure you were speaking to him. But, now we have the witness of the Holy Spirit to guide us. But, Father God, I ask you to keep us dry, while the forest gets rained on. And, I ask you to keep the ground dry where we will be sleeping tonight. In Jesus Christ’s Name, amen.”

In the distance, thunder boomed.

“I have a tarp we could hide under,” Cheng said, reaching for his backpack, which still sat on the ground.

“I feel that God is going to do something awesome,” Hu said. “Even with a tarp, the ground will get muddy, and our backpacks will get soaked through from the mud. God will do for us what He did for Gideon — He will give us a ‘dry fleece.’”

Cheng frowned, trying to figure out what Hu meant, but then he said, “Oh, you’re saying God will keep us dry while the area around us is wet?”

“Yes,” Hu said, looking up at the approaching clouds.

About thirty minutes later, the clouds reached them and began to cover the sky directly overhead. Hu

had been praying all that time and Cheng had been viewing his map and pouring over scripture he had written down in a small notebook. He didn't have a Bible of his own. Someone had let him borrow a Bible for a few days, long enough for him to copy portions of it down.

"Maybe I should get my tarp out?" Cheng said.

"Just watch and see what God will do," Hu said. As he spoke, thunder boomed powerfully from two miles away. It sounded like an explosion had gone off. The sound of rain pelting trees from a few yards away reached Hu's ears, but he continued to put his trust in God.

Just as the rain was beginning to fall on the trees a few yards away, wind began blowing from the opposite direction, and the clouds started departing to south, moving away from Cheng and Hu's position. Not a droplet of rain had touched them.

Seeing the clouds drift away, Hu raised his hands toward the sky and ecstatically praised God for His goodness and love. Cheng stood to his feet and gasped, looking at the departing clouds, which were swollen with potential rain water.

"Praise God! He heard our prayers!" Cheng shouted. "This is a miracle!"

After worshiping God some more, Hu sat down on a rock. He was feeling a little tired and in need of a nap.

"Do you want to stop here for a short nap?" Hu asked his new friend.

"I'm fine with that," Cheng said, "but where do we go when night falls? I have a tarp. Do you have a tent or anything?"

"I brought a sleeping bag and a tarp to sleep on, but I have no rain tarp. I trust God will continue to protect me from the weather," Hu replied.

Suddenly, bushes twenty feet behind Hu rustled and a few twigs snapped. Hu turned quickly to see what it was and his eyes opened wide.

Chapter Fourteen

"Supernatural Strength"

The steel cell door creaked open and a flashlight shined into Vasily's face, causing him to close his eyes briefly before opening them a crack. Three armed men in camouflage fatigues stood in the doorway, looking at him grimly. Each had close-cropped hair and a grim expression on his face.

Vasily had been in solitary confinement for a couple days. He was incarcerated at a concentration camp in Siberia. Most of the men he had joined in an escape attempt had been caught and also placed

in solitary confinement cells. One, Boris Dernov, had been shot in the shoulder as he was making his escape on a stolen snowmobile. He was recovering in the camp hospital.

“Get up,” a soldier said gruffly, motioning toward Vasily with his hand.

The 60-year-old Russian slowly stood to his feet from the hard sleeping pad he had been sitting on.

“What is going on?” Vasily said.

“It’s time to put you back to work, old man,” a young soldier said arrogantly.

The soldiers grabbed him, pulled him out of his cell, and shoved him down a narrow, concrete hall. Dim light bulbs in the ceiling, which were spaced wide apart, provided the only light in the prison other than the flashlight which a soldier carried.

Now, a new Christian, Vasily regretted that he had attempted to turn in Sergey Ulanov and other Christians staying at Sergey’s house in the town of Medvedski. They had vanished while Vasily was asleep. The Russian soldiers he thought would arrest the Christians had instead arrested him because the government suspected that Vasily had been working with the Christians, even though he hadn’t. Vasily now realized that God had miraculously taken or translated Sergey and the other Christians away from Sergey’s house.

“I thought I was to stay in solitary confinement for three weeks,” Vasily said.

“You are being ordered back to work,” a soldier replied indifferently.

‘How could they decide to remove me from solitary confinement?’ Vasily wondered to himself.

After passing through a secured door, Vasily found himself back outside in the cold, winter air. Snow was falling on the camp in gentle but steady flurries, covering the land with more white powder. A lone soldier standing outside the prison door inhaled harmful tobacco smoke from a cigarette as he watched the camp routines continue. Vasily knew that the Russian soldiers were not allowed to smoke on duty, but this one was somehow getting away with it.

They passed a camp hospital building constructed of brick and concrete, which had few windows. Clusters of leafless thorn bushes surrounded the building, providing a layer of protection against intruders and also acting as a deterrent to any would-be escape artists. Some distance further, after passing by some barracks buildings on the right, they reached a tall razor-wire-topped fence. Guards standing by unlocked and swung open a gate the width of two trucks. Through the chain link fence, Vasily saw piles of large rocks and over 90 men breaking them into smaller pieces with hammers. Seeing him hesitate, a guard shoved him forward.

“Get moving,” he said gruffly. “You are going back to work.”

Once Vasily reached a pile, a guard pointed to a sledge hammer lying on the ground. “Pick it up and start swinging,” the guard said coldly, clasping in his hands an AK-74M, which hung from a sling around his shoulders.

Another guard nearby carried a leather bullwhip in one hand and had a gun slung over his shoulder.

“My son,” God’s loving voice reached Vasily’s spirit and soul, “My strength is made perfect in weakness. I will give you the strength to work, and soon I will lead you to a place of safety. And, I love you very much. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Father God,” Vasily said quietly as he reached for the hammer, “I want to thank you for the strength you will give me, but I don’t really want to do this work. I am older than most of these men, and I have some back problems. Will you take the back problems away from me and give me the strength to do this work?”

“I will, My son,” Abba God said.

“Get to work!” a guard said, cracking a bullwhip near Vasily’s feet.

Vasily began swinging the hammer at a rock. It splintered into smaller pieces with the second blow. Several more swings broke the pieces into small chunks.

“Break up the larger chunks,” the guard with the bullwhip ordered, pointing at golf-ball-sized rocks.

After an hour had passed, Vasily said to God quietly while he worked, “Abba Father, when will I be able to escape or be released from this prison? Thank you for reducing the back pain, but when will I be able to leave?”

“Very soon, My son,” Abba God said to him. “This will not last much longer. Just be patient. I will give you the strength. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken.”

Snap! A whip cracked loudly near his head, just a couple feet away from his ear, causing Vasily to flinch.

“Get to work!” a guard barked.

Groaning quietly, Vasily continued to crush the rock with the hammer, sending small splinters flying while his breath came out in small clouds. As he worked, the snow fell on his orange hat, his shoulders, and his eyebrows. The sub-zero temperature stung his face and slipped through gaps in his coat and gloves. He had to keep working and moving to stay somewhat warm.

After another hour of work, his arms felt sore, but he had to keep swinging. “Dear God, please help me to trust you,” Vasily said.

“I will,” Abba God’s kind voice replied.

“It’s time for your break,” a soldier from behind him said suddenly.

Dropping the hammer, Vasily lowered down onto a small boulder, not bothering to dust the snow off. Every inhalation stung a little, but he had to breathe deeply due to his exertion. This is very difficult, he thought. In some ways he would rather be in solitary confinement than have to work so hard in the cold. He reached over and took a thermos provided for him and drank deeply from it.

Thirty feet away from him, a man breaking up rocks suddenly fell to the ground, crunching into the

snow, and dropped his sledge hammer. The guards ordered him to stand, but he was too weak. So, they began kicking him and yelling at him to stand. He slowly stood to his feet, but collapsed again, exhausted and sick. The guards mercilessly kicked him and told him to stand, but he remained motionless. Then, a guard tapped his knee with the end of his machine gun. There was no reflex. He bent down, removing a glove, and placed his hand over the man's neck to check his pulse. After half a minute, he stood and said to another guard, "He's dead, I think."

"What should we do with the body?" a young soldier asked.

"Just leave it until evening," the older soldier replied. "Then, we will dispose of the body."

Vasily shuddered. He was grieved to see the man die from sickness and exhaustion. He sure hoped and prayed that he would not die like that. But, God's comforting words returned to his memory: "*I will give you the strength to work, and soon I will lead you to a place of safety.*"

"Dear Abba Father God, get me out of this camp very soon, please," Vasily anxiously said under his breath.

"You will be going very soon," God said. "Now, trust Me and you will see Me give you supernatural strength and supernatural warmth."

"I choose to trust you, Abba Father," Vasily said.

"Very good, My son," God said.

"Your break is over," a soldier said, approaching him.

Vasily whispered, "I can do this through your strength alone. And, I choose to trust you."

Then, he picked up the hammer, and a sudden feeling of warmth rushed through his body. The cold didn't feel as cold as it had before, and life and power began coursing through his veins in a way he hadn't felt before. Vasily swung at the rocks with more vigor than he'd had since he was a young man. The hammer felt less heavy in his hands and the strength to wield it did not diminish as he continued breaking up rocks.

A prisoner nearby glanced over at Vasily from time to time. When the guards were gone, the man said, "What did you eat for lunch today? You are swinging like a steam hammer."

"It is nothing I can do naturally," Vasily said as he worked quickly. "It is God who strengthens me."

"I want to know this God you speak of," the man said, breathing deeply from exertion. The man groaned as he raised his hammer for another swing. He had just missed his target by an inch.

"Call on the Name of Jesus Christ," Vasily said, "and trust only in Him to save you from your sins by His precious blood, and you will be saved. Of course, look to God for help to forsake your sins. And, you will see God do miracles for you like He is doing for me."

“Visitors”

Piles of corn kernels and grain poured out of a white grain sack and into a metal feeding trough. Simmental cows* stepped forward through slots in a wooden pen and began hungrily munching on the grain and kernels in the trough. This was the second day Mark Mzembi had fed the cattle, and he liked watching them eat. The cows devoured the grains as if they were delicious, gourmet food. (* *In South Africa, they're called “Simmentaler” cows.*)

“Hey Mark,” a 13-year-old boy said as he approached the 32-year-old Zimbabwean, coming from the barn, which was behind Mark.

“Hello, Simon,” Mark said addressing the teen boy, who was ethnic Zulu like his father, Sizwe Mah.

“How did you like taking the Landini tractor for a spin?” Simon said as Mark picked up another grain bag from a small stack nearby.

“It was fun,” Mark said as he pulled out a knife to cut the bag open. “I look forward to learning how to operate your dad’s combine. Have you learned how to drive it?”

“My dad says he will teach me how once I’m 17,” Simon said. “But, he allows me to drive a small tractor we have and a Yamaha Viking ATV. It has a trailer for transporting stuff. But, I can get it up to 80.5 kilometers per hour.*” (**Or 50 miles per hour.*)

“With the trailer?” Mark asked, squinting with a smile on his face.

Simon laughed, imagining his ATV bouncing over rough terrain, at top speed, with a trailer attached. “No. That would be crazy,” Simon said, chuckling. “The trailer would bump around like popping popcorn.”

“That sounds pretty fun,” Mark said. “I noticed your dad has a lot of nice rigs. I wonder how he could afford them.”

“The farm is doing well and we’ve sold a lot of cows,” Simon said. “My dad saved up a lot of money when I was little and bought better tractors than he had before. But some of the stuff we have was bought using loans.”

“So, what do you want to be when you grow up?” Mark said as he lifted the hefty sack and began dumping it into the trough.

“I want to be a farmer like my dad,” Simon said, smiling. “I can’t wait to be able to drive the big tractors that my dad drives and tune up the engines.”

A beeping sound suddenly interrupted their conversation, and a voice spoke from a two-way radio clipped to Mark’s belt.

“Hello Mark, this is Sizwe. Do you copy? Over.”

Mark removed the radio and held it to his mouth. Pressing the talk button, he said, “This is Mark. I copy. What is it? Over.”

“We have a two cars pulling up our long driveway,” Sizwe’s voice crackled through the speaker. “I don’t know who they are. Pray for me. They could be asking for trouble. Over.”

From Mark’s position behind the barn, he couldn’t see the graveled road leading up to the farm.

“I’ll pray for you. Over,” he said before clipping the two-way radio to his belt.

“I have to see who they are,” Simon said before he started running toward the barn. Soon, he was lost from view as he darted around the barn and ran toward the two-story farm house.

“Dear Father God,” Mark said, “I pray that you will protect this family and me from those thugs that stole my motorcycle. I was sure I saw one riding my Honda motorcycle and following us out of the town when Sizwe drove us toward his farm. I hope that these people coming to this house are not those thugs. Protect us from harm and guide Sizwe in what to do. I pray these things in Jesus Christ’s Name. Amen.”

Mark picked up an extra food bag and set it on the cargo bed of a dark blue Honda Pioneer 700 ATV. Then, he hopped in, started it up, and the gasoline engine hummed to life. Shifting to drive, Mark pulled out of the field and accelerated, passing around the large white barn and down the graveled path that led from the barn to the farm house. He could see two older Mitsubishi cars, which appeared a little rusted and worn, resting beside the house. One was red and the other was tan. As he drew closer, Mark could see that both cars had a few dents and scratches in their surfaces and some small cracks in their front windshields.

The people who owned them were not rich, Mark realized, feeling a little relieved that they couldn’t belong to the thugs he encountered a couple days ago. Those thieves had a newer Nissan Titan pickup truck and a brand-new motorcycle on a trailer behind it.

Parking beside the Mitsubishi cars, Mark jumped out and headed toward the house on foot. He knocked, but the door remained shut. His heart rate increased slightly as Mark felt that something might be wrong. Perhaps the cars actually belonged to criminals Mark had not met before. Could the Mahlangus be held hostage? More seconds passed. Mark decided to knock again.

At last, the door swung open. Sizwe’s eleven-year-old daughter, Lesedi, stood in the entrance, smiling meekly. “Hello Mark, we got visitors,” she said, fingering a braid of black hair.

“Who are they?” Mark asked, closing the door behind him quietly.

“I don’t know. I think they are trying to escape or something,” Lesedi said, shrugging.

“What do you mean they are trying to escape?” Mark asked, concerned.

The young girl just shrugged.

Mark walked past her down the hallway, which occupied the length of the house. Paintings of tractors and savannah landscapes and family photos hung from the walls. Mark slowly walked past the entrance to the kitchen on the right, which had a white, sparkling floor. The room was empty.

To the left, further down the hall, a wide entryway opened into the Mahlangu's large living room, which was comfortably furnished with couches, bookshelves, a keyboard on a stand, and other furniture. Across the hall from the living room entrance was an entry leading into the spacious dining room with its long table. Mark hesitated at the threshold of the living room and listened to see if he could hear any conversation.

"It is very generous of you to help us," a man's voice said. "We were living in constant danger, and I fear that there will be more and more danger to come."

"Why do you say that?" Martha Mahlangu, Sizwe's wife, asked.

"Terrorism and violence against Christians is increasing in the inner city where we live," a man said. "It is not safe to go out at night anymore. I used to work unloading freight at night, but I had to quit my job because I would be mugged and threatened every other night, it seemed. Some gangs would find out that I was a Christian and would threaten to hurt me if I witnessed to them. They would rob me and sometimes beat me as I got out of my car, when I arrived at work. When I told me boss about it, he scoffed at me and said I should take the bumper stickers off my car."

"What do your bumper stickers say?" Sizwe asked.

"The only way to Heaven is by Jesus Christ," a lady's voice said. "Another says, 'Jesus Christ is Lord.'"

"There is no way that I will remove those bumper stickers," the man's voice said, "because I do not want to be offended by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But, the gangs threatened to spray paint my car and hurt my family if I didn't stop distributing Gospel tracts and witnessing in their area. I prayed about it, and I felt that God was telling me to leave Johannesburg."

"What about the police? Did you contact them about your trouble?" Martha asked.

"We did," the man said, "but they said they couldn't handle it because of extreme violence that would erupt if the police were spotted inside the gang's area of influence. They told us they could not protect those neighborhoods because the gangs were armed with machine guns and were very violent."

"I have a question for you," Sizwe said. "I hope you take it well, but I was wondering something. Why didn't the gangs try to kill you earlier?"

"They threatened us and they stole my wallet once. But, I believe God was protecting us and providing for us," the man said.

"I believe He was too," Sizwe said. "Well, you are welcome to stay at my house. I have a basement that is very comfortable and it is outfitted with guest bedrooms, a bathroom, and a small kitchen. But, you all are free to eat what my wife prepares and have meals with us."

Mark decided his curiosity was too much to just stay put. He walked around the corner of the entryway and entered the living room to see two large, leather chesterfield couches facing each other in a corner of the room to the left of the entry. Sizwe and Martha sat on one which faced a second chesterfield on which sat two other married couples. All were likely of Zulu or Sotho ethnicity, Mark

thought. One couple was young, probably in their early thirties, like him. The other couple appeared to be in their early forties.

Bushy, artificial plants in terra cotta pots rested beside the ends of the couches. Between the two couches, a mahogany table supported six coffee cups on platters. A small plate of chocolate chip dessert biscuits (or cookies) sat beside the cups.

Sizwe looked up as Mark entered.

“Come in Mark, and have a seat,” Sizwe said, motioning to a small recliner near his couch.

“Thank you,” Mark said, walking over and taking a seat.

“This is Mark Mzembi,” Sizwe told the couples on the couch across from him.

“He’s from Zimbabwe.”

“And, Mark,” Sizwe said, “the couple closest to you is Lareko and his wife Nomsa Ngwenya.”

“Hello,” Mark said, nodding toward the youngest couple. They smiled back happy to see a man about their age.

“And, this is Tau and his wife Mbali Buthelezi,” Sizwe said, motioning with his hand toward the couple who appeared to be in their early forties.

Just then, Lesedi entered the living room with another young African girl Mark had not seen before, who appeared to be about ten-years-old. A little white girl followed them. She was Sizwe’s adopted daughter, Grace, a five-year-old brunette, who was full of energy. Following right behind her came seven-year-old James, Sizwe’s white, adopted son. Despite their ethnic differences, the children got along well and cared for each other.

“What are you talking about, dad?” the unknown African girl asked Tau.

“We are talking about what happened to me and why I felt God leading me to go to this farm, Awande,” Tau said looking lovingly at his young daughter.

“Those bad men said that they were going to hunt you down, didn’t they daddy?” Awande asked her dad.

“What?” Martha Mahlangu said, covering her mouth, in shock. “You didn’t tell us that.”

“I was going to mention it to you later, but I didn’t want to upset you,” Tau said.

“I pray to Jesus every day that He will protect us from them,” Awande added with some concern in her young face. “But, I believe He will take care of us.”

“I guess,” said Tau, “I should explain that I told the gang leader about Jesus Christ, and afterward, I got a phone call. The voice on the other end said with a cold and hateful tone that my life would be taken from me the next time I entered that part of town, but that is where I work. Then, before I could respond, the speaker had hung up.”

Tau took a sip of coffee and sighed. All eyes were glued to him with curiosity, especially Mark's and the hosts'.

"Well," he said, "I sought God about what to do, and He showed me to drive out to the farming district where you live. I heard about you from a Christian friend, and God showed me to stay at your house. We packed our bags and what little we had and were almost ready to leave. The next day, I got another call from the same person. He said that his men will hunt me down and kill me unless I renounce my faith in God right then, over the phone."

Mark felt a tinge of fear in the pit of his stomach, which grew stronger as he listened.

"I refused to reject Jesus Christ or renounce my faith. The speaker cursed at me and said that I was a dead man. But, I know that God will protect us. We have the weapons of prayer, faith, and the armor of God," Tau said.

A dreadful feeling of terror struck Mark in his chest, causing his muscles to tighten. What if that violent gang somehow found out that Tau had reached the Mahlangu farm? The question disturbed him as he listened to the conversation. Mark knew he needed to bring this concern before his Heavenly Father God, so he stood up and excused himself. Walking back through the living room, Mark headed down the hall toward a large, walk-in closet beside a bathroom.

Opening the closet door, he slipped in and quietly closed it shut behind him. In the dark, Mark began to pour out his fear and anxiety into the hands of his loving Father God. The major concern he felt was for the safety of the children, and women, and for himself.

"Mark," James's young voice came through the closet door. "Mark, are you hiding in there?"

Mark stood and opened the closet to see the seven-year-old outside.

"I'm talking to God right now. I'm not playing hide-and-go-seek, James."

"I was wondering if you are okay," James said. "You look afraid."

"I am scared," Mark admitted.

"What are you scared of?" James asked innocently.

"I don't want to talk about it. Well..." Mark said, sighing, seeing the boy looking at him with concern. "I am worried about the evil men who threatened Tau and his family."

"You don't need to be scared. God will fight for us like He did for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace," James said confidently and matter-of-factly.

Just then, a sound distracted the boy and he turned to see his sister and the other girls running down the hall. Then, he ran off to join them, leaving Mark in the closet.

His simple, child-like faith struck a chord in Mark. The Zimbabwean realized that he needed to have faith like a child because God is always faithful to His Word. 'God will never fail or forsake me,'

Mark realized, remembering a verse he read in the book of Joshua, chapter 1. As he pondered the scripture, the exact words in Joshua chapter 1, verse 9, came to his mind: “**Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.**”

But, as he thought about that truth, a scene flashed into his mind of vehicles filled with armed men racing toward the farm. He pictured tough-looking gangsters armed to the teeth with AK-47s and grenades. Mark closed his eyes and shook his head, trying to get the images out of his mind. ‘Dear God, please help me,’ Mark said quietly, clenching his teeth together. As he said that, peace slowly began to return to his soul and he began to relax, realizing that somehow God would protect and keep them safe.

Chapter Fifteen

“Encouragement”

The five friends stood on a woven rug that rested on a hardwood floor in Steve’s living room. Steve was praying for the group and requesting that their Heavenly Father God would guide them and lead them in the ministry in communistic Russia, where suspicion and fear were rampant. Under the *new* Russian government no Christians could worship together, except in Russian Orthodox churches or in liturgical churches that were controlled by the communistic government.

Any other churches were outlawed and the members were to be arrested and put into labor camps. Steve prayed for the Christians in the labor camps and for the people in the small town of Medvedski where Sergey came from, requesting that their eyes might be opened to see that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that only Jesus Christ can save them from their sins.

After Steve finished praying, Sergey (a burly, middle-aged Russian with a longish brown beard) cleared his throat and said, “I feel God is showing me to pray for my old coworker, Vasily Volvakov. God showed me that Vasily is now a believer in Jesus Christ and that he is in a difficult time in his life.”

Alexei, a red-bearded Russian man in his late thirties, looked at Sergey with a questioning look, combined with surprise. “Really? Vasily is saved?”

“Yes,” Sergey said to Alexei. “I don’t know what happened after God had translated me and the other people staying at my house, but I know Vasily was not with our group. He also had expressed skepticism about Christianity. And, God had showed me that Vasily had reported me to the communist authorities, but God had translated us away from Medvedski before the Russian soldiers could reach my *izba* home.”

“Did God show you where Vasily is now?” Jason Harper (a clean-shaven Caucasian American in his thirties) said.

“No,” Sergey said, shaking his head. “I don’t know, but I know that Vasily needs our prayers.”

“Let’s pray then,” Steven (a man in his mid-thirties with a short, brown beard) said.

Together they prayed for Vasily. Sergey opened the prayer session, and Sarah (a brunette who was in her mid-thirties, who was married to Steve) was the last to pray. Sarah prayed for Vasily to seek God and turn to Him with all his heart and soul, believing that God would show Vasily what God’s direction for his life would be.

When they were done praying an hour and a half later, Steve looked at the group, smiling. “God has shown me that He wants to give a message to the group.”

All eyes looked at Steve as he continued, “I will only speak what God has me to say.”

Then, Steve began speaking as the Holy Spirit prompted him, putting the words into his mouth:

“‘My children,’ says God, ‘I am your God and your Abba Father, and I love you all very much. You will be going to the village of Medvedski very soon. I will protect you from Russian guards and from evil people. The village needs to hear the Gospel message and see Me work signs and wonders.

“I will bless you as you depend on Me, and do My will. I will protect all of you like I have already been doing. You remember how I protected you from the Chinese soldiers that sought your life? I will do the same for you in Russia as I did for you in China. I will never leave you nor forsake you, and I will never leave nor forsake anyone who seeks Me and does My will. I will bless all who seek Me, and I will guide them into all truth. I love you all very much. Keep your eyes and ears on Me, and you will do well.

“Meditate in My Word to get the food your souls and spirits need, and I will greatly bless you. I love you all very much. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Wow,” Alexei said. “Praise God that He will protect us and provide for us even in the heart my country.”

“God is good,” Jason said, smiling, looking up toward the front door. “I can see Jesus Christ smiling at us, standing beside the door.”

“How do you see Him?” Sergey asked, confused.

“I don’t actually see Jesus the way I see you,” Jason said, “but I sense His presence and love, and I can get the faintest hint of his appearance. It is like God puts this into my mind and spirit. It is not a vision, but I can detect Him standing over beside your doorway.”

“That is amazing,” Sergey said, looking at the door. “I wish I could see Jesus like you do. But, I don’t know if Jesus would let me sense Him like that.”

“Oh,” Jason said, smiling, “He certainly **will** let you sense Him and picture His appearance because He has no favorites. He loves us all equally. Romans chapter 2, verse 11, says, ‘**For there is no respect of persons with God.**’”

Sergey just grunted and scratched his longish, brown beard.

Jason said, “In Deuteronomy chapter 10, verses 17 and 18, we read: ‘[17] For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward: [18] He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.’ **The word *terrible* means awesome or inspiring awe.** God does not have anyone who He regards higher than others. He treats us equally to His love and compassion, and He desires to have an intimate relationship with all of us.”

Sergey continued stroking his beard, in thought, while he listened and pondered Jason’s words.

“Now,” Jason continued, “we will not experience God’s love and intimate closeness, unless we truly desire it and ask Him for it. In James chapter 4, verse 8, says: ‘**Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.**’ God is not asking us to work for His love. Rather, He is asking us to desire His love.”

“Please explain,” Alexei said, entering the conversation.

Jason said: “Our choice may be either to shut the door of our hearts to having closeness with God’s heart, or to open the door of our hearts to experience God’s closeness and compassionate love. We have to decide whether we will believe God’s Holy Word, the Bible, and desire close fellowship with God, or whether we will be content with what we already have.”

“How do we desire closeness with God?” Sergey said.

“When we want to know a friend better, we would like to spend more time with him or her, correct? When Steve and Sarah were dating, they wanted to spend much time together...” Jason looked at the couple saying, “Didn’t you?”

“That’s right,” Steve said, glancing at his wife.

Sarah smiled at Steve and said, “I couldn’t actually love Steve if I didn’t want to spend plenty of time with him.”

“You see,” Jason continued, “God loves us and desires that we spend time with Him, but it is about fellowship with God, not performing for God.”

Looking at his friend, Jason said, “Steve, do you perform for Sarah to love you?”

“No,” Steve chuckled. “I don’t do works to make her love me. I know she loves me. It’s the reason we’re married. She loves me in spite of my faults. She knows I’m not perfect and that I mess up, but she knows that I tell her I’m sorry, and repent, and show love to her.”

“Now,” Jason said, turning toward Sergey, “marriage is not a perfect example of the relationship we can have with our loving Abba Father God, but it is a picture. God desires to have close fellowship with His creation. That’s us. And, a good marriage is a creation of God to give us a picture of the relationship He wants with us.”

“Thank you for sharing that information with me,” Sergey said. “I will think about it. I want to have a deeper walk with God.”

Sergey took a white, ceramic cup of water from a coffee table and drank from it. Then, he said, “I realize that I need that now, especially with all the trials I expect to go through in the near future.”

“But,” Jason said, “that close, personal relationship with God will bless you, whether you are having trials and difficulties, or not.”

“I feel that God wants to speak to us another message,” Steven said.

“Go ahead,” Jason said, looking at his friend.

“Here’s what God is saying now,” Steve said before he let God’s Spirit speak through his mouth.

“‘My children, I am the Lord your God, and I love you all very much,’ says God. ‘I will guide you into all truth, for I am the Truth, and all My ways are true, and righteous, and good. Seek to know Me better than you do now, and I will help you to grow, and I will help you to get to know Me much better than you have ever known Me before. **Some of you have had wrongful beliefs about Me, but I will help those to change as you look to Me, and meditate on My Word, the Bible.**”

“The Bible is your book of blessing, for through its pages I will reveal nuggets of gold that will help your souls and spirits to grow, and to know Me much better. That is why I preserved My Word, and that is why I still preserve it for you so that you can be benefited and blessed. **Obey My Word, the Bible, and you will prosper. Look to Me, and you will live.** Now, rest, My children, and I will meet all your needs. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

When Steve was finished speaking as the Holy Spirit guided him, a calm and peaceful atmosphere settled over the group. Faces looked up and eyes closed as the members of this small team quietly prayed and sought God. After a while had passed, Alexei said, “I believe God is showing me that He would like us to prepare for being translated to the village of Medvedski tomorrow.”

“Praise God,” Steve said.

“I’m grateful for your prayers and encouragement,” Sergey said. “I have struggled in trying to believe that God really is fully here to love and care for me. But, I will choose to believe that truth. I’m also grateful for your hospitality, Steve, and for your delicious apple pie, Sarah.”

“You’re welcome,” Steve and Sarah said in unison, smiling cheerfully.

“Meeting”

Hu Zheng and Cheng Yuan had heard a loud snap and a rustling of bushes coming from a place in the dense, Yunnan jungle some distance behind Hu. The young Chinese man stood to his feet, feeling fear tighten around his mid-section as he gazed into the bushes in the afternoon sunlight. The rustling had stopped suddenly and the jungle remained fairly still, except for the occasional chirping of birds and distant hooting of macaques and other monkeys.

“Who goes there?” Hu said, tensely, in Chinese, hoping it wasn’t a tiger or a Chinese soldier.

At last, the bushes parted, and a man shoved his way through. He appeared to be ethnic Vietnamese and smiled at the two other men and said, “Greetings.”

Dressed in black trousers, sandals, and a blue collared shirt, which was un-tucked, the man appeared to be in his forties, about the age of Cheng Yuan. He carried a backpack and a walking stick, like the other Asian men.

“Who are you?” Hu asked him, feeling a little more relieved that he wasn’t a Chinese soldier.

“I am Nguyen Duc Quang. My surname is Nguyen. Duc is my middle name. But, you can just call me Quang,” the Vietnamese man said in perfect Mandarin Chinese. “You must be Christians.”

“How do you know?” Cheng asked, approaching Quang.

“My Father God told me that there were Christians heading south through the jungle,” Quang said. “I was to go meet you and bring you back to the city of refuge.”

“A city of refuge?” Hu said, confused. “What city are you speaking of?”

“It is called *The City of Blessing*. God has miraculously provided this large town in a jungle of Mainland Southeast Asia,” Quang said. “I cannot tell you exactly which country it lies within, because God doesn’t want me to reveal its exact location, but I came from that town just yesterday. I was translated into the jungle some distance from the town and spent part of a day walking along animal trails. People from all over Southeast Asia have come or been miraculously transported to that city of refuge.”

“I look forward to going there,” Hu said. “My family has turned on me and will not have anything to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They despise me. My aunt threatened to turn me in to the communistic authorities if I didn’t renounce my faith in Jesus Christ.”

“That must be also why God sent me to you,” Quang said.

“I know I am basically a stranger to you,” Quang said, glancing from one man to another, “but I feel God has been showing me something. The Spirit of God has revealed to me that very soon the Antichrist and the False prophet will come to the earth to lead the world into the worship of Satan and the New Age religion of humanism, sorcery, and Satanism. All this will be cleverly disguised to look legitimate to the world, but it will be very deceptive.”

“Wow,” Hu said, shaking his head in amazement as he listened.

“People must start seeking God like never before,” Quang continued, “and must go where God sends them to go. If they remain part of this world system, they could be greatly deceived. I understand that everyone on this planet will worship the Antichrist and receive the mark of the beast, unless their names are written in the book of life, or unless they are in the most remote parts of the world (where no electricity and modern infrastructure is to be found) and they do not follow evil spirits to their own destruction.”

“The Antichrist is coming soon,” Cheng said, agreeing. “I have heard how the Chinese government is just starting to force people to move to large cities, and is taking them off their land, and away from their villages. Any who resist the change are being beaten into submission or are being bribed with extra benefits. But, many willingly go because they will have better access to healthcare and better access to the job market.”

“I haven’t paid much attention to the news,” Hu said. “So, what happens to the villages they leave behind?”

“The villages are either bulldozed or left abandoned,” Cheng said.

“This is all to prepare for the new world order and the mark of the beast that the book of Revelation speaks about,” Quang said as he removed his backpack and set it on the ground. Then, he opened the top flap and reached into the sack. Pulling a red-leather Bible from within, the Vietnamese man flipped through the pages until he came to a certain spot.

“Here is Revelation chapter 13, verses 1 and 2,” Quang said. “It says: ‘[1] And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. [2] And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.’ The dragon is referred to in Revelation chapter 12, verse 9, as Satan. Satan gives this beast power, a throne, and great authority. This beast is the Antichrist, as he commonly is called.”

A distant droning cry of jet engines reached their ears from miles away as a passenger airliner approached from high in the atmosphere.

“So, doesn’t the Antichrist die and rise back to life,” Hu said, ignoring the sound of the distant jet engines.

“That is what appears to happen,” Quang said. “Now, Revelation chapter 13, in verses 3 and 4, speaks of the Antichrist dying and appearing to rise to life. It says: ‘[3] And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. [4] And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?’

“So, the Antichrist is killed, but he rises to life again, as it seems. And, the whole world worships him and marvels over his supposed ‘resurrection.’ Now, people that live in very remote areas will not worship the Antichrist or know exactly what is going on in the world beyond their isolated homes because they do not have access to the internet, satellite TV, or radios.”

“Why do you say that people in remote parts won’t worship the Antichrist or know about him?” Hu said. “I thought it said in the scripture that all the world worshipped the dragon and the beast.”

Quang said: “When the Bible says that all the world wondered after the beast and worshiped the beast, it obviously excludes true Christians because we are not part of the world system. Revelation chapter 13, verse 8, says: ‘And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.’ I memorized that verse because of its importance in understanding this scripture. So, all who are not written in the

book of life, and who dwell on the earth, shall worship the Antichrist.”

“That’s interesting,” Hu said, scratching his clean-shaven face.

“We know that God sees the future,” Quang continued. “I believe that all the people who dwell in remote areas of the world will either be saved and be born again, or will leave their remote regions and join cities and towns where they will willingly accept the mark of the beast. Then, it is certain that those ones will never be written in the book of life.

“But, the ones who are not saved in our time, who dwell in the jungles, if they choose to make Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord, they will be saved, even after the Antichrist arrives on the scene. Their names will be written in the book of life. So, even when the Antichrist is ruling over the earth, those ones, who will eventually turn to God in the future, will not know about the Antichrist or serve him. But, if their neighbors greatly resist God’s Spirit calling out to them, I believe they will listen to the enemy, and will leave their villages and jungles, and will enter the towns and cities where they will willingly receive the mark of the beast. I believe that demons will draw them into those towns and cities so that they can receive the mark of the beast.”

“I never thought about it like that,” Hu said. “So, the Bible itself is not saying that every person on the planet will actually worship the Antichrist, unless God sees that those people will never make Jesus Christ their Savior and Lord.”

“For life,” Quang added.

Seeing Hu’s confused expression, Quang said, “Some people will not make Jesus their Lord and Savior for life. At some point, some Christians will turn from their faith, and serve their flesh, and serve their own will, instead of God and His will.”

“But, I remember a Bible verse where Jesus said –” Hu said as he reached for his backpack. Within twenty seconds, he pulled out his Bible and flipped through the pages until he reached a certain spot he had bookmarked.

“Jesus said to some people who claimed to do miracles,” Hu continued, “that He never knew them. Listen to what He said in Matthew 7:22. Jesus said: ‘**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?**’ But, In verse 23, Jesus said: ‘**And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.**’ So, you see right there, Jesus was saying that He never knew them, even though they called him Lord and claimed to do miracles in His Name.”

“That is a good point you make, Hu, but God showed me something interesting about this scripture I think you will find interesting,” Quang said.

“Yes,” Hu said, listening curiously.

“I encourage you to seek God about it for yourself,” Quang said. “But God showed me an example of a pillar in the temple of God. In the book of Revelation, chapter 3, verse 12, Jesus says that those who overcome will be made into a pillar in the temple of God in Heaven. This is figuratively saying

that we will be part of the temple of God and will never leave it, meaning the body of Christ.”

“Hmm,” Hu said, nodding in agreement. “That makes sense.”

“Now, a person who falls away is not a pillar in God’s temple because he or she did not overcome in the end,” Quang said. “But, the person who overcomes is said to be a pillar in God’s temple. Now, God showed me that if a person were to live 900 years and serve God for 90 percent of that time, or 810 years, and if he were to fall away from the faith, his service to God would still be nothing compared to eternity.

“If you divide any number by infinity, you will only get zero. So, the time that the 900 year old man spent serving God is still zero compared to eternity. But, I was bothered by the fact that God said He never knew him. So, I asked God about that verse. Do you want to know what He showed me?”

“Yes,” Hu said. Cheng, standing nearby, nodded in agreement.

“If we imagine that we saw time from God’s eternal perspective,” Quang said, “we could picture that every person’s life is like a column of some material.”

Quang turned and looked around at the jungle. Spotting a long stick, he took it and jammed it vertically into the soft dirt so that it stood upright.

“What are you doing?” Cheng asked, knitting his brow in wonderment at the Vietnamese’s actions.

“You’ll see,” Quang said as he walked a short distance away from the others.

Quang looked around until he saw some rocks the size of basket balls. He grunted as he lifted and carried the stones, one at a time, and stacked three of them into a column beside the upright stick.

Dusting his hands off, Quang said, “Again, every person’s life is like a column of some material. As people go through life, the column grows in height, from their limited perspective. God sees the whole picture and sees all time. So, God sees the end result of their life and all their decisions. A person who once served God only has a nanometer-thin section of granite. The rest of their column of life, which stretches into the infinite future, is not granite or any stone. Instead, it is rotten wood.” He gestured toward the vertical stick.

“Okay,” Cheng said, nodding.

“Now, the Christian, who does not fall away from his faith, is a pillar of solid granite,” Quang said, motioning toward the column of stacked rocks. “The nanometer-thin section of rotten wood that was their sinful past has been removed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and they are a beautiful granite pillar that stretches into eternity, like a ray. You are familiar with a mathematical ray?”

“Yes,” Hu said. “It is a point with an infinite line shooting from it.”

“That is how God sees each person’s existence,” Quang said. “We all know that human spirits and souls cannot cease to exist. Since we are made in God’s image, we exist for ever. So, if we serve God during our life on earth, after we are saved by Jesus Christ, we are a pillar of granite in God’s temple. But, if we serve God for some or most of our life on earth, but fall away from the faith at the end, we

would only have served God for a length of time comparable to a nanometer or a nanosecond of eternity.

“A person whose life is a rotten log, with only a very thin section of granite, is not a pillar. Such a person is not one of God’s elect, who He knows will stay with Him to the end (by way of their own free will choosing to obey Him). You see what I’m saying?”

“That makes sense,” Hu said. “But, I wonder if there are scriptures speaking of the falling away of former Christians.”

“Yes,” Quang said, “there are **many** scriptures. One example is in Hebrews chapter 3, verse 13, which says: ‘**But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**’ Sin is deceitful, and we can harden ourselves against God’s conviction by sinning against His Word and His Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were never removed.

“The book of Galatians, Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, and all of the New Testament books reiterate the Ten Commandments in different ways. Sinning against God will make us hardened against Him. And, the next verse in Hebrews 3 (verse 14) says: ‘**For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;**’ We can only be partakers of Jesus Christ if we are faithful to His Word and faithful to repent when we are convicted of sin.” [*See the “Footnote” at the end.*]

“That is very sobering,” Hu said. “I guess I never read that verse carefully. I should look at the book of Hebrews again.”

“Another scripture contains the very words Jesus spoke to his disciples in Matthew 13,” Quang said. “In Matthew chapter 13, verse 22, Jesus said: ‘**He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.**’”

“Who is this speaking of?” Cheng asked.

Quang walked over to a wild *pomelo* tree ten yards away. Reaching down to a rotting pomelo fruit,* which had fallen to the ground, Quang picked it up and returned to his friends. (**A type of large citrus fruit with green skin.*)

“The man who hears God’s word, and allows the ways of the world to choke out his spiritual life, so that he becomes unfruitful, is a man who once had spiritual life to begin with,” Quang said, holding the rotten fruit. Flies were buzzing around it. “He *becomes* unfruitful. That means, of course, that he was fruitful at one time, but he lost that fruitfulness. The only way he could have fruit was that he was at one time a branch connected to Jesus Christ, the tree.*” (* *See John chapter 15.*)

“That is a good point,” Hu said, thinking deeply about what Quang said.

“In Matthew chapter 7, verse 21, Jesus said: ‘**Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.**’ People will call Jesus ‘Lord,’ but they will not obey His will. Getting back to the parable about the ground or soils, Jesus taught that different people received salvation, which is represented by a seed.”

Quang dropped the fruit and picked up his Bible. He flipped through the pages until he reached a certain place, and said, "In Luke chapter 8, Jesus spoke of a sower sowing seed in different types of ground. The soils in which the seed was sown represent believers or temporary believers, while the footpath represents unbelievers who reject God's Word immediately."

"Some people rejected the Gospel once they heard it," Quang said, looking from Hu to Cheng. "They are the path Jesus speaks of in verse 5 of Luke 8. Jesus said: 'A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.' Birds came and snatched away the seed because it was rejected by the people with that type of heart."

Hu nodded solemnly, thinking of his uncle Bo, his aunt Li, and his parents. He hoped they would receive Jesus Christ soon. He wanted to pray for them regularly that their eyes would be opened to the Gospel and to God's love for them.

"Other people," Quang continued, "are the rocky soil that had shallow depth of earth. They receive the Gospel seed, and the seed sprouts into a plant. They are saved, but when trials and hardships come, they reject Jesus Christ, and turn away from Him. Their plant withers up."

"That is very sobering," Cheng said quietly while he listened.

"Still others are like the weed-filled soil, as I mentioned earlier," Quang said. "They may start out good, being born-again, but weeds creep into their hearts and choke out the life of God in their hearts. Then, they reject Jesus Christ in favor of the cares of this life and other things of a worldly nature. There is no more room for Jesus in their hearts, and they cease to produce fruit. Jesus said that those who produce no fruit, or bad fruit, are to be cut down and cast into the fire."

"Where did Jesus say that?" Hu asked, reaching for his Bible, which he had set down on his backpack.

"Matthew 7:19," Quang said. "In Matthew chapter 7, verse 19, Jesus said: 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.' Then He says this in verse 21, which I quoted earlier: 'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'"

"That is concerning to me," Cheng said, swallowing.

Both Quang and Hu looked at him, wondering what he'd say next.

"I must confess that I lied to you earlier, Hu," Cheng said, looking down.

"Huh?" Hu said. "When?"

"I told you earlier that my wife and young children are not Christians, but I lied to you," Cheng said with sadness in his voice. "In actuality, My wife is a Christian, but she didn't want to come with me into the jungle. She preferred to stay put and tell the authorities a lie that she was not a Christian.

“I was ashamed to tell you about this earlier, but the Holy Spirit has been convicting me about lying to you. My wife even took down papers with scripture verses, which we had posted up in our house, because she was afraid someone might see it and know she was a Christian.”

“Oh,” Hu said, a little surprised.

“I wanted her to leave all and come with me,” Cheng continued, “but she didn’t believe that God would provide for us in the jungle, and she said she would miss her parents and her friends. I told her that if she refused to honor God and confess that she was a Christian, God would eventually have to deny her.

“But, she wouldn’t listen to me. I told her that she had to refuse to deny her faith in God and that God would help her, but she said I should not tell her what to do. I left with my backpack early that morning, long before the sun rose. The last I know is that she still believes that she should lie about her faith.”

“That is hard, very hard,” Hu said. “I’ll pray for her.”

“Do you forgive me for lying to you?” Cheng said. “I was wrong for doing that.”

“I forgive you,” Hu said, smiling reassuringly.

“So, does what I shared with you two make sense, scripturally?” Quang asked.

“I need to study the Bible passages you shared and seek God about it, but I am starting to see what you are saying,” Hu said.

Footnote: Here is Hebrews chapter 3, verses 7-19, for context. These speak of the falling away. Please pay attention to verse 13.

Hebrews 3:7-19

7 Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice,

8 Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness:

9 When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.

10 Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways.

11 So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

14 For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;

15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the

provocation.

16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?

18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Chapter Sixteen

“The Arrest”

The Russian *izba* cabin, where Sergey lived, was not empty while he was gone. Sergey’s brown cat sat on its favorite seat, a rocking chair a short distance from a green potbelly stove. A fire crackled in the stove, warming the home in preparation for soon-to-arrive travelers. A bearded man, dressed in white, stood in the room. He wore a white, long sleeve shirt, white trousers, and sand-colored boots. He appeared to be in his early thirties and had toned muscles and brown hair. The cat would not have known that an angel had been taking care of it while its owner was gone.

Suddenly, the angel vanished right as the cat’s eyes closed shut. A few minutes passed before the animal peered out from its comfortable seat and listened to the ambient sounds in the room: the crackling fire in the stove, the hum of light bulbs in a ceiling fixture, and the sound of the wind blowing gently against the windows outside.

The cat hopped down to the ground and looked around the room while its ears shifted positions, listening for the man dressed in white. The cat knew its owner had not turned up yet. It knew that a man (named Vasily), who was staying at its owner’s house, was forcibly removed from the home by Russian soldiers, who arrested him. It had no idea that the soldiers had come to the home to arrest its owner Sergey.

The soldiers had arrested Vasily because they thought he had helped Sergey and his Christian guests escape, even though he hadn’t, for Vasily had called in the raid by reporting the Christians to the authorities. Many hours after Vasily was gone and the house was empty of humans, a man dressed in white had appeared in the home. The cat did not see the man materialize from thin air, but it saw him come from the second story down the staircase. The man had fed the cat and had kept the house warm while the cat’s owner, Sergey, was gone.

Now, as the cat looked around for the kind man who was dressed in white, it suddenly jumped several feet into the air, surprised, and ran to a corner of the room, terrified at what had just happened.

For, in that moment, five people had suddenly appeared in the living room. Sergey, Jason, Alexei, Steven, and Sarah looked around at their new surroundings, remembering Sergey's old cabin home. They had just been translated by invisible angels to the *izba* cabin and were a little shocked at seeing the sudden change of surroundings.

"Wow," Sergey said. "We're here, just where God said He'd take us. Every time I'm translated, I have a little of the feeling you get after you step out of a roller coaster once it comes to the end. I don't know what to describe it like."

"It is exhilarating," Sarah said, tucking some strands of hair behind an ear.

"It is God's awesome power that I can never stop feeling ... awe over," Jason said, looking around the cabin, somewhat dazed by the sudden shift from his home in the Eurasian city of refuge to the Russian *izba*.

The brown cat curiously poked its head out from behind the couch and looked at the people. In its memory it thought it was sure it had seen those same people earlier, some weeks ago, it seemed.

After the group got adjusted to the cabin again, Sergey walked into his kitchen, opened his ice chest, which could act as a refrigerator or an ice chest, and pulled out some smoked meat. When the power was out, it was kept cold by ice taken from a small lake.

"I can't expect you all to just stand around and not eat anything," Sergey said. "Let's have some breakfast, shall we?"

Then, Sergey picked up a metal cooking pot and slipped out his back door. Tromping through the snow, he approached a small building beside his storage shed where he kept his snowmobiles. It was a homemade, wooden, insulated, chicken coop in the middle of a yard enclosed by a chicken wire fence to give the chickens space for recreation.

A long nesting box protruded from the side of the large coop to provide easy access to the chicken eggs. Reaching over to the protruding nesting box, Sergey opened a flap to see a small pile of eggs. He removed them gently, placing each one carefully into his cooking pot.

"Sergey," a man's voice said from a short distance away, "it looks like you've returned home."

Sergey turned to see his neighbor, Egor Aminev. It felt like a long time since he last saw him. The man didn't know that he was a non-conformist Christian, and Sergey had liked it that way. But now, being translated back to his home, Sergey knew he was there for a reason.

Egor, who was a fairly slim man in his mid-forties, with slicked-back blond hair, was smoking a cigarette, as usual. His sunken cheeks and pale skin made him look rather ghostly and a little gaunt. Sergey knew that Egor was a heavy smoker who sometimes suffered from not having enough to eat for his body size, since he gambled much of it away on internet casinos. And, the cost of cigarettes certainly cut into his food budget. Sergey felt bad for him.

"When did you get back from your trip, Sergey?" Egor asked, blowing some harmful smoke from his lungs. "Where did you go?"

“I got back today from a long trip in Eurasia,” Sergey said. “How would you like to have breakfast with me? I have some guests.”

The sun was just barely starting to rise in the distance, lighting distant clouds with hints of orange. Wolves howled in distant parts of the nearby evergreen forest, which was frosted with white powder.

“You want to give me breakfast?” Egor said. He looked like he was thinking hard about something. Finally, he said, “I, I... sure. I’d be happy to have breakfast. I have some potatoes and soup from my dinner last night. I could bring those over.”

“Oh,” Sergey said, “there is no need. Just come over.”

“You probably don’t want my smoke in your house,” Egor said.

“You could just leave the cigarette in a tray outside and pick it up on your way out,” Sergey said, warmly, knowing the harm of tobacco smoke.

“Okay,” Egor said. Then, he looked furtively left and right before he said in a low voice, “Sergey, did you realize that while you were gone on your trip, soldiers broke into your house. Your front door is damaged. Once they were gone, I shut your door and tried to keep an eye on your house, but I got really busy the next few days and couldn’t look after your house. So, I couldn’t take care of your cat or chickens, just to let you know.”

“They were fine. And, I didn’t notice any damage on my front door. So, don’t worry,” Sergey said, trying to remain calm. He was concerned where the conversation was headed.

“I have to ask you a question. Why were soldiers breaking into your house?” Egor said, looking left and right nervously as he drew on his cigarette. “Are you wanted by the government or something? Could I be in trouble for just talking with you?”

“Egor,” Sergey said calmly, feeling God’s peace enter his soul, “I am a Christian and a follower of Jesus Christ. He is protecting me from the communists. I am safe from harm. It was God who sent me away from my home before the soldiers arrived to arrest me. He is taking care of me and He will take care of you, if you turn to Jesus Christ for salvation.”

Egor backed away and squinted at Sergey. “I just realized that I need to get ready for work, and that I will have to be at my job an hour early. Yeah. It was nice talking. Good bye.”

With that, Egor turned around and headed toward his front door. He disappeared into his house, shutting the door tightly behind him. Sergey felt a feeling of dread begin to fill his heart and tug at his chest. ‘Egor could report me to the police in just a few minutes from now,’ Sergey thought. ‘While I and my guests are eating, the police could arrive to arrest me. What should I do? Should I attach a trailer to a snowmobile, and have two others take the second snowmobile, and then head off into the forest? But, we don’t have provisions for living in the woods.’ The thoughts raced through his mind.

Sergey set the cooking pot full of eggs down into the snow and hurried back toward his house. Pulling the back door open, he closed it quickly behind him and looked at the four others with alarm in his face.

Steve and Sarah were talking with Jason while Alexei was petting the brown cat and scratching under its chin.

“Friends, I believe we have been identified as enemies of the state,” Sergey said, trembling.

The four others turned toward him, concerned.

“Shortly after we left this home and were translated to China, a team of Russian soldiers, seen by my neighbor, broke into this house. This neighbor of mine now knows I am a true Christian and that the soldiers were hunting me down for my faith in God.”

“How did your neighbor know that about you?” Steve asked.

“Egor, my neighbor, saw the soldiers break into my house,” Sergey said, “and I told him that they were coming for me because I was a Christian. But, I shouldn’t have told him that because right after I did, he made up an excuse to leave and vanished inside his house. I think he may be calling the police as I speak. The Russian government is offering money and extra rations to anyone who will turn in a non-conformist Christian. We should get out of here as soon as we can.”

“Sergey,” Steve said calmly, “didn’t God protect us from the Chinese soldiers when God translated us to China?”

Sergey inhaled deeply and sighed. “Yes,” he said.

“Didn’t God protect you from the Russians that were about to arrest you when you had new Christians staying in your home?” Steve said. “He translated you away from the soldiers, didn’t He?”

A pause followed Steve’s words. Sergey frowned in thought and pursed his lips.

“That is right,” Sergey said half a minute later. “That is right,” he said more strongly. “God did protect me, didn’t He?”

“And, God will continue to protect us, Sergey,” Alexei piped up.

“Excuse me,” Sergey said as he headed toward the back door.

“What is he doing?” Sarah said right before the door closed behind the burly Russian.

Back outside, Sergey retrieved the cooking pot with the eggs. Then, after returning to the kitchen, he fired up a propane burner and fried them in a metal pan. He threw in sliced pieces of smoked meat and some herbs. After they were thoroughly cooked, he turned the burner off and, leaving the pan atop it, he headed toward a cabinet where he stored his plates and bowls. As he was reaching for a plate, a loud knocking sound shot through the air. Rap. Rap. Rap.

It had issued from the front door. Hearing it, everyone froze.

Rap. Rap. Rap. The knocking continued. “Dear Father God,” Sergey said quietly with fear in his heart, “what should I do? Who is that?”

“Go and answer the door, My son. I will never leave you, nor forsake you,” God’s voice replied calmly.

Finally, Sergey headed toward the door, struggling with fearful thoughts, but trying to maintain his composure.

He opened the door to see a man dressed in a warm, dark-blue jacket with a wide, furry collar; a *ushanka* hat; wool trousers; and shiny, black boots.

“Are you Sergey Ulanov?” the police officer asked coldly.

A black leather belt strapped around his waist held gun magazines, a pistol holster, a flashlight, a truncheon, a two-way radio, handcuffs, and other police gear. Sergey felt his heart sink into his stomach, but he silently began giving his fears to God, and a sense of peace slowly returned to him.

“Yes, I am,” Sergey said. “What is this about?”

“I hereby place you under arrest for conducting illegal activities in your home,” the officer said, reaching for his handcuffs.

“What?” Sergey said, dumbfounded. He wondered to himself how God could allow this to happen.

“Please stand against the wall with your hands raised,” the officer said.

Then, Sergey noticed two black police *GAZ Tiger* trucks* with three additional officers either in the street or in his yard. One of them was approaching Sergey’s front door from behind the first police officer. [**Or "GAZ Tigr" trucks. Tigr is Russian for tiger.*]

Reluctantly, Sergey backed up against the door and raised his hands, wondering what God was going to do now. He knew that if those police officers put him in prison, he would be sent to a concentration camp. And, his guests would be interrogated by the police and subsequently arrested.

“Turn around,” the officer ordered gruffly.

Then, Sergey heard God the Father’s loving voice speak to his spirit and soul: “My son, I will have you call on My power to blind these men. Elisha called on My power to blind the men who sought after his life, and so it will be with you. Call on My power, and you will see a miracle happen.”

Then, Sergey, still facing the police officer, said calmly and with a new sense of supernatural peace: “I command your eyes to be blinded, that you will not see, and your feet to turn around and head back where you came from, in the Name of Jesus Christ, My God, and Lord, and Savior.”

The police officer squinted at Sergey, holding the handcuffs in his hands, and reached for his pistol in its holster, but then, he stopped. Breaths of vapor shot from his nose into the cold air. It seemed like minutes passed. Sergey’s heartbeat seemed to thump in his ears. Then, the officer stretched out his right hand and moved it through the air as if feeling for something, and he said, “I can’t see. What did you do to me? I’m blind!”

He groped and stumbled down the steps toward the snow-covered yard. Then, he walked back and forth, shouting, "I'm blind. Someone help me."

The three other police officers walked over to him, baffled by his antics.

"Ivan," an officer said to the blind man, raising three fingers, "how many fingers am I holding up?"

"Don't you get it?" the blind officer said angrily. "I can't see. That man did something to my eyes. It's like magic. He did something to me."

"I'm going to put a stop to this," another officer said, reaching for his pistol, but that moment, his hand stopped and hovered over the holster.

He rubbed both eyes, blinked several times, and squinted. Then, he said, "I can't see anything. What happened to the sun?"

"You can't see either?" a different officer said, astonished.

"Let's get out of here. This place is cursed," a police officer said, grabbing one of the blind men by the hand and pulling him toward a police truck.

The other seeing officer directed his blind friend into the other police truck. Once the doors were shut, the black *GAZ Tiger* trucks roared to life and drove quickly through the streets, away from Sergey's cabin. Less than two minutes later, the loud hum of the truck engines faded into the distance.

Sergey breathed a sigh of relief, gazing out at the town and the tire tracks in the snow near his yard. He had been spared arrest by another miracle of God, and Sergey was very grateful. Lifting up his arms, he praised God, rejoicing in Abba God's love and power, and then he turned and slipped back into his house.

"What happened?" Sarah asked, approaching him with curiosity and surprise on her face.

"The police attempted to arrest me," Sergey said with joy in his face, "but God told me to call for blindness on the officer arresting me. The man became as blind as if he were in a dark cave. He couldn't see where he was going. Another officer reached for his gun, but God struck him with blindness so that he could not see where he was going either. The seeing officers pulled the blind ones into their police trucks and drove off. Praise God!"

"Wow," Steve said, amazed. "I am just struck by how God works to protect us from all harm. Praise His Holy Name!"

"God spoke to me while they were about to arrest me and reminded me of how Elisha prayed for all the soldiers, who sought to arrest him, to be blinded, by the power of God. And, it happened. I can't remember where that was in the Bible."

"That is from 2 Kings, chapter 6," Sarah said, remembering what she had read in her daily Bible reading.

“What does the verse say?” Sergey asked.

“Let me find it,” Sarah said, reaching for a backpack God had translated (or moved) with her. She pulled out a Bible and flipped through the pages. Then, she found her place and began reading, “It says in 2 Kings, chapter 6, verse 18: ‘**And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.**’” *[Bold font was added.]*

“Praise God for His awesome love and power! He did for us what He did for Elisha,” Jason said, lifting both hands Heavenward. “Praise God that He does not respect one person above another! As He was in the Old Testament, God is today in this New Covenant, in which we live, working the same miracles as He did in the book of Acts and in the Old Testament.”

The five people began rejoicing and praising God. After a while, they turned back to their breakfast, which was now cold, sitting in the frying pan. But, all agreed in their hearts that the food was nothing compared to the miracle of deliverance God had just done for them.

“Fire”

“Mark, come quick,” Sizwe said, motioning for Mark to come. Sizwe had been working in his large garage while Mark Mzembi had gone on a walk around the farm. As Mark passed by the garage, Sizwe, wearing grease-stained overalls, had come running out the wide open double door of the garage with a look of concern on his face.

“What is it?” Mark said as Sizwe approached with a concerned look on his face.

“Something big is happening to South Africa, my country,” Sizwe said. “Come, listen to the radio.”

Sizwe led Mark into the garage where a tractor was sitting on the concrete floor with its hood open, exposing the diesel engine within. Beside it rested a large tool box.

“Listen,” Sizwe said, pointing to a radio sitting on a work table, in a corner of the garage.

“We are getting reports,” said the broadcaster, “that armed men dressed in military fatigues and wearing black scarves over their faces are attacking residential neighborhoods of Cape Town and Bloemfontein. In Johannesburg car bombs went off in a crowded mall. The military and special police units are now actively engaged in fighting these terrorists as I speak. People have reported multiple gunshots and machine gun fire throughout Cape Town, Bloemfontein, and Johannesburg. We do not know how many people have been killed or injured because this is a developing situation.”

Mark looked at Sizwe and they exchanged glances.

“My dad lives in Johannesburg,” Mark said as the broadcaster began talking about who might be responsible for the attacks. “I tried calling him the other day, but I couldn’t reach him.”

“I’ll pray for him to be safe,” Sizwe said. “Perhaps, your dad would like to come to my farm. We are

far from any city, except for a small town a few miles away. And, God is protecting us.”

Mark pursed his lip in thought as he walked away from the radio. He was concerned about his dad and mom. Both were in dangerous areas. As the news revealed, South Africa was becoming more dangerous than ever. It seemed it was actually falling apart while terrorists were striking at towns and large cities, killing many people. Something had to happen to put an end to the violence.

“My son,” God’s loving voice spoke to Mark, “I am with you. I love you very much. You are precious to Me. I want you to know that I have a plan for you. You will go to Johannesburg to see your father and tell him to come with you to the farm you are staying at right now. Then, you, and the Mahlangus, and their friends will travel to a place I will show you. For, the farm will only be a temporary resting place for you. It will not be your permanent base.

“I know that your dad says he’s a Christian, but he has never accepted Me as his personal Savior and Lord. He went to church, and he took communion, and he sometimes read his Bible, but he did not trust in Me to save him. Only I can save people and only I can give them life. Now, tell Sizwe what I am showing you. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“What’s wrong, Mark?” Sizwe said with concern, looking at the 32-year-old Zimbabwean.

“God just spoke to me,” Mark said. “He told me that He would like me to bring my dad to your farm, if that would be okay with you.”

“That would be perfectly fine,” Sizwe said. “I have plenty of bedrooms in the house for him to have a place to stay. There are rooms on the top floor and in the basement that are still unused. Or, he could stay with you in the motor home.”

“Also,” Mark said, “God showed me that this farm is a temporary resting place. He showed me that He will have us go to a new place, where I am sure He will also provide for us.”

Hearing that, Sizwe looked at the ground, knitting his brows in thought. “I have a lot of equity in this house and land. And, most of my new farm equipment is still being paid off on a monthly basis. I suppose I will have to sell the equipment so that I will not be liable for the debt. This is tough, very tough. I don’t want to just leave it all behind. Farming has been very successful in the last five years, and Africa needs the food.”

“Sizwe, My son,” God’s kind voice said to the ethnic Zulu.

“Yes, Father God,” Sizwe said. “That must be you.”

“I want you to know that I love you very much,” Abba God said lovingly. “Don’t be concerned about the tractors and the land. I will provide for all your needs. Regarding selling the property, I will show you what to do later. But, seek to know Me and I will bless you greatly. You know Me, but you can grow in your walk with Me. I will guide you in all things. I have a place prepared for you to go to. It will not be in South Africa. It will be in the center of Africa, in a remote region. I will protect you and provide for you there. There will be no harm come to you or your family. Trust Me. I shall keep you all safe from harm and bring other people to join your group. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Heavenly Father,” Sizwe whispered. “I will trust you. Thank you that you will provide for me, and my family, and the guests. I praise your awesome Name! You will never leave us, nor forsake us!”

“What happened?” Mark asked.

“Abba Father God spoke to me,” Sizwe said, excitedly. “He told me that He will provide for all our needs and that He will bring us to a safe place in the center of Africa, in a remote region. It will not be in South Africa. I don’t know how we’ll get there, but God will show us. God will provide!”

“Praise God!” Mark said, happily.

Right after he spoke, the crunching sound of gravel being pressed under a car came from the driveway leading up to the Mahlangus’ two-story house. Mark’s heart seemed to freeze, and his breath caught in his throat. It was the same silver Nissan Titan pickup truck that the thugs had driven when they stole Mark’s Honda motorcycle from him some days ago. Right behind it, another pickup truck crunched up the driveway. This one was a dark red Nissan Titan. The red truck drove straight toward Mark and Sizwe, who both stood in the open door of the repair garage.

The truck pulled up in front of the double door and the four doors flung open. Five armed men wearing scarves over their faces and carrying uzi automatic pistols poured out of the cab and trained their guns on Mark and Sizwe.

“What are you doing here?” Mark said, feeling boldness begin to penetrate his heart as he remembered God’s words to him.

The armed men wore camouflage trousers and khaki shirts or green T-shirts. Ammo clips and grenades sprouted from their tactical belts. Almost all of them wore expensive dark sunglasses.

Menacingly pointing their uzis at Mark and Sizwe, they scowled. One of them, who had a green scarf over his face to conceal his identity, said, “Are you followers of Jesus?”

“Yes,” Sizwe said, piping up. “We serve the living God.”

“We are here to teach you Christians a lesson you will never forget as you suffer in the flames of Hell,” the armed man said, coldly.

Sizwe glanced toward the house in the distance, and was relieved to see that the men in the silver truck were just standing around the truck or beside the front door of the house, apparently waiting for their leader to order the attack.

Mark felt peace come into his soul like he’d never felt before. “My son,” God said to him, “I want you to call fire and brimstone down upon these wicked men. Their hearts are very hardened against Me, and they will not repent from their sins because of the hardness of their hearts. Like Elijah did in the book of 2 Kings, in sending fire from heaven upon the wicked men who sought to take his life, I will have you call fire from heaven upon these wicked men who seek your life and the lives of those who dwell in this place.”

The clicking sound of machine guns being cocked came from a short distance away.

Mark returned his attention to the five armed men. With boldness and peace in his heart, he said: “In the Name of Jesus Christ, My Savior and Lord, I command fire to fall from heaven upon you because you are not going to repent from your wicked deeds.”

The men glanced at each other and laughed. Then, they returned their attention to Sizwe and Mark. “Die, Christians!” one shouted as he took aim with his machine gun and placed his finger against the trigger.

Whoosh! A powerful rushing sound thundered through the air as a bright, orange column of fire, eighteen feet wide, suddenly shot through a gap in the clouds and struck the ground where the thugs and their pickup were. Within the time it took Mark to blink his eyes, the entire truck and all five men were vaporized into dust. No metal frame, engine parts, or drive shaft could be found. No machine guns, or belt buckles, or any item could be seen. The only thing that existed where the five men had been standing was a black, shallow crater in the grass. It was over eighteen feet in diameter.

Mark fell to his knees completely shocked by the magnitude of the destruction. He was unscathed and perfectly whole and well, but the sight took his breath away. “Oh, Lord God, what happened?” Mark said to His Abba Father. “Dear God, what happened? What happened? What happened?”

He kept repeating the phrase over and over, inhaling in short, quick breaths. Sizwe also dropped to his knees and prayed to God, shedding tears of sorrow mingled with joy. He was glad God had spared his and Mark’s lives, but was grieved with the realization that the men who just died were now in Hell.

But, Mark continued to repeat his question. Finally, he stopped repeating it, and began to breath more deeply. The fear was starting to fade as he realized that God had protected him.

“My son, there is no need to be afraid,” God’s kind voice spoke to Mark’s spirit. “What you just witnessed was My power to fulfill My Word and to protect you from all harm. Those wicked men were going to kill you and rape the women. They were going to kill the children and dismember their bodies. I want you to know that I protected your family in Christ from harm. I protected you.

“I will show you greater things than these. You do not need to be concerned about the police. The police have no knowledge of the whereabouts of these criminals. They had no idea the criminals had come to your friend’s house. You are safe. You did not commit any murder because it was My power that brought the fire from heaven and consumed these wicked men who sought to kill you. I love you very much. And, I the LORD your GOD and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you dear Abba Father for protecting us and keeping your Word,” Mark said. “Thank you.”

Sizwe stood to his feet, remembering the other Titan truck, which was silver. He gazed at his house in the distance, and again let out a sigh of relief. The truck was gone. A black patch appeared where the truck had last been parked. There was no sign of the armed men who had been standing beside it. Two columns of fire must have struck the earth simultaneously, he realized. Now, as Sizwe gazed at the house, he thought he remembered seeing a second column strike the earth near the house at the same moment that the one directly in front of him had struck the red pickup truck with its crew.

‘This is amazing,’ Sizwe thought. ‘The God of the Bible was showing Himself powerful and strong,

just as He had in the days of the book of Acts and in the Old Testament. He hadn't changed one bit ever since the last book of the Bible was written.' "Lord Jesus, you are the same today as you were in Bible times," Sizwe said. Then, a verse came to him, which was in Hebrews chapter 13, verse 8: 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.'

Chapter Seventeen

"Communist Attack"

The PLA Chinese major general grimly pored over a map on his large computer screen, in his office. The red flag of the People's Republic of China hung respectfully from a short flagpole in a stand behind his desk, and shiny medals were displayed in glass cases on his wall. Red dots on the map indicated towns and cities where at least three percent or more of the population was known to be Christian. Two numbers, in a small-sized font, appeared above each town. One was red and the other was blue.

He scrolled down the map until he reached the southern provinces of China. The colonel's eyebrows knit together in deep concentration as he studied the red numbers. One town in particular had a high concentration of Christians. This was very concerning to him, since he believed Christians were a dangerous "cult," which could theoretically overthrow his government if the Christians were allowed to continue as they were, hiding from the authorities.

For the town he was focusing on, the red number was: 5,579. The blue number, which appeared below the red number, was: 16,300. The Christians in that town had numbered almost a third of the population of the town of 16,300. As he scrolled down through the enlarged map of the Yunnan province, he noticed that the percentage of Christians was large in a third of the Yunnan villages.

These numbers were from older records, and most of the Christians had gone into hiding. 'By now,' he thought, 'the number of Christians might have increased by ten percent, and they probably are hiding out in caves, or jungles, or moving to other countries.'

'It is time to put a complete end to the Christian religion,' the colonel thought as he scrolled through the map. 'It is time to bring the Christians out of their superstitious beliefs and into the light of communism,' he thought. 'If they will not bow to us, then they will die. We will hunt every last one of them down and either convert them to communism, or kill them.'

"Announcement"

Men and women on bicycles, motorcycles, delivery trucks, and small cars slowly flowed through the streets of the small town of 16,300. Some bicyclists zipped around slower vehicles while avoiding pedestrians. Shops were open in the main street, and sellers displayed various wares and foods, such as bowls of noodles, rice, mushrooms, and vegetables.

Potential customers moved from vendor to vendor, looking at items for sale. Slightly incongruous with the old feel of the town, Chinese tourists, from other provinces, texted on cell phones or sat at outside tables with their computer tablets. At one table, a small group of older men played a traditional Chinese board game.

The sun was out on this peaceful Friday afternoon and the town seemed to be alive with activity. But, while the people carried on with their work or recreation, six-wheeled army trucks began rolling through the streets. Chinese soldiers armed with bullpup-style *Type 95* automatic rifles scanned back and forth through the crowds while they walked on either side of the main street. People looked at them curiously, but pretended to return to work when the soldiers glanced in their directions.

Some of the soldiers, with rifles slung over their shoulders, began plastering brightly colored orange notices on bulletin boards and handing them to shop owners and employees to publicly display. One of the soldiers carrying the notices was a sergeant named Kun Ren, who was in his later twenties. Kun approached a middle aged lady selling rice, fish, dumplings, and stir fry meals from a couple catering carts in front of a small shop, where she and an assistant prepared the food. She looked at him, somewhat startled to see a soldier approaching her.

He handed her an orange notice and said, "Post this up where your customers can clearly see it."

"What is this all about?" she asked, taking the sheet from him.

"The central government," Kun said, "has ordered that all Christians are to be reported to the municipal governments once their whereabouts and daily activities are known. So, if you see people, who are talking about Christian things, you must report them to the government in your town. Failure to do this may put you in harm's way if the government should find out that you are aware of Christian activity in your town that you have not reported to them."

The lady blinked twice before she said, "I know of suspicious activity, and not just suspicious activity. My nephew, Hu Zheng, is a Christian. I believe he headed toward the jungle just a two days ago. I reported it to the municipal government already, but they seem to be busy handling other matters. And, they didn't seem to know what to do with my report.

"That will have to change," Kun said.

"Hu told us that if we did not repent from our sins that we would go to a place of torment called Hell," Hu's aunt, Li, said. "He told us that a man named Jesus Christ died for my sins about 2,000 years ago. I laughed at it and told him that if he told me that again, and didn't renounce his faith in this foolish religion, I would report him to the police. I did report him, but the police didn't find him when they came to his house.

"His parents thought he ran into the jungle while they were asleep. They showed the police the ashes of scraps of paper containing Bible verses that Hu had written down. They said they burned the verses when they found them hiding under clothes in Hu's bedroom."

"I would like to find him myself," Kun said, scowling. "So, he said that if you didn't repent from sin, you would go to a place called Hell?"

“Yes,” she said. “I was very offended.”

“I would like to talk to my commander about being assigned to hunt down your nephew,” Kun said. “I would personally like to bring him to justice. Someone like him must be arrested or killed for his religion that is corrupting Chinese society.”

“Kun Ren”

Two days later, Kun, a sergeant in the PLA, was walking toward a *Changhe Z-18* transport helicopter at his military base. He carried a backpack full of rations, supplies, a map, compass, and other essential equipment. Other soldiers headed toward four other helicopters parked in an open field on the base. Veterans of various Southeast Asian conflicts, they were all well prepared mentally and physically for a long stay in the jungle.

Their new mission was to locate and arrest or kill Christians hiding in the jungle. New and improved heat sensor technology allowed them to detect humans in the obscuring depths of a dense jungle by day or by night. The technology came in the form of helmet-mounted headgear and optics, which a third of the soldiers were equipped with.

Kun instinctively bent down a little as he reached the edge of the spinning rotors.

Half of the soldiers were also given new *Type ‘Lóng’ 64* bullpup machine guns* which were equipped with sensors which would assist in placing accurate shots. Named after the Chinese dragon (i.e. *lóng*), this was the considered the most lethal light machine gun ever fielded.

The sensors enabled the *Type ‘Lóng’ 64* machine guns to fire and hit targets with nearly a hundred percent accuracy in all conditions, because the guns would fire at humans automatically when a special switch was engaged. [**Note: This is a fictional gun, but it is realistic to the potential of modern technology.*]

The sensors in each gun detected human-shaped body heat and automatically activated the firing mechanism when the gun barrel was aligned with its human targets. The results in tests showed that the guns were three times more accurate than most marksmen.

Kun looked forward to putting the new technology to use against Christians should they resist capture or try to flee.

In addition to the newer guns, the soldiers were armed with plenty of grenades and spare ammunition. Rumors had circulated throughout the army that in several provinces of China, Christians had escaped capture from platoons of highly trained soldiers. The soldiers had been arrested and interned in military prisons to discipline them for their apparent “ineptitude” or for supposedly “allowing” the Christians to escape, but Kun suspected the soldiers were not inept nor conducive to the Christians’ escape.

He suspected that the Christians had brought technology with them which he believed had somehow caused them to blend in perfectly with their surroundings, similar to how a chameleon lizard disguises itself. ‘Our infrared optics and self-firing guns will put an end to Christians escaping

capture,' Kun thought.

Once he was seated in the helicopter, Kun relaxed and gazed out the window. In a short time, they would be flying over the jungle. Then, a short time from then, he believed he would have the Christians in his gun sights. More of his men piled in as the sergeant watched the activity outside with a thin smile on his face.

“Intrusion”

Thwack. Thwack. Thwack. The chopping sound of a helicopter flying over the tree tops filled the air, waking Hu from sleep. He was lying on a small tarp spread on the ground under a tall kapok tree. Five yards away to his right, Cheng was snoring in his sleeping bag. Three yards to Hu's left, Quang stirred in his sleeping bag and sat up. He listened to the night air, blinking his eyes several times to clear them.

“What is that?” Quang said.

“It sounds like a ...” Hu started to say.

“Helicopter!” Quang said. “It must be Chinese soldiers. We must move.”

Quang stood quickly and fast-walked toward Cheng. He shook the snoring man, saying, “Wake up, Chinese soldiers are coming! We need to pray.”

Cheng slowly opened his eyes and looked up, blinking. “What? Soldiers are coming?”

Then, he shook his head to clear it, and sat up. “Oh, Lord God, please protect us,” Cheng said, anxiously, looking around. “Blind their eyes.”

The helicopter was overhead now. The wash from the rotors was causing the upper branches and leaves of tall trees to shake and toss. The sound was loud and powerful like a hurricane, Hu thought in his groggy state of mind. He jumped up, snatched his backpack, and left his sleeping bag and tarp on the ground. Not wasting a moment, Hu walked quickly toward a thick cluster of bushes and ducked into a gap in the dense foliage. Cheng was right behind him, but Quang didn't follow them in.

The helicopter descended a few dozen feet toward the forest canopy before pausing and hovering in the air for a little over a minute. Each second passed as if it were two. The time dragged on. Then, to Hu's relief, the helicopter lifted up higher and began moving away. After a few minutes it was gone and the loud chopping sound of the rotors faded into the distance.

“God spared our lives. They could have spotted us with heat sensors,” Cheng said, gulping.

“You're right. Where is Quang?” Hu said.

Cheng looked back and forth, nervously. “I don't see him. I have no clue. He might have found another hiding place.”

“You there,” a voice said from a short distance away. ‘Could that be Quang?’ Hu thought, turning toward the sound.

“I see you in those bushes. Raise your hands now!” the voice said gruffly.

‘That wasn’t Quang,’ Hu realized, feeling fear striking his chest. ‘It must be a Chinese soldier.’

Reluctantly, Cheng and Hu raised their hands, even though they didn’t see the source of the voice. A sound of thrashing came from the bushes and a Chinese soldier appeared through a gap in the foliage. He was equipped with futuristic optics that covered both eyes. A headset provided him with a small mouthpiece connected to a two-way radio.

“You must be Christians, correct?” the soldier said coldly.

“Yes, we are,” Hu said boldly while he noticed the soldier’s gun.

The soldier carried a machine gun that had two scope-shaped devices mounted on it. One was directly on top and one was slightly to the side. Hu had no idea what the side-mounted device was for, but the top-mounted one was likely a scope or gun sight. He wore a patch indicating he was a sergeant in the PLA.

Pointing his gun at them, the sergeant pulled two handcuffs from a black case on his belt, and shoved the handcuffs toward Hu and Cheng, saying gruffly, “Put these on and be quick about it.”

Feeling a heavy weight on his chest, Hu reluctantly snapped the handcuffs around his wrists, after passing a pair to Cheng.

“Do either of you happen to know of a man named Hu Zheng?” the sergeant asked with a small hint of amusement in his voice.

There was a heavy silence as Hu contemplated what to say. ‘What should I do, Father God?’ Hu spoke to God silently. ‘What should I tell him? Am I going to go to a concentration camp? I thought you said that you would protect us. What is happening?’

“Answer me,” the sergeant barked, slapping Hu on the face with his hand.

The strike stung his cheek and a tiny surge of anger attacked Hu, but he quickly gave it to God and chose to forgive the soldier, realizing that the man had not felt God’s loving Presence and peace.

“My son,” Abba God’s loving voice said, “tell this soldier that you are that man he speaks of. Tell him that if he repents from his sins, he will be saved from sin, but if he hardens his heart against Me further, he will be lost forever. Tell him those words, My son, and I will protect you, and bless you, and keep you. And, I the Lord your God have spoken.”

“I am the man you speak of,” Hu told the sergeant. As he spoke, rustling sounds came from the bushes and more Chinese soldiers came into view in the moonlight that penetrated through gaps in the forest canopy.

“I spoke to your aunt Li,” the sergeant said, “and she told me you went into the jungle to hide from

the authorities. But, now you will not be hiding anymore. I will see to it that you are placed in a maximum security labor camp. Your suffering will be great there until you forsake your foolish Christian religion. Then, you will be permitted to return to a normal life. But, if you don't ever forsake your foolish beliefs, I can guarantee you that you will die."

"God was showing me to tell you," Hu said calmly, "that you must repent from your sins and He will save you from sin and from the consequences of sin. But, if you harden your heart against God further, there would be no hope for you. I ask you, please take to heart what I am saying. Please —"

"Be silent!" the sergeant shouted, cutting Hu off.

Hu stepped toward the sergeant, feeling calmness and peace wash over him. He knew it was God's loving grace that gave him the ability to do what he knew he needed to do.

"You can throw me into a camp, but I will never forsake my best Friend and God," Hu said.

"Then, I will kill you here and now," the sergeant said, aiming his rifle at Hu's chest. Cheng stepped back, with wide open eyes, anticipating the next thing to happen. But, Hu stood still and calmly and peacefully faced his foe.

"I will not allow you to kill me or arrest me, in the Name of Jesus Christ," Hu said boldly.

The PLA sergeant flinched slightly, but maintained his aim at Hu's chest.

"And, by the Name of Jesus Christ," Hu continued, "I declare that the blood of Jesus Christ protects me from all harm, and that I have been given power, in Jesus Christ's Name, over all the power of the enemy."

The sergeant shook his head slightly as if a mosquito had poked his skin, but it wasn't a mosquito that irritated him.

Hu continued: "In Luke 10:19, Jesus Christ said: '**Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.**' Leave now, in Jesus Christ's Name."

The sergeant stood there slightly dazed. Then, he shook his head and blinked several times.

"I command you to leave us in Jesus Christ's Name. That goes for all of you," Hu said strongly, glancing at the other soldiers.

At last, the gun was lowered, and the sergeant back up. Then, he left, in a daze, brushing past bushes. The sergeant spoke into his two-way radio and ordered the other soldiers to follow him. The other soldiers back up, slowly turned, and followed their leader through the forest, away from Hu and Cheng. As he watched them leave, Hu thought they also seemed to be in a bit of a daze.

A few minutes later, the thwacking sound of helicopter rotors returned. The loud droning of the rotors could be heard for several long minutes. Hu prayed while he waited. The seconds passing seemed like minutes, and the minutes like hours. But, he prayed fervently, both for the continued

protection of him and the other Christians, and for the salvation of the soldiers.

Then, a fearful thought came to him that the soldier might be planning a second attack to come up from behind. But, Hu gave that thought to God. Finally, the roaring of the blades began to fade as the helicopter lifted off with the soldiers.

When the thumping sound had faded into the distance, Cheng exclaimed, “I can’t understand this. God protected us when you just simply told the soldier a scripture verse and meant it. That is a miracle. That is awesome what God has done. Glory to His Holy Name!”

“Amen!” Hu said, smiling, looking up. “I praise you Abba Father for saving and delivering us from the soldiers and from death. Thank you so much. You knew it wasn’t our time to go to be with you in Heaven. Oh, Lord God, will you powerfully convict those men of their sins and of their need to be saved through Jesus Christ, your Only Begotten son? Convict them that only through the blood of Jesus Christ can they be saved. And, I pray that each soldier will soften toward you, and repent, and receive you, Lord Jesus, as their personal Savior and Lord. In Jesus Christ’s Name. Amen.”

At that moment, the handcuffs miraculously detached from Hu and Cheng’s wrists and dropped to the ground.

“Oh,” Cheng said, surprised. “My handcuffs fell off! This is a miracle since I had snapped them on tight. Yours were on tight too, weren’t they?”

“I snapped them on tight because the guard was threatening me,” Hu said, “but how they came off is a mystery.”

Hu looked down at the handcuffs and rubbed his wrists, amazed. Then, scripture came to him from the book of Acts. Hu remembered reading about Simon Peter, in Acts 12, who was miraculously released from prison by an angel and by his invisible angelic team.

“God never ceases to amaze me,” Cheng said, smiling and looking up toward the night sky which peeked through the jungle canopy.

“In the Helicopter”

Inside the *Changhe Z-18* helicopter, Sergeant Kun Ren thought about the strange events that had just taken place. With his advanced heat-sensing equipment, Kun had located a small group of Christians and the nephew of the food vendor, after days of scanning the jungle with four helicopters. He had confronted Hu, but something had happened inside Kun that had shook him just a short while ago.

He had forgotten what his mission was and who he was after, until just a few minutes ago. All Kun knew when he was in the jungle was that he must return to the helicopter and go back home. The other soldiers with him did not remember ever seeing any Christians in the jungle. But, as the miles of jungle passed by below, Kun started to remember what his mission was and that it was not finished. He was given orders to hunt down Christians in the jungle. And, he needed to do that. The other three helicopters must be still on that mission. Somehow they did not realize his team was leaving.

Kun put on noise-cancelling headphones with an attached microphone. Then, he spoke to the pilot and copilot. “We need to turn around,” Kun said. “There are Christians in this jungle. We passed over human heat signatures fifteen minutes ago. Over.”

“Copy,” the pilot said. “We will turn around and head back. Over.”

As the helicopter turned around, Kun thought to himself, ‘Once I capture those troublesome Christians, I will make them pay.’

Chapter Eighteen

“Deliverance”

“Hu and Cheng, where are you?” Quang’s voice echoed through the jungle.

After the loud helicopter rotors had awoken the three Christians, Hu and Cheng had hurried into a dense cluster of bushes a short distance from their sleeping bags, small tarps, and backpacks. But, Hu’s backpack was missing from the sleeping area. Meanwhile, Quang had quickly grabbed the backpacks, tarps, and sleeping bags, and hid them in other bushes. Then, he ran toward the cover of a dense patch of broad-leafed elephant ear plants, which were mingled with rice-paper plants.

Soon after, the sound of Chinese soldiers talking had reached his ears. He had crouched as low as he could and waited in the dark. Finally, after what had seemed a long, long time, the soldiers had left the vicinity, and their helicopter had returned to pick them up. Seeing them finally gone, Quang had crawled out from the bushes and brushed leaves and small bugs off his shirt.

Now, he was looking for his friends, but they were nowhere to be seen, and dense foliage blocked his view in all directions. A few stars peeked through small gaps in the jungle canopy overhead.

“My son,” God’s loving voice spoke to Quang.

“Yes, Abba Father,” Quang said. “Is that you?”

“It is I, the Lord your God,” Abba God said to his spirit and soul. “I love you very much. Look to your left, and walk in that direction, and you will find your friends. And, I the Lord your God have spoken.”

“Yes, Abba Father, I’ll do that. Thank you,” Quang said as he walked in the direction God showed him.

Pushing through some bushes, Quang soon came upon a small opening in the dense foliage and immediately saw two figures in a patch of moonlight, which was splashed on the rainforest floor and

was casting their shadows.

“Hu, Cheng,” Quang said, “are you there?”

Turning toward him, the two men saw him approaching and walked in his direction.

“It’s us, Quang,” Hu said, wearing his backpack, which he had brought with him earlier.

“Are you okay? What happened to you?” Quang said.

“God delivered us from certain arrest, and our handcuffs miraculously dropped off our wrists,” Cheng said, showing his hands to Quang.

“Praise God!” Quang said, excitedly with wide-open eyes. “God has delivered us from those who sought our lives, like he did for Daniel in the lion’s den. But, I feel we need to start walking tonight. The helicopter might return.”

“That would be a good idea,” Hu said, starting to walk back toward the direction where their sleeping bags had been.

Hiss. A hissing sound caused Hu to freeze in his tracks. Slowly, he turned his head to the left, and he felt his heartbeat speed up. A chain viper* appeared in the moonlight raising its body into a striking posture with its mouth open to expose its fangs. Large, black-rimmed, oval-shaped spots appeared on its tan skin. [**Or a Russell’s viper.*]

Hu tried to breath as calmly as he could, but he felt afraid that it would strike him. He began backing up slowly. Suddenly, another hiss reached his ears from his right. It was a different chain viper, and it was only four feet away: too close for comfort. He felt surrounded. Hu decided then that he had to just run. He turned around quickly and began to run, but a sharp pain suddenly shot through his ankle.

To his horror, Hu saw a chain viper fastened onto his leg just above his shoe and ankle, and below the hem of his trousers. He cried out in fear and pain, and tried to shake it off. A couple seconds later, the viper dropped off into the bushes.

Hu ran, limping through the jungle, and saying, “Lord God, please help me! Please help me.” Forty feet away from the vipers, Hu came to a stop in a patch of moonlight. The pain was throbbing through his ankle. Then, he remembered what he read in the Bible how Jesus said in Mark 16, verses 16-18, that Christians will not be harmed by poison or serpents (i.e. snakes).

“Dear God,” Hu said, keeping his eyes open to watch out for snakes, “I trust you to protect me from the poison. Lord, keep me safe and keep these snakes and poisonous animals away from me. I trust you to. In Jesus Christ’s Name, Amen.”

“I will, My son,” Abba God said to Hu’s spirit and soul.

Then, Hu also remembered how a follower of Jesus had been miraculously protected from snake poison in the book of Acts. The Apostle Paul had been protected after having received a poisonous snake bite in the book of Acts, chapter 28. Paul had arrived on the island of Melita (or Malta). He had

just experienced a shipwreck, and all the men's lives had been spared.

They had gathered sticks and fallen branches on the island and started a fire to warm themselves. As Paul was gathering some sticks to add to the fire, a poisonous snake suddenly bit his hand. He shook it off into the flames, and felt no harm from the poison, just as Jesus had said his followers would feel no harm from poison.

Hu noticed that his ankle had not swollen at all and that the bite gouges, where the fangs had entered his skin, were drying up quickly. Trickles of blood had only moved a few centimeters down his ankle.

"Hu," a voice called his name from some yards away.

"I'm here," Hu said.

Bushes rustled and Cheng came into view. "Hu, are you alright? What happened?"

"I was bitten by a chain viper," Hu said.

"You are a dead man," Cheng said, with his eyes widening. "May God spare your life. Where were you bitten?"

Hu pointed to his ankle and pulled up his trouser leg. Cheng bent down to look at the bite mark, and his brow furrowed with bewilderment. He shook his head and gently placed his finger near the bite mark. Hu didn't wince or flinch. 'That's strange,' Cheng thought.

"What happened?" Quang called out as he approached them.

"Hu got a snake bite from a chain viper but I don't see any swelling. This is a miracle," Cheng said still crouching beside Hu's leg.

"God is protecting him from the poison," Quang said, smiling. "He did that for me when I was bitten by a cobra. The wound didn't swell up at all, and I felt no effects of poison. The people who knew I'd been bitten didn't believe that I was bitten by a cobra. But, it was a miracle of God that I am alive. Praise God's awesome name!"

"I remember," Hu said, "how Jesus said in Luke chapter 10 that we have power over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt us. He also said that we will have the power to trample underfoot snakes and scorpions."

"Do you remember the verse?" Cheng said.

"I need to get my Bible," Hu said, lowering his backpack to the ground. Zipping it open, he reached in and pulled out his Bible. Before long, Hu had turned the Bible to a certain place in the book of Luke.

"Luke 10:19 is a very good verse," Hu said, smiling. "I quoted it earlier when I confronted the Chinese soldiers. In Luke 10:19, Jesus Christ said: '**Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt**

you.”

“Praise God!” Cheng said. “You challenge me to take the Bible literally. I want to do that from now on.”

Just after he said it, a droning, thumping sound reached their ears. It was growing louder by the second. All three instantly recognized what it was: the sound of a helicopter approaching from the distance.

“They’re returning!” Cheng said, alarmed. “We need to get our stuff and get out of here.”

“Don’t be afraid, Cheng,” Quang said. “God will take care of us, just as He already did for you and Hu earlier. If a snake bite can’t hurt us, and if the soldiers can’t arrest you, when you hold to the Bible’s promises, then, why should they be able to hurt us the second time around?”

But, Cheng didn’t seem to be listening. Fear tightened his facial features. “I need to get out of here,” he said before hurrying off into the bushes, vanishing from Hu’s sight.

“Let’s pray for Cheng,” Quang said calmly. “Fear is our enemy. It harms our faith and handicaps our walk with God. The answer to fear is to just choose to believe God regardless of what our feelings are telling us.”

“I agree,” Hu said, feeling more confident about God’s power, love, and protection.

Together, they interceded and prayed for Cheng and for other believers in Christ. Before long, the helicopter arrived and hovered 100 feet away, again tossing the upper branches of trees in the blast from its loud rotors. Hu could not see them, but he was sure soldiers were zipping down static lines from the helicopter to the rainforest floor. In moments, they would fan out in groups of four and search through the forest with their advanced, helmet-mounted and gun-mounted heat-sensing equipment. The only answer to this trial was to trust in God, Hu realized.

Hu and Quang hurried over to a dense cluster of bushes, making sure there were no snakes within, and crouched down low.

Five minutes later, the sound of rustling came from nearby bushes. Hu peeked out through gaps in his hiding place to see the shadowy forms of Chinese soldiers walking carefully through the forest. Heat-sensing optics, attached to helmet mounts, were locked over many soldiers’ eyes. Each soldier carried *Type 95* bullpup machine guns or *Type ‘Lóng’ 64* machine guns, which were equipped with heat sensors.

Soldiers just feet away walked past Hu and Quang’s hiding place and continued combing the jungle for Christians using their heat-sensing technology. Hu knew that they should have located him, but God must have kept the sensors blind to Hu and Quang’s presence.

“You, come here,” a soldier said gruffly a few yards away. Hu flinched and peered through the bushes, trying to see the soldier.

As he carefully moved leafy twigs apart, Hu caught a glimpse of a soldier approaching a bush some yards away from Hu’s position. The bush shook and rustled as a man pushed his way through of it.

Then, Cheng, trembling in fear, stepped into a patch of moonlight, having emerged from the dense foliage.

“Dear God,” Hu said quietly, “I ask you to protect him.”

“You Christian,” the soldier said angrily, pointing his gun at Cheng, “where are your friends?”

Cheng remained quiet.

“I asked you a question,” the soldier snarled.

Cheng didn’t speak, but lowered his head. The guard slapped him in the face and shouted, “Speak up and tell us where your Christian friends are hiding!”

“My son,” God said to Hu’s spirit, “I want you to confront these soldiers and tell them that if they will not submit to Me, they will perish, and that you will call fire from heaven upon them, unless they repent, and unless they leave. Go do that, and I will bless you. And, I the LORD your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Yes Father God,” Hu said, feeling courage begin to return to his soul in stronger amounts. He pushed his way out of the bushes and approached the PLA soldiers with boldness that Hu knew he normally didn’t have.

Soldiers wheeled around and aimed their guns at him. “Halt!” they snapped, but Hu continued walking.

The soldier confronting Cheng, turned suddenly and glared at Hu. It was the same PLA sergeant Hu had seen earlier.

“So, you are the Christian I confronted earlier,” the sergeant said arrogantly. “You slipped away when my back was turned. But, now I’ve found you again.”

“That is not true,” Hu said. “I commanded you to leave in the name of Jesus Christ, and you had to go. And, now, I say to you in the Name of Jesus Christ, who is your Creator, who you despise, that if you will not repent and leave us alone, I will call fire from heaven down upon you and upon all who will not willingly leave. If you do not submit to God, you will perish.”

“Hey, Christian,” the sergeant said coldly, “what makes you think you can tell me what to do? I am Sergeant Kun Ren, a decorated veteran of the American war, when we invaded the U.S. I have imprisoned many Christians during my career as a soldier in the PLA. What makes you think that you can escape me? You think that your God will bring fire down upon me? Is that a joke?”

A few soldiers nearby chuckled as they continued to aim their guns at Hu’s chest.

“I will boil you alive and pull out your nails. You will suffer a long and terrible death for your arrogance against me and against your country, Christian!” Kun said angrily before he keyed his two-way radio and ordered his men: “Take him down, but don’t kill him just yet. We’ll make him suffer a long and slow death.”

Soldiers started walking toward him still training their guns on him.

“You have shown your true nature, that you will never repent from your sin,” Hu said boldly. “I call fire down from heaven upon you and your hardened men in the name of Jesus Christ.”

The soldiers continued to advance toward him. They would be on top of him within fifteen seconds. Suddenly, as they approached, several bright beams of light, shaped like columns of fire, shot through the jungle canopy and passed through trees without affecting them. Within a second of time, the beams of fire engulfed all the Chinese soldiers, except for one, who was two-hundred yards away. In that instant, the rainforest was brightly lit up as if by floodlights.

The next moment, the jungle was back to its nighttime gloom. Pools of moonlight splashed on the forest floor here and there. In the moonlight appeared several black craters, which had not been there before. Still shocked by the powerful miracle, Hu realized that where each soldier had stood, only a smoking, black crater remained.

Cheng’s jaw dropped as he scanned over the small craters where soldiers had once stood. It was hard for him to believe what he saw before his very eyes. The destruction was overwhelming. This was God’s power to judge the wicked in Biblical proportions. Elijah, the prophet, had called fire from heaven upon an altar and later upon soldiers who had sought to take his life.

‘God is doing today what He has done in the Bible times,’ Cheng realized, relieved at God’s powerful deliverance. If it hadn’t been for God’s deliverance, he and his friends would have been tortured to death, he believed.

“Great is our loving God!” Cheng said loudly, raising his hands in the air as he stepped forward over the blackened crater, where Kun Ren had stood.

“God be praised forever!” Quang said as he approached Cheng.

“Abba God, you are awesome and Holy,” Hu said to God loudly. “There is none who can deliver like you can!”

Chapter Nineteen

“The Surprise”

Sledgehammers swung and shattered rocks into pieces. Vasily Volvakov worked hard, crushing rocks with his sledgehammer, hour after hour, with only three breaks for a period of twelve hours per day. In spite of his age of 60, he had energy that even younger men didn’t have, who worked in the rock-crushing enclosure at a labor camp in Siberia. The Russian guards even commented to one another, on occasion, about Vasily’s endurance and strength. But when he overheard them, he quietly gave God the glory.

The cold air stung his face as he worked, but Vasily tried to keep blinking and moving his face muscles to keep them from becoming numb. It felt like it was negative 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

After becoming a Christian in the labor camp, Vasily had begun speaking more and more to God and hearing His loving voice better. God had given him supernatural strength for him to work well, without feeling exhausted like other men, who worked for 12 hours with two fifteen minute breaks, and a half-hour lunch break. This added up to 13 hours outdoors, in sub-zero temperatures. Every so often, men died from exhaustion or sickness. [See "**Footnote**" 1.]

"Hey," a prisoner ten feet away said, when the guards had moved away from earshot.

"Yes," Vasily said just before he slammed his hammer into a rock, bursting it into small chunks.

"I heard you speaking to God. Are you a Christian?" the man asked just before he swung his hammer.

They had to keep working or a guard would crack a whip a few feet from their backs as a warning not to "slack off."

"Yes, I am," Vasily said, glancing at the man.

The prisoner was dressed in the standard orange jumpsuit, orange hat, coat, and gloves that inmates typically wore in prison systems around the world. Appearing in his forties, he had a stubbly brown beard and brown eyes. But, Vasily noticed that there was the softness in his eyes and expression of a young boy.

"I am a Christian too. I love Jesus," the man said before turning back to his work.

"What's your name? I am Vasily Volvakov," Vasily asked between swings.

"I am Dimitri Averin," the man said.

Soldiers dressed in thick camouflage jackets and *ushankas* approached them and passed by, on a routine walk. Once they were gone, Dimitri said, "Vasily, would you like to take part in my Bible study?"

"Where, when?" Vasily said.

"Don't tell anyone unless you feel God prompting you to," Dimitri said.

"That sounds reasonable. Where and when do you have this study?" Vasily said, feeling more curious now than ever. He had a hunger to read the Bible. He had not read the Bible, except for a verse here or there, when he was a non-Christian.

"The Bible study will be at night," Dimitri said. "Meet me at barracks number 20 tonight, at twelve O'clock. Don't tell anyone else about this, unless the Lord directs you to."

"Okay," Vasily said, continuing to break rocks into pieces.

“Moving at Night”

Vasily cracked the door of his barracks open and gazed at the brick clock tower which sat atop the brick prison camp administration building in the middle of the large, fenced-in enclosure. Each of the four clock faces read 11:55 P.M. As he peered out at the tower, Vasily prayed that all the men in his barracks would remain asleep.

It wasn't quite time just yet to sneak over to barracks number 20, but he felt itching to move, and he had been awake since 11:40, thinking about the Bible study with a spiritual thirst for God's written Word. Vasily also was nagged by thoughts regarding the risk of having a secret, midnight Bible study in a labor camp. What if guards caught him sneaking around, or worse; found him partaking of a secret Bible study? Would he be tortured? Would he be placed in solitary confinement? Nevertheless, Vasily felt the risk was worth the blessing of drinking from God's Word the spiritual refreshment he needed.

When the clock read 11:56, Vasily looked up and silently said to God, “Dear Heavenly Father, will you blind the guards so that we can meet to have a Bible study? Also, please provide light so we can read. I trust you will. What would you show me? Should I stay or go?”

“My son, Vasily,” God said to him in a kind, loving voice, “I love you very much. You may go at 11:58 and I will be with you. Do not fear. I will blind the guards so that they will not see either you or anyone else who meets to have this Bible study. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Abba Father,” Vasily said, feeling peace settle into his heart.

He prayed for the study to go well as he waited. Finally, the hands on the clock tower face read 11:58 P.M. It was time to move out. Looking back over the bunk beds with sleeping men, Vasily waited to see if there was any movement. A half a minute passed before he was sure only he was awake. Then, he slipped quietly out the door and shut it carefully behind him.

In the moonlit night, Vasily saw the labor camp with its guard towers, high fences, rows of numbered barracks, its chow hall, its brick administration building, its hospital, its latrine building, and its prison or solitary confinement building. Other buildings sat outside the fenced enclosure, including barracks for Russian soldiers, garages for their vehicles, and other structures that Vasily had no idea what purpose they served.

Careful to avoid the roving beams of searchlights mounted on guard towers, Vasily walked quickly from one barracks to another, leaving his barracks, number 9, behind. Staying in the shadows as much as possible, he slowly made his way to barracks number 20. He had to make sure that no guards on the ground or in the towers were looking in his direction. A guard was stationed at the entrance to the hospital, which was behind the chow hall. The guard was currently out of sight, since the hospital was located behind the brick chow hall and the nearby latrine building.

Vasily's barracks sat behind a row of barracks numbering from 1 to 5. Those provided him cover from a guard stationed at the administration building, which was two stories high and made of brick and mortar. A small courtyard opened to the night air in the middle of the administration building.

But, that courtyard was the last place he'd like to go.

Behind the administration building stood the prison which was dutifully guarded by two soldiers. A number of inmates were locked up in solitary confinement cells, including men who had attempted to escape the labor camp by way of a tunnel system some days earlier.

While the barracks 1 to 5 provided cover from the guards, an open space between two clusters of ten barracks made him pause to consider his options. There was no cover in that snow-covered space between the sections of barracks. If a searchlight swept through that area while he was in the middle of it, he would be spotted and thrown into solitary confinement, with reduced rations, and would likely have to stay there for over a week.

Or, worse, they might expect him to work three hours more per day, with reduced rations and without any breaks. For many men, this increased the chances of an early death from exhaustion or sickness. But, Vasily wanted to trust God to take care of him.

"My son," God's gentle voice said to Vasily as he hesitated.

"Yes, Abba Father," Vasily said, trying to breathe deeply to slow his heartbeat.

"Walk across that field and do not fear," God said to his spirit and soul. "I will blind their eyes so that they will not see you. They will only see snow if they were to look in your direction. Do not fear. Just give the fear to Me, and trust Me, and you will do well. Trust is a choice: it is not a feeling. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken."

"I will take a risk and trust you," Vasily said, still hesitant, as he eyed a couple guard towers and their bright searchlights, which were scanning the ground outside the base. Others were shining on barracks and structures within the enclosure, slowly sweeping over them.

"Father God," Vasily said, looking up, "I choose to give you my fears. I was afraid I would be caught and either worked to death, or put in solitary confinement with small rations. But, I give those fears to you. You will protect me from these communist guards."

Then, he took a step of faith into the white field between the barracks sections. Vasily hesitated for a few seconds before he took another step, and another. A couple seconds later, a soldier came around the corner of the admin. building and looked in Vasily's direction for three seconds. The Russian prisoner was in clear view and would be easily spotted, but the soldier shrugged his shoulders and continued walking, as if he only noticed a mouse in the snow or something ordinary.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Vasily began walking across the field more quickly. As he was just a few feet from the cover of a section of ten barracks, a searchlight swept across the tall, razor-wire topped, chain link fence, and the beam of light headed his direction. Before he could run, the beam reached him, illuminating his bright orange coat and jumpsuit in white light. But, the beam continued its sweep as if Vasily didn't exist.

Once he was in the section of ten barracks, Vasily breathily exclaimed, "Praise you, Lord God, for blinding their eyes! Praise you, Lord, for protecting me!"

"Shh," a man's voice came from Vasily's right.

A tall man with a burly build and a rugged face, dressed in orange, approached Vasily slowly. He was a prisoner Vasily hadn't met before. The man looked somewhat tough, and Vasily apprehensively wondered what this prisoner would do next.

"You're Vasily, aren't you?" the man asked without a trace of inflection.

"Yes," Vasily said with a little trembling in his voice.

"I am Georgy Veselov," the tall, burly man said. "Dimitri told me about you. Come this way."

Vasily wondered if this man could be trusted, but he decided that the only thing to do was follow him. Georgy led Vasily down an alley between two barracks. This alley faced the chain link fence. In the middle of the alley, a 9 foot by 9 foot concrete square appeared in the snow, rising four inches above the ground. Snow remained on its surface, despite the fact that footprints appeared all around it and throughout the alley. An opened, rusty lock rested a few inches from a metal hatch, which filled the slab's surface.

"What's that for?" Vasily said, pointing to the lock.

"That rusty lock used to keep us out of the sewer system, but not anymore," Georgy said. "God answered our prayers and had an angel open it. We didn't have any tools to lock pick it, but prayer unlocked it. It doesn't work anymore, so we can reattach it and make this sewer hatch look unopened."

"What about your footprints in the snow?" Vasily asked.

"We walk around our barracks throughout the day, and sometimes at night, to disguise our footprints going to and from this hatch," Georgy said as he reached for the handle and pulled the hatch open with a slight heave.

The open hatch revealed a metal ladder crawling down the side of a vertical, concrete shaft.

"After you," Georgy said, motioning toward the hole with a hand.

'Could this be a trap?' Vasily wondered, glancing at the big man. But, curiosity got the better of him. He slowly lowered himself down to the ladder and began descending one rung at a time. The air felt more humid the further down he went and the foul smell of sewage wafted faintly up to his nose. But, electric light appeared below his feet, splashing onto a paved walkway.

Once he reached the last step, he hopped down a couple feet and landed with a slight thump. He was standing in a corner formed by two tunnels. The tunnel to the left vanished into the darkness. The tunnel to the right, which was at a right angle to the left side, contained ceiling lights in steel cages and three metal doors in its right wall. This passage came to an abrupt end at a wall of concrete.

As Vasily took in his surroundings, the closest steel door flung open and Dimitri Averin appeared in the entrance. Motioning for Vasily to come, he said, "I am so glad you were able to make it. Come this way."

Vasily heard a clanging sound come from the concrete entry shaft. 'It must be Georgy closing the

hatch,' he thought.

Passing through the nearest door, Vasily blinked several times, surprised at what he saw. Inside a 20-by-30-foot concrete room, about thirty men were standing. A handful of them carried small stacks of paper and three had leather-bound Bibles in Russian. All of them wore the standard orange uniform of labor camp inmates.

A door in one wall, leading into the next room, was opened to provide more space for movement. It seemed to Vasily as if God had provided the area for the men to gather in secret. The room was clean of all miscellaneous junk that most utility or storage rooms tended to collect. And, it was brightly lit by ceiling lights, which were encased in protective metal cages. It seemed as if the Russian soldiers or utility workers paid no attention to this particular underground room.

“Brothers in Christ,” Dimitri said warmly, motioning toward Vasily, “welcome a new friend of the Lord. This is Vasily, who I learned is a true Christian.”

Several of the men smiled and waved. One approached Vasily, saying, “I am glad you could join us. We are glad to have more brothers in Christ in this camp.”

He was man in his forties with red hair, blue eyes, and a medium build.

“Who am I speaking with?” Vasily said.

“Oh, forgive me. I am Artemy Aminev,” Artemy said, extending a hand. Vasily shook it, feeling grateful to have friendly hosts.

“I’m happy to see that more Christians than I thought was possible could fit inside this church building,” Vasily said, smiling as he glanced at the room, and then back at Artemy.

Artemy chuckled before saying, “There are more of us in this camp than most people realize. The Gospel message is spreading through this prison camp like wildfire, Vasily. God is able to touch many people here, and many are turning to Him for salvation through Jesus Christ.”

“That is wonderful. Glory be to God!” Vasily said with excitement and joy in his heart.

“Brothers in the family of God, may I have your attention?” Dimitry Averin said, loud enough to get everyone’s attention.

When all eyes had focused on him, Dimitri opened his brown leather Bible.

“Brothers,” Dimitri said, scanning across the many faces, “we are gathered here tonight to enjoy the Word of God and to share it with each other. Our life in this camp is very difficult, but our loving Father God is giving us the grace we need for each new trial we face. Most of us here are placed in this camp for the very fact that we desire to worship God, not in a man-made religion, but in a relationship on a very deep, personal basis with our loving God.

“Our children and wives were separated from us and placed in camps or in orphanages because we determined to obey God and His Word over the pressure society has placed on us. We are here because the world hates us like how they hated our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Listen to what

Jesus said in Matthew chapter 10, verses 24-25: ‘[24] The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. [25] It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?’

“If the world falsely called Jesus ‘Beelzebub,’ which is an evil spirit, certainly they would call us false labels, such as ‘traitors to the state,’ ‘religious fanatics,’ ‘extremists,’ and ‘purveyors of lies.’ But, all these false accusations spoken against us... We stand against these lies and reject them. Sadly, some of our people have denied the Lord and denied that they were Christians. Some have even turned us in for being obedient to God. Jesus spoke of such people that they have chosen whom they will serve.”

Dimitri flipped his Bible over to another passage. Once he was there, he said, “In the book of Luke, chapter 16, Jesus spoke of how we much choose to either serve Him or serve something else. In Luke 16:13, Jesus said: ‘No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.’

“It is impossible for us to serve God and serve material possessions or money. But, this principle applies to people as well. Listen to what Jesus told His disciples and the multitudes that followed him in Luke chapter 14, verses 26-27. He said: ‘[26] If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. [27] And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.’”

A man raised a hand and said, “Dimitri, why did Jesus said that we should hate our family members? I’m confused.”

“He is not saying that we should actually hate anyone,” Dimitri said, “because Jesus clearly said in that same sentence that we should hate our own life also. He is not speaking of self-hate or anything of that sort. What Jesus is saying is that we should love ourselves and other people less than we love Him.

“So, if Jesus is telling us to warn our family or our friends, and they reject the Gospel and tell us to stop preaching to people, we must tell them that we ought to obey God rather than men. We must do God’s will even if there is a cost. Because, after all, having eternal fellowship with God now and in Heaven is far, far better than temporary relationships on earth at the expense of fellowship with God forever.”

“Are you saying that Christians can fall away from the faith?” another man asked.

“What does the Bible say?” Dimitri asked, rhetorically. “In Hebrews chapter 10, the Holy Spirit, through the writer, speaks of a man who trampled underfoot the blood of the covenant whereby he was sanctified. Let’s look at that.”

He began flipping through the pages until he found the place he was looking for. Once he found the spot, Dimitri said: “Hebrews 10:26-30 says: ‘[26] For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, [27] But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

‘[28] He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: [29] Of how

much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? [30] For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people.”

A hush fell over the room.

“Was that man really a Christian?” a man close to Dimitri asked.

“Yes, because verse 29 shows that he was sanctified by the blood of Jesus Christ. That means that the blood of Jesus had once made him holy before God. And, verse 30 speaks of how God will have to judge His people. But, to clarify this further, let’s look at Revelation chapter 3, verse 5.”

Flipping quickly over to the spot, Dimitri placed his finger on the verse and read it aloud: “‘**He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.**’ So, Jesus speaks of people who will not have their names be blotted out of the book of life. But, by saying that, He is showing that some people will be blotted out of the book of life.”

Dimitri flipped through the pages once more until he came to a certain spot. Then, he said, “In John chapter 15, Jesus spoke of how He is the vine and that we Christians are the branches, which are attached to Him. Here is what Jesus, in John 15:1-2, said: ‘**[1] I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. [2] Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.**’”

“For the branch to be in Jesus, that branch must be depending on Him for the power to produce fruit,” Dimitri said, again scanning the men’s faces. “But, when a branch, which was depending on Him at one time, ceases to produce good fruit, and instead produces bad fruit, Jesus will call out to that person. But if that person doesn’t repent, Jesus will eventually have to remove it and cast it into the fire. In John 15:6, just a few verses down, Jesus said: ‘**If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.**’”

“This fire is not temporary, brothers,” Dimitri said soberly. “This is Hell and it is eternal. The Holy Spirit in Revelation chapter 14, verses 9 through 11, declares that anyone who worships the beast, or who receives the mark of his name, will be tormented with fire and brimstone, which is burning sulfur, and this torment shall last for ever and ever. Forever is a long time.”

Dimitri quickly flipped to Revelation 14 and said: “I’ll read Revelation 14:11 to you. It says: ‘**And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.**’

“Only a hardened person would continue to go after sin in opposition to what the Lord was showing him. And, only a hardened person would worship the beast, who is the Antichrist, because God’s Spirit would powerfully convict such a person not to do that abomination.”

“Dimitri, you mentioned Revelation 14, which speaks of people who took the mark of the beast,” Vasily said. “Could you explain what the mark of the beast is? I am a new Christian, and I have never really read the book of Revelation. I was an atheist before I met Jesus while in solitary confinement, in this camp.”

“Certainly, brother Vasily,” Dimitri said. “The mark of the beast is a substance that is placed into a person’s skin. This thing, whatever it may be, will allow one to buy or sell. Without this mark, no one who lives within the civilized areas of the world will be able to buy or sell. You can read about that in Revelation chapter 13, verses 16-18. But, God will certainly provide for the needs of those who turn to Him. The Holy Spirit in Psalms 34, verses 9-10, has the psalmist write: ‘[9] O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him. [10] The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.’”

Suddenly, the door flung open and Georgy Veselov, with some fear in his eyes, said, “The soldiers... they found the hatch and I, I heard their voices coming through. They noticed the lock is missing. They are opening the hatch as I speak! We have to go to the sewer passage now!”

Men looked at each other with concern and began talking quickly among themselves about what they should do.

“Men,” Dimitri said loud enough to get everyone’s attention. He raised his hands and said, “Men, brothers, don’t fear. God hasn’t given us the spirit of fear. Let us pray and trust God to take care of us. Running through the sewers to escape is only going to delay them by a few minutes, since the sewer is only under this base and the nearby military base a couple miles away. God will provide for us. Don’t give up your hope in God. He is greater than any problem we face.”

“You’re right, Dmitri,” Artemy said. “I will seek God about this.”

The men began praying fervently and quietly. Some looked worried. But, Vasily noticed that Dimitri’s face was calm and peaceful. There didn’t seem to be fear in his expression but just joy and peace. Footsteps came from the passage outside the door and something clattered against its metal surface. A minute passed.

Vasily prayed fervently, begging God to spare them from being found. He felt fear attacking him with the thought that they might be tortured or placed in solitary confinement with little food or water.

Suddenly, the door swung open and a soldier peered in, swinging his AK-74M machine gun side to side. The man looked a little surprised. Then, his expression turned cold and hateful. “You fools! What you think you’re doing down here? This area is supposed to be sealed off to people such as you.”

Another soldier appeared behind him. The first soldier continued, saying coldly, “What are you doing? Having a prayer meeting? Praying in groups is against the camp policies. We will place all of you for five hours in the cold without your coats or gloves; we deprive you of food for ten days; we will give you no work breaks, such as lunch; and we will place half of you in solitary confinement, with no pillows, sleeping pads, or shoes.”

“And,” the other guard added, “if you still conduct illegal prayer meetings, we will give you each twenty lashes with a whip and we will force you to work at night, under supervision, in addition to your daytime work. I want you all to move out in a single file. Get moving!”

Just as he finished his order, the sound of an earthquake – a rumbling shudder– shot through the air. The soldiers turned around, looking up at the ceiling to see where it came from. As they turned away from the Christians, a miracle happened which would stun the guards for the rest of their lives. The soldiers returned their attention to the Christians, but found an empty room where more than thirty men had once stood. Both men’s jaws dropped in bewilderment at the vanishing.

[Footnote 1: The prisoners in this Siberian concentration camp started work well before the winter sun rose and ended about the time it was setting. Spotlights would illuminate the work sites and camp during the early morning darkness, until the sun illuminated the landscape. Hours later, as the sun set, the lights would come back on for several hours, before shutting off at 10 P.M. Then, searchlights would scan the camp at regular intervals.]

Chapter Twenty

“Communist Norway”

[In the future, Norway and all of Europe will be communist and under the control of Russia, God showed this writer. I encourage you to seek God about this.]

Karl Holst, a sandy-haired Norwegian, opened his Bible and flipped through the pages until he reached a place in the book of Revelation. He was sitting in a metal folding chair facing a circle of men and women who also were holding Bibles.

“Is everyone at Revelation 5?” Karl asked the group of twenty-two people.

Most nodded or muttered that they were at the place.

“I’ll read down to verse 5, starting at verse 1,” Karl said. “As I do, I encourage you to think about what is happening and what significance it has to us now.”

They were in the windowless basement of an old apartment building. A handful of tall floor lamps were scattered among the group to provide light in a room that would otherwise be dark.

Clearing his throat, Karl read from Revelation 5:1-5: “[5:1] And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals. [2] And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? [3] And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.

‘[4] And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon. [5] And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.’”

Looking at the faces of this Bible study group, Karl said, “Notice in verse 3, how no man or woman was worthy to open the book? No one but Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, could open that book. We are not worthy, in ourselves, for any of God’s purposes, but God gives us the grace to do His will and to serve Him in His Kingdom. Though we are not worthy in ourselves to serve God, God sees value in us. That is why He sent Jesus Christ, His Only Begotten Son, to die on the cross for our sins.”

A few of the men and women nodded and said, “That’s true.”

“Verse 5 speaks of the Root of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” Karl said. “This is Jesus Christ, of course. And, notice how He is called the Root of David? What this means is that Jesus Christ is the Creator of David. Though his physical body, which Jesus dwelt in on earth, was genetically from David’s DNA, Jesus is the One who created David and his DNA.

“Now, we probably all know that, but it is good to be reminded of who Jesus Christ is. He was not just a good teacher on earth. He was and is the Son of God, who is One with God the Father. Jesus Christ will come back in a visible form to this world, riding on a white horse, and many thousands of saints, which will include you and me, will follow Him. He already dwells in us Christians by His Spirit. But, we will all see Him coming in the clouds of Heaven.”

In one corner of the room, a set of stairs led up to a door that opened into a yard outside. That door opened and a young Syrian man in his early twenties entered. Another staircase, located in the middle, of the room reached a door that opened into the first floor of the apartment building.

Closing the outside door behind him quietly, the Syrian man said, “I saw soldiers approaching from down the street. We need to quietly pray that God will keep them from coming to this apartment.”

“Abdul, how many soldiers did you see?” a thirty-year-old Norwegian woman asked.

“I saw two,” Abdul Hamed said with some concern in his face. “They appeared to be members of the People’s Army of Norway, and not Russians soldiers. But, both are a danger to Christians like us.”

“Let’s pray,” Karl said, closing his eyes and bowing his head.

“Dear Abba Father,” Abdul said as he approached the group with closed eyes, “deliver us from the People’s Army and from the Russians. You know how ever since the Russians took down the United States, the European countries and NATO lost their power to fight Russia. You know how Russia and its allies did a blitzkrieg war and took country after country, until they even conquered as far west as Iceland and Britain.

“All of Europe is in the clutches of the communists and governments that are loyal to Russia. We live under oppression. We can’t even pray or read the Bible in public for fear of being locked up or beaten. Churches have been closed and have had to move underground. Oh, Abba Father, deliver us from these communist soldiers, and bring your Church into close fellowship with you.

“And, work that the communist soldiers, both those who are Russians and those who work for the puppet government here in Norway, will see the truth about who you are, and will worship you, and trust only in Jesus Christ for salvation. In Jesus Christ’s Name, amen.”

“Amen,” a Nigerian man said.

Seventy percent of the group was composed of ethnic Norwegians, 20 percent of the people were Syrian or Afghan, and 10 percent were African. Karl was glad to have Christians in his group who represented a variety of ethnic groups in his country. Norway had changed a lot since he grew up back in the '90s.

Now, in his thirties, Karl saw more Arab and African people living within northern European countries than in his childhood. But after the Russians took over Europe, many Muslims decided to flee back to Muslim-dominated countries. The majority of the Syrian refugees in Europe had decided to return to Syria as the Russians and Arab states helped Syria rebuild, following the end of the Syrian civil war.

Abdul walked up the steps to the door leading to the outside and placed his ear against the wood. He was listening intently for soldiers.

The policies of the communistic puppet governments in Europe had narrowed religious freedoms to a point where only Russian Orthodox or some liturgical Churches, which had sold themselves to communism, could exist. Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, and other denominations of Protestants were outlawed. And, anyone who met in secret to worship God would be put in prison, beaten, or sent to a prison camp. The government declared that it had to approve all assemblies and meetings, which were held for "religious purposes."

"I don't hear anyone, but I need to make sure no one is watching us," Abdul said from the stairs.

"Aren't you being a little fearful?" a 60-year-old Norwegian man said.

"I don't want to be," Abdul said before he cracked the door open and peeked out through the gap between the door and its post. Finally, after a minute had passed, Abdul sighed. "I think we are safe. I think it would be good to start having us leave, one at a time," Abdul said.

"But, Abdul, you just came in and missed the scripture passage I was sharing in Revelation chapter 5. We haven't got to the next part I was going to share with the group," Karl said.

"What was that?" Abdul said.

"I was sharing about the book that Jesus Christ only was worthy to open," Karl said. "I was going to share next a brief summary of the seven seal judgments from the book of Revelation. We are moving very close to the time when the Antichrist will arise on the earth, and when these seal judgments will enter into full force. At this point in our lives they are just about to open."

"I'm curious now what these judgments will look like," Abdul said before he closed the door tight and started descending the stairs.

"In Revelation chapter 6, God's Word speaks of seven seal judgments," Karl said. "Who would like to read Revelation 6:4? This takes place after the first seal is opened. The first seal releases a rider, on a white horse, who carries a bow. The second seal is a rider on a red horse."

"I can read that," the Nigerian man said, holding a leather Bible open.

“Go ahead, Toben,” Karl said.

Toben Nenge cleared his throat and said, “Revelation 6:4 says: *‘And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.’* That sounds like what we’re seeing now with all the wars happening in different countries and in Nigeria, where I came from.”

“The wars are starting to spread,” Karl said, “but what God showed me is that the ten kingdoms that the book of Revelation speaks of, which will all exist soon, are beginning to arise as I speak. The Russian empire is one kingdom. The Chinese empire is another. You know that China now controls Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand.”

“China has even captured large pieces of America,” a fifty-year-old Eritrean woman said.

“That’s right,” Karl said.

“What about the first seal?” Toben asked.

“The first seal has already been opened,” Karl said. “We have seen the spirit of conquest sweep across Europe, America, and Southeast Asia. But, the red horse seal will release chaos, bloodshed, and murder throughout the whole world, and especially in the areas where old rivalries exist. When this second seal is opened, expect that some people in Europe will start attacking non-Europeans like never before, and expect terrorists to strike like never before.”

“That is a scary thought,” Abdul said.

“But, God will protect and provide for us,” Karl said, trying to keep his friend calm.

“Now, the next seal judgment in Revelation 6 is the black horse,” Karl said. “The rider has a balance for weighing food. One side would have weights and the other side would have grain, or something that was being sold. Less than a quart of wheat (or about 1.92 pints) would be sold for a day’s wages, so food prices will really increase dramatically when this third seal is opened. Sadly, there will be many people starving to death from this plague around the world, and even in our continent of Europe.”

As Karl scanned across the group, he noticed that many of the men and women looked somewhat downcast and sober as they thought about the implications of the judgments and how it would affect them.

Seeing their concerned looks, Karl said, “We Christians don’t need to be concerned about our own lives, or what we’ll eat, drink, or wear, or where we’ll live.”

Karl flipped back through his Bible until he came to Matthew 6.

Karl said: “Jesus Christ told us these words in Matthew chapter 6, verses 31 through 33: *[31] Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? [32] (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. [33] But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*’ There is no need for us to be alarmed. If

we seek God's will and do it, we will have all our needs met by our loving Heavenly Father."

"That is comforting," a brunette Norwegian girl, in her twenties, said.

"Now," Karl said, "the fourth seal unleashes death on a large scale, as a result of the first three plagues taking their toll. It is sad that many will die during this fourth seal judgment, but if they die, it is because they did not want to repent and seek God as He calls out to them. If they turn to God, He will certainly provide for their needs during this time, and forever afterward."

"What about the fifth seal?" a Norwegian teen guy with glasses asked.

"The fifth seal shows the martyrs who have died for the sake of Christ now in Heaven," Karl said. "Many of these will die for Christ's sake during the second half of the seven-year tribulation period. In chapter 6, they are asking God to avenge their blood on the wicked who killed them. The Antichrist will seek to slay many people during the second half of the tribulation period.

"Revelation chapter 13 speaks about how the Antichrist and the False Prophet will cause anyone who refuses to receive the mark of the beast to be killed. But, God will protect those who follow His voice and the leading of His Spirit. Revelation chapter 12 speaks about how those of Israel who believe on Jesus will go into a place of refuge, in the wilderness. Since God does not respect one person above another (as we see in Romans 2:11), we know that God will provide places of refuge for Gentile Christians as well."

The brunette girl lowered her Bible and said, "Karl, are you saying that people who die as martyrs are not being led by God to die for their faith?"

"Inga, God does not want people to have to die a torturous death," Karl said. "But if people don't follow God's leading, they may die a slow death, but God will give them the grace for it. However, I know that God prefers that His children follow His leading, and go where He sends them. In Matthew 10:23, Jesus said: '*But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*' Jesus also told his disciples to beware of men in verse 17 of that chapter."

"In other words," Karl said, "Jesus is saying to not put your trust in men because they may turn on you and seek to harm you. If we follow His leading, things will go well for us. But, if God is calling you to die a martyr's death, He is not calling you to die a torturous death, but a swift one. Revelation 20:4 shows how people who refuse the mark of the beast will be beheaded. Beheading is a swift, painless death. But, for the Antichrist, it is a very efficient means of killing people in his cruel, planet-wide dictatorship."

"So, God would never lead His children to be burned at the stake or tortured to death?" Inga said.

"That is correct," Karl said. "God may allow it, but if we follow His voice, He will not lead us to a place or situation where that would happen to us."

"Are there any examples in scripture that support what you're saying?" Inga asked with a questioning look on her face.

"Yes, there are a number of them," Karl said. "Are you ready for them?"

“Sure,” Inga said.

“In Numbers 35,” Karl said, “we learn that the Jews had cities of refuge where people, who accidentally killed their neighbors, could flee to for safety. In 2 Kings 1, Elijah called fire from heaven upon soldiers who were seeking to capture him, to kill him. In 2 Kings 6, *Elisha*, Elijah’s successor, requested of God that an army of enemy soldiers would be blinded so they could not capture him or the town he was staying in. And, God answered his prayer. David was helped to escape before Saul would have killed him. God certainly worked to deliver David from his enemies, who sought to take his life.

“In Psalm 91, verses 1-4, David says with confidence in God: ‘[1] **He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.** [2] **I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.** [3] **Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.** [4] **He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.**’” [Note: Bold added.]

“What about the New Testament?” Inga said.

“There are many examples from the New Testament too,” Karl said. “Paul, an apostle, was let down in a basket by night to escape from Damascus, when men in that city sought his life. That’s in Acts 9. In Matthew 2, an angel told Joseph, in a dream, to take Mary and the baby Jesus, and go to Egypt, because King Herod sought to kill Jesus, and *I think likely also* do harm to Mary and Joseph.”

“Hmm,” Inga said, listening attentively.

“In Acts 17, Paul and Silas also escaped from Thessalonica by night, where men sought their lives,” Karl continued, letting his eyes scan over the faces in the group of more than twenty. “And, as I mentioned earlier, referring to Revelation chapter 12, God will provide a place of refuge for believing Jews to go to during the last half of the tribulation.

“Also, in Genesis 19:15-17, God, in His mercy, had angels bring Lot out of the wicked city of Sodom, when God was about to bring fire and brimstone on it. If Lot had remained in that city, he would have died, but he would still be brought Heaven and given a white robe.

“Oh, I almost forgot; In Acts 23, God also had Paul’s nephew tell him and the Romans (who were holding him in their custody) that certain men were plotting to kill Paul, when they had an opportunity. Then, the Romans escorted Paul with many soldiers out of Jerusalem. God spared Paul’s life out of His love and mercy for Him.”

“But, those people you spoke of are all gone to Heaven. What about us?” Inga said.

Karl said: “Paul wrote in Romans 2:11 how that God does not respect some people more than others. I can quote it for you. Romans 2:11 says: ‘**For there is no respect of persons with God.**’ God loves us and cares for us all the same.

“But, James 4:8 and Jeremiah 29:13 both show that those who seek and desire God will get to know Him more personally than others, because they are opening their hearts, more and more, to experience God’s love. You see, God works according to our free will, which He gave each person

when they were conceived in the womb.”

“I’ll have to think about that,” Inga said with a hand on her chin as she contemplated what he had shared.

“Secret Police”

Wearing an yellow florescent vest over his blue polo shirt, Karl approached a metal staircase attached to a large gantry crane designed for unloading container ships. He climbed the steps up to a platform where he entered an elevator. Pressing a button, he waited as the elevator hummed to life and defied gravity as it lifted him up high above the dockyard. Once he reached the top of the gantry crane, Karl emerged from elevator doors and breathed in the fresh air.

He was standing on a metal balcony which led to a control cab. The city of Oslo, Norway spread out below him, stretching out for a few miles into the distance. Skyscrapers stood proudly among the multitudes of high rise-apartment buildings, multi-floored hotels, malls, businesses, and boutiques. The numerous windows of the new and old tall structures reflected the pink rays of the rising sun. It was summer in Oslo and the August temperatures felt good to Karl, regardless of the fact that the average temperature was less than 60 degree Fahrenheit.

Here high above the harbor, he felt a breeze stir his vest and ruffle his hair. He was thinking about the Bible study he had the other day, remembering how the people took the information he shared with them. Some seemed to be a little troubled by his talk, but others spoke to him afterward and said that his teaching made sense, but they would like to look into it more.

But, Inga Jacobsen seemed skeptical and tried to argue that God had allowed *Job*, from the Bible, to suffer for no real reason, saying that Job was serving God faithfully. Karl had heard others tell him that argument before. The question about Job honestly bothered him. He needed to find an answer from God because Job, who was a righteous man, had suffered for what seemed to be no apparent reason. And, this didn’t seem to fit with what Karl had been telling the Bible study group about, how God never ever would lead Christians into places where they would be tortured or killed slowly and painfully.

Stepping into the control cab, Karl sat down in the comfortable operator’s seat and gazed down through the *Plexiglas* windows at a dizzying view of the ground more than a hundred meters below. The front third of the floor and all of the front side of the cab were crafted from the tough, transparent material, making him feel safe from wind and rain.

A large container ship had just docked, brimming with tall stacks of shipping containers, which came in a variety of colors. He was supposed to start unloading very soon. But, in the time before he would get the orders to start unloading, Karl prayed to his Heavenly Father.

“Father God,” Karl said, “what would you tell me about Job? Inga pointed out that he suffered a lot from events that you allowed, which seemed to have no real purpose. I thought you were the One we could trust to take care of us. What would you tell me about this concern I have? Why did Job have to suffer?”

“My son,” God’s loving quiet voice said, “the Job from the book of Job suffered from the loss of his children and the loss of his herds because he was starting to put them before Me. He did love Me, but his heart was starting to draw away from Me, and toward his own works. He boasted of good deeds he did and of works of service he did for the poor, and for the outcasts. He complained and said that I was unjust and cruel, and that he, Job, was innocent of any transgression.

“It is true he followed the laws I gave mankind from the beginning, such as to not commit adultery and to not steal, but he was trusting in his own works to satisfy Me, and he was turning more toward his physical possessions than he was toward Me. I will tell you that no man is righteous of himself or of his own works. Your righteousness comes from Me, and Me alone, through the blood of the offering of Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and for the sins of the whole world. That is correct, My son. Do not fear. I will never leave you, nor forsake you. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Wow,” Karl said. “I didn’t realize fully that Job was turning away from you, but I noticed he did seem to accuse you of doing him wrong and of making him into a target for you to shoot at. I knew that wasn’t right.”

“My son,” Abba God’s voice said calmly, “that showed you his heart and that he was turning away from Me, even before he experienced the loss of his children and herds. That is correct. And, I the Lord your God have spoken.”

A voice squawked over the two-way radio in the cab: “Karl, we’re ready for the unloading procedure.”

“Copy. I’m on it. Over,” Karl said after he pressed the ‘talk’ button.

Moving a joystick forward, Karl sent the control cab rolling down a long crane arm that stretched many yards out over the docks and above the water. As the cab rolled forward on its track, Karl thought about what God had told him. He wanted to share that new information with Inga Jacobsen the next time he saw her.

Just as he was close to the point where he would need to be for unloading the containers, his radio came to life. “Karl, this is Jens*. We need you to return and come down to the ground level. Some undercover cops are wanting to see you. Over.” [** Pronounced: ‘Yens’.*]

“Copy. I’m coming. Over,” Karl said, feeling his heartbeat quickening.

He stopped and then pulled back on the joystick, sending the control cab back toward its resting position near the elevator and balcony. He felt fear gripping his stomach area as he returned. This was the last thing he wanted to hear. What kind of trouble was he in? Why would undercover cops want to talk to him? Did they learn that he was conducting an illegal Bible study in the basement of an apartment building late at night?

The owner of the apartment was a secret Christian and had allowed them to meet down there for a weekly study and prayer time. Could one of the residents have seen people approaching the basement entrance and somehow overheard what the Christians were doing down in the basement? Karl had made sure the people coming to the Bible study did so at night and one at a time to avoid being noticed. One member would arrive at the basement, and five minutes would pass before the next

person would quietly open the outside door, and descend the stairs to the concrete below.

Having left the control cab once it came to a stop, Karl was now inside the elevator and descending to the ground. He hoped that no one in the Bible study had snitched on him or on the others. But, only God knew if there was a mole in their group. After the elevator came to a stop, he quickly descended a flight of stairs to the ground. His chest tightened as he noticed a black *Audi Q3* SUV with tinted windows parked nearby and three men in dark business suits quietly standing around it.

One had blond hair and a prominent chin. Another had dark brown hair, which was slicked back. A third man was shorter and stocky with a brown crew cut. All men appeared athletic and strong.

As Karl stepped to the concrete pavement, they turned and approached him with emotionless expressions on their faces.

“Are you Karl Holst, a longshoreman?” the blond-haired man asked him without extending any hand of greeting.

“Yes,” Karl said.

“We would like to take you in for questioning,” the dark-haired man said while the man with the crew cut walked up beside Karl, to Karl’s left.

“And, you are?” Karl said, with concern in his face.

“Hey!” Karl said as the man with the crew cut suddenly grabbed his wrist, with a vice-like grip, and snapped a handcuff on it. Then, he pulled Karl’s wrists close together and locked a second handcuff around his other wrist.

“We are officers of the peace, and you are being detained for certain illegal activities you are participating in,” the blond-haired man said. “I am Officer Erikson and this is Officer Landvik.” He nodded toward his colleague with the blonde hair. Then, motioning toward the man with the crew cut, Erikson said, “And, this is Officer Lund.”

“Why do you wish to question me?” Karl said. “Have I done something illegal while operating this gantry crane?”

“We will speak about it in the car,” Officer Landvik said.

Knowing he had no choice, and was locked up, Karl reluctantly followed them to the car and got into the back seat, after Landvik opened the door for him. Once he was seated, Officer Lund sat down in the passenger seat near the opposite door, giving Karl a cold look, *as if* to say, ‘Don’t even think that you can escape from us.’

Many questions and fears raced through Karl’s mind as the SUV drove off, rolling through the dock yard, which was filled with stacks of metal containers, high-capacity forklifts, and transport trucks. A few workers looked at the car with curiosity as it drove past them, but most ignored it.

“So, what is this all about?” Karl asked as he leaned forward in his seat, looking through the Plexiglas window in a partition that separated the back seats from the front. He was no doubt being

taken by the secret police to an interrogation room somewhere hidden from the public's awareness.

"Mr. Holst, we received a report," Officer Landvick said, "from a source that you are currently involved with illegal religious activities, including illegal secret meetings at night, and proselytizing citizens of this fine country. We will ask you more questions later."

Hearing that, Karl felt peace come into his heart. It was the peace of knowing that he was doing God's will and suffering persecution for the sake of Christ. Karl let himself relax and receive God's peace. He told his Heavenly Father his concerns as the *Audi Q3* pulled out of the shipping yards and onto a road that would take them back into the city center of Oslo.

A several minutes passed while the SUV drove through heavy morning traffic on well-used streets, and then turned onto less-used streets, which were lined with apartment buildings, houses, and many trees.

"My son, Karl, do not be concerned," God's loving voice said. "I am with you. I will never leave you, nor forsake you. What you were telling your friends was certainly correct. I do not allow My children, who seek My best will, to have to suffer torture, without warning them and calling out to them. If they follow My leading, they will never suffer torture or slow deaths. I will certainly take good care of them. But, they must surrender themselves to Me and follow My leading. And, I will bless them. And, I the Lord your God have spoken."

"But, Father God," Karl said, feeling some anxiety, "I am being arrested for serving you. I have led a Bible study in an apartment building basement like you showed me to do. Now, I am being arrested for that by the secret police. What do I say and do? I would like to get back to my brothers and sisters in Christ. Will you take care of me in this time?"

He tried to peer through the tinted glass in his door, but it was hard to see features and details of the streets he was passing through since the glass was nearly opaque.

"My son, Karl," Abba God said, "I will certainly guide you in what to say to these men. I will give you wisdom and understanding from Me. I shall never leave you, nor forsake you. And, I will deliver you from the prison. I certainly will. Remember Peter, the apostle? He was delivered from prison when he was locked up by Herod. I sent angels to rescue him, and to take his shackles off, and to open the prison doors. I shall do the same for you. Just watch and see, and rest in Me. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken."

At last at its destination, twenty minutes after Karl's capture, the *Audi Q3* rolled up to a medium-sized office building, which resembled many government buildings in Oslo, after having passed through a manned checkpoint gate. The car drove down a sloping entrance into an underground parking garage and pulled gracefully into an unoccupied space between two dark grey *BMW 7 Series* sedans. Officer Landvik approached Karl's door and opened it while Lund kept a sharp eye on his prisoner.

"Come out of the vehicle slowly and place your hands behind your back," Landvik said coldly.

Once Karl was out, and the door was shut, Landvik smiled at him diabolically and said gloatingly, "You are the twelfth Christian I personally have arrested for conducting illegal religious activities. Do you know what happened to the other eleven?"

Karl remained silent.

“They are on their way, or have already arrived, at some concentration camps in Germany and Poland. If you don’t forsake your superstition, you will be next to go to labor camps where I have heard it said that they make you work until you die from exhaustion.”

Karl shuddered slightly, but began silently telling his burdens to his loving Heavenly Father.

“Let’s get him moving to the interrogation room,” Officer Erikson said.

“Interrogation”

“Have a seat, Mr. Holst,” Erikson said.

Reluctantly, Karl sat in a metal chair before a steel table. A lamp was shining in his eyes in the darkened interrogation room. Landvik, the dark-haired Norwegian, knelt down and snapped a shackle around Karl’s left ankle. He shook his leg, but felt it would only move seven inches in any direction. Solid chain links locked his ankle to the concrete floor. There would be no escaping this eerie room, Karl thought.

On the other side of the table, hidden by the bright glare of the desk lamp, Erikson leaned forward in his seat while Landvik stood in a corner of the room away from Karl’s view. Officer Lund had left them to attend to other duties.

“So, tell me, is it true that you are conducting illegal religious activities in a basement?” Erikson asked with an even, emotionless tone. “Are you having Bible studies?”

“How is it illegal for men and women to read and study a book, which is meant for spiritual encouragement?” Karl asked.

“Mr. Holst, answer my question, please,” Erikson said calmly but with a slight degree of firmness.

“Tell me, by whose authority is a Bible study made illegal? Is it by God’s authority or man’s?” Karl said with peace filling his heart and a new sense of boldness.

“I am the one asking the questions, not you,” Erikson said coldly. “Are you leading a Bible study? Answer my question.”

“Why are you so concerned about this?” Karl asked.

“We are concerned,” Erikson said, “about the spread of harmful and dangerous ideas in our country and with the rise of cults, which would want to usurp our great nation and the integrity of the European commonwealth. We must put a stop to their spread. It is clear that you are conducting Bible studies. So, this must end now.”

There was a pause which filled the room with silence for a few seconds. Erikson pressed his

fingertips together while he rested his hands on the metal table top, thinking of what next he should say.

“Mr. Holst,” Erikson said, “if you cooperate with us, we will show you mercy and allow you to live a normal life in this great communistic republic through which our country now is rising to prominence. Will you cooperate with us and cease all illegal religious activities, such as proselytizing; and participating in Bible studies, or group worship; and disseminating harmful and illegal religious literature or ideas?”

“I will do what my God shows me to do. I must obey Him over man,*” Karl said simply.
[* Note: See Acts 5:29.]

“If you refuse to cooperate with us,” Officer Erikson said, “I can only say that you will be sent to a labor camp where you will face indefinite, hard, manual labor; small rations; and torture, until the day that you deny your faith in your religion.”

“I will never deny my faith in my God,” Karl said with conviction. “Jesus died for me on the cross for my sins...”

“Be silent!” Erikson said gruffly.

“..., and I can never deny my faith in Him,” Karl finished.

Erikson glared at Karl, but his facial expression was hidden from Karl’s eyes by the bright light shining in his face.

“How many people are in your group?” Erikson said after he forced himself to relax his pent-up hatred.

“There are less than thirty,” Karl said.

“Give me five of their names, please,” Erikson said, pulling out a computer tablet.

“Do you know where you’re going when you die?” Karl asked, leaning forward.

Erikson paused and seemed to be stuck in a moment of intense thought. A minute passed. It seemed as if the interrogator had forgotten his next question.

“Hell is a real place,” Karl said calmly. “People have been there briefly to see it before they were returned to their bodies. There were many videos of their experiences on the internet before it was heavily censored. I don’t want you to go there.”

“Shut up!” Erikson shouted. “I don’t want you telling me about Hell. That place doesn’t exist. It can’t exist.”

“People have been there. There are testimonies,” Karl said.

“Enough about Hell. I am asking the questions,” Erikson said angrily.

“Only Jesus can save you from Hell if you turn to Him,” Karl said.

“Be silent!” Erikson said sternly, pointing a finger at Karl.

Erikson pressed a button under the table and leaned down toward a small microphone under the table. “Guards, take the prisoner, Karl Holst, to a holding cell.”

A thick metal door opened a few seconds later, and two security guards wearing police belts with handcuffs, pistols, flashlights, and other tools entered. Officer Landvik unlocked his leg shackle and the two guards grabbed each of Karl’s arms, which were still linked by handcuffs.

They led him down a concrete hallway in the basement of the police building, and took a left at an intersection. Karl was taken to a room where his mug shots were snapped, his name and personal information was entered into a computer, and he was given an orange uniform to put on. They took his shoes, watch, cell phone, keys, and personal belongings, and placed them in a security box. Once he had come out of a dressing room, wearing the uniform, the guards reattached his handcuffs and escorted him out of the room, back into the hallway.

After walking down this hallway some ways, they reached a hallway, branching off to the right, which was lined with small concrete cells. Each cell contained a small lavatory, bright florescent lights encased in wire cages, and two folding beds attached to the walls. The guards shoved him into one of these and locked the door once they had removed Karl’s handcuffs.

As the guards’ footsteps echoed down the corridor, Karl sighed and looked up, trying to picture the Lord Jesus. He desperately wanted to know what God had to say about this. He was now in the custody of the secret police of a communistic puppet government, and facing what Officer Erikson said would be indefinite hard labor, and possible torture in a German labor camp. What would his Abba Father tell him now?

“My son,” Abba God’s loving voice said, “I know you are troubled about this, but I will deliver you, just as I did Paul when he was escaping from Damascus, when the people sought his life. You will escape. I promise this. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Father God,” Karl said, smiling, as he felt the peace of God fill his heart again.

That night, as Karl lowered himself into a hard-padded bed and tried to make himself comfortable, he thought about his friends and wondered what they were doing, and if they knew he had been arrested. He thought about Inga and wondered if she and the other people in the group knew he was gone.

Karl remembered that one of his Christian friends from the Bible study, named Felix, worked in the same dockyard where he was employed. Felix Tangen operated a high-capacity forklift. Surely, Felix would hear the news from coworkers. He hoped his friends were praying, because he was needing prayer in this difficult time in his life.

Finally, he drifted off to sleep, thankful that the overhead lights turned off automatically at 10:30 PM.

Chapter Twenty-One

“The Traitor”

“The Prayer Meeting and the Traitor”

Miles away from the secret police headquarters, in the downstairs den of a 5-bedroom house, twelve Christians were praying and interceding for Karl the day after Karl was arrested by the secret police. It was a Friday when Karl was locked up. Now, on this Saturday, Toben Nenge, a Nigerian emigrant to Norway, led the prayer meeting. Standing beside him was Karl’s good friend, Felix Tangen, a tall, Norwegian man in his late forties, with brown hair and graying temples.

At the moment, Inga Jacobsen (a brunette, Norwegian, 22-year-old girl) was praying and asking her Father God to deliver Karl from prison. Though she disagreed with him on several issues, she liked him as a good friend, and felt some attraction to him, even though was ten years older than her.

“And Father God,” Inga prayed, “please deliver Karl from the jail, like you did for Daniel in the lion’s den, and Peter, who you delivered from prison by sending an angel. If you can have an angel unlock Peter’s chains, and release him from prison, surely you can have an angel, even the same angel, unlock Karl and release him. Let your best will happen, Father God. In Jesus Christ’s Name, amen.”

“I have a word from the Lord,” Toben said, looking around at the group as they opened their eyes.

“God wants me to speak,” Toben said. “He will speak a message through me. God says: ‘My children, your prayers are being answered. Just wait on Me, and you will see Karl delivered from prison. I will certainly bring him out, just as I did for Simon Peter. Now, rest in Me and look to Me. I will bless you and protect you as you look to Me. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.’”

“Wow,” Inga said, smiling. “That is exciting to me. God just spoke through you, Toben. And, He’s answered our prayers.”

“I believe God will deliver Karl from prison very soon,” Felix’s wife, Elise said.

Suddenly, a ding-dong chime filled the air.

“I better see who it is,” Felix said turning toward the door.

“Wait, Felix,” Elise said, with concern on her face. “Shouldn’t you seek God if you should answer the door?”

The ding-dong sound repeated.

“I’ll do it as I go,” Felix said before walking through the doorway and into a downstairs hallway.

He entered a staircase, which was nestled between two rooms to the left of the hallway, and quickly ascended the steps, taking stair steps two at a time. He opened the door at the top of the staircase and hurried through his living room until he paused before the front door, breathing deeply and quickly from the exertion. Then, he looked through a peephole in the door. A delivery truck started up and drove down the street, which bordered his small yard on the outskirts of Oslo, Norway.

Felix flung it open and found a cardboard package on his doorstep. Taking it inside, he set the box on his kitchen counter top and opened it with a knife. The box was about the size of two medium-sized novels placed side by side. He reached in and pulled out a paperback book and an empty prescription medicine container, which was capped.

Though he normally did not see plastic containers shipped with novels, Felix immediately knew what the container was for. The book was a fictional military thriller about World War 2, but it was of no interest to him. Felix noticed a slip of standard-sized computer paper containing the proof of purchase. Staped to the receipt, a slightly smaller piece of paper caught his attention.

Felix examined it closely for a few minutes before he heard the sound of the stairway door opening with a slight squeak. He shoved the plastic container into his left pocket just before his wife came into the kitchen. As she was entering the kitchen and looking around, Felix quickly removed the attached piece of paper, crumpled it, and shoved it in his pocket.

“What is that?” Elise said, peering at the opened cardboard box and the paperback novel sitting beside it.

“It’s a novel I got in the mail,” Felix said, picking up the book and showing it to her.

“You seem kind of nervous, Felix. Are you okay?”

“Yes,” Felix said. “I might seem nervous because I had been concerned that the secret police could have been at the door. But, it was just a delivery truck. It’s gone now.”

“Okay. Don’t worry about it. God is taking good care of us. He promised never to leave us, didn’t He?” Elise said.

“That is right,” Felix said, nodding somewhat stiffly.

“Felix, who came to the door?” Inga said as she entered the kitchen a short time later, while he was placing the novel back into the box it came in.

“It was just a delivery truck. That’s all,” Felix said as nonchalantly as he could.

But, as Inga looked at him she thought he seemed to be slightly nervous.

“Is something wrong?” Inga asked. “You seem a little stressed.”

“I thought the person at the door could have been secret police,” Felix lied, speaking as calmly as he could. “That’s all.”

“Would you like to have lunch with us?” Elise asked Inga.

“That would be great,” Inga said. “I could use the encouragement. My roommate is a non-Christian, but she seldom is to be seen in the apartment we share. I think she does a lot of her studying at the University of Oslo. It can feel lonely in our apartment.”

As Inga talked with Elise, Felix took the box with the novel and excused himself, saying he needed to run an errand. Opening a closet, Felix reached inside and drew out a green backpack. Then, he entered an attached two-car garage and started up his dark blue *2017 Volkswagen Tiguan*.

After activating his garage door with a small remote, Felix brought the car up to speed and cruised through his neighborhood, heading toward a busy city park twelve blocks from his house. Tall apartment complexes, shaded by Rowan and Alder trees, gave way to a large city park, which was filled with conifer and deciduous trees, some playground equipment, and pavilions. Finding a parking spot, he slipped in between two cars and came to a stop.

He opened the box with the novel and pulled the book out. Then, he flipped through the pages. “Ah ha,” he said to himself as his eyes noticed some ruble notes. He pulled the notes out and added up the money he had received: 3,000 rubles.* A yellow slip of paper, sandwiched between two currency notes, informed him that 337,500 rubles* were located in a small safe buried in the park.

[These amounts are about equal to \$100 and \$11,250 US dollars from the year 2017, respectively.]*

[Note: The United States would already have been attacked and conquered by the time Russia takes over all of Europe, and turns the European countries into communistic puppet states. I encourage you to seek God about this, for I understand that this shall indeed happen in the near future.]

Moving over to the right passenger seat, Felix opened his glove box and found a paper notepad and a ballpoint pen within. He pulled both out and wrote on the paper as quickly as he could, while still being legible. He wrote down the names, contact information, and addresses of certain people he knew — 30 names total — and put an “x” beside several names, indicating their importance in the underground Church. Once he was finished, he glanced over it twice before breaking into a grin.

Then, he removed the prescription medicine container from his pocket, tore off two pieces of paper from the notepad, and shoved the rolled up paper into the plastic container. A member of the secret police would later find the pieces of paper.

The instructions he had crumpled up also indicated that he would be paid another 337,500 rubles if all 30 people, who he was betraying, were arrested or killed by the secret police. But, a warning stated clearly that failing to cooperate fully meant severe consequences would follow.

As he exited the vehicle, with the cash in his wallet, and the green backpack on his back, Felix felt a sense of apprehension, mingled with glee. The fresh summer air invigorated him and the thought of what he was about to do increased his adrenaline levels. He reached into his left pocket, where he had shoved the paper that came with his receipt, and pulled it out. Unfolding the crumpled paper, he saw a map of the same park displayed on its uneven surface.

An 'x' indicated where Felix was to place his message. He strolled through the busy park, past a group of children playing tag, and up to a cluster of bushes at the base of some *Grey Alder* trees. As nonchalantly as he could, he reached in and placed the plastic container with his handwritten message into the depths of the bushes. He was standing right where the map indicated the 'x' to be. Then, he groped through the bushes until he found a metal object partially buried in the ground near the base of a bush. Dirt had been piled over most of it, except for two corners.

Felix took a stick and dug around the metal box until it could easily be moved. After a little work, he removed a small metal case with a combination lock from the soil. The crumpled paper provided him the code for the safe. After a few tries, he had it opened. Neatly stacked, large-denomination ruble notes filled the safe. Without trying to draw any attention, he quickly pulled the cash out and shoved it into his green backpack, and placed the prescription container with the note into the safe. Then, after snapping the safe shut, he jammed it back into the ground and spread a thin layer of dirt over 90 percent of it.

Whoever was going to pick up the message would arrive sometime that Saturday, he understood from the crumpled instructions. As he left the place and walked down a mostly empty path, Felix hoped that his wife didn't suspect he was not being honest with her. She seemed to know him well enough to tell when something wasn't right, but if he did some good acting, he thought, she might not notice his unusual behavior.

"Karl's Escape"

Karl awoke and sat up in his hard, folding bed. He was in a cell in the headquarters of the secret police of the communistic, Norwegian puppet government, which was secretly controlled by Russia's revived neo-soviet empire. He heard his heart beating in his ears.

After Russia had been greatly provoked by the United States, it retaliated with a massive strike on the U.S., knocking out cities and military bases with fury and bitter hatred that resulted from America's surprise attack on Russia.

Once America was blasted to rubble, and the weakening NATO alliance was crippled, the neo-soviet Russians concentrated on conquering Europe, country by country, with the help from Belarus, and central Asian countries, which were allies of Russia. In a few short years, Europe was completely under the control of the neo-soviet government of Russia, which had become strongly communistic.

Karl looked around at the dark room, realizing it was still night time. He could only see some dim light squeezing through the small gap between the door and the linoleum floor.

The neo-soviet Russian government set up puppet governments in all the countries it conquered, and made sure those countries walked in step with its central government. Prison camps and death camps were starting to pop up all throughout Europe as the communistic puppet governments and Russia dealt with insurrectionists, criminals, terrorists, and aggressors. But, sadly, among them many, many Christians were captured and imprisoned.

Stepping onto the cool surface, Karl stretched his arms and wondered why he had woken up so suddenly.

The neo-soviet Russians and their puppet governments promoted state churches, which were liturgical and lifeless, but banned any church denominations which did not fall under the control of the communistic governments. Members were to be registered with the state, and the distribution of Bibles was banned. Christians who did not succumb to this were subject to persecution, confiscation of property, and the removal of Bibles. But, eventually, they were arrested and thrown into prison camps.

As Karl's eyes adjusted to the dim light coming from the hallway outside his door, he realized that the room was not empty. He felt a presence of someone standing not far away from him. Then, the ceiling light suddenly turned on and Karl saw a man, dressed in white trousers, a white shirt, and sand-colored boots, standing in a corner of the room.

"Who are you?" Karl asked, surprised, blinking in the light.

"I was sent by the Lord to deliver you," the man said simply. "Come with me. You will have no harm come to you."

The man had brown hair, was clean shaven, and had a medium build, but Karl had a feeling that this man was not a human.

Karl said, "May I ask you a question, sir?"

"Yes?" the man said, smiling kindly.

Squinting at the stranger, Karl said, "In the book of 1 John chapter 4, verses 1-4, we are told to test the spirits to see if they are of God. Do you confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh?"

"I do indeed confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, and I am a servant of God," the man said, still smiling warmly.

"You must be an angel," Karl said, feeling amazed at what was happening to him.

"I am sent by the Father. Now come and follow me," the man said as he walked toward the door of the cell.

He pushed the door open as if it had never been locked, and Karl's mouth dropped open. 'This is a miracle,' he realized, still somewhat dumbstruck by the fact that an angelic being was leading him out of his cell.

They entered the concrete hallway, which was illuminated by white LED ceiling lights, and walked down it for some distance. As they took a right around a corner, Karl stiffened. A security guard, armed with a tactical shotgun, was standing in this new corridor. The man in white gently took Karl by the arm and kept him walking toward the guard.

"He will see us," Karl said, fearfully.

“Do not fear or be concerned,” the man in white said.

The guard suddenly turned their direction and walked toward them. Karl cringed and prayed fervently but remained as silent as he could manage as they approached the guard. Every footstep felt like one more step toward a concentration camp, to Karl’s mind. The seconds slowed down as the guard drew very close, but then, Karl noticed that the guard wasn’t even looking directly at him or at the man in white.

In seconds, the guard swept past Karl and continued walking down the hall, acting as if he never saw them at all. As the footsteps receded, Karl realized that the guard had not actually seen him. God had miraculously made Karl and the man in white invisible to the guard.

Now, they approached a security station where a guard sat behind bullet-proof glass, keeping an eye on computer monitors. But, just as before, Karl and the man in white slipped by without the guard noticing them. The stranger escorted Karl toward a heavy security door, which could normally only be opened remotely by the push of a button from within the enclosed guard station. But, the man in white just pushed the metal door open as if it were never locked, like he did to Karl’s cell door.

They were now in a parking lot within a fenced-in plot of land. The secret police headquarters sat behind Karl like a sleeping dinosaur, ready to awake and attack its next victim. That thought kept his heart beating fast. By now, the security team should have seen Karl leaving, since tiny radio frequency identification chips were placed into each prisoner’s orange uniform, in unknown locations.

The night sky was full of stars which sparkled in the vast distance like a field of diamonds on black velvet. Buildings and trees kept him from seeing across the town, but Karl knew that he was some considerable distance from his apartment. He knew he couldn’t just get a taxi or anything like that since he was a wanted man. And, he couldn’t call a friend to pick him up because he had not cell phone.

The man in white reached over and touched the orange hem of Karl’s shirt sleeve. Suddenly, the surroundings changed, and Karl instantly found himself inside an apartment or a small house. The lights were off, except for a blue night light in the living room beside a bedroom door. The blue light would automatically come on in low light levels. Seeing the night light, Karl recognized his own apartment.

“How did I get here?” Karl said out loud, amazed at what had just taken place.

He was standing inside his living room, beside his brown three-person couch, and was facing a row of artificial plants in ceramic pots, which he had placed in front of a kitchen table to mark the boundaries between his small living room and “dining room.” Like the living room, the dining room area was also carpeted with an off-white carpet, for some reason.

“My son, you were translated,” Father God’s loving voice said to Karl’s soul and spirit. “I delivered you because you trusted in Me and you loved Me. I allowed that to be a test for you to see if you would follow Me to the end. And, I see that you are bearing good fruit. There is a good heart within you. Now, go to bed and rest. I have deactivated the tracking chips in your clothing. And, I have sent the clothing you lost back to you, along with your personal items. You are safe in My hand. And, I

the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Abba Father,” Karl said, closing his eyes and smiling. “I am so glad to have you as my loving Father and God. No one loves like you do.”

Karl stepped into his bedroom, which lay to the left of a guest bedroom in his two-bedroom apartment. It was somewhat small, but it had a closet on the right wall and a comfortable bed beside a reading desk and computer chair. He had spent a lot of good time with God before that desk meditating on God’s Word, the Bible. But, now, Karl wondered if he could really sleep in his own room. Wouldn’t the secret police be searching for him high and low? It seemed like his apartment would be the first place they would look.

“Should I stay here or should I go somewhere else?” Karl asked his Heavenly Father.

“Stay for tonight and rest,” Abba God said. “You do not need to fear the authorities. In the same way that I protected you and kept them from seeing you and the angel, I shall also protect you here. Now, rest, My son. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Yes, Abba Father,” Karl said, letting himself relax.

Karl flipped on the overhead light and had a quick look around to make sure everything was as it should be. But, his eyes suddenly latched onto a pile of items set on his bed. Walking over to it, he picked up his jeans and shirt, which he wore the day of his arrest. His cell phone, wallet, keys, and other items he kept in his pockets were all present. God must have had an angel take them from the prison to his apartment.

After he put the items away, Karl reached into a secret storage area in his apartment and pulled out a precious copy of the Bible, which the communistic puppet government had banned. Going to his desk, he switched a lamp on and began reading from the Bible in the book of Psalms, chapter 91.

Karl came to verse 15 and read aloud: “**He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.**”^{*}

[Note: The pronouns referring to God have been emphasized by adding bold font.]*

After talking more with his Father God, Karl plopped into his bed and fell asleep. Outside, while Karl slept, the headquarters of the Norwegian secret police was waking up to the reality that one of their important prisoners was missing.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“The Search”

Major Lukas Grieg was running, or he felt like it. He had just gotten out of his car in the parking

garage of the headquarters of the Norwegian secret police, and was heading toward an elevator at a quick walking pace.

Lukas Grieg, a brown-haired man with an athletic build and piercing eyes, aged 42, was a major in the military-like *Ministry of the Interior Special Command for National Protection* (or the SCNP). Most everyone in this military-like command structure called themselves state protection officers. But, Lukas knew that some prisoners had called them “secret police,” “the Gestapo,” or “the Norwegian KGB.”

Immediately after entering a chrome-plated elevator, Lukas pressed the button for the second floor. Less than twenty minutes ago, Lukas had been awoken from sleep by a secure phone call from a first lieutenant he was in charge of. He had been informed that an important prisoner, Karl Holst, had escaped from a cell in the SCNP headquarters. Lukas had also been told that the lieutenant colonel, who was in charge of the headquarters, had also been notified.

The elevator came to a stop at the second floor, which housed the offices of high-ranking personnel. Once the door slid open, Lukas stepped out into a sparkling hallway. He walked briskly down a white vinyl floor past artificial potted plants and office doors. He was very concerned about the prison escape. For that to happen, in his mind, it would mean that someone on the inside would have to have helped the prisoner escape. This individual would have to be a mole or a compromised person, Lukas thought.

After a short walk, Lukas reached a metal security door. He placed his hand on a scanner to the right of the door. A small screen beside the biometric hand scanner displayed the words, “Enter the number access code.” After he quickly typed in a number code on a keypad, the door unlocked and Lukas flung it open.

He walked down another stretch of hallway before he reached a door in the right wall of the hallway, which was secured by a hand scanner. Gaining access after a short delay, he hustled through the door and entered a large, circular command center with giant wrap-around screens on the walls. Dozens of empty chairs were nestled up to computer stations, which were spread throughout the mostly-empty room. A few people typed away on keyboards and studied the data being fed to their computer monitors.

Standing before a mammoth-sized screen, a tall man with graying hair, Lieutenant Colonel Nils Anker, turned his head from side to side to take in the data. Seeing him, Lukas was surprised that the colonel would be on the scene so early.

“Excuse me, sir,” Lukas said as he approached his commander.

The colonel turned to see Lukas approach.

“Major Grieg, you must have been informed about the situation regarding the escaped prisoner?”

“That is correct, sir,” Lukas said. “I came here as soon as I was called.”

“We have a mess on our hands. I need to find out who is responsible for that escape. Moles like to live in the dark, and we have got to dig up their concealed network, Major.”

“Sir, where do we start?” Lukas said.

“The police have already been notified and are conducting a search. And, our night crews have been dispatched to comb the nearby neighborhoods surrounding this complex, but I don’t think they will find anything,” Nils said with knitted eyebrows.

“What I want you to do is begin a thorough house sweep,” the Lieutenant Colonel continued after a brief pause. “Find out who is responsible for this escape. But, you must do it secretly. If we let all the people here know what we are doing, the mole might be able to slip through our radar.”

“I will have this matter investigated, sir,” Lukas said. “We will find this mole.”

“That is what I want to hear,” the colonel said, smiling grimly.

A pause followed. Then, Colonel Anker said, “Before long, these troublesome Christians will be history.”

“Oslo”

The sound of rapping came from the front door of Karl Holst’s apartment, waking him from sleep. Groaning, he rolled over on his bed and squinted at a digital clock on his bedside table. The clock displayed 8:50 AM on its screen. He hadn’t slept in this late for a long time. Yawning, Karl stood to his feet. As he did, he heard the knocking again. Quickly, he grabbed his keys and wallet, changed into some khaki trousers and a long sleeve shirt, and hurried to the door, wondering who it could be. If it was the police, they might have already broken the door in by now. But, he didn’t want to take a risk.

“Dear Abba Father, should I answer the door?” Karl asked, still feeling a little groggy.

“Answer it, My son,” God’s gentle, quiet voice said. “You will be fine. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

Karl unlocked the bolt and opened the door to see Toben Nenge, his Nigerian friend, standing in the entrance with a small, dark green backpack in hand. He seemed fairly calm, but Karl could see some concern in his face.

“Karl, I am so glad to see you whole and in one piece,” Toben said excited and pleased to see his friend. “You have to tell me about your escape. God showed me to come to your apartment.”

“Come in,” Karl said, glancing left and right nervously. He hoped no neighbors would overhear their conversation.

Once the door was closed and locked, Karl motioned toward his brown couch and said, “Have a seat, Toben.”

“I’d rather stand,” Toben said. “I don’t know if I will be here long, or if you will be here long, because I have heard rumors that the police are searching for you. I suspect that both of us either are,

or will be, wanted men. Where do we go from here, Karl?”

“All of Europe is controlled by communistic puppet governments in a neo-Soviet empire,” Toben continued. “America is in ruins. South America and Central America are experiencing high levels of crime, chaos, and civil wars. Africa is experiencing droughts, famines, terrorist insurgencies, and civil wars. Asia is under the control of countries which hate Christians. Communist China controls southeast Asia and many islands in the Pacific.”

“You’re right,” Karl said, nodding.

“And,” Toben added, “Australia and New Zealand have been conquered by China. There is no escaping to New Zealand. We could go to Antarctica, but how would we survive in that harsh environment?”

“We have to see what Father God will show us to do,” Karl said. “It is clear that there is no country we can go to for safety. Every country is persecuting Christians. But, I feel that the persecution will be worse. Now, they tolerate us if we agree to go to their state Churches, and agree not to sell or distribute Bibles, or to witness, but in the near future, they will likely turn up the heat and demand that we renounce Jesus completely.”

“That is right, brother,” Toben said, puckering his lips. He added, “They want us to register as Christians and attend state Churches, which are restrained from witnessing or warning people to repent from their sins and turn to God. If we witness to people and the authorities find out, we will be arrested, or fined thousands of dollars, or just be taken to a concentration camp.”

Suddenly, a loud knock came at the door. Both men turned quickly, fearing that the police had arrived. Again, Karl asked God what he should do. And, again, God showed him to open the door. Slowly, he unbolted the lock and eased the door open a crack.

Four people stood outside and several smiled to see him. Abdul Hamed, Felix Tangen, Elise Tangen, and Inga Jacobsen stood in the hallway outside Karl’s apartment. Abdul carried a small, grey backpack, in which Karl knew he often stored his Bible.

“Karl, you’re back,” Inga said, smiling. “I am so glad to see how God delivered you.”

“Come inside,” Karl said, ushering them into his small living room.

The four entered and two sat on his brown couch, while two stood.

“I am so glad to see you safe. That was a miracle that God did to help you escape. He is truly our best Friend,” Inga said, ecstatically.

“It feels like a dream. I am really blessed to have such a miracle-working God and Father,” Karl said, smiling. “What brought you all over here?”

“Abdul heard God tell him to call us and have us go to your apartment,” Inga said.

“Karl, it’s good to see you safe,” Felix said as he stood a short distance away. “When did you escape from the prison and how did that happen?” Then, trying to be somewhat humorous, Felix said, “You

didn't bribe anyone, did you?"

"No," Karl said, chuckling slightly. "God sent an angel early this morning to wake me from sleep and escort me out of the secret police headquarters. The whole escape was a series of miracles. The cell door opened as if it had never been locked. Security guards didn't notice me. I passed by one in the hallway and another in a guard station, and they acted as if I didn't exist. The heavy steel door to the outside was unlocked. It was a miracle."

"That reminds me of the account in the book of Acts how an angel of God brought Simon Peter out of a prison. The next day they were going to kill Peter, but God delivered him," Elise said as she sat on his couch.

"I fear that we're not safe in Oslo anymore," Abdul said. "But, where would God have us go?"

"I'm sure that God will show us when we seek Him about it," Karl said.

"I want to do that. You're right, Karl. God will show us when we ask Him, because He is our Abba Father, who loves us," Abdul said.

A pause followed. Then, Felix cleared his throat and said, stammering a little, "I, I n-need to make a phone call. I'll be back soon."

"Who are you calling?" Elise said.

"I n-need to call my boss to see about... taking the rest of this day off," Felix stammered, blinking quickly after hesitating in mid-sentence. "I-I took off the morning, but I think I'll t-take the rest of this day off."

Then, Felix walked toward the front door, slipped out of the apartment, and closed the door quietly behind him. 'Why is he stammering?' Karl thought, wondering about his friend's unusual behavior.

"So, should we pray?" Toben said.

"Yes," Karl said, closing his eyes to pray. "Dear Father God, we are in a predicament. We need your guidance on what to do. The police know of my escape and are searching for me. It is truly a miracle that they have not already come to this apartment. But, you are protecting us. Dear Father, lead us where you would have us go and to what you would have us do. I need you each day. I cannot live life without You. You are my Life and my Hope. I trust in you. In Jesus Christ's Name. Amen."

More prayers went up for safety and guidance as the fellow believers prayed and interceded for themselves and for other Christians. Finally, the door opened again, and Felix returned to the apartment.

"I couldn't take the day off," Felix said. "So, Elise, would you be able to get a ride with someone else?"

"Sure," Elise said, frowning slightly. "But, I thought your boss would let you take a day off once in a while."

“He n-normally does, but they n-need me today,” Felix stammered slightly turning his eyes away from his wife. He blinked several times and swallowed. Then, he kissed his wife on the cheek quickly and said goodbye to the others.

“Karl,” he said, smiling weakly, “you’re a good man. Bye.”

Then, Felix opened the front door and left the group.

Once he was gone, and the door was locked, Karl began thinking about those last words Felix uttered. ‘Why would he say I’m a good man?’

Toben was standing near the wall beside a bedroom door. His eyes were closed. He nodded his head several times and then his eyes opened. “Brothers and sisters,” Toben said, “Father God has shown me he wants to speak a message through me.”

All eyes focused on the Nigerian man, and the others waited for him to speak.

Toben said: “God says: ‘My children, I am your loving Abba Father and God. The man who just left your group is a traitor. I know this may sound strange to you, but it was he who turned your group in to the police. He turned in you because he wanted to get a reward, like Judas, who betrayed Me for thirty pieces of silver.

“It was he who sought to get the leader of your group, Karl, arrested and imprisoned. He told the police that if the leader was arrested, the others would disband and no longer meet, but he hoped to later turn in the rest of you for more money. He is greedy and fearful, and doesn’t want to serve Me or My Kingdom anymore. This man is leaving because he has already contacted the police and they are already beginning to surround your apartment building.

“There is no natural way for you to escape the police but, just trust in Me, for I will deliver you and I will not let you come to harm. I will blind the eyes of the police so that they will not see you. Now come, and leave, and follow Toben, for I will guide him in where to go. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

Once the message was done, Toben inhaled deeply and closed his eyes. “This is sad,” he said, shaking his head.

“Dear God,” Elise said with tears in her eyes, “you’re saying my husband is a betrayer? Felix a traitor? Not Felix: he loves me.”

The others looked back and forth between Toben and Elise, confused.

“Elise,” Toben said. “God is telling me that you need to seek Him about this matter. Has your husband done anything strange lately?”

“My husband,” Elise said with watery eyes. “Felix isn’t a traitor.”

“Elise,” Toben said gently, “seek God about it, and He will show you the truth.”

“May I use that spare bedroom?” Elise said to Karl.

“Sure,” he said, nodding.

She left the couch and slipped into the room, closing the door shut. Loud sobs came from the room, through the door, as she cried about her husband. Then, they began to subside as Elise poured out her heart to her Abba Father God.

Meanwhile, Toben said, “God is showing me that we will leave once she comes out of the room.”

As they waited, Karl and the others silently prayed for her and for Felix. Karl felt deeply troubled that his friend Felix had betrayed them. ‘How could my good friend do that to me just for the sake of getting money?’ Karl thought. ‘I don’t understand, Father God, why this happened.’

“My son, Karl, I love you very much,” Abba God’s loving voice spoke to his spirit and soul. “You are doing well. I will show you what I want you to see about this. Your former friend was a man who loved this world more than he loved Me. He didn’t start out that way, but neither did Judas Iscariot, because Judas responded to My call to become a disciple and to follow Me.

“Judas gladly listened to me and received what I said. But, after some time had passed, he began to love money, and began to desire wealth, and lost an interest in walking the narrow way. The pleasures of the world appealed to him more than I did. That is why Judas Iscariot betrayed Me.

“Many people over the centuries have demonstrated that they are tares, and are not wheat. They start out following Me and trusting in Me for salvation, but they turn aside after the sinful pleasures of this life, and after the lusts of the eyes, and after what the world calls good. Then, I lose all ground in their life, and I am kicked out of their hearts, and am replaced by other things.

“That is what happened to Judas and that is what happened to King Saul of Israel. He served me early on, but not a long time after he was crowned king of Israel did he decide to do things his way, instead of Mine. I called out to him, but he refused to repent, and he hated My servant David. He hated David because he realized that I anointed David to take his place because of his rebellion against Me. His pride is what led him to betray David and to seek to slay David because David was doing what was right.

“That is what your former friend has done. Just forgive him and leave your troubles with Me. I will lead you out into the wilderness of Scandinavia, where I will provide for you and blind the eyes that need to be blinded. And, I the Lord your God and Abba Father have spoken.”

“Thank you, Abba Father,” Karl said. “That makes more sense now, but it truly is grievous what Felix did. But, I forgive him.”

The door to the spare bedroom opened and Elise came out, wiping tears from her eyes.

Inga gave her a comforting hug. Then, Elise cleared her throat and said, “Father God showed me that what you said was indeed His words, Toben. He did say that my husband, Felix, betrayed us. But, I choose to forgive him. And, God said that He will show Toben what to do.”

Toben closed his eyes as he silently sought God. Then, he said, “God is showing me that we need to go down the hall and there will be a stairwell we can take to the first floor.”

“Excuse me. I will be back very soon,” Karl said.

Wasting no time, he jogged back to his bedroom and placed his Bible into a small, blue backpack, along with a flashlight and some small items. Then, leaving his bedroom, he hurried up to the front door, swung it open, and glanced left and right. Looking back into the living room, he said, “The coast is clear.”

Toben stepped into the hall and walked toward the left. The others followed. Once the last person stepped through, Karl put on the backpack, shut off all his lights, and locked the door. The hallway was lit by blue LED lights in the ceiling. A tan carpet reduced the sound of their feet as they walked past numbered apartment doors.

At the stairwell door, Toben paused for a moment before opening it and walking down the concrete steps in the echoing chamber. More feet followed, sending a cacophony of echoing footsteps through the stairwell. Karl trusted that no one would open a door in the shaft and hear their sounds.

At the first floor level, Toben paused at the door and listened. Then, he swallowed and pushed the door open a crack to peer through the gap, which revealed an outdoor parking lot. He recoiled slightly, stepping back.

“What did you see?” Inga said.

“Police,” Toben said. “They’re everywhere. But, for some strange reason, they don’t seem to be moving from their positions.”

“You know, God is taking care of us,” Toben said a moment later, trying to reassure both himself and the others, who looked worried.

Then, he swung the door open boldly, and stepped into the morning sunlight. They were in a parking lot between two apartment buildings. The lot was occupied by two police cars and a large, armored police truck. Several officers, wearing armored vests and helmets, stood nearby armed with assault rifles, shotguns, and pistols. Normally, they would have entered the building by now and would have broken into Karl’s apartment, since he was a wanted man. But, they just stood there as if they were only keeping an eye on the apartment, expecting that Karl might arrive there sometime soon.

As he and the others walked away from the building as casually as they could, Karl noticed that the police officers didn’t seem to pay them any attention. ‘That’s very odd,’ he thought. ‘Why wouldn’t they at least stop us to ask questions and request ID?’

Toben led them to the street and down a sidewalk for half a block. Cars flowed by in both directions on the busy street. Despite being communist after the Russian invasion, Norway and most of Europe maintained some capitalist tendencies and ideologies, such as privately owned businesses. Toben held up a thumb to hail a taxi. After a couple minutes, a *Mercedes-Benz Viano* taxi van pulled to a stop. It belonged to a private taxi company, which, thankfully, was not government affiliated.

After opening the sliding rear door, Toben motioned for the ladies to go first. Once all were seated in the middle and rear seats, Toben stepped forward to the front partition window and spoke through a small square opening. “Take us to Hamar, please,” Toben said.

The driver, a Norwegian man with short blonde hair and blue eyes, turned toward him. “That’s about an hour and a half from here on the E6.* It will be more costly now since the government has a heavy tax on individual trips that require more than an hour and a half of driving time. I would have to drive there and back, so it will be about three hours for me. The tax is part of the new environmental guidelines set forth by the U.N. Do you still want to take a taxi? The train fare would be much cheaper.”

[Note: The E6 motorway is the main north-south route that runs from the southern tip of Sweden up through Norway to the Arctic Circle.]*

“You can take us to the train station, then,” Toben said.

“Very good,” the driver said, shifting the van into drive.

Once there was a gap in the heavy traffic, the *Mercedes-Benz Viano* slipped into the traffic flow and rolled through the streets of Oslo. In the rear bench seat of the van, Karl looked through the tinted windows at the buildings and billboards that passed by. He noticed several billboards displaying repeating video advertisements showing a man standing in front of the new flag of Norway with text appearing at the bottom of the screen. The text read: ‘Support our government; support equality; support unity.’

This new flag design incorporated the old flag of Norway with several changes. A gold border surrounded the red flag. In the upper right portion of the flag, a stylized image depicted a man dressed in a workman’s outfit standing beside a woman wearing a traditional Norwegian dress. Both were holding up the lower ends of a red five-pointed star from which emanated golden rays. Karl knew that the red star was another symbol of communism.

He did not enjoy seeing what had happened to his country of Norway, but he knew that the Norwegian people had for a long time been closed to the Gospel, and that now more and more were hungry to find out more about Jesus. Karl had discretely witnessed to coworkers and people he met in the streets of Oslo.

He had noticed recently that many Norwegians and refugees seemed more interested in Jesus than the majority of people he had met a few years ago. Despite the efforts to squash Christianity in Norway, the communists had fanned the flames of the Gospel. Karl knew that secret Churches were starting up all over Oslo and across Norway.

Before long, the taxi van pulled to a stop in a large parking lot in front of the train station. Flashing lights drew Karl’s attention. He peered out the tinted windows to gaze at three police cars which surrounded a wreck. There appeared to be an accident where a large delivery van had crashed into two cars. Seeing the flashing lights and six police officers, Karl leaned toward Toben, who was in the row in front of him.

“Toben,” Karl said.

“Yes,” Toben turned toward him.

“There are a lot of police officers out in front of the train station,” Karl said. “I wonder if it would be

better to take the taxi up to Hamar.”

“That is an idea,” Toben said, turning to look out the window at the officers. Toben closed his eyes and prayed. A few seconds later, he leaned toward the driver and said, “Would you be able to drive us to Hamar? We’ll give you a large tip for your trouble.”

The driver tapped his fingers on the dashboard for a few seconds before he turned toward the passengers.

“There must be a reason why you don’t want to take the train,” he said.

“We would prefer the van to a train. And, we will pay you a good tip,” Toben said.

“Okay, fair enough,” the driver finally said.

Just as the driver was shifting the taxi into drive, a police officer approached the van and raised a hand, signaling him to stay put. Karl felt butterflies in his stomach, but he began giving the fears to God as they came.

Once the officer was at the front passenger door, the window lowered and the driver leaned toward him.

“Hello,” the officer said. “I just want to let you know that there is another accident two blocks down Queen Euphemia Street. You might want to take a different route if you are heading that way.”

“Thank you,” the taxi driver said. The officer waved and left.

Karl breathed a quiet sigh of relief. He realized he should have trusted God to protect him. He leaned back in his seat as the van pulled out and drove on its way heading toward the E6 motorway, which would take them to the town of Hamar.

To be continued...

See the next part.