



Chapter 26

Jeremiah, Stephen, and Josiah left the Council and headed downtown toward the UFP headquarters. It was late evening and clouds blocked the stars. Jeremiah told the two young men of the importance of their mission, and how many lives had already been sacrificed for this very moment. He then told them something that startled them.

“If you two are successful tonight, every one of the Remnant will have the ability to read the Sovereign’s Words, to study them, and apply those words to his or her own life. I only hope that they will appreciate it,” he sighed. “They have been deprived of it for so long, I do not want them to take it for granted as people did before the Year of Purification.”

“What do you mean, people took it for granted?” asked Josiah with astonishment.

“Before the Year of Purification people actually owned multiple copies of the Book of Books. The Book was even available in various translations, some with illustrations or extra notes that gave insight and application to help illuminate the ancient words. But people didn’t cherish those books. In fact, most followers didn’t even read them. These priceless books often sat on shelves collecting dust. The words of the Sovereign were at their fingertips, but most people were too busy or uninterested to read them.”

“Oh, to have my *own* complete copy!” exclaimed Josiah. “I can’t even imagine owning a copy and not reading it!”

“And you say every copy was complete? It is hard to imagine!” added Stephen.

Josiah had a far away look in his eye, as he imagined such a time. “If I had my own complete copy of the ancient words of the Sovereign,” he continued excitedly, “I would read and study it for hours a day!”

They continued to walk in silence for a while. Josiah was excited, but he also was keenly aware of how important this mission was to the Remnant. They walked for nearly a half hour as Jeremiah led them into the heart of the downtown until they entered a small park nestled between tall buildings. There were some scattered trees and shrubs lining crack filled sidewalks that criss-crossed in the center of the square plaza. There was more dirt than grass. The place felt very dark and neglected. The only light was a lamppost in the center where the two sidewalks crossed. Jeremiah led them toward the light, but then stepped over a short bush and motioned for them to follow. They stepped over and into the shadows below a tall twiggy tree. Josiah was about to jokingly ask if he would have to climb the tree, but Jeremiah knelt down next to a thick metal grate that lay hidden in the middle of the dirt floor. “All right boys. We are here,” he announced.

“Here? Where? The UFP headquarters are at least two blocks from here,” questioned Josiah.

Jeremiah ignored his question and spoke into a small communicator hidden in his cloak.

“Solomon, come in Solomon. We are at the entry point. Proceed with the plan.”

They listened intently to the faint crackling coming from the device until they heard a quiet,

“Good to go, old man. Your fan club has been notified.”

Josiah and Stephen looked at each other in bewilderment. They didn’t like not knowing the details of the plan. As they joined Jeremiah on his knees, the deep hum that was coming from the vent began to slowly fade. The steady drumming of the giant blades somewhere in the

distance was slowly being replaced with silence. Soon it was obvious the exhaust fans had come to a halt.

“Let me guess! This is a ventilation shaft for the UFP headquarters, right?” whispered Josiah, who was beside himself with anticipation for the immediate start of this adventure. “The fans are now off?”

“Well, the ones we need to be stopped are stopped,” said Jeremiah. “This ventilation shaft is the one that will get you two closest to your destination,” he explained.

“What about this heavy grate covering the fan?” asked Stephen.

“I think you’ll find that the bolts holding them are quite loose, and you’ll find the infrared sensors have been...”

“Deactivated by Solomon!” Josiah spurted out as he interrupted Jeremiah.

“Yes, my friend,” answered Jeremiah softly. “But for now, this is as far as I go. You two take it from here. I’ve got something else I need to do.” Before they could ask what Jeremiah was talking about he added, “Let us kneel and intercede together one last time.”

The three of them huddled together and Jeremiah began interceding like Josiah had never seen or heard before. His seriousness sobered Josiah and reminded him of the danger that lay ahead of them. Josiah opened his eyes for a moment when he felt drips of water hit his hand. He thought Jeremiah was crying, but he wasn’t. He was sweating large drops of perspiration. Jeremiah asked the Sovereign for protection, for safety, for wisdom, for courage... the courage to accept the will of the Sovereign, even if it meant personal sacrifice. When he was done, he gave Stephen and Josiah a great bear hug and then looked into their eyes for several lingering moments. Josiah would never forget that look.

As Jeremiah watched, Josiah and Stephen made quick work of the grate covering the ventilation duct. “Jeremiah you were right, this was loose,” said Josiah, turning to look at his mentor, but Jeremiah had vanished. “Well Stephen, I guess it’s up to us now,” Josiah said to

his friend. But Stephen was already in the ventilation tunnel. “Hey, wait for me,” whispered Josiah.

The tunnel was narrow and went on for about two city blocks. Several times they had to carefully crawl between the stilled blades of the fans stationed in the shaft. By the time they reached the end of the tunnel, Josiah’s knees hurt from crawling, but he said nothing. When they reached the end they were stopped by a large grate, which connected to a large furnace room, and above their heads was a small ventilation cover that opened to the floor of a room inside the building. There was no way to enter the furnace room, but the vent above offered a better option for entering the building. Josiah tried to help Stephen push the ventilation cover up, but the bolts held tight.

“What now Stephen?” asked Josiah. Without answering, Stephen pulled two small devices from his cloak. One looked like a laser light, and the other was a small cylinder. Stephen took the small laser torch and cut through the bolts around the edges of the heavy metal grate while Josiah held the other device, a mini vacuum that sucked in the smoke from the torch so they wouldn’t set off any smoke alarms. Because both boys’ hands were full they were unable to grab the vent cover when it fell to the bottom of the tunnel with a loud crash! The sound of the metal cover on the thin aluminum sent loud repercussions throughout the tunnel and certainly up into the room above!

They both froze and stared at each other for several moments. Then Stephen, hearing noises overhead, quickly jumped up and out of the tunnel and into the room above them. Josiah cautiously poked just his head up through the opening to see where his friend went but he froze when he saw two guards rush into the room with weapons drawn. His jaw dropped as he watched the scene before him. Effortlessly, Stephen dove and rolled behind a pile of boxes and pushed the entire pile down on top of the ambushed guards!

As the guards groaned in aggravation, Stephen leaped back toward his friend, grabbed Josiah’s hand, and pulled him up quickly into the room and they ran toward the door. Together they pushed the door shut and heard the mechanism lock. As they ran down the hall they heard the guards back inside cursing and complaining about all the junk stored in the room. Amazingly, the boys hadn’t even been seen! Adrenalin rushing through their veins, they

rounded another corner and nearly ran full speed into two more guards. Fortunately, the guards had their backs to the boys who had stopped in their tracks as Josiah stammered, “We’ll never get past them. We’re trapped!”

Stephen held out his arm to keep Josiah behind him. He looked ahead and waved his other arm toward the guards. Josiah heard Stephen say softly, “Jehovah-Jirah!” Instantly, one of the guards reached up and pushed a button on a control panel. A door opened and the guards left. Running past the door, Josiah asked Stephen how he had done that. He could hardly believe what he had just seen. Stephen had no time to answer as they came to another door. He tried the ‘open’ button, but it was locked.

Josiah then said, “Wait, it’s my turn.” But before he could raise his arms, a light above the door lit and a bell chimed. “It’s an airlift!” Josiah exclaimed.

“And it’s arriving!” said a startled Stephen.

Instinctively, they each moved to the sides of the door and pressed their backs against the wall as the door opened. Two guards walked out and continued down the hall without noticing the two boys who had now ducked into the airlift.

Josiah asked, “What floor?”

“Let the will of the Sovereign guide us. The next floor the lift takes us to will be our destination.”

“But won’t somebody be entering? Won’t they have called the airlift?”

Stephen quickly answered, “As it says in the Book of Books in Isaiah 7:7, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It will not take place. It will not happen’.”

Josiah smiled. It was just like Stephen to remind him of the reason they had come here in the first place and of the Person who was guiding them. He wanted to ask Stephen what Jehovah-Jirah meant, but decided to save that question for later.

The airlift came to a halt and the doors opened. They stepped out cautiously and Josiah looked to the left, relieved to see no one, but as he turned to the right, his gaze followed Stephen's. He was staring at a man leaning into a water station getting a drink. The boys rushed silently past him just as he stood up and ran toward the airlift, cursing that he almost missed it. By the time the man entered the airlift and turned to enter his destination, Stephen and Josiah had already rounded the next corner and were out of sight.

The pace of this mission was exhilarating and exhausting. Josiah hunched over and rested his hands on his knees breathing heavily. "Hang on, I need a second."

"No time, we've got to keep moving," Stephen said as he disappeared around the next corner. Josiah sighed and followed him around the corner, but was surprised to see Stephen now hanging from a pipe in the ceiling. As he ran toward Stephen, Josiah heard a frightening sound behind him - the sound of a multitude of footsteps all marching in sequence.

Stephen swung his feet up to the pipes and wrapped his legs around them, placing his back against the ceiling. With one arm wrapped around a pipe, he drew up his cloak with the other arm and then tucked the end of his cloak in his arm around another pipe.

"QUICK! Get up or they will see you!" he yelled down to Josiah.

Josiah, suddenly realizing why Jeremiah had insisted on the gymnastics exercises as part of their training, automatically leapt into the air and repeated Stephen's feat. The ease with which he was able to maneuver himself to the ceiling surprised him. Within seconds, a large group of guards was marching below them. Every muscle in his body ached as he watched a drop of sweat fall unnoticed to the ground below. Soon the sound of the guards' boots was gone and Stephen and Josiah dropped silently to the floor.

"Now you may take that rest, my friend. You've earned it!" said Stephen with a smile. "The Sovereign is with us! It is the only way to explain us getting this far, and so quickly!"

As Josiah nodded, still out of breath, Stephen walked over to a digital display unit and looked up Josiah's destination. "Here is your destination. The Sovereign has led us to the right floor. Nefari's office is just down this hall. Room 16550. Now speed on your way."

"What about you?" asked Josiah, suddenly concerned for his friend.

"I am headed to this red area," answered Stephen, pointing to the digital map. "I'm sure this unmarked area on the top floor must be my destination."

"But what if one of my passwords works?" asked Josiah eagerly.

"Then I shall find the nearest exit and rejoin you back at the Gathering. If not, be listening for when Nefari whispers it in my ear, and then you'll have it."

"I should go. It was *my* dream," Josiah offered, feeling a sense of dread coming over him and an intense fear for his friend.

"No, your destiny lies with that Book. I've got to get that code, and you've got to get the prize while I keep them busy. Don't worry about me. I am not afraid. After all, as the ancient Paul said, 'to live is the Redeemer, to die is gain'. Now GO!" Stephen said that final command with such authority and conviction that Josiah was compelled not to waste another moment.

"I will see you again!" Josiah offered as they turned away from each other and went their separate ways.

Stephen boldly re-entered the airlift and hit the top button. The airlift made the familiar *hiss* and soared up through the building to the top floor. The doors opened and he slipped out quietly. He noticed a series of red flashing lights imbedded every five feet in the walls. There was no audible siren, but he wondered if he had set off a silent alarm. He continued walking down the center of the hall, confident in his mission. Perhaps the time to fulfill the prophecy from his childhood had come. He had been given the name Stephen after a dream revealed to him that he would be a martyr for the Remnant. While this had disturbed him for years, he had finally realized that he did not know when it would happen, so he should make the most of his

life and be worthy of the honor whenever the time came. He was determined to be prepared. So he had dedicated his life to being the most highly trained of all the Remnant disciples. He knew that when the time was right, the Sovereign would call on him for a task no other could accomplish, a task that would forever change the Remnant. Many times he had thought it was his time, and each time he had returned alive to continue serving the Sovereign longer. Excellent training partnered with a willingness to surrender all at a moment's notice had given him courage unlike any other before him. This life of surrender and victory had removed his fear of death, and made him a cunning and courageous opponent. Stephen wondered, as he had many times before, would this be his final mission? Or would his obedience provide him with the fortitude and focus needed for success? It did not matter to him, but getting the Book of Books did.

Stephen brought his hands together in front of him, arms bent as though interceding, and touched the tips of his fingers together. Walking boldly down the center of the hallway, he called on the Sovereign to make straight the path before him. Doors opened without him doing anything. Guards walked right past him without noticing him. The stationed guards he passed also seemed to look right through him as if he were not there. Stephen meditated on the words of John the Ancient, speaking them softly as he walked. "He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts..."

He finally reached his destination and ducked into a corner. Just as Josiah had described in his dream, directly across from him was the doorway he sought. Though no Remnant member had ever been there before, Josiah's description of the situation was perfect. A small group of guards was stationed not more than fifty feet from where he stood and the path to the door was indeed in full view of the guards. He stared at the sign on the door, "RESTRICTED", and knew what lay on the other side. The future of the Remnant depended upon him getting that password for Josiah.

Stephen reached and activated the earpiece Solomon had so skillfully implanted in his ear lobe. He whispered, "*Josiah, is the safe open?*" But there was no answer. Why was he not answering? Something must have happened.

Stephen looked up and saw the blast door just as Josiah had described, recessed into the ceiling, across the hallway between him and the guards. Yes, it was a good idea to try and lower that door. There was the keypad in the wall just as Josiah had described it. He punched in 2911 and the door came down with a loud thud. He wondered if the number was a reference to the book of prophecy that shared Jeremiah's name, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." These words from the ancient Jeremiah's book brought comfort to Stephen, especially since in his ancient language training Stephen had learned that the Hebrew word for 'plans' in that reference was literally, 'thoughts'. The Sovereign actually *thought* about him, and when He did, they were *good* thoughts, thoughts to give him a hope and a future. He needed that word from the Sovereign right now. He took out his key card and prepared to open the door to the Archive Room.

Looking at the card and slowly spinning it in his hand, he asked again, "*Josiah, where are you? Did you get in?*" But no answer came.