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The
SWORD
of the
SPIRIT

The
SWORD
of the
SPIRIT:

City on the Brink

WAYMAN JACKSON

XULON PRESS

Xulon Press
2301 Lucien Way #415
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1:

THE INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BOOM! LIGHTNING STRIKES IN THE MIDDLE OF A luscious green forest. The full moon is shrouded in darkness by the presence of evil. Wickedness slowly sets its weight in the woods like a thick blanket of mist.

A frightened man runs through the forest. “Oh God, please, someone help me!” he shouts. The man flees for safety because fire blasts from the sky have destroyed his home city. He shouts, hoping that someone will hear him.

The man slows down and stops to take a quick breath. He rests his hand on the cracked bark of a tree. Unsure of what to do, he looks down the dirt trail and hopes it will lead him to the next town. He must keep moving to stay alive. If he is followed, then someone from his country will make sure he wishes for death. As he thinks about this, he hears a

rustling sound moving through the foliage behind him. The man's body jolts. His heart bounds into his chest.

"Oh no! I've been followed!" he shouts.

The man looks through the moonlit shadowy forest. His eyes dart as shadows jump from tree to tree. The sound rustles closer and closer. Hezekiah breaks into a mad dash through the forest. Rough twigs scratch his arms as he flees. The smell of a wet beast floods his nostrils. He tries to outrun the noise, but the cacophony grows louder and louder. The sound moves ahead of him on his right side in the thicket, something big zooms across Hezekiah's face! Hezekiah slides to a stop. It's a deer in full stride.

Hezekiah exhales. He inhales fresh air as he wipes sweat from his face. The doe runs across the path and jumps through the berry bushes. Hezekiah turns to walk again but stops when he hears heavy footsteps. A howl booms through the forest. Hezekiah flinches. His heart jumps into his throat as he stands still. The howl came from the same direction as the fleeing deer. The man looks intently. He hears more bushes rustling as he stares into the misty darkness. The rustling leaves and bushes shake with a violent, swooshing fury.

The trees stop shaking. Silence takes over. The hairs on the man's neck stand up as he looks into the quiet dimness. The bushes rustle. A large object flies out of the bushes and thuds Hezekiah's chest. He stumbles back from the hit and looks down. It's the doe's half-eaten leg!

Hezekiah gasps. His legs quiver and buckle under his own weight. His knees and hands hit the uneven ground. Twigs and sticks poke at his hands as ice-cold sweat rolls down his spine.

As he struggles to stand, his body becomes heavy. The smell of blood floods his nose. His stomach turns bitter, and the hot fluid pounds up his throat. Shaking, Hezekiah tumbles as he is choking on his breath. His heart thumps uncontrollably. He hears a thunderous clash close by.

Hezekiah shouts to himself, "Get up! Get up!" As if by instinct, he staggers across the rough ground, gets to his feet, and takes off through the forest.

The hot wind sweeps past his ears as he sprints at top speed. He looks back and sees a large shadow, darker than the night, behind him. Hezekiah's face smacks into a low tree branch. He flips through the air and thumps onto the leafy ground. In a daze, he struggles to maintain his focus. Eyes aching and sweat dripping down his face, he tries desperately to stare through the thick shadows of the forest. As the man stares into the gloom, a beast growls through the darkness.

Hezekiah lifts himself as he hears a massive swarm of birds piercingly chirping through the trees. The birds' rhythmic tweeting booms like peals of thunder as they move swiftly through the trees escaping the forest. Head ringing in pain from the tree strike and the loud birds, he falls to his knees, covers his ears, and tightly closes his eyes. Gritting his teeth hard, he struggles to stand but falls to the ground because the chirping is deafening.

Suddenly, the chirping stops. Trembling, the man lifts himself as the forest enters into total silence. The forest canopy trembles. Hezekiah glances upward and gasps.

A shadowy figure falls through the forest canopy and slams into the ground in front of him! The force of the impact lifts Hezekiah off his feet. He falls backward and tries to stand up. The dark creature roars like a Tyrannosaurus rex! The ground shakes from the roar and the grass is uprooted and flies through the air. The hot wind from the beast's roar rushes through Hezekiah, blurs his vision further, and causes him to slide backward. Hezekiah stops sliding. As he rubs his eyes clear of hot slobber, he gasps hard. It's a menacing three-headed dragon! It has large spiny scales, red eyes, and razor-sharp teeth.

Its sulfurous breath rushes through the dragon's nostrils and teeth as he breathes, revealing the red color of the beast. The beast stares into Hezekiah's eyes as he positions his body to strike.

"No! No! No! Stay back! Please, don't kill me! I did everything you wanted! I did everything you asked!" shrieks the man while stumbling across the grassy, wet forest floor.

The dragon's eyes glow bright poppy-red as he stares into Hezekiah's eyes. Unable to scream because of the massive lump in his throat, he yelps out of terror. As the weight of fear presses upon his chest and the strange mystic glow of the dragon's eyes mesmerize him, Hezekiah stiffens.

The dragon roars, jolting Hezekiah and rattling his bones. The dragon lunges at him!

A beam of light strikes down from the sky between him and the dragon, and the demonic creature stumbles backward. A mysterious shining figure appears from the bright warm light. His countenance is piercing and more brilliant than the sun. His hair is like white wool, white as snow, and His eyes blaze like fire. The figure lights up the forest with a blinding warm light.

As the shining figure looks straight into the dragon's eyes, the dragon's body trembles. Recoiling back in amazement, the dragon shields its eyes.

The shining man quickly unsheathes a sword of blinding light. As he strikes the air, a blast of fire explodes from His sword with a crack like thunder! The blast echoes through the forest. The forest floor quakes as the shockwave from the blast rips across the grassy ground. The dragon jumps to escape the flaming sword but is caught in the powerful blast. The explosion hits the dragon in the chest and bursts through! The hot blast incinerates the dragon and shoots through the forest. The blast leaves a great trail of hot volcanic fire stretching through the forest for miles into the vanishing point.

Hezekiah gasps and trembles. His knees buckle. He stumbles to the grassy forest ground, not knowing what will happen next.

"Who are you?" Hezekiah asks.

The figure turns around and peers into his eyes. He walks toward Hezekiah and stops a few feet away. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End ...who is, who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

The shining man's answer clicks like a light in Hezekiah's mind, "You are Jesus, the Son of God!" Feeling dirty with his stomach churning, Hezekiah lowers his head in shame. The blood on Hezekiah's hands from past sins prevents him from looking up.

"Don't bother yourself with me, Lord, because I am a sinful man."

"Hezekiah, I know who you are, and I know what you have done. You are the reason why I am here." With a warm smile Jesus asks, "Do you want to be born again?"

Hezekiah lifts his head. "Born *again*? What does that mean? How can someone like me be born again?" asks Hezekiah, frowning.

"Just as your mother gave birth to your body, so I will give birth to your spirit through the Holy Spirit."

"But why? Why would I need to be born again?"

"I told Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. I left their presence for a moment, and Satan used a serpent to tempt them to eat the fruit of the tree, telling them that they would become like God, knowing good and evil, if they eat its fruit. They ate the fruit of the tree, and their spirit died instantly. When their spirit died, they were separated from my presence. Their spiritual deaths caused them to die physically over time. Since Adam and Eve were the parents of all humanity, death spread to everyone. That is why you need to be born again because your spirit is dead on the inside. When you're born again, your spirit will become alive and be perfect."

Hezekiah squints, "How is this possible?"

"My Father, through the Holy Spirit, placed me inside of a virgin woman named Mary to be born into the world so I could die for all of humanity. Once I died on the cross, I paid in full for everyone's sin in the world. Anyone who trusts me will have a perfect spirit, the Holy Spirit."

Hezekiah cracks a smile as a tear runs down his face. The thought that God wants to give him a second chance causes his body to tremble. Hezekiah glances at his hands and mentally sees the blood that he has

spilt. With watery eyes he looks up into Jesus's warm gaze, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?"

Jesus extends His nail-pierced hand and says, "Believe that I am the only Son of God. I sacrificed myself to save you from your sins. Turn away from your iniquities, and accept me into your heart as your Lord and Savior."

Hezekiah thrusts his hand out and grabs Jesus's hand. "I accept you into my heart as my Lord and Savior."

Instantly, Hezekiah's spirit is reborn from the Holy Spirit as he transforms into a child of God. Like a breath of fresh air, he feels clean as God wipes his sins away.

For the first time, pure warmth radiates through Hezekiah's body as he breaks into a smile. Hezekiah looks at his surroundings and realizes he is transfixed in the air as he holds Jesus's hand.



2:

THE COMMISSION

“COME WITH ME,” SAYS JESUS. THE SON OF GOD TAKES Hezekiah straight up and out of the forest with a flash of light. His eyes water because of their ascending speed; he feels the cold wind rush by him as they clear the vast forest in seconds. He looks at his surroundings and sees nothing but an open sky. They leave from overland and fly through a starlit sky across the sea.

Almost unable to speak from the cold wind rushing past his face, Hezekiah asks, “Where are we going?”

“We are going to the town of Sodom. I want you to represent me there. Sodom is in desperate need. Except for one person, everybody there is spiritually dead. In other words, they all will go straight to hell unless they repent and accept my gift of salvation.”

“What do you want me to do?” asks Hezekiah, through the rushing wind.

“I want you to tell people that I will save them from their sins if they turn to me. I will satisfy them with eternal life if they turn away from their lives of wickedness and follow me.”

“Why can’t you tell them?”

“I will ...through you. I will strengthen you to complete this mission. Whatever you ask, I will provide it for you.”

“Can I really ask for anything?” Hezekiah asks, squinting to clear his watery eyes.

Jesus turns His head toward Hezekiah and stares into his eyes. “Keep in mind that I’m not going to give you something for your selfish motives. I will grant you what will help others and yourself for my sake.”

“Oh, okay, fair enough.”

A few seconds later they reach the coast. From the sky, Jesus sees a rocky mountain just off the beach. Without slowing down, Jesus’s foot touches the mountain top, ripping the mountain in half!

“Oh!” Hezekiah shouts, stunned by the sound of the mountain cracking.

The shaking resonates throughout the area. As the oscillation slowly stops, Jesus puts Hezekiah down in a grassy field at the apex of the mountain. They both gaze across the city located at the foot of the mountain. The city is grand and has an adobe architectural style, buildings in the city range in height from multiple stories tall to a flat single-story level. Its layout is like a grid. One main street runs through the middle of town (aligned with low-level structures), from the mountain to the town’s entrance, while many other side roads branch off the main street. Many street lights illuminate the roads. The metropolis brightens the night like a beacon of light. However, almost all citizens are filled with darkness.

“The real name of this place is The City of Light. However, I call this town Sodom for a reason. There is a war for the hearts, minds, and souls of the people in this city,” Jesus proclaims.

Hezekiah turns toward Jesus and frowns. “I don’t understand. The good news of salvation is fantastic. Why would anyone fight against me?”

“There are forces here that are convincing people not to trust me, telling all sorts of lies. However, I want you to tell them that only in my name will anyone be saved.”

“You want to save others just as you saved me.”

“Satan wants everyone to die and go to hell with him. So, he is doing everything in his power to convince people that there’s nothing wrong with the way they are, convincing people that they don’t need salvation. He will stop at nothing to accomplish his goal of death for everyone. As we speak, there are spiritual forces that are at work destroying this city from the inside out. They are almost at the point of completion. You are the last person I will send to tell people about me. Protect this city, Hezekiah.”

As Hezekiah gazes upon the metropolis, frowning, he looks toward Jesus and He’s leaving! “Wow! Wait! Why are you leaving? I don’t know what to do or how to do it. Don’t leave me here alone. Please!”

Jesus smiles. “Don’t worry. I will be with you in spirit. In fact, I don’t want you to do anything until I send the Holy Spirit to you. The Spirit of God will strengthen you to do my will. I will guide you through the Spirit and make you stronger each day. He will help you in my name to fight against the devil’s wicked schemes and help you tell people how to receive salvation. Also, the Holy Spirit will seal and protect your spirit because you will always belong to me.”

Hezekiah has a tear in his eye as he asks, “Why are you leaving?”

“I must leave to prepare a place for you in heaven. Don’t worry. I will be back. Until then, go! Tell people about me until I return. Remember, I will be with you always.”

In a blinding burst of light, the Son of God ascends above the clouds back into the heavens. As Hezekiah looks on, the brilliance of heaven overtakes the darkness and turns night into day for a moment. The Anointed One disappears into a blinding warm light. As the light of heaven fades, the crisp cold air of the moonlit night returns. Hezekiah is left on top of the mountain, looking over what could very well be an impossible assignment.

“What now?” he asks as he gazes over the bright city. As the man makes his way down the mountain, he thinks about what the Lord told him. The thought of the people being so close to destruction overtakes him with a sense of hopelessness.



3:

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

TWO HOURS LATER, HEZEKIAH ARRIVES at the base of the mountain and is inside the city.

“This city doesn’t look so bad—maybe the situation isn’t as dark as I think it is,” he says to himself.

People start flooding into the main street of the city because they’d heard the mountain explode. Also, a news crew arrives to investigate the explosion.

“What happened to the mountain?” asks a bystander aloud as Hezekiah walks down Main Street.

Everyone in the city looks at him and wonders if he is the cause of the mountain exploding.

“Who is that?” asks a male cloaked in shadow, whose name is Diablos, watching Hezekiah from a distance. His bushy black eyebrows, tan skin, black shirt, shorts, and sandals further conceals him.

“Hey, it looks like another Christian,” replies Deception, the male figure next to him. His crystal green shirt shines in the moonlight as

his black shorts and sandals remain in shadow. Before Diablos became Diablos, his name was Multi. Multi had long shiny black hair, gold eyes, and a muscular figure. He was given the knowledge and wisdom of multigroup management with laser precision. He enjoyed pleasing God by working his gift of management. He regularly managed thousands of angels and delegated various tasks with such wisdom that all the angels assigned under his command seemed to work as one. As his abilities grew, he gained the ability to give power to others and draw power from others to complete tasks. Although he was not as respected as the angels that he admired like the archangel, Michael, or Lucifer, the work he did brought a joy to him and his joy was reflected in his work. The confidence and speed with which he made his decisions garnered respect amongst his peers. He smiled continuously.

However, one day, the anointed guardian cherub, Lucifer, approached Multi and a group of other angels and declared himself more powerful than God. Mystified by his idol and never before hearing a lie, he thought it must be true. Lucifer offered him the position of archangel if he joined him. Conflicted in his heart between God and Lucifer, Multi consulted with his friend, Perception.

Perception himself was a herald in heaven. He was allotted with the ability to shape light into whatever he wanted, to shape himself and his surroundings using light, and to influence others through his truth telling. Able to spread information quickly through his gift of gab, his words hit powerfully to the hearts of the other angels. His gift grew so powerful that when asked, he was able to create mental images in other angels' minds in order for them to find different perspectives about any subject. Matched with his gift of shape-shifting, Perception pleased God regularly through how well and how accurately he was able to not only tell, but explain the truth about God. He had golden short, spiky hair, and golden eyes and skin. He was medium height, with a muscular build. A trusting and kindhearted angel, he declared the power of God daily and encouraged other angels to worship God. When Perception heard that Lucifer was more powerful than God, not

ever hearing a lie before and based on Lucifer's majestic appearance he thought that it must be true. So, Perception reasoned with Multi and encouraged him to follow Lucifer.

However, Lucifer was caught. He was judged and kicked out of heaven. In the process the rest of the angels who followed Lucifer got judged as well. Multi was stripped of his angelic name and title of manager and renamed Diablos for helping Lucifer organize the rebellion. He screamed. All of his hair fell out of his head. He fell to his knees and pleaded for his position back, but he was rejected. His eyes turned a piercing red.

Perception was also stripped of his name and title. He could not take being rejected by God, the source of his truth telling. He screamed within himself and his body trembled. His skin turned pale, his body became slender, and his hair and eyes turn crystal green. His mind contorted from truth to lies. He's renamed Deception for helping to spread the lie of Lucifer. They're kicked out of heaven.

Over time Lucifer rediscovers Diablos and Deception. He makes them the same offer but grander. Diablos is promised a position of being Satan's right hand if he successfully conquers enough cities in Satan's name. Deception is promised to be a herald of Satan's glory if he helps Diablos prevail. They accept and follow after Satan. Because of Jesus, however, and his gift of salvation for humans, they develop a jealousy of humans and become envious of their existence.

Diablos, the dominant figure of the two, is always focused, methodical, as well as forceful. He is calm, but his countenance hides an undertone of fierce anger.

Deception is the laid-back, smooth-talking type, with a sharp mind and a sinister personality to match. He spreads many fabrications in town, cloaking many people in a shroud of mental darkness to blind them from the truth of their sinful condition.

"This man was sent by God? He doesn't look like much. It looks like God found this guy off the street! All he has on is a pair of white,

loosely fit pants. He doesn't even have on any shoes!" Diablos laughs and huffs.

"I thought God gave up on this dusty city a long time ago. Oh well, at least I get to have some fun. I do like to seduce these Christians into evil," Deception says with a wicked smile.

"No! We will kill him now! This is the last city I need to conquer to be at Satan's right hand! We cannot afford to play with this man. If people in this town get saved because of him, we will lose control over the people. We already have this city in our complete control! We will not let some man stop us now!"

Deception glances at Diablos and chuckles. "Yes, you're right. Let's kill this Christian quickly. At least I'll get to see some action today."

Hezekiah continues to walk down the dirt road of Main Street. His golden brown skin, short black hair, and reddish-brown eyes seem to shine in the moonlight. He is not tall nor short, but his athletic build makes him seem like a worthy foe to any human. In the eyes of a demon, he looks like easy prey. A young boy with a green shirt and tattered gray pants, walks up to Hezekiah.

"Excuse me, Sir?" asks the kid, now holding his breath.

"What can I do for you?" asks Hezekiah.

"Do you have any money?" asks the kid with a face that seems to shine.

Hezekiah exhales and scratches the back of his neck. He notices the salty dirt in the kid's hair and his tattered clothes. *This boy must live on the streets*, he thinks. He gets down on one knee to talk to the little boy, "I'm sorry. I wish I could help you, but I don't have any money." The boy's shoulders slump. "What's your name?" asks Hezekiah.

"My name is Immanuel," he says, eyes bright.

"It is nice to meet you, Immanuel. Hey, are you lost? Where are your parents?"

A tear runs down Immanuel's face and he blinks a few times. "I don't know. My parents were taken a few weeks ago," Immanuel exhales.

Hezekiah stares intently in Immanuel's eyes and asks: "By whom?"

Boom! An explosion knocks everyone in town off their feet. A tower of flames emanates from the center of the city. Adrenaline now pumping, Hezekiah slowly stands.

“They were taken by ...by THAT!” shouts Immanuel.

“What?”

Hezekiah gasps. Everyone in town trembles. A creature emerges from the mushroom cloud of smoke. A gigantic, orange and black tiger, with a wrecking ball for a tail, arises from the flames. The tiger roars and a shockwave booms from the tiger’s mouth. Everyone slaps their palms over their ears. People tremble to their knees as the dusty ground shakes. The news crew keeps broadcasting live as the situation unfolds. People get up off the ground and run screaming as they sprint away from the beast. Everything moves in slow motion as Hezekiah’s thought process comes to a complete standstill.

I have been called to protect Sodom from this type of evil? he thinks, jaw dropping.

“Why are you just standing there? Run!” shouts someone, running past him.

The creature leaps forward and sprints in his direction. It gallops faster and faster toward Immanuel. Hezekiah sharply turns toward the boy.

“Run, kid, run!” he shouts.

Immanuel chokes up, and he can’t breathe. The man of God scoops the boy into his arms and sprints back toward the mountain. In hot pursuit of them, the creature stops in its tracks, whips its tail toward them, and slams it into the ground, narrowly missing them. The force of the impact shoots Hezekiah and Immanuel into the air. The man of God loses his grip on Immanuel. They fall, slam, slide, and roll hard and fast across the ground; their vision gets fuzzy as they tumble to a stop. Before Hezekiah gets a chance to recover, the demon rampages toward them, unleashing a bone-rattling roar.

“Oh God, HELP!” shouts Hezekiah.

A beam of warm light shoots down from heaven and engulfs Hezekiah within it. The charging demon slides to a hard stop. Within the light, a figure taking the form of a dove flutters around the man of God and indwells him, filling him with swelling warmth. Warm winds gush around Hezekiah as the white-hot fire of the Holy Spirit surges inside of him. The light disappears, and Hezekiah's countenance sparks with lightning. The man of God has a gold Buster Sword in his hands.

"This power, bursting through me, is not like anything I can describe. This must be the Holy Spirit," he says to himself. "This sword is like the sword Jesus had in the forest. This weapon must be from the Holy Spirit—the Sword of the Spirit—let's see what this blade can do!"

The creature lunges at the man and swipes with razor-sharp claws. Hezekiah dodges and strikes with his sword. A blast of fire shoots from his sword, and the beast sails backward through the air in the fire wave. The burst of fire explodes, knocking the tiger to the ground.

The demon regains its footing amid roaring fire, cocks its tail, and whips it at Hezekiah. Hezekiah jumps out of the way, and the tail slams into the ground. The force of the impact slams him into a building. He bounces off the wall and falls to the ground.

With his head throbbing and joints aching, the man of God struggles to his feet, gripping his sword.

"I ...I shall not die but live and **DECLARE** the works of the Lord!" he shouts. Hezekiah peers into his opponent's eyes. His eyebrows furrow as his mind focuses through the sharp muscle pain. Senses and pain levels at new heights, the man of God rises to his feet. The injured creature gallops toward him. Buster Sword in hand, Hezekiah braces himself for the next attack.

"Greater is He who is within me ..." says Hezekiah, the Spirit Warrior, as the tiger lunges at him! "than he who is within the world!"

The Spirit Warrior strikes with a blast of bright light from his sword. The creature is caught in midair as the explosion shakes and rips up the ground in its path. The flash of light completely encompasses the beast

as it turns everything bright blue and white. The demonic foe lets out a booming roar, and the blinding light incinerates the monster in a flash.

Visibility returns, and nothing is left of the beast but a fire trail through the city street. The Sword of the Spirit disappears. Silence fills the town as nothing is heard but the sound of a roaring flame. Jaws drop all around as people stare. News cameras continue to broadcast live to capture the now quiet scene.

“Wow! That was so cool. You did it!” shouts Immanuel through the silence.

Hezekiah turns to Immanuel and puts a hand on his shoulder. “Are you okay?” asks Hezekiah.

“Wow. That was so great. How did you do that? How did you get that great sword?” says Immanuel, jumping up and down.



“He won? I can’t believe he could do all that! I had him in my clutches, and God ruined everything!” shouts Diablos, chest tightening. He gazes at the scene from across the street.

“I can’t believe he won either,” says Deception. He smiles a toothy grin. “There seems to be more to this Christian than meets the eye. Well, no matter. I’m going to have fun ripping his mind and body to shreds,” says Deception, with a soft cackle.



As the citizens gather around the man of God, they cut their eyes at him and grit their teeth.

“Who are you?” shouts the town sheriff with a gruff voice.

“Huh?” says Hezekiah, frowning.

“Who are you?” shouts the sheriff.

Hezekiah slightly opens his mouth, cocks his head to the side, and frowns further. “What? Are ...are they angry with me?”



4:

PUBLIC OUTCRY

“WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING here?” shouts the sheriff, a tanned skin cowboy looking fellow. He balls up his fists and they shake as if he’s ready to attack.

“Excuse me!” shouts Hezekiah squinting his eyes.

“Who gave you the right to meddle in our affairs?”

“Meddle in our affairs? What do you mean ‘meddle in our affairs’? God just saved this town from destruction!”

“You saved nothing! You only hastened our demise! You don’t have a clue as to what is going on here!” Hezekiah is speechless as the sheriff continues his rant.

“You interrupted a tough but delicate sacrificial system.”

“What is a sacrificial system?”

“Our gods, Moloch, in particular, are hard at work protecting this town from enemies who desire to overrun and destroy us. Moloch has his forces patrol the outside of the city to ward off invaders for us. For payment, we sacrifice a child to Moloch or one of his creatures once

a month. The gods are appeased, and our town remains safe. However, because you annihilated one of his creatures, you just made Moloch furious!" The crowd murmurs and complains as the situation begins to ignite.

"What? You have things way wrong. You don't even know what you are saying. By no means are these demons gods!" shouts Hezekiah over the angry voices of the crowd.

"So, what are you saying?" asks the sheriff, lowering his voice. The crowd also listens quietly peering at Hezekiah.

"There is only one God, and His name is Jesus."

The group wails and grits their teeth.

"Don't you dare say that name! Speaking that name is forbidden in this town! That name has been against the law for years. Anyone caught saying that name is thrown in jail. Every time someone says that name, our gods go crazy with rage and attack our town! Many of us have lost family, friends, and other good citizens in the community due to someone even mentioning it. So, please, do not say that name!"

The crowd shouts as they stomp the ground causing the salty dust to rise. Hezekiah's presence in the city not only poses a threat to their way of life but pricks their hearts with conviction.

"What are you waiting for? Take him to jail!" shouts a bystander.

"You moron! You are nothing but trouble. You will only get us killed!" shouts someone else.

Tensions continue to rise with the dust in the air. The shouting turns deafening as the man of God speaks: "I'm sorry for your losses. However, Jesus is the one who has given me the power to protect this city. If the people in this city turn to Jesus, they will be set free from demonic oppression. You don't have to sacrifice your children to God for payment. God sacrificed His own Son for you so that you can be saved for free!"

The sheriff furrows his brow. "This Jesus you speak of does not have the power to save us from anything. His name will do nothing more than kill us!"

The crowd screams in agreement with the sheriff as tensions reach a boiling point.

“You’re wrong, Sheriff. Jesus saved me, just a few hours prior, from certain death. He saved me again just a few moments ago. Not only did God save me, but Jesus changed me; He gave me hope and a future. God can do the same for you; if you repent of your sins and give your lives over to Him today. Because only at the name of Jesus, will anyone be saved!”

Silence overtakes the crowd for a moment. With a flash, their faces redden. They scream and charge Hezekiah! They stampede toward him and take him by force.



5:

REASSURANCE

“SERVES YOU RIGHT,” SAYS A JAILER.

A group of officers throw Hezekiah, face first, into a dark damp cell. His body plops onto the dirt floor as the brown door shuts behind him. Hezekiah glances at his surroundings and notices the stone-gray, block walls that make up his cell. A dusty toilet and sink are the only items in the cell.

When the crowd rushed Hezekiah, they intended to beat him to death; however, in the midst of beating him, more law enforcement arrived on the scene and rescued Hezekiah from the mob. They quickly dragged him off to jail before anyone got hurt.

The man of God leans against the wall and slides to the ground. He sits in silence for a moment. His heart feels as if it's shrinking. Hezekiah licks his lips and tastes his own salty blood on his teeth.

“Man ...I ...can't believe I was thrown in jail for saying 'Jesus.' God just saved this city, and I'm thrown in jail for saying His name?” Hezekiah shakes his head. “Jesus was not kidding when He said protecting this

city would be a battle.” He rubs his dry hands through his curly, black hair. “I had no idea that the level of resistance to God from the townspeople would be so strong. Maybe, this town is just beyond saving. Now I’m trapped and alone in this prison cell. What am I supposed to do now?” says Hezekiah to himself, at a loss as to what to do next.

Some dirt falls on his head. He wipes his hair. A beam of light enters the cell from above. Hezekiah looks up and there is no light fixture in the cell. He squints his eyes at the falling dust as the cell rattles. “That’s weird,” he says. He slowly stands to his feet. The cell shakes; he stumbles to the ground. A warm and bright light thrusts into his cell. Hezekiah rubs the dirt from his eyes. He looks into the light and gasps. “Didn’t I tell you that I will never leave you?” says a voice. Hezekiah smiles wide. “Jesus! I’m so glad to see you. Am I finished? Are you here to take me with you?”

Jesus puts up a hand at chest level and lowers it. “No. I’m here to tell you why you’re in prison. I allowed you to be thrown in prison because there are a few people in here that you need to witness to quickly.”

Hezekiah slightly tilts his head. “Why?”

“Because they will die tonight if they don’t accept me.”

“Wait. What? But why?”

“The spirit of death is on his way to the prison, and he desires to drag these three people to hell. They have only one more chance to accept me before their hearts become too hard to change,” says Jesus.

Hezekiah puts his hands on his hips. “Why can’t you change their hearts if they become too hard?”

“If I do, then I will destroy their free will, thereby destroying their minds.”

“Is that right?”

“Hezekiah, I want a real relationship with people. If I wanted mindless worship, I would have just made robots.”

“Oh. Why can’t you take the people to heaven anyway if they don’t accept you?”

“If I did that, they would burn up as soon as they got there. The townspeople still have a price to pay for their sins. For example, their worship of false gods and their child sacrifice have led many folks astray. Those worshiping themselves have caused many others to curse my name. The other townsfolk who they have hurt through committing adultery have to be answered for. The people who they cheated and caused to die, knowing and unknowingly, they have to answer for.

“For all the sins they’ve ever committed, they must be held accountable. If they don’t accept my free offer of salvation, they will die in their sins.

“Look, I’m not hard. I have already paid their sin debt in full. If anyone goes to hell, they have to step over the cross to get there,” says Jesus.

“Okay. Since you’re here, why can’t you tell these people about yourself?” asks Hezekiah.

“I will.”

“Really?”

“Yes, through you.”

“Oh.”

“I want you to tell the following people about me: two officers and one prisoner. One officer is in Watchtower 4. The next officer is on foot; you will see her after your encounter with the first officer. The last person is in the dungeon under the prison. You will reach the oubliette by going straight down through the courtyard,” says Jesus.

“What do I say? What do you want me to say to these people when I reach them?” asks Hezekiah.

“Don’t worry about what to say. I will give you the words to say to these people when you reach them.”

“How will I get past the guards?”

“Don’t worry about the guards. I will help you get past them.” Jesus motions with His hand. Light flashes. The Sword of the Spirit appears in His hand. Jesus gives Hezekiah the Sword of the Spirit.

“I was wondering where this sword disappeared to after the battle. As soon as the fight was over, this sword disappeared into thin air,” says Hezekiah.

“Let me tell you how this sword works. You didn’t realize this before, but the Sword of the Spirit goes back inside you when you’re not using it. The blade is always with you because you belong to me. Also, this sword is a Bible. It will not only teach you the scriptures, but it will prompt you to use the right scripture at the right time. In battle, when you combine an attack with Bible scripture, the sword’s power is amplified; the blade can be amplified by ten, twenty, or even 100-fold.

“You must sharpen your sword by studying the Bible. The right scripture will deal a critical blow against the right enemy. However, if you don’t sharpen your blade, nor use it regularly, you will forget how to use it,” says Jesus.

“So, I should use the sword every day?”

“Furthermore, this sword has the power of the elements; from fire to water and every element in between is at your disposal. You can use single elemental attacks such as light, or you can combine attacks like fire and lightning. In addition to this, the sword will give you the strength to do more physically and give you physical durability.

“You will be able to take more damage than a human can normally. However, you are not invincible. If you take on too much damage, you can get killed. Until you get the full armor of God, you won’t be fully protected.”

“Okay, what else can this weapon do?”

“Be aware, you can get through any physical and spiritual barrier with this sword, but you can’t kill any human with it directly.”

Hezekiah frowns. “What? Then how do I defend myself against the townspeople?”

“You will find out along the way how this sword works, but for now you must go, because Death is rapidly approaching the prison.”

Jesus departs in a flash of light, and Hezekiah has the Sword of the Spirit. His countenance sparks with lightning. He turns to the cell

wall at the back of the room, and he strikes with an explosive blast of fire. The cell wall is blown to pieces.

Down the hall, guards hear an explosion from Hezekiah's cell, and they rush to his cell. They look inside the jail cell and see nothing but a giant hole in the wall.

“Sound the alarm! The prisoner has escaped!” shouts one of the officers. Hezekiah is gone.



6:

THE SHADE OF DEATH

FROM THE COLD NIGHT SKY, A SHOOTING STAR slams into the roof of the prison's cafeteria; it instantly rips through the ceiling and the fluorescent lights. It slams into the floor and rips up the white tiles. The shock of the impact knocks the metal tables, glasses, plates, food, benches, and corrections officers into the air. Every officer in the cafeteria falls from midair and smacks hard into the tile floor.

In piercing pain, amid broken dishes, and broken pieces of sharp tile ripping through their clothes and skin, everyone staggers to get up as they notice the thick black smoke emanating from the meteor in front of them. Their throats are sore from the burning black smoke.

The awful smell and taste of a burning dead body causes everyone to gag. The meteor jolts. Everyone stiffens, and a cold sweat slides down everyone's neck.

"Go see why the rock moved," says a tanned, burly sergeant to one of his officers.

Silence enters the darkened room as one of the guards, dressed in a black tactical uniform, cautiously walks toward the meteor. Fear grips the young officer's throat as he moves. The smell of a dead body intensifies. Cold sweat beats down his face as he gets near the asteroid.

"Hurry up!" yells the sergeant, gruffly.

The air is thick with tension. The young officer covers his soft nose and mouth to protect his lungs from the searing hot smoke and dead body smell. He reaches slowly with his other hand to touch the asteroid. His heart thumps violently as he feels the rocky meteor.

"AAH!" shouts the officer, as he jumps back. He vigorously shakes his hot hand. "It's just a rock. It's just a hot and smelly rock!" says the young guard. He exhales and nasally laughs.

Bursts of shaky laughter and coughing fill the room. The officers smile and high-five each other as others slump their shoulders. The sergeant orders more security personnel to set up barricades with flashing yellow lights around the asteroid.

"We'll have the next shift move the meteor in the morning," the sergeant says. He lets out a huge breath.

Within the smoke, red eyes flash. Black tentacles fly everywhere! And a monstrous beast emerges from the smoke. The sergeant, grips his chest and shouts: "Shoot it! Shoot it to death!"

Simultaneously, the officers open fire with their machine guns to stop the beast from advancing. The smell of gunpowder fills the air, and their hearts pound violently inside of their chests. The beast stumbles and cries out a bone-rattling roar. It falls and slams to the tile floor with a hard boom, causing the ground to crack. In tunnel vision, the officers deplete their ammunition, shooting the fallen beast.

"Did we get it? Did we kill it?" shouts the sergeant.

"Someone, shine a light on that thing!" says an officer in the crowd.

One of the guards turns on his flashlight. The creature's appearance is massive. The monster is fifteen feet tall and six feet wide. It has a muscular, gray, human-like body; it has bone spikes for hands, hind feet, and a white human skull for a head. The eyes of the creature are solid

black. The body of the beast continues to emanate thick black smoke while lying lifeless on the ground. The guard holding the flashlight trembles as he walks closer to the creature.

“Is it dead?” shouts the sergeant, voice sharp. The officer breaks out in a cold sweat. His heart races as his body trembles and tenses the closer he creeps toward the beast.

“Hurry up!” shouts the sergeant, causing the officer to jump and jostle the flashlight. Covering his nose and mouth from the smoke, the officer, his hand trembling, shines his flashlight directly into the Monster’s lifeless, cold eyes. Nothing happens.

“It’s dead, Sir,” says the guard with a sigh.

The black eyes blink. Tentacles flash into the air! The officers scream as Death’s arms flail violently while attaching themselves to every officer in the room. A red electrical shock surges through the monster’s tentacles and causes the officers to flounder. The officers scream in agony as they feel their blood cells being sucked out from their bodies like a vacuum. The hairs on their heads bristle and fall and the officers’ flesh and blood are sucked into the tentacles. Their brittle, lifeless skeletons fall to the ground and shatter like glass. The beast dissolves into a puff of smoke; sweeping quickly through the prison, it looks for its desired victims.



7:

CRITICAL CHOICE: PART ONE

“HEY, WHO ARE YOU?” SHOUTS THE TOWER officer to the guard down below.

“I’m your relief,” says the man on the ground, dressed in a black special operations uniform and hat.

“Thank the gods! Why are you here so early?” asks the tower officer, whose name is Greg.

Greg’s usually smooth olive skin has turned pale because of the meteor he saw shoot down from the sky. The radio traffic he heard when it crashed into the cafeteria terrified him even further. He had already resolved in his mind that he is not dying for this job. So, with a possible monster inside the prison, he wants to leave. Greg presses a red button on the control panel to unlock the door at the bottom of the tower. A few minutes later, the officer who was on the ground is in the building. The tower has thin sliding glass windows all around overlooking the

dark prison and the surrounding area. The wooden walls, sink, and toilet are all covered in shadow. Only the emergency light from the outside shines through the windows because Greg is trying to hide.

“I’m so glad you’re here early, so I can go home. Because chaos has broken out inside the prison, and an inmate has escaped!” says Greg.

“What the heck is going on down there?”

“Some are saying over the radio that the angel of Death has broken loose inside the prison. Others are saying that some monster has broken inside the jail and is killing everyone in its path. Whatever the case, I want to get the heck out of here.”

“When and where did the angel of Death come into the facility?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care to know. I want to get the heck out of here while I still have the chance,” says Greg rushing to pack his belongings.

“What about the prisoner who escaped? Why was he here in the first place?”

“He’s supposed to be in prison for saying and preaching in a forbidden name.”

“Jesus?”

“Hey!” shouts Greg as his eyes widen. “Are you stupid? Just saying that name can land you in jail!”

“I’m willing to take that chance.” The man in black takes off his black hat. Greg’s pulse races.

“Hey! I recognize you. You’re the inmate who escaped, that Christian outlaw!” Hezekiah had knocked out an C.E.R.T. officer and taken his uniform to gain access to the tower.

Greg rushes to sound the alarm, but Hezekiah grabs his arm.

“Wait!” Hezekiah says.

“Wait for what?” shouts Greg.

Greg pushes Hezekiah against the window, and Hezekiah shoves him back into a cabinet with a hard thud. Hezekiah and Greg continue to wrestle, each trying to gain the upper hand. Greg sees the alarm in

his sights and struggles to reach for the button, but Hezekiah is too strong. Finally, Hezekiah yells out: “I am here to save you from death!”

“What?” says Greg as he softens up a little.

“Jesus offers the way to be saved and receive eternal life,” says Hezekiah breathing a little heavy.

Greg, seeing that he is not going to win the struggle, relaxes and lets go of Hezekiah and slightly puts his hands up. Hezekiah lets Greg go.

“What? He paid for my sins so that I can go to heaven? Please, I heard this mumbo jumbo before. I don’t need to be saved by Jesus. I do all the right things. I stay out of trouble. I am a good member of society. I have a decent job. I even worship the gods, including death. So, I don’t need to be saved from death.”

“Death comes to every man, and it desires to kill you tonight! However, there is a way out! Jesus is the only one who can deliver you from death. He is the only one who can give you eternal life and save you from death tonight!”

“I don’t believe you! Everyone dies! Everyone has to face death!” shouts Greg, folding his arms.

“With Jesus, death is nothing more than a door into eternal life with Him. You don’t have to go to hell when you die. Not only that, if you accept Christ now, you also won’t die tonight,” Hezekiah says, trying to calm down.

Greg throws his hands in the air, giving up. “Okay. What do I have to do to be saved? Can we pray together?” asks Greg in a gentle tone.

Hezekiah’s eyes widen. “Good. Let’s pray together.”

“How do we pray? Do we close our eyes in reverence or something?”

“Yes. Good idea,” says Hezekiah smiling.

As they both close their eyes in prayer, the officer opens his eyes and picks up a shotgun.

“Lord Jesus, we pray—”

Bang! A hard strike hits Hezekiah under his chin as the officer uppercuts Hezekiah with the butt of his shotgun. Sharp pain instantly shoots through the holy warrior’s head, causing a loud smack between

his ears as he is knocked off his feet. With a loud crash, Hezekiah crashes out the tower window and falls out of the tower. He smashes through a greenhouse glass ceiling adjacent to the building, slamming through a table.

“Thanks, but no thanks. I’ll take my chances with the gods. I don’t need your Jesus. Ha!”

Greg picks up a phone and calls the prison’s Correctional Emergency Response Team commander.

A tall, dark-skinned muscular man, dressed in a black special operations uniform and hat, answers the phone. “C.E.R.T office, Lieutenant Lee speaking, how can I help you?” Lee’s office is stone gray in color. A few desks, chairs, and computers decorate the room. A mural of him and a few others on his team is painted on the wall.

“This is Greg from Tower 4. I just encountered the Christian outlaw.”

“Wait! What?” shouts Lee, slowly standing from his seat.

“He stole a uniform from one of your C.E.R.T. officers and got into the tower.”

“Wait, wait, and hold on. You mean to tell me that the Christian outlaw beat down one of my officers, put on his uniform, and tricked you into gaining access into the tower?”

“Yes.”

“And why would he do something like that, Greg?”

“He wanted to tell me about his Jesus before ‘the angel of Death’ came to the tower,” says Greg. Greg hears laughter in the background, and his face turns red. “Hey, that’s what happened! Don’t laugh at me for what he did!”

“Ha! Ha! That’s the dumbest story I’ve ever heard,” says Lieutenant Lee laughing. “You know, there is a reason why you are in the tower, Greg.”

“Hey, keep focused. I knocked that man out of the tower, and he’s in the greenhouse just below. He’s there now! If you can, just ...” Greg pauses as a cloud of black smoke envelops the tower, as if it was being sucked in through the windows. “What is with all this black smoke?” From within the smoke, red eyes flash. Greg screams hysterically.

“Greg, why are you screaming? What’s going on!” shouts Lee as the phone statics.

Steel tentacles fly toward Greg! Greg dodges as the tentacles pound into everything in the room smashing things to bits. “Stay away from me!” shouts Greg as he darts around the room. Greg glances through the smoke and sees an opening. He darts and jumps out the tower window! The tentacles shoot out the window and pull Greg back into the tower. The tower’s cockpit explodes into bursts of flames!

“Hello! Hello!” says Lee, as the phone disconnects.

“What happened?” asks Jason, one of Lee’s C.E.R.T. officers. Jason is an olive-skinned man with an athletic build. He is not tall, but not short, either. His stark brown eyes hint at the intensity he uses to intimidate others of a lesser frame. With a personality as fiery as his red curly hair, Jason is always ready for a fight.

“Greg’s dead,” says Lee.

“What?”

“His story was true, and the angel of Death just killed Greg.”

“Did you say that death monster killed Greg? And it’s near Tower 4 now?” asks Jason, voice quivering.

“Yeah, and so is that Christian outlaw. They must be connected somehow. Assemble the team and let everyone know where the outlaw is.” Lee looks at Jason for a moment and notices his trembling hands. “Didn’t you want action on your first day as C.E.R.T.?” asks Lee. Jason softly gasps. “Well, now is your chance, and it’s about to get wild. You think you can handle it, Jason?” asks Lee.



8:

CRITICAL CHOICE: PART TWO

“ARGH ...” SAYS HEZEKIAH, WAKING WITH A SHARP pain in his head. After being hit in the face with the butt of the shotgun and falling twenty feet from the tower, he has a throbbing headache. Laying on the prickly thickness of healthy squash leaves and wet soil, Hezekiah sits up to get his bearings. The warm moist air rests on his exposed skin as his fingers grip soft soil. As the smell of crushed squash enters his nose, Hezekiah comes fully out of his daze. The tropical plants in the greenhouse reflect the moon’s light from their leaves. From under a wooden table across the room, a female officer, whose name is Aerial, approaches Hezekiah. She kneels down at his side and softly touches his arm.

“Hey, Man, are you okay? No, don’t move. It’s okay,” says a fair-skinned officer with blond hair.

Hezekiah sits up a little further and meets her gaze. “No, it’s not okay. Death has broken loose in the prison, and now the tower officer is dead,” says Hezekiah holding his head.

She gasps. “What! Oh no! That means it could still be in the area! I have been hiding out here ever since that monster broke into the prison! When I was younger, I saw that monster creep into my parents’ house. I was sleeping in the living room when the living room got really cold. I opened my eyes and saw thick darkness.

“When I saw through the blackness, I saw a ghost standing in the doorway. I stiffened. The monster hovered down the hall into my parents’ room. My parents screamed! The ghost disappeared. I ran inside their room and found my father dead on the ground! I’ve been afraid of death ever since. I don’t want to die! I don’t want to die!”

“Calm down! It’s going to be okay.”

“What do you mean it’s going to be okay? Death has come to take us away!”

“No! Death will not win, not tonight. Listen, Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself for us, to save us from the power of death. He has made death nothing but a door into the threshold of heaven. If you accept Jesus Christ today, even if you die, you will later be brought back to life and live for all of eternity.”

“How do I do that?”

Hezekiah gets on one knee and puts a hand on her shoulder. “If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

“Okay, I believe. What is it now?”

“If you repent of your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive you of your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.”

“Okay, how do I do this?” asks the officer. Unwilling to be tricked again, Hezekiah says: “I’ll guide you in prayer. You pray, and I’ll keep watch.” The officer closes her eyes to pray, and Hezekiah guides her in prayer: “Say: Lord Jesus, I repent of my sins, and I turn away from them now. I accept you into my heart as Lord and Savior.” As Hezekiah

and Aerial pray together, her spirit is reborn, and the Holy Spirit takes residence inside her soul. Aerial smiles as a tear slides down her cheek. They both stand to their feet.

Through the skylight, Death crashes into the room! He hits the ground and unleashes an ear rattling roar! The beast's scream distorts the air as it pushes back both Aerial and Hezekiah.

"Go, get out of here!" Hezekiah shouts to Aerial.

"I'm not going anywhere. I not afraid anymore!" shouts Aerial, balling her fists.

Death lunges toward Aerial. Steel tentacles flail as the beast thrusts toward her. Hezekiah moves in front of Aerial and strikes the beast with the Sword of the Spirit releasing a blast of fire mixed with lightning. The burst plows into Death hard. He catapults and crashes through the wooden wall; he skids along the ground and rests on a heap of fire outside the greenhouse. Amid the fierce fire burning around him, Death disappears into a puff of black smoke and flees, searching for his next victim.

Hezekiah turns to Aerial. "Quickly, how do I get to the dungeon from here?" asks Hezekiah.

"You have to go inside the prison and take an elevator down there. The entrance to the prison is on the other side of the wall. It will take you thirty minutes to get there from here."

"I don't have that kind of time," says Hezekiah.

Hezekiah turns to the part of the green house that faces the prison wall. With his mighty Buster Sword he strikes with a blast of fire that smacks and booms through the greenhouse and prison wall. The hole in the wall leads him back into the prison. As the Swordsman departs, Aerial's soft hands grab his hand.

"Thank you," says Aerial, as the expression of hope gleams from her face.

"Thank God for His gift. I'm just the messenger," says Hezekiah. The man of God leaves, and Aerial is left with a sense of hope she had never felt before, nor could she even begin to describe it.



9:

CRITICAL CHOICE: PART THREE

HEZEKIAH ADVANCES INTO THE PRISON'S GRASSY courtyard as security shines a spotlight on him. Booming machine guns shoot at him from every direction. They can't get a good shot because Hezekiah swiftly moves away from the spotlight. Projectiles slice through the air all around him as he sprints to get to the middle of the courtyard. A bullet zooms past his eyes! Frantic, he yells to himself: "How do I get to the dungeon from here!" He remembers God telling him it was directly below the courtyard. "There's no time to take the elevator. I'll have to go straight down!" shouts Hezekiah to himself.

In the blazing gunfire, the Swordsman leaps into the air and strikes downward. A booming blast of hot lava shoots out of his sword! It surges through the air. The lava rushes into the courtyard and the ground below him buckles. Hezekiah falls through the courtyard, amid blistering, bright, lava, into the dungeon below.

Amidst volcanic ash, the man of God makes a three-point landing. He regains his footing and sprints frantically through the unpopulated dungeon. Realizing he has no idea where to go, he asks God for help. Two tanned skinned officers run his way and Hezekiah darts into an empty cell.

“Do you see anything?” says an officer, named John, to the other, named Alex.

“No. the perimeter officers say the escapee blasted through the ground right here! So, where is he?” asks Alex.

“Don’t know, but we need to get back on post. That death row inmate is too dangerous to leave alone. He set a trap for the last officer.” John pauses for a second. “You know, I wouldn’t mind if that angel of Death also comes down here and kills him. That inmate has caused us nothing but grief ever since he got here.”

“You’re right, but let’s get back because it’s still our duty to guard him,” says Alex, hands trembling.

“Forget that! As soon as that monster shows up, I’m gone,” says John.

“Thank you, God,” the Swordsman says quietly to himself, realizing that Jesus just gave him his answer.

Hezekiah quietly follows the security staff through the underground maze. He stops when they stop. He moves when they move. They all stop at the threshold of the hallway leading to the inmate. Unable to sneak any further, Hezekiah thinks. Still disguised in the uniform he’d taken from the C.E.R.T. officer, Hezekiah acts casual and walks toward the entryway. However, the previous fall into the dungeon ripped his pants leg and jacket.

“Hey, who are you, and how did you get down here so fast?” asks John, gruffly.

“I am here to help you protect the inmate down here,” retorts Hezekiah.

“Are you new here? I have never seen you before?” asks John as he squints through the gloom at Hezekiah.

“Yes, I just transferred here yesterday. With everything going on, I thought you would need an extra hand. Not only that, but we also heard that the Christian outlaw was down here. Have you seen him?”

“No, we haven’t seen anyone yet. It’s been just us two. Since all the drama started, we haven’t seen anyone for a while. Say what happened to your clothes?” John asks smoothly.

“I was running, and the floor collapsed from under me. My clothes must have ripped from the fall. Where did you say the inmate was?”

“Okay. Well, go on in the cell block. The prisoner is on J-range; he’s on deck three in cell sixteen at the very back of the range. You will see other rooms on both sides of the hallway leading to his, but his cell is on the range’s back wall. It’s the largest lockdown cell. You can’t miss it,” says John.

The prison guards lets Hezekiah through, and he runs toward J-range. As soon as Hezekiah is out of sight, John walks to his metal desk and picks up the phone and calls Lieutenant Lee’s cell phone.

“Hello? Hey, this is John from the dungeon.”

“How can I help you?” shouts Lee panting as he and his team are running through the dark prison.

“The Christian guy is down here. Bring backup now!”

“We’re on our way!” Shouts Lee.

John hangs up the phone. “That guy thinks we’re stupid,” says John.

“What guy?”

“The man who showed up just now is not ‘new.’ He’s the Christian outlaw.”

“What? Why did you let him pass? We need to get him now!” Alex starts to run, but John grabs his collar and yanks him back.

“Don’t do that, you idiot! That man just blasted through layers of rock with his sword! What the heck do you think we’re going to do? Ask him to turn around and cuff up?” asks John mockingly.

“You know, you can be mean sometimes.”

“Well, better mean than stupid. Besides, this range is a dead end. We have the escapee trapped with no way out. Every available officer in this prison is about to come in with guns blazing and blow this guy away. Sword or no sword, he’s done.”



10:

CRITICAL CHOICE: PART 4

PASSING BY EACH IRON CELL DOOR, HEZEKIAH wonders why this cell block has only one inmate in it. As he stands in front of the last cell. He sees an inmate looking out of a false window. The inmate turns his gaze through the metal bars to Hezekiah.

“What are you looking at? Can I help you?” asks the convict in a gruff manner.

“No, but I can help you.” The inmate looks at Hezekiah for a moment and then smiles.

“I’m intrigued. Do you have that package officer James left for me?” asks the inmate, whose name is Mark, a pale-skinned man with a very sinful past. As a contract killer for hire, he was responsible for the deaths of over fifty people. With guilt clawing at his conscience daily, he’s learned to cover it up with a gruff toughness. With the nickname Grim Reaper, he has no idea what’s coming his way.

"I beg your pardon? No. Listen, Death has broken in this prison, and he is here to kill you."

"What, tsk? I don't care!" says the inmate waving Hezekiah away.

"Excuse me?" asks Hezekiah, frowning.

"I have been in prison for ten years. I have forty years to go if they don't decide to execute me first. I'll see these walls for a long time without ever going outside. Death would be absolute freedom for me."

"If you die, you will go to hell, and you will never be free," says Hezekiah bluntly.

Mark squints, "You sound like one of those Christians. In any case, I don't believe in Jesus or God or anything like that. I believe that when you die, you die, okay?"

"How can you say that when you're living in a town where demons run wild wreaking havoc?"

"I don't know what to think about those things that are running around everywhere. I'm not interested in your Jesus; I don't want to hear anything else about Jesus!" Mark shouts.

The cell block's emergency lights go out. Mark's cell door opens on its own. Mark frowns. Hezekiah turns around and faces the hallway.

"Hey. Hey! What's going on?" asks Mark, eyes wide.

"Death is here," says Hezekiah, squinting into the gloom.

A roar rattles the entire cell block, causing the cell bars to rattle. Hezekiah looks toward the front of the cellblock, where the two guards were posted. He sees a thick blanket of smoke, darker than the cell block's lack of lighting, moving across the concrete ground. The Sword of the Spirit shines, acting as a lantern. The ground trembles. They both look at the dense black smoke slowly moving toward them. Red eyes flash in the darkness. Mark's heart beats rapidly in his chest. Sweat beads down his face and his chest tightens. He grips his shirt for comfort. Mark peers further into the smoke and sees a menacing shadow. His jaw tenses as his head trembles. With pain swelling in his lungs, he hyperventilates. A human skull emerges from the black smoke. Mark's eyes bulge. The human skull roars! Mark flinches. As the skull rises into

the air, its muscular gray body is emerging from the smoke! Mark gasps. The monster slowly moves, causing the ground to tremble. Like flipping a switch, Death gallops thunderously toward them both, building speed as he charges toward Hezekiah and Mark! Mark's heart pounds like a drummer in his chest.

"Please! Please! Don't let it kill me!" shouts Mark, gripping Hezekiah's arm.

"I thought 'death would be freedom' for you," says Hezekiah imitating his voice.

"I take it back! I take it ALL back! Just don't let it kill me!" says Mark, shivering and clenching one hand on his chest.

The man of God sprints toward the beast with his sword raised, kicking up dust as his dash seems to turn to flight. Hezekiah strikes the creature with a blast of booming light. The demon leaps out of the way and fires back with his tentacles; one tentacle whips around and slaps Hezekiah in the face, sending him soaring and twirling through the air. He smacks into the back wall of Mark's cell. The man of God falls to the ground and is out cold, and Death slowly advances down the hallway, toward the inmate's cell.

"No! No! No! No! No! You got to get up, Man, GET UP!" Mark shouts, as he violently shakes Hezekiah, trying desperately to revive him.

The ugly head of Death slowly peers inside the cell and growls loudly for a moment as he looks the inmate over. Mark has a lump in his throat as he stares straight into Death's cold, black eyes. Mark's body trembles as his jaw drops. Warm nervous sweat goes down his spine as he is unable to move. From Death's mouth, a drop of hot spit plops on Mark's head. Death roars, knocking Mark off his feet and shaking the cell.

"Jesus, if you are REAL, please save me NOW!" shouts Mark, with a strained voice.

"Jesus cannot save you because He doesn't exist! There is no God!" shouts Death. Death lunges at Mark to kill him! A light flashes. The demon slams hard into the cell wall across the hall. The slam causes the

bars to fly from the cell door and bounce off the walls. The bars clang and rattle as they roll across the ground. Hezekiah had awakened and launched an attack at Death, through Mark. The Swordsman remembered that the Sword of the Spirit would not kill people. However, it does excellently against physical, spiritual barriers and foes.

As Death struggles to regain its footing, Mark grabs Hezekiah's arm and pleads with him: "I don't want to die today! I want to accept your Jesus!"

"Okay, talk to God and ask Him to forgive you of your sins. Next, turn away from your sins and ask Him into your heart as Lord and Savior. You pray. I'll watch," says Hezekiah.

Mark prays frantically: "Lord Jesus, please forgive me for my sins. I turn from my sins now and accept you into my heart as Lord and Savior." Mark's soul is reborn from the Holy Spirit.

Angry because of the inmate's new faith in Christ, Death shoots out his tentacles, snatches Hezekiah out of the cell, and throws him down the other side of the hallway. The Swordsman bounces off the hard stone ground and slides as Death gallops after him. Death fires his tentacles again and grabs Hezekiah. With his rough limbs, Death tightly squeezes Hezekiah.

Under intense pressure and pain from Death's grip, the holy warrior says: "I shall not die, but live and declare the works of the Lord!"

"You will die because God has left you here to die! You failed to save everyone, and for that, God does not love you anymore. You deserve to die. So, slip into the darkness," says Death in a smooth voice.

As Hezekiah starts to fall unconscious, the Holy Spirit shines brightly in his soul.

God whispers: "There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death."

A light bursts through Hezekiah. He opens his eyes and breaks free from Death's grip! The Swordsman falls to the ground and quickly gets back up.

“What shall we then say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” Hezekiah slices toward Death and a burst of light erupts from his sword! Death is hit in the face and the creature slides back. Hezekiah charges as if taking flight and continues his assault. “We are more than conquerors through him who loves us! For I am persuaded that neither death ...” Hezekiah strikes Death in the face; “nor life ...” the Swordsman slices the death angel's chest; “nor angels ...” a blast of lightning electrifies Death's legs; “nor principalities ...” burning hot light plows into the angel's torso; “nor powers ...” Hezekiah jumps and strikes Death down the middle; “nor things present nor things to come ...” Hezekiah strikes Death in the face; “nor height ...” the Swordsman, uppercuts Death off his feet; “nor depth ...” he slashes his sword down the middle of Death's face, cutting the skull in two. Hezekiah rapidly twirls his sword, “nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” Hezekiah strikes. A blast of fire mixed with lightning rockets from his sword! The cell block trembles. The blast slams into Death's body. The dark angel is blown away as he bellows out a shriek. The blast careens Death toward Mark's cell. Mark leaps out the way. The blast slams Death through the stone wall with a burst of light. The dark angel fades away and disappears into the darkness. The hole in the wall reveals a secret underground cavern. Hezekiah falls to one knee. Mark runs from his jail cell and helps Hezekiah to stand.

“I owe you, my life. How could I ever repay you?” asks Mark.

“You owe God your life. So, serve Him,” says the man of God, struggling to maintain his balance.

C.E.R.T. officers show up. “Hey, that's that Christian outlaw, get him before he escapes!” shouts Lieutenant Lee. Hezekiah regains his strength and darts into the cave. Jason chases after him.

“Wait, WAIT! Don't go inside the CAVE!” shouts Lee.

Determined to catch Hezekiah and prove he is not afraid; Jason ignores Lee and pursues Hezekiah anyway. They both disappear into the cavern. Meanwhile, the other officers grab Mark and escort him off to another cell.

“Do we pursue, Sir?” asks one of the other officers.

“Are you mad? Those two are already dead! Why do you think this cell block is underground with just one death row inmate in it? That cave is filled with monstrous spirits more twisted than you can imagine. Leave this place and have this cell block sealed off. Those two have just entered into the cave of Moloch,” says Lee, frowning.



11:

THE CAVE OF MOLOCH

“COME BACK HERE!” SHOUTS JASON AS HE CHASES Hezekiah through the catacombs. The taste and smell of rotting corpses rushes into their nostrils as they sprint through the bumpy stone halls of the cavern. As Jason chases Hezekiah through the dimly lit cave, Hezekiah slows to see strange markings on the walls.

“This looks like a pentagram,” says the Swordsman to himself. As he stops to look at the motifs, the Sword of the Spirit brightens and interprets the wall’s language. “Beware all who enter, for this cave belongs to the god Moloch. Leave your sacrifice here and go no further,” reads Hezekiah out loud.

The man of God is hit from behind! Jason’s tackle carries himself and Hezekiah off a cliff! A sharp pain shoots through Hezekiah’s lower back as air whooshes past his ears. Both men struggle for control as they fall down a shaft and plummet further into the cavern.



Back inside the dimly lit prison, Lieutenant Lee is walking to Captain Smith's office. He's walking there to talk about the incident in the dungeon. Lee, a man who is not easily intimidated by anyone, is walking toward his boss's office holding a trembling hand. He is six-five in height and is built like a brick wall. He is famous for his combat skills and for breaking stone with his fists. The very sight of Lieutenant Lee strikes terror in the eyes of his opponents. However, his boss, Captain Smith, is far more terrifying; he is connected to many people's mysterious and unsolved disappearances. If he sees anyone as a potential threat to himself in any way, Captain Smith has them removed. Captain Smith is officially under investigation by the warden but is secretly protected, without his knowledge, by Diablos and Deception, to do their bidding. His crimson hair, dark red eyes, and chiseled physique almost give a visual warning for people to stay away. Captain Smith is untouchable, or so he thinks.

As Lieutenant Lee approaches the captain's office, he ponders about Jason and how stupid he was to chase the Christian outlaw into the necropolis. Jason is highly skilled in combat and is a pupil of Lee's. But he is no match for the creatures that lurk in the necropolis. He is also Lee's best friend, his confidant, and in the worst possible time, the captain's son.

"How could he be so stupid?" Lee thinks to himself as he walks down the dim hallway. Only the emergency lights are on because the electricity is out. When Death blew his way into the prison, he knocked out the main power. The power outage allowed Death to slip through the penitentiary in the dark.

"How could you let this happen?" shouts Captain Smith from behind his desk, as Lieutenant Lee enters the doorway of the dimly lit office.

"But, Sir, I ..."

"You can't even begin to imagine what kind of danger you've put on this entire city! Not to mention, you let my only son run into the catacombs without stopping him!" shouts Smith, eyes bulging.

"But, Sir, when the prisoner escaped, we couldn't stop him! You know how powerful that weapon of his is. You also know how headstrong your son can be; they couldn't be stopped!"

“How did he get that sword back in the first place?” asks Smith, his face turning red.

“Sir, I don’t know.”

“What do you mean ‘you don’t know?’ What do you know?”

Lieutenant Lee is left speechless because no one could clarify how or why Hezekiah got the sword back in his possession; nor could anyone elucidate the nature of the weapon itself. No one bothered to check Hezekiah because he had been wearing nothing that could conceal a sword the size of a person.

“Don’t worry about it now, Lee! Your primary concern now is sealing off the necropolis that was opened by the prisoner’s escape. If you don’t, every subterranean monster under this town will be unleashed and they’ll devour us all,” says Captain Smith, his voice quivering. A warm tear creeps in the captain’s left eye as he starts thinking about his son.

“Well, Sir, there is a bright side to all of this.”

“What bright side could there possibly be?” asks Smith, voice cracking.

“Because they entered into the cave of Moloch from the town’s old underground entrance, Moloch might see it as two more offerings from the town, to make up for the failed sacrifice that didn’t happen,” says Lee. Lee puts a hand on his mouth and gasps.

The captain is silent for a moment as he thinks about his son. Lee’s words strike like a stake into his heart. He grits his teeth and his eyes sharpen. “You had better hope so for your sake, Lieutenant.” Captain Smith slowly stands to his feet, frowning. “If Moloch comes tomorrow, then YOU will be on the chopping block!” shouts Captain Smith. He yanks a stapler off the table and flings it at Lee.

Lee dodges the stapler and runs out the office. Captain Smith slumps into his chair. Hot tears stream down Captain Smith’s face. As Smith thinks about his son, his heart melts from stone into flesh; his body trembles in pain. He looks up, choking up, and says softly: “God, if you’re real, bring my son back alive.”



12:

STRANGE CHILD

IN THE UNDERGROUND CAVE, HEZEKIAH AND Jason awake to screeching. The shriek rattles the cave walls and the dust on the ground around them. Pain shoots through their bodies as they struggle to get up. As they become acquainted with their dark surroundings, something shuffles in the darkness. A dark figure charges toward them! Fear grips their throats. Both scramble for their weapons; Jason pulls out and fumbles a flashlight from his pocket. He shines the light on the dark figure charging at them, and they see a helpless, scared little girl.

The girl is ashen in appearance with blond hair that almost looks white and eye pupils looking almost black. Frail in appearance, she seems very hungry.

“Are you here to save us?” asks the little girl, shaking.

Hezekiah exhales. “What do you mean by ‘us?’” he asks.

“The rest of us are down this cave. If we hurry, we can still save the rest of us!”

“How did you escape?”

The girl doesn't say a word. She starts walking and leading them down an even darker hallway. As they walk, dust shuffles in the darkness behind them. The tart taste of stale air saturates their tongues and nostrils as they move through the tunnel; their nose hairs singe and bristle from the smell. Jason's flashlight illuminates corpses along the path at random. The officer's throat fills with fluid pressure as he gags. The acrid smell of the corpses thickens as they walk. Hezekiah sees more writings scratched, as if desperately, on the walls: “Only true light can save you from the darkness.”

“We are here,” says the little girl.

They stop. The hall ends at a dark area. In the room are figures hidden in shadow, huddled together. The children are standing in the darkness, just staring at the two men. The place is entirely still. Ice-cold sweat runs down both Jason's and Hezekiah's faces as they approach the children. Their hearts palpitate in their chests, but the children are still and silent.

“They must be scared to death,” says Jason, rubbing the back of his wet neck. A roar rattles the cave walls behind them, and the sound of shuffling dirt turns into a thunderous stampede!

“You must save us! We don't have much time!” shouts the little girl, flailing her arms.

Jason moves toward the children in the dark; he touches one of them, and the child attacks him viciously. Hezekiah sharply looks back at the girl who led them. He notices the little girl is skipping away laughing, swaying her bright red devil's tail behind her. Hezekiah uses his sword to illuminate the darkness, and the false children turn into little ghoulish, pale-faced devils as they attack Jason.

“Get these things off me!” cries Jason, eyes bulging. The ghoulish devils scratch into Jason's skin, craving the scent of his blood.

Hezekiah slashes with a blast of light from his sword. Jason is free, and the devils flash into dust. The officer and the Swordsman

quickly find themselves facing a giant stampede of childlike devils. Jason's body trembles.

"We're going to die!" squawks Jason.

"We are not going to die today!" shouts Hezekiah.

Jason clutches his chest. Hezekiah grabs Jason's forearm and sprints toward the cave wall at the rear of the room. The devils screech and drool as they stampede behind them. Seeing their prey trapped, they stampede faster and faster toward Hezekiah and Jason. Hezekiah faces the wall. He cocks his sword arm back and slices. Lava explodes from his sword. The Sword of the Spirit hits the cave wall and buckles it.

The large hole reveals another tunnel, and they sprint through it with the false children in pursuit. The devils swarm after them like locusts. Hezekiah can see the red glow in their eyes. "They're after us! Stop them!" screams Jason.

Hezekiah looks up at the ceiling, which is made of large, jagged rocks. He strikes. Lava burst from his sword. The burst goes through the roof, causing an avalanche of rocks to fall. The cave quakes violently as Hezekiah and Jason sprint to escape the falling stones. The devils try to flee but are caught by the rain of boulders. The demons screech as the rocks crash down, entombing them. Violent quaking shakes Hezekiah and Jason off their feet; they bounce off the ground and fly a short distance away from the avalanche. They land hard on the ground as the shaking slowly stops.

"Aah!" screams Jason.

"Shut up!" shouts the Swordsman as he slaps the officer repeatedly in the face, to get him back under control.

"Don't make any more sounds! We don't need any more trouble! Got it?" shouts Hezekiah.

"Uh-huh."



13:

REVELATION

JASON CALMS DOWN, AND BOTH THE SWORDSMAN and Jason walk through the cave. They walk for a while and come to a junction in the path where five dark tunnels in front of them each lead in different directions.

“Which way do we go?” asks Jason, his voice barely above a whisper.

Hezekiah bows his head and closes his eyes. “Father God, we pray that you would direct us in the way you want us to go, in Jesus’s name,” says Hezekiah.

As the man of God finishes praying, the sword illuminates the correct tunnel. The tunnel lights up a bright gold color as if thousands of candles have brightened it.

While they walk, they both see a significant number of small skulls and children’s clothing in the tunnel. They also notice a small, childlike skeleton, clutching what looks like a little white teddy bear, wearing a red ribbon around its neck.

“I wonder if we are going to be the sacrifice everyone is waiting for?” asks Jason.

“What do you mean?” asks Hezekiah, squinting his eyes.

“The town is in great danger because Moloch didn’t get the sacrifice he wanted yesterday.”

“Why do you bow down to these demons?”

“We have no way of defending ourselves! We’ve tried every weapon we had against these monsters, and nothing’s worked! The strongest weapons we have didn’t even put a scratch on them. We’ve tried *over* and *over* again to destroy them, but they’ve always prevailed! So, we gave up and made a deal with Moloch. We agreed to sacrifice one child a month in exchange for our lives.”

“Oh,” says Hezekiah quietly, having an epiphany.

They are both quiet for a moment, just staring at each other. The Swordsman puts his hand to his face and lowers his head. He rests his other hand on the lumpy cave wall. The amount of trouble that grips the town of Sodom is terrifying. This formula of one child a month that the people agreed to could threaten the city with extinction. If they don’t comply, they are dead, but complying means being killed off slowly. Compassion fills his soul as he becomes even more determined to protect the city.

“I’m ...I’m sorry. That’s no way to live. I am here now, so you no longer have to sacrifice any more children.” says Hezekiah.

“What’s so special about you? You’re the one who started this mess!” yells Jason.

“I’m not the special one, but the one who sent me is: Jesus is the Son of God. He sent me to tell people that He is offering the gift of salvation. By forgiving people of their sins, He can give people the gift of eternal life with Him.”

“Even if what you say is true, why would God want to forgive us of our sins? The town is guilty of so much evil. I have done so much wrong. Forgiveness is impossible for us!” shouts Jason with his face turning red. He lowers his head as a tear falls from his eyes.

“With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible.”
Hezekiah assures him.

“Prove it!”

“He’s forgiven me. Before I came to this city, I was an evil king over a vast kingdom,” says Hezekiah.

Jason’s squints in wonder.

“My Christian parents one day crowned me intern king at the age of eighteen because they were going on trip out of the country for a few months. They wanted a break and they wanted to test me to see what I would do as king. Also, they figured I should get practice under controlled circumstances. So, they left me to the care of my father’s trusted general Alexander. When I became king, I was insecure and terrified of my own people. I made a lot of obvious mistakes that made me look bad. People were concerned about the future of the country because I was to inherit it. They also questioned my father’s decision of making me king. I overheard many people in the halls of the palace talking about taking the kingdom away from me and giving it to someone else. One day, I was coming out of saber class and walking through the halls of the sunlit palace and Alexander drew his sword and tried to kill me! The guards found out, rushed to my aid and placed me in my room. I thought it was for my protection, but it became my prison. Through intrigue and politics, Alexander took over the kingdom. He intended to starve me to death so he stopped having the guards bring me food and water; all the while contacting my parents and telling them I was doing a great job. During the midst of this, I was approached by the devil.”

“What?” asks Jason.

“Yes. He promised to restore my kingdom to me and that I could have it passed down for generations to come if I gave him complete control over my life.”

Jason gasps. “So, what happened?”

“Being a young king, and desperate, I gave in to him. I knew it was wrong, but I gave in anyway. I got the throne back through much bloodshed. Alexander and myself dueled sword to sword in the throne room

until I killed him. However, the bloodshed didn't stop there. Satan encouraged me to kill off anyone who was deemed a threat. So, I did. If anyone challenged me, I had them killed. Still afraid of assassination attempts after the first political coup, my repression of even imagined dissent meant that blood continuously flowed through the streets. After a while, my parents got wind of what had happened to me and what I was doing. They tried to come back, but I stopped them from entering the country at every turn. I prospered more and more with Satan in my life.

"At the same time, more and more people around me began to die. Months and years went by. The focus went from survival to full-out satanic worship. He wanted everyone in the country to worship him. If they didn't, he wanted me to have them killed. Whomever he told me to kill, I did. I had men and women killed to satisfy his bloodlust. After a while I got sick of killing people," says Hezekiah shaking his head. "I started having dreams about their deaths and guilt began to saturate my soul. I approached Satan about it, and he made promises to me that blood would stop flowing through the streets if he were revered.

"At the height of my power, the devil began to destroy my nation, the kingdom he'd promised to be everlasting, by summoning dragons from above to set the city ablaze. I was the only one who escaped the flames," says Hezekiah. Jason's jaw drops as Hezekiah continues, "While escaping through the forest, I was followed through the darkness. As I was running through the woods, I was knocked to the ground by a low tree branch. I quickly got up, turned around, and saw nothing. Then a wet mist seeped into the forest. Birds started chirping extremely loudly as they flew through the trees, escaping the woods. The birds were chirping so loudly that I felt my eardrums pop. The chirping suddenly stopped. I took a quick breath of relief, looked up, and a creature slammed into the ground from the forest canopy. I was face-to-face with a three-headed dragon. There was nothing I could do; I knew I was dead.

"A beam of light shot down from the sky, right in front of me. A person with a countenance brighter than the sun emerged from the

fire. I was so awestruck that I could not move. The person unsheathed a lightning-like sword. And with one stroke of its edge, a powerful blast of lightning obliterated the three-headed dragon, leaving a trail of flames and volcanic ash for miles in front of us.”

Jason’s eyes widen. “What happened next?” Jason asks.

“The shining figure turned around. I was almost speechless, but I managed to ask Him who He was. He told me in so many words that He was Jesus, the Son of God. I was in deep shame when He told me this, not only because of the countless people I’d slaughtered, but because my parents raised me to believe in Jesus and I accidentally had them killed because of it,” says Hezekiah, as he chokes back tears. “I then told Jesus that I didn’t deserve to be in His presence, but He responded by asking me: ‘Do you want to be born again?’ I asked Him what it meant to be born again. He explained that my spirit would be reborn from the Holy Spirit of God.

“After talking for a bit, I asked Him, ‘what must I do to be saved?’ He said: ‘Believe that I am the only Son of God, I sacrificed myself to save you from your sins, turn away from your sins, and accept me into your heart as Lord and Savior.’ When I did, my heart, soul, and spirit were reborn. I could feel that all my sins were washed away. I felt pure for the first time, ever,” says Hezekiah, eyes swelling with tears.

Both men are speechless for a moment.

“So, you were the king over ‘The Valley of Dragons?’” says Jason with a smirk. “I knew you looked familiar. People used to talk about how cruel and merciless you were. Many people passed through town, scared to death, glad to be escaping your murderous rage. You were well known all over. I recognize your face because I visited your kingdom once when you were at the height of your power. You were in a parade, and I saw you riding your white warhorse, waving to the very people you oppressed. Quite frankly, If God could forgive you, He can forgive anyone. We can talk more when we get out of here,” says Jason with a smirk.



14:

THE BATTLE FOR THE CHILDREN

AS THEY REACH THE END OF THE TUNNEL, JASON and Hezekiah look out into a firelit part of the cave. There they see a thousand sobbing children, real kids of all colors who had been taken from the people of Sodom. The children are serving as payment for the failed sacrifice. Moloch had sent an army of demons into the city to abduct every single child.

“My God!” shouts Jason with wide eyes. “They must have taken every single kid in town!”

“Do you see why you should never give in to the devil? You give him one child, and he will take them all!” says Hezekiah.

One by one, the children notice the Swordsman and remember that he’d saved the town a day before. They sprint toward him. The kids are crying, wide eyed, and confused as to what is happening to them. Tears stream from the children’s eyes as they wear fear on their faces.

The man of God and the officer's eyes swell with warm tears from the sad scene.

"Have you come to save us?" asks one of the little girls, with tears in her eyes. As youngsters' mass hysteria comes to a swelling point, Hezekiah can't help but notice that they are being watched.

"Yes, child, we are here to save you," says the man of God, voice cracking.

The girl's eyes light up. All the children cheer and applaud. They all knew how powerful the Swordsman was with his sword.

"Listen ...all of you, listen!" says Hezekiah. Everyone quiets down. "We need everyone to hold each other's hand. The officer and I will lead you out of this cave. However, you must follow only us and stay together," says Hezekiah. The Spirit Warrior turns to Jason "I will watch over the group and take out any threats that come our way. Lead the children out of the cave and make sure that no child is left behind."

Hezekiah turns to the children and prays: "Father God, in the name of Jesus, we thank you that you put us here, in the right place at the right time to save these children. Lord God, we pray that we all get out safely with no child lost. Father God, we also pray that you would light the path that you want us to take, in Jesus's name."

The man of God finishes praying, and the path on the other side of the room lights up. The children sprint to the entrance of the tunnel, ahead of Hezekiah and Jason. "No, kids, wait for us!" shouts Jason, chasing them.

With a crash, a brown boulder drops down onto the ground, blocking the tunnel's entrance. The stone cracks open and morphs into a rock creature, and the rock monster lets out a thunderous roar. The sound echoes off the cave walls, rattling the salty dust out of place. The children recoil and scream as they sprint away from the beast.

Hezekiah sprints straight through the crowd of screaming children toward the beast. The creature fires his rough tentacles and grabs some of the screaming children. The Swordsman races toward the captured children, leaps into the stale air, and slices through the monster's arms

in one quick swoop, freeing the children. Hezekiah sprints toward the demon as if in flight. He jumps and strikes with a blast of lava from his sword. The lava slams into the creature blowing it away from the tunnel's entrance.

The man of God motions for everyone to escape. Jason leads the scared kids as they dash through the tunnel.

Several minutes later, as the last child leaves the cave, the creature struggles to its feet. It coughs and tenses its body. "They may have escaped, but you will not leave here alive!"

"We will see about that!" shouts Hezekiah. The rock creature lunges at the man of God, with its sharp rock-claws. The Swordsman sidesteps and strikes with a flash of fire. The beast is hit hard and breaks in half. The monster's destruction triggers a thick blanket of hot mist to saturate the air. There's a loud boom, and a flood of ghouls bursts out of the walls from every direction. Hezekiah gasps. He swings his sword in a craze. Hezekiah strikes them down one by one but is struggling to fight all of them off. The monsters pile on to Hezekiah in their attack.

The sword creates a small fire barrier to protect him. In desperation, the Spirit warrior plants his sword in the ground, covers his head, and prays: "Father God, help!" Power explodes from the blade in all directions, incinerating the demons piled on top of Hezekiah. More demons boom out of the cave walls stampeding toward him. The sword explodes again and creates a barrier of hot fire. The dark beasts rush into the flames to attack Hezekiah! The sword continuously bursts with power as the Swordsman strikes down floods of demons with bursts of light.



Jason makes it out of the underground catacombs to a rumbling, dark, cloud-covered sky. The children are afraid but are relieved as they step out of the grave into the open fresh air. The scent of rain is in the air as they step out into the middle of a grassy field. As the wind howls in strength from the storm clouds and the icy chill of the wind breezes

by them, the officer helps the scared children out of the cave. Jason glances over toward the distance and his eyes widen.

In the wilderness facing them, bear-sized, dark-blue, and gray wolves watch from a distance. As the last child comes out of the cave, the wolves stampede toward the children. Each child's heart jumps violently as fear grips their throats at the sight of the wolves.

The kids tremble in panic and they scream. Jason falls to his knees. "God, in the name of Jesus, I repent of my sins, and I accept you into my heart as Lord and Savior. I ask and pray, God, that you can please protect these children, in Jesus's name!" Lightning cracks in the sky and strikes Jason!

The wolves stampede toward the children! They snarl and bark. The children shriek as their hearts pound in their chests like a freight train. The scent of wild dogs fills the air. The kids huddle together, gripping each other tightly. One of the wolves lunges at one of the kids. Mouth full of white teeth, the wolf soars through the air. The child closes her eyes. Stabbing pain rushing through her body, as a blast of lightning surges straight through the child, tearing the lunging wolf to shreds and leaving the child unharmed!

Jason is standing with a countenance like lightning. He is full of the Holy Spirit and he too is now armed with the Sword of the Spirit! A wolf lunges at another kid. The officer strikes with a blast of blue lightning, and the wolf turns to ash. Jason quickly separates himself from the children, and the group of wolves swarms him from every direction. Jason strikes them all with a blaze of bright blue lightning, electrifying them all with a single stroke. Jason sprints through the low grass toward the remaining pack of wolves. The pack of wolves advance toward Jason.

Hezekiah explodes out of the tunnel in a blaze of fire and joins the fight. The Spirit Warriors sprints toward the remaining pack of wolves sprinting together through the low grass. The two leading wolves leap high into the air toward Hezekiah and Jason. The Swordsmen jump high into the frigid air toward the wolves. The two groups collide. Lightning flashes. The wolves are struck down!

The men of God land back-to-back. The wolves move in. Hezekiah takes off as if in flight and attacks with a blazing combo of sword strokes. The wolves fly in every direction as they are struck; Jason spins with his sword like a fast-spinning top. His blade shoots lightning in all directions. The lightning electrifies the wolves in a ring of light.

The children start screaming. Hezekiah and Jason look back and see another giant wolf sprinting toward the children. The men of God rush after the wolf, but the wolf is too fast! The wolf is in tunnel vision as it zooms toward its prey. The giant beast jumps into the air toward the screaming children. “NO!” shouts Hezekiah.

Like a crack of lightning, Jason is in front of the children, facing the wolf. Time seems to slow down to a standstill as the officer is facing the lunging wolf. Jason’s sword trembles and shines brightly. Jason shouts: “Greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world!”

He swings his sword, and a blast of lightning erupts from the sword! The giant wolf is suspended in midair, being caught by the explosion of surging lightning. The beast lets out a howl as it’s reduced to dust. Bright light overwhelms everyone’s sight, and the sky rumbles from the burst of lightning.

Visibility returns, and there’s a great calm. The large group of children cheer thunderously. During the excitement, Hezekiah walks up to Jason, and they high-five each other.

“Man, you got some incredible moves,” says Hezekiah, grinning widely.

“You’re not too bad yourself,” shouts Jason.

“I thought some children were going to die until you zipped past me to meet the wolf face-to-face. That was awesome!”

“No, God is awesome. I had no idea He cared for us that much. Also, I didn’t know that Jesus could answer prayer so fast. When the wolves were coming after us, I felt like we were staring death in the face. I knew I couldn’t help myself, let alone the kids. I remembered what you said in the tunnel, how God saved you from the dragon.

“So, I figured if He can save you, He can save us as well. So, I prayed for Christ to save me and to protect these kids. I thought that He was going to come down from the sky, in a beam of light, to protect the children, as He did for you. I had no idea that Jesus was going to give me the power to do it! I know now that ‘whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,’” says Jason, wondering where and how he formed the words for the scripture.

“I’m glad that you accepted Christ into your heart when you did. If not, you and the children would have died. I’m also glad that you have the Sword of the Spirit. Now we can both be witnesses for the city of Sodom!” shouts Hezekiah grinning.

“Yeah, Man, we can save this city together,” says Jason, smiling.

As they begin to move toward the city of Sodom, the Holy Spirit sharply speaks to the officer. The officer pauses for a moment and is in surprise about what the Spirit of God just said.

“Hezekiah, we cannot go back to town with you,” says Jason, frowning.

“What?”

“God’s telling me that the people in town gave up their children willingly to save their own lives. In doing so, they forfeited their right to take care of these children. If we take them back now, they will give their kids back to Moloch. They will only learn their lesson if the children stay gone,” says Jason. He sighs and puts his hands on his hips.

“Where will you take them?”

“There is a city a few miles from here where all the youngsters have extended family; they will be able to take care of these kids,” says Jason.

“Will they ever go back to their parents?” asks Hezekiah, eyebrows drawing together.

“I don’t know. But for now, I will keep the children safe there. The people must not know that these kids are alive. If they find out, they will demand them back and have them sacrificed. Trust me, I know.”

“I won’t say anything. You don’t have to worry about me.”

Jason sighs. He looks over his shoulder and looks in the direction of the next town over. “Well, I guess this is it. We must be off now.”

“I guess this is farewell,” says Hezekiah.

“We’ll meet again. If not here, then in heaven,” says Jason. He silently waves and turns to walk away.

“Hey, wait,” says Hezekiah. Jason turns around. “I never got your name.”

“I guess there wasn’t time to ask while you were slapping me around in the tunnel,” says Jason, with a cackle.

“Or the time you tackled me off an underground cliff,” responds Hezekiah. They both laugh a hearty laugh.

“Well, my name is Jason.”

“Hezekiah is my name, as you well know.”

“Whatever, Man,” Jason says with a laugh.

As they part ways, with Hezekiah going toward Sodom, and Jason, with the children, headed toward another city, the sun breaks through the clouds, revealing the sight of a breathtaking sunrise.



15:

THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS

IN THE TOWN OF SODOM, A GLOOMY ATMOSPHERE has overtaken the city. Heartache has gripped the metropolis because they know every child is gone. A city council meeting has just adjourned at the City Hall, and the two leading council members begin to talk after the meeting. Gene, the city's leading council member, sits at his table. The walls in his office are gray and the window blinds are shut. The desk light is on.

Gene is slim and pale, with sharp red eyes and thin receding red hair that he slicks back. Gene is dressed in a solid black robe that goes down to his feet. A man dealing with hard facts about the world around him at large, he is a survivalist by nature. His parents raised him to survive by any means necessary. No concept of God was ever introduced to him at any point in time until he was an adult. By then, he had no interest. To Gene, God is a crutch for weak people and a way for religious people

to control others. When Gene became council leader, a Christian tried to witness to him about Christ and conviction pricked him. He was so annoyed that he, along with a few others worked hard to outlaw Jesus's name. And they did. He had the man ushered out of town.

James, the other council member left in the room, has tanned skin, thick brown hair, brown eyes, and a black robe. Raised an agnostic, James didn't find a reason to oppose Gene when he proposed the idea to outlaw the name of Jesus. James was the deciding vote. Ten years after the vote, and seeing what the town has become, he's starting to wonder about Gene's past proposition.

"Well, it's done, and it's a new reality we are just going to have to live with," says Gene, frowning and shifting in his chair.

James runs his hands through his curly hair. "Gene, last night was a hard night. We can't go through anything like that again," says James. He rests his hand on the back of his neck.

Early the night before, Moloch and his demonic troop went into the city and demanded that all children be taken from their parents. It was payment for the botched sacrifice, the sacrifice that was supposed to have happened earlier that same moonlit morning.

"James, we need to find a way to console the townspeople because I overheard some talking about suicide," says Gene, frowning.

"You're right, Gene." James moves his hand through his curly brown hair and drops it. "People are crying out in the streets, but I don't know if we have any real way to console them. We could offer them money for their loss, but that does not replace losing a child." James bites his lip for a moment and shakes his head. His face reddens. "It was bad enough to sacrifice one child a month, but now all the youth are gone!" James balls his fists. "It's only a matter of time before that monster starts demanding adults because we don't have any more children."

Gene glances at James's fists and glances at his tan face. James is grinding his teeth. Gene gazes into James's bloodshot brown eyes. Gene moves his hand an inch toward James and stops. "James," Gene says softly. "I know this is hard, but we can't be caught saying the wrong

thing, or this whole town may be destroyed,” says Gene softly, gently pushing the air with his hands.

“Look AROUND, Gene! This whole town is already being destroyed!” shouts James.

James storms out of Gene’s office and slams the door shut. Gene flinches and exhales. Gene sits in silence for a moment. A light tap hits the door. He jumps out of his chair and grabs his chest and sighs. The door opens ajar. A woman, with short blond hair and green eyes, and an emerald green blouse pokes her head in the door.

“Don’t scare me like that,” says Gene.

I’m sorry. Can I come in?”

“Yes.”

Gene’s secretary, Delilah, walks in and quietly closes the door.

Gene sits back in his chair and his eyes widen. “Well, what is it?”

She swallows hard. “Sir, we have a big problem.”



16:

THE CAVE OF SHADOWS

AFTER ESCAPING FROM THE CAVE OF MOLOCH, Hezekiah is making his way back to the city. Walking along the grassy path, his eyes widen and he smiles. Thoughts of another person in the world wielding the Sword of the Spirit run through his head. He yawns and stretches his arms. The sky is blue with a few clouds and the aroma of grass relaxes him.

It feels nice to just be out here with no one trying to kill me, he thinks.

While walking, the soft grassy floor turns rocky under his boots. The man of God notices that the only way into the city is through a cave in the mountain. He rubs the back of his neck. He moves through the path as the grass sways in the wind. He sees an old wooden sign on the path. He walks to it and reads it. The wooden sign reads:

“This path leads to the Cave of Shadows. Traveler beware!”

A bead of sweat runs down Hezekiah’s face. Thoughts of fighting more demons enter his mind. Hezekiah backs away from the sign,

shakes his head and exhales. “I don’t know if I can do this right now,” says Hezekiah to himself, heart thumping in his chest.

“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.” says a voice behind him.

Hezekiah turns around and gasps.

“Jesus! I’m so glad to see you.” Jesus is a few feet behind him. Hezekiah runs back in the soft grass to Him and stops. “What are you doing here?” asks Hezekiah.

Jesus smiles at him and puts a nail pierced hand on his right shoulder. Hezekiah smiles. “I’m here to reassure you. I know what you have been through, and I know that you are tired and afraid. Just remember that I am always here for you, and I will never leave you. You’re afraid to go into the Cave of Shadows, are you not? I will use this cave to strengthen you against fear. However, you must trust me. Do you trust me?” asks Jesus.

“Yes, Lord, I do.”

The Lord fills Hezekiah with the Holy Spirit and sends him into the cave.



17:

INNOCENCE IN HIDING

AMID A PILE OF RUSTY, FILTHY TRASH CANS AND foul solid waste, Immanuel slowly comes out from hiding. He emerges into a dark, dirty, adobe walled back alley, after hiding from the city's people. A day ago, as the citizens began to talk about Moloch's arrival, Immanuel recognized that it would be a big sacrifice. Since he knew the streets so well, he hid in a back alley while Moloch was in the city.

As he currently leaves the adobe alleyways, wiping filth from his green shirt and pants, he wanders through the busy city streets, and notices that many children are gone. No. All the kids are gone! Not being naive about what happened to the other children, he does his best to stay out of sight. So, he goes back into hiding and travels through the city's back alleys to avoid the townspeople.

Hungry, Immanuel goes to the back of Mr. Pan's restaurant to look for nourishment. Ever since his parents' sacrifice a few weeks before, he had been forced to live on the streets. Sometimes, people would give him food out of pity, but most of the time he would have to find

sustenance in trashcans or beg for money. Immanuel's parents sacrificed themselves to save him. They had just secretly turned their lives over to Jesus at the time. When the time came for them to give up their son to Moloch, they refused and were taken instead. The townspeople thought that his parents were fools, but Immanuel saw the love of God through his parents that day.

The child of God knocks on a hard wooden door behind the restaurant. The door opens.

"What do *you* want?" asks the owner, sneering.

"Do you have any extra food, Mr. Pan?" Immanuel politely asks.

Mr. Pan has jet black hair, black eyes, and olive skin, and an average frame. He has on light blue shirt, jeans, and an apron. He is one of many Asians in the community. He is also very business-minded, and he is always looking for ways to make money. He's not quick to give money, but in Immanuel's case, the boy's kind spirit reminds him of his son.

Mr. Pan goes back into the restaurant and gives the young boy a basket of food out of habit. He jerks his head toward Immanuel and gasps.

"Hey! How did you get past Moloch? Just yesterday, he collected all the children in town! Make sure that you keep out of sight, okay?" Mr. Pan puts his hands on his hips. "You know what? Come and stay with me! You will be much safer in the restaurant than out there on the streets," says Mr. Pan.

Immanuel stares into Mr. Pan's eyes. "If they knew that you still had a child, you would get into a lot of trouble," says Immanuel.

Mr. Pan waves his hand through the air. "I no longer care about getting into trouble. Besides, I need the extra help anyway."

Mr. Pan is grief-stricken because he gave up his only son when Moloch came into town. His wife had passed away a few years before, and he is still in mourning over his wife's death. When Moloch took his son, Mr. Pan's grief turned into sorrow and then into anger. At this point, he doesn't care what anyone thinks anymore; it was just lovely to see a child again.

“Okay, I’ll stay with you,” says Immanuel, smiling. He starts to walk into the door until Mr. Pan puts up a hand. He looks at Immanuel’s tattered clothes as a tart smell of body odor and trash enters his nostrils. He pinches his nose.

“Just make sure you take a bath first thing because you smell like death.”



18:

THE BOARD MEETING

GENE, WITH HIS HANDS STILL TREMBLING FROM the terrible news, calls an emergency council meeting that very hour. While pondering over the disturbing news he received from his secretary, the council members, still dressed in their black robes, settle into the dimly lit boardroom. The walls are royal blue in color and in the center of the boardroom sits a sizeable brown table with twelve black leather chairs surrounding it. At the back and along the sides of the room are windows overlooking the city. However, Gene prefers to have the window blinds shut.

“What’s this meeting about, Gene? I was on my way home,” asks James, frowning.

“I just received news from my secretary that Moloch is on his way to town.”

“What does he want?” shouts Eric, a council member with tan skin and dirty blond hair.

“I don’t know yet!” shouts Gene. He glances down, closes his eyes, and exhales. He lightly taps the table to keep his emotions in check. Gene gazes at Eric. “All I know is that Moloch is on his way to town, and he is bringing an armada with him,” says Gene, heart twisting in his chest.

Everyone gasps. They slam their fists into the table and exhale. Gene’s secretary slips into the room and gives a note to Gene and quickly leaves. He reads the message. “Oh my ...” says Gene. His hands tremble as he uses them to cover his face.

Eric pounds the table with his fist. “What is it now, Gene!” shouts Eric as he slightly stands.

“Well ...” Gene removes his hands from his face. “The reason why Moloch is coming into town is ...” he exhales, “he’s rejected the sacrifice.”

“WHAT!” shouts everyone else. Some pull at their hair and scream. Others ball their fists or clinch their teeth. Gene places his shaking hands over his tight chest while the rest of the council wails in terror.

“Do you know why Moloch rejected the sacrifice?” asks Ahithophel, a tan skinned man with gray hair, another member of the council.

“I gave my little girl’s life in this sacrifice, and it’s still not good enough for them!” shouts Drake, a caramel skinned man with black hair, another council member.

As some pound the table with their fists and others cringe, gasping for air, Gene vigorously hammers his fists onto the table. Everyone looks his way. He clears his throat and adjusts his clothes.

“There is a solution to the situation, per what my secretary told me.” He glances at everyone in the room. “If we give Moloch one more child, he will spare this city!” says Gene.

“We gave him every child in town, Gene! What does he mean by giving him ‘one more child?’” shouts James, as his face reddens.

“There is one more child,” says Gene, softly smiling. “Remember a few weeks ago, when two parents sacrificed themselves to save their child? Well, that child is still in town. He asked me for money before Moloch arrived yesterday evening. The child disappeared shortly before

Moloch's arrival, but I didn't give it a second thought. I didn't think a child such as him mattered anyway."

"You mean the child that was involved in that botched sacrifice that happened early yesterday morning?" asks Drake, frowning.

"Like I said before, I didn't think that he mattered in the grand scheme of things; however, I see him clearly as he is now—the answer to all our problems. If we can find this kid now and take him to Moloch, we can save the city!" says Gene, smiling.

"Are you sure we can find this kid in time?" asks Akron, a muscular tan skin man with black hair and eyes, another council member.

Gene slightly leans forward and makes eye contact. "We don't have a choice. Let's advertise a town hall meeting for today and conduct it in the middle of the town square. We can broadcast the meeting live on television. That way, we can let the people know of the situation and raise a search party to look for the kid throughout the city," says Gene.

"That's a lot of work in a short amount of time. Do you think we can get this done by today?" asks Eric.

"We don't have a choice. Moloch comes today! We need to make this happen yesterday. Anyone who keeps this child from us will be killed," says Gene, frowning.



19:

THE CAVE OF SHADOWS: TEST ONE

HEZEKIAH IS WALKING IN ABSOLUTE DARKNESS AS he enters the cave of shadows. Each step he takes causes his pulse to race. The scraping of claws against the gray rocks fills his ears. Grotesque faces weave in and out of the burning light emanating from the sword. Demonic spirits surround him on every side, desiring to tear him apart. Only the holy light from the sword is keeping the demons at bay.

As the man of God arrives at a dimly lit area. He looks toward the wall and sees a wooden sign that reads:

“To get past this room, you must defeat a childhood phobia. If you fail to face your fear, you will be eaten alive.”

The cave room lights up, and Hezekiah’s sword disappears. Hezekiah gasps. He looks around for the sword. Hezekiah hears a faint growl and he stiffens. His heart picks up speed. He peers into darkness. The growling gets deeper. A drop of cold sweat slides down Hezekiah’s face,

and his hands start to tremble. A shadowy form moves toward him. The growling grows louder. Hezekiah takes a step back. The figure races toward him! Hezekiah jumps back. Out of the darkness, a chihuahua emerges. "Oh, that's ...a relief," Hezekiah says looking down at his hand.

"Why ...why is my hand still shaking?"

The dog barks and Hezekiah's heart jumps. His body trembles, "Why ...am I still afraid." The chihuahua barks again and Hezekiah jumps. Hezekiah covers his ears and his body trembles. As the dog barks, Hezekiah's pulse thrashes in his ears.

"What is going on. Why am I still afraid!"

The chihuahua keeps barking and the barking gets deeper. Hezekiah's eyes fix on the chihuahua. Growling echoes all around the room. Hezekiah flinches, and his eyes dart toward the sound. A growling pit bull emerges from the shadows. Warm drops of slobber fall from its mouth. Hezekiah steps back. His eyes open up further. Hezekiah's chin trembles. Five more pit bulls emerge from the shadows. "No, no, no!" shouts Hezekiah shaking his head. He hugs himself tightly as he clinches his teeth. Multiple red eyes shine through the darkness. Another pit bull emerges from the shadows, then another, and then another. Light brightens the room. Hezekiah gasps.

From every part of the room, giant grotesque beasts in the form of dogs confront the man of God. Each dog has large overgrown fangs and claws. They range from small to massive in height, and the largest dog standing in the center of the room is nearly fifty feet tall. Every dog's eyes in the room glow a bright red. They growl at the Swordsman. The dogs bark, and Hezekiah jolts off the ground and lands on his butt. He covers his ears with his hands. The barking dogs' brash sound resonates painfully throughout the cave, piercing through the Swordsman's ears causing him to have a sharp headache. The smell of the hounds fills his nostrils as Hezekiah's heart thuds in his chest. The dogs stroll toward him displaying their sharp teeth. Holding his hands to his ears, he trembles on the hard, rocky ground. His body is drenched in sweat.

Hezekiah's anxiety triggers a memory that takes the former king back to his childhood.



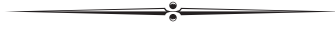
Hezekiah was walking alone outside his parent's palace, hiding from them. He'd snuck out to avoid a spanking for cursing out his schoolteacher. As the young prince walked down the street, he noticed a small red house in someone's yard. Being royalty, he thought he could go anywhere in the kingdom he wanted, so the young prince went to look at this strange little house. As Hezekiah looked inside the small red house, he saw nothing inside but some food and water.

The prince turned around and gasped, then his breath was caught in his throat. A large, muscular, brown pit bull stood there with its nostrils flared. It had big red eyes and large white teeth. It started growling. Hezekiah's body trembled. The canine's muscles tightened up as it growled louder and louder. Unable to breathe, he stumbled and fell trembling to the ground. Hezekiah's eye's swelled with tears. Warm wetness soaked his legs and pants. The big dog was barking furiously.

Hezekiah jumped up and sprinted in a random direction. The canine swiftly bounded after him, rapidly catching up. The pit bull jumped into the air. It tackled the prince to the ground, and they both tumbled through the grass. The hound opened its jaws. Hezekiah blocked his face as the dog snapped his jaws on Hezekiah's arm. Pain shots through Hezekiah's forearm. Blood surged out. Hezekiah screamed. His heart pounded in his chest. As the canine tasted the boy's warm blood, it shook his head trying to rip the flesh from his arm. Hezekiah's short life flashed through his mind. The young prince screamed at a high pitch and squirmed uncontrollably.

Hezekiah raised his other arm to hit the pit bull. Something plowed into the pit bull. Both Hezekiah and the pit tumbled across the ground. The dog opened his jaws. Hezekiah rolled a few inches away. A figure rushed into Hezekiah's sight. Hezekiah opened his eyes and smiled.

The teacher, whom he'd cursed at, sacked the dog. The boy's instructor scooped him off the ground. The teacher and Hezekiah both escaped for the palace.



As that memory flashes through his mind, without warning, the demon canines rush him! The hounds start barking, snapping their teeth, and swiping with their claws. The man of God jumps up and stumbles backward onto the hard stone ground. He crawls to his feet and runs in panic, but he can't escape. The cave behind him is blocked off! Hezekiah's breath is caught in his throat as the sight of the dogs causes his head to rattle. Pain spikes through his head as terror seizes his body.

His heart drums painfully fast against his chest wall. The smell of wild mongrel overwhelms his nostrils. A hound knocks him into the cave wall! Hezekiah gasps. The dogs close in, growling. Hezekiah squeezes his eyes shut.

Then a memory of Jesus flashes through his mind—the memory of Jesus saving Hezekiah from the three-headed dragon in the forest echoes in his head. Hezekiah grits his teeth and feels the hot power of the Holy Spirit burst into his soul. Hezekiah opens his eyes and his nostrils flair. He stands, and shouts: “The Lord is my light and my salvation, of whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be AFRAID?”

Hezekiah's voice thunders and echoes off the cave walls. The dogs disappear into a puff of smoke. The cave wall opens on the other side of the room, leading to the next challenge.



20:

STRONG DELUSION

IMMANUEL QUICKLY FINDS FAVOR WITH THE entire community. The only child left in town reminds the people of their children. Immanuel was kind-hearted and thoughtful even before his parents were sacrificed; after his parents' sacrifice to Moloch, he became even more kind. Also, everyone in town developed a respect for the child because he didn't become a troublesome kid.

Mr. Pan was happy that Immanuel agreed to work for him, not only because he was a hard worker but having Immanuel around helped the restaurant owner cope with his own son's death. Vast numbers of people began to flood his restaurant to eat and binge drink alcohol because their children were gone. The diligence the boy displayed while working in the eatery impressed many of the patrons who drank at Mr. Pan's place.

"Take a break. You earned it!" says the restaurant owner, smiling for the first time since his son's abduction.

"I'll be outside if you need me," says Immanuel.

As Immanuel goes outside, he sees a stage set up in the middle of the city.

A town hall meeting is about to take place. The sound crew finished prepping their equipment, and the camera operators are now in place. The council members along with a security detail assemble on stage. A great crowd gathers.

Gene tightly grips the podium as he clears his throat. His chest tightens, so he exhales and blinks hard as he begins his address to the assembly, "Good afternoon, my fellow citizens of our great city. I have an important announcement. I say this with great difficulty and sorrow for everyone here. Everyone did the best they could in the sacrifice that happened yesterday evening. We commend all of you for doing your best to save everyone in the city," a drop of sweat slides down Gene's face; "however, I heard some disturbing news today." Gene tugs at his collar and swallows hard, "I regret to inform you that the child sacrifice ...was rejected."

With a sharp gasp, everyone in the audience falls silent.

"Also, Moloch is on his way to the city, to destroy us," says Gene.

Everyone screams. Some put their hands over their faces as others stomp the ground, pointing at Gene as they yell out: "This is YOUR fault!" Some in the crowd vehemently shake their heads, crying: "this can't be true!" Panic rips through the gathering as Gene vigorously waves his hands in the air. When some rush the wooden stage to attack Gene, he gasps and steps back. Police step from behind him and push the attackers back into the crowd. Gene rushes back to the podium and grabs the microphone.

"Listen for a minute. I know that you are afraid. I also know that you are in great pain from what happened yesterday, but I assure you we will get through this together!" shouts Gene.

"What do you mean 'get through this together'? We're going to be slaughtered!" a red-faced woman shouts.

“I have a solution to our situation. I can say it if everyone heeds for a second. Pay attention for a second. Please, LISTEN!” shouts Gene through the microphone.

Silence prevails over the audience.

“Moloch wants one more child to be sacrificed for the city to be saved,” says Gene.

“There are no more children!” a woman screams from the crowd.

“Ah, but there is one more child. It slipped my mind yesterday when we were sacrificing our dear children; the one child responsible for our kids being taken in the first place was not present at the sacrifice yesterday,” says Gene. The audience murmurs. “He is still here in this town, and we can use him to save the city! Moloch communicated with us today and said that if we give him this miscreant, this selfish street punk, this thug, the one responsible for our precious, innocent children’s abduction in the first place, he will spare our city!” shouts Gene.

The council leader’s smooth speech is persuading many of the people in the crowd. The more Gene speaks, the more they grit their teeth and murmur. The TV camera zooms in on his face.

“Anyone who tries to hide this criminal from us will be severely punished. It is not because we need him to save the city, but because he is the reason our sweet children are gone. So, let’s get this menace, not for us, but for the memory of our children!” shouts Gene, theatrically shedding a tear for effect.

The council leader finishes speaking and the entire crowd turns toward the restaurant’s direction because they saw the boy working there.

Immanuel gasps and sprints into the eatery. The boy runs straight into Mr. Pan, almost knocking him to the ground.

“What are you doing? Why are you running so fast in the restaurant?” Mr. Pan asks, frowning.

“There is a mob outside trying to use me in another sacrifice!” shouts Immanuel flailing his arms.

“What?” Mr. Pan’s jaw drops.

“Yeah, they want to kill me, Mr. Pan! I’m scared! I don’t know what to do!”

“Go out the back door!” Mr. Pan points.

As the boy sprints out the back door and escapes through the back alley, the angry mob bursts through the restaurant’s front doors. Everyone in the eatery becomes silent. The mob walks up to Mr. Pan. A tall, tan skinned man, dressed in a black leather jacket, boots, and blue jeans, whose name is Tommy, emerges from the mob.

“Mr. Pan, where is that kid you had in here working for you?” asks the mob leader, frowning.

“I don’t know. Immanuel must have gone home a few hours ago.”

“What do you mean he went home a few hours ago? I just saw him a few minutes ago!” shouts the mob leader, voice rising.

“Well, Sir, I was in the kitchen all day. The last time he checked in with me was a few hours ago, and he told me he was leaving.”

Tommy balls his fist, stops himself, smiles and chuckles. “Mr. Pan, I like your restaurant, so I’m going to give you this one chance. Do you or do you not know where that menace is?”

“The child, Immanuel, is not here right now. So, you and your throng need to leave my restaurant right now,” says Mr. Pan, crossing his arms over his chest.

The mob’s leader turns to the customers in the restaurant. “Have any of you seen that little boy in here?” shouts Tommy.

“No, I think he left a few hours ago,” some of the customers say, smiling.

Tommy moves his face close to Mr. Pan’s and stares him in the eyes, “You’re lucky, Mr. Pan, because I was about to rip this establishment apart. Mark my words, if I find out that you helped that boy escape, I will kill you!”

The mob leader shoves Mr. Pan into a table stacked full of dishes. The restaurant owner tips over the table and falls, along with the tableware, to the hardwood floor. The plates and cups shatter around him. Tommy and his mob leave the restaurant in a violent rage, looking for the boy.



21:

THE CAVE OF SHADOWS: TEST TWO

HEZEKIAH TRAVELS THROUGH THE CAVE AND SEES another sign. This sign reads:

“To all who enter, beware of rejection because it’s a killer.”



Everything goes pitch black. All sensory feeling evades the man of God as his mind wanders through the darkness. A loud ringing jolts into his ears and wakes him up.

Next time, don’t fall asleep in class,” says the teacher.

In a daze, Hezekiah’s eyes shift around the room. His foggy eyes spot a chalkboard, small tables attached to chairs and teenagers all around. As his vision clears, he gasps, wondering *Was I asleep in class?*

“Hezekiah, you’re never fully involved in the class. Your head is always in the clouds, or you’re sleeping. It’s amazing you’ve made it this far in the royal academy,” says the educator with a smirk.

The bell rings. The class exits the room along with Hezekiah. The teenaged prince walks out into the courtyard to clear his head. His mind is racing from the crazy dream of fighting demons and monsters. It’s a crisp, clear, sunny day outside. However, with no friends at school, it might as well be dark and rainy. Ever since Hezekiah started at the royal academy, he regularly walked alone because he is the school outcast. He doesn’t fit in with the “in” crowd because the other kids are jealous that he’s the king’s son. He doesn’t fit with the smart kids because he is failing all his classes. The athletes don’t accept Hezekiah because he’s not on any popular school team. In fencing class no one likes him because of their jealousy of his skill. He didn’t fit in anywhere, and the isolation is piercing his heart.

While thinking about what the instructor said, he bumps into something like a brick wall and falls to the ground.

“Hey! Watch where you’re going, you idiot!” shouts the captain of the football team, frowning.

“I’m sorry, I wasn’t paying attention,” says Hezekiah, putting a hand up in front of him.

“You never pay attention. Your head is always in the clouds. That’s why the teacher says you’re lazy.”

The teenaged prince gets up and walks away, head down with his hands in his pockets.

“What’s wrong with me? Why don’t people like me?” says Hezekiah to himself, with watery eyes.

“It’s because you’re a loser,” a girl says from the crowd of students in the courtyard.

At once, students rush to encircle him. Hezekiah gasps, “The entire school must be out here! What’s going on now?”

Teenagers rush out of hallways, classrooms, and the cafeteria to join the gathering of students. Teachers try desperately to get through the crowd with no success.

“What’s going ...?” *Smack*. He’s hit in the face by a full and open can of soda. The pop can burst and splashes all over the prince’s clothes. The entire crowd laughs as Hezekiah looks at himself, eyes wide. People from everywhere throw wads of paper at his face. Someone else takes a full twenty-four-ounce bottle and throws it at his head. The bottle bursts into Hezekiah’s face, and the students laugh even harder.

“What’s going on? Why are you doing this to me?” asks Hezekiah, shaking.

“It’s because you’re an idiot. You’re just stupid, ugly, and slow,” say different people in the crowd.

As they continue to insult him, he lowers his head. Hezekiah’s throat thickens. His eyes grow wet and his vision blurs. He starts to weep.

“Look at him. He’s crying now. Ha! OH, look at the baby cry. Waa-wa! Does the baby want a bottle?” the crowd torments him.

“Maybe I am stupid. Maybe I am dumb,” says Hezekiah, soul heavy. His head pounds with pressure.

“Yeah, you are dumb. Maybe you should kill yourself,” says someone in the crowd with glee.

“Yeah, kill yourself. Kill yourself. Just kill yourself already,” the crowd murmurs.

“Maybe I should kill myself. I’m too stupid to live anyway!” says Hezekiah in tears, choking up. Hezekiah’s heartfelt sorrow strangles his heart. An oppressive darkness presses down on his body.

“Nobody loves you. We all hate you, daddy’s little boy. You were just a royal mistake anyway because obviously, you’re too stupid to be here! So just kill yourself!” says a girl, sharply, and then giggles loudly and smiles.

A knife appears in Hezekiah’s hand. Thoughts of cutting his own throat flash through his mind. His eyes are red and a hollowness settles heavily into his chest; the blade glimmers in the sunlight. The thought

of killing himself promises a happy release from the deep sorrow seizing his heart.

Adrenalin pumps through Hezekiah's body as his heart races. Cold sweat soaks his clothes even further as a heavy dull pain consumes him. The teenagers in the crowd start to hype him up and chant:

"Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go. Go ..."

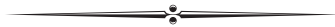
The crowd's chant reaches a fever pitch as the young prince puts the knife-edge to his throat.

"He's going to do it!" shouts the football captain as he points.

Stop! I love you! a voice says inside of Hezekiah, causing him to stop.

The crowd gets angry and louder, insulting him and throwing trash at him, urging the prince to kill himself. However, the voice from the inside grows more robust and continues: "*You are fearfully and wonderfully made! I will never leave you nor forsake you. You are more than a conqueror through Christ Jesus who loves you. But God commended His love toward you in that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you!*"

Hezekiah's eyes widen. He lifts his head and gazes into the crowd. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. That whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.' So, I don't care what you say about me because God loves me!" Hezekiah shouts. "If God is for me, then who can be against me!"



The crowd and the school disappear in a puff of smoke. The man of God is back in the cave. Reassured by God's love for him, he thinks about his school days for a moment.

"I wished I knew God then, as I know God now. Maybe I would not have cut myself so long ago," says Hezekiah to himself, moving his hand across the old scar on his neck. The Swordsman walks boldly to the next test.



22:

HIDDEN HELP

IMMANUEL CONTINUES TO FLEE FROM THE MOB. He runs like a mouse escaping from a cat. The boy sprints through every back alley he can think of, but he can still hear the angry voices of the mob pursuing him. He reaches a dead end in a dark and dingy alleyway. Standing against a hard and gritty brick wall, there is nowhere for him to run. Immanuel can hear the mob's roar getting closer and closer in the darkness! His heart pounds in his chest as he hears the murmuring of the group coming his way. The boy's pulse races in his ears. He is soaked in his own nervous sweat. Cold tingles invade his senses as the angry voices of the crowd grow louder and louder. Desperate, he darts his head to look for a way out but finds none.

"There he is!" shouts Tommy.

The mob surges toward Immanuel. Dust flies into the air. The boy screams just as he is yanked up into someone's house.

Confused, the mob continues their search for the child in the dark alley. As Immanuel opens his eyes, a voice from behind him speaks: “Be quiet. If you don’t want the mob to find you, stay silent.”

Immanuel turns around and sees an old lady cooking. He looks around further and sees white tile floors, brown cabinets, tan walls, and he hears the sound of warm running water over dishes.

“You can hide in my house, Son,” says the old lady, whose name is Martha. Martha has hair as white as snow and golden-brown skin. Her gray eyes stare deeply into Immanuel’s as if looking into his soul. As the steam of boiled carrots, salted potatoes, and small chunks of beef and gravy, fills the young boy’s nostrils, his stomach growls.

“That smells good, Ma’am,” says Immanuel, licking his lips.

“I’m cooking beef stew. Do you want some?”

“Yeah, that would be great!” he says, grinning.

As the old lady directs Immanuel to the brown kitchen table, she fixes him a plate. Outside, Immanuel can still hear people murmuring as they continue to search for him.

“Why are you helping me?” Immanuel asks the old lady as she piles food on his plate.

Martha sits at the table next to him and looks him in the eyes. “You remind me a lot of my grandson. He was so bright, helpful, and a good kid, just like you. He was the only grandson I ever had. One day, the city council came to my door because he was picked to be the next human sacrifice for Moloch. I let them take him, thinking it was for the good of the town. But I was wrong, and now he’s gone.

You see, whenever you choose to sacrifice your children’s lives for the future, you are sacrificing your future. Children are the next generation. If they’re gone, no one’s left to carry on where you left off. So, I’m helping you, not just for you, but for the memory of my grandson, and for this town’s future,” says the old lady choking up.



23:

THE SPIRIT VS. THE FLESH

HEZEKIAH IS WALKING THROUGH THE CAVE AND sees another wooden sign on the wall reading:

“Beware all who enter. The greatest test is before you.”

The man of God walks past the sign into a large, gray stone cavern with large waterfalls lining the walls on each side. The waters cascade below into an underground river. A large stone bridge rests in the middle of the two waterfalls that lead to the cave’s exit. Mist sprays onto Hezekiah’s warm body from the waterfalls, cooling him. He takes a slight breath of relief. As Hezekiah looks further into the area, he sees another man kneeling on the bridge, looking down into the water below. The figure is dressed in all black, lustrous leather. His jacket, pants, and leather boots are tailored to his physique. He also has a white plush cape flowing from his shoulders down his feet. The character holds a glittering steel sword unsheathed in his right hand. Hezekiah walks toward this man with caution, and the closer the man of God walks

toward this person, the more he resembles Hezekiah. In fact, he looks precisely like Hezekiah.

“I will not let you pass, Hezekiah,” says the mysterious figure, abruptly.

Hezekiah stops with a fixed look of concentration.

“Who are you, and how do you know my name?” asks Hezekiah.

“I am you, your majesty,” says the mysterious figure.

The man of God gasps. He squints his eyes as he stares at his own doppelganger.

“You have already failed, Hezekiah,” says the doppelganger as he stares into Hezekiah’s eyes.

“What makes you say that,” asks Hezekiah.

“You masquerade as some holy man when, in reality, you are a powerful king!” he shouts.

“No, that’s not true! I have left that life of merciless evil; I follow God now.”

“Oh, please! You only left the high life because it was stripped from you. Had Satan not destroyed our kingdom, we would still be living in the lap of luxury.”

The man of God looks away and wonders *Would I be here if I still had a kingdom to rule?*

“You know for a fact that you’re born to rule and reign. You are not meant to live on the streets like some bum. We went completely poor, caring about other people’s needs! What good has that done for us? We are cold, fearful, and afraid daily because you refuse to be who you really are!”

“Who am I?”

“You are royalty! People should be attending to your needs, not the other way around. We have accomplished too much to live on the cold streets now. We are better than this. Therefore, I am going to offer you this chance.”

The mysterious man sheaths his sword and reaches out his right hand toward Hezekiah.

“Come with me, and I will restore our kingdom to us. We will rule and reign together, just like the good old days. So, what do you say?” asks the mysterious man with a glimmer in his eye, full of sincerity.

Hezekiah looks away and then gazes into his eyes. “I am now in Christ. ‘Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.’”

The mysterious figure grinds his teeth and sharpens his eyes.

“I am a new creation who is born from above. I have been reborn from the Holy Spirit and made into a child of the Almighty. I am not the same person I was before, and I have a new purpose in Christ Jesus. So, I reject your offer! I’d rather live on the streets with the Lord than to be a wicked king with you!”

The evil-Hezekiah snarls and, unsheathing his sword, the doppelganger shouts, “Then you will die with the Lord!”

He lunges toward Hezekiah with his steel sword! Hezekiah rushes at the evil version of himself. They both yell as they draw close with their swords. With a loud echoing clang, they clash swords as light flashes!

“I’ll rip the flesh from your BONES!” shouts the mysterious figure.

“If God is for me, then who can be against me!” shouts Hezekiah.

The Swordsman pushes the evil-Swordsman back as they rapidly clash swords. Each counters the other’s thrusts and evades with loud clashes. The evil-Hezekiah jumps back, thrusts forward like a rocket, and swipes at the Spirit Warrior to slice him in half. Hezekiah quickly jumps and flips high over the evil-Swordsman. While still in the air, the Spirit Warrior energizes his sword and says, “Greater is He who is within me, than he who is in the world!”

From the air, Hezekiah strikes with a blast of bright lava from his sword. The burst slams into the bridge, and the stone bridge buckles and violently rips apart! The evil-Hezekiah plummets, screaming, into the rushing waters below. The explosion pushes Hezekiah toward the other side of the bridge. Hezekiah lands on the other side of the cave and runs out the exit.



24:

GOD IS FIGHTING FOR US

THE OLD LADY AND IMMANUEL ARE EATING when they hear a loud *BAM, BAM, BAM*, at the door.

“Don’t get up. We’ll pretend that we’re not home,” says Martha.

The mob bursts through the front door! The woman stands in the kitchen archway between the tumult and Immanuel, blocking the horde from getting into the kitchen.

“You can’t take him!” she shouts.

Tommy quickly pushes her out of the way into a pile of dishes, causing a loud crash as the plates shatter on the floor. Tommy yanks the little boy out of his chair.

“You’re coming with us!” says the mob leader. Tommy rushes the boy through the house.

They throw the child out of the front door. He flies out of the house into the evening air, toward the dusty ground. Immanuel slams back-first into the ground; he bounces and tumbles across the dusty earth. He stops with his face in the dirt. He lifts his head. In a daze, with

gritty dust on his tongue and teeth, slight pain surging through his head, the boy struggles to get off the ground to no avail. People burst out of businesses and homes to defend the child.

“Hey, leave that kid alone! He is the only one left around here. Show some respect!” shouts a burly man from the crowd.

The city council arrives on the scene, and a news crew follows close behind with cameras broadcasting live to every television in the city.

“This kid is the only one who can keep us from total annihilation! Moloch is demanding a sacrifice today, and this child will save us all!” shouts Gene.

“We have already given up enough of our children. How much more is he going to take?” shouts a woman from the crowd.

As the town leaders, the mob, and the other citizens of the city argue over the child, the night sky turns a stark red. A wet, gray mist enters in from the city’s entrance. Everyone in the crowd peers toward the town’s entrance. The entire city populous, either by television or outside on the street themselves, turns to face the city’s entrance. A shiver ripples them all. The ground slightly trembles. They all hear the rumble of marching feet headed their way.

“Oh no! He’s here!” says Tommy. His hands start to shake. “What do we do?” he asks.

Suddenly, a roar rattles their eardrums. Everyone drops to their knees and covers their ears. The roaring stops. Everyone slowly stands.

Gene gazes at Tommy. “Whatever we have to do in order to survive,” says Gene, eyebrows drawing together.

James scowls at Gene and then puts his head down.

Through the dark mist, red lightning flashes. The people gasp. A grand procession of bipedal bull-like demons appears. The bulls are in a variety of colors and sizes. Some are up to eight feet in height. Also, human-like ravens, with red eyes and gold armor, glide about in the sky. They precede Moloch as he enters the city. Icy sweat breaks out on everyone in the city. The outside crowd trembles to their knees shaking their heads. A trumpeter plays and their hearts jump in the

townspeople's chests. A demonic bull clears his raspy throat and says: "Introducing to you all, all the way from his great and glorious throne ..." the bull peers into the crowd and the people drop to their knees, shaking, "the great and powerful Moloch the magnificent!"

The people in the city clap nervously, whimpering. Gene calmly stands to his feet and exhales. He smooths out his black robe and briskly walks toward Moloch grinning. James's jaw drops.

"Ah! The great and honorable Moloch. It's an honor to have you here in our little city. How may we be of service?" says Gene smoothly, as he walks up to Moloch. He slows his pace and stops.

The head demon resembles a pale bull with long, thick black horns on his head, black eyes, a man's chest, arms, and legs. He is twenty feet tall, and he has a chiseled physique.

"We are here for the child sacrifice. Do you have the sacrifice ready?" says Moloch gruffly.

"Yes, we do. Here is the boy," Gene says pointing to Immanuel.

"Good. Have someone bring him to me."

"I will bring him to you myself!" says Gene, with a toothy grin.

Gene briskly walks to Immanuel. Immanuel gasps. He tries to move but Gene grabs his hand too quickly. Gene drags him through the dirt. The entire city watches, gritting their teeth, frowning, and shaking their heads, as Gene drags Immanuel, who is kicking dust into the air and screaming, into Moloch's presence. As the boy fights to get away, the crowd's hearts cave into their chests as they tremble. Gene slaps the child in the face. Everyone flinches. The smack echoes through the silence of the metropolis. Face red, Immanuel grits his teeth and jerks away from Gene. Gene snatches Immanuel's arm and throws Immanuel, face first, to the ground at Moloch's feet. Gene steps away. With sharp pain coursing through his body, Immanuel struggles to his feet.

Moloch peers into Immanuel's eyes. "Any last words, Child?" says Moloch gruffly.

Immanuel puts his Head down, shakes his head and lifts it up. He grits his teeth. “My God ...my God will save me!” shouts Immanuel.

“God?” retorts Moloch.

Moloch and his armada of troops laugh.

Moloch takes a knee and stares Immanuel in the eyes. “I am god, and there is no other who can save you, Boy! Do you think this is the first town I have been to? I’ve been around since the children of Israel arrived in Canaan. They used to sacrifice their children to me for a blessing. I have been eating children for a long time before that—with no other god to stop me. I’ve been to thousands of cities and have eaten many children. If your god were such a powerful god, Child, he would surely have stopped me by now.

“I will do to you as I’ve done to all the other children: I will skin you alive in front of these people and burn you with fire! Then I will eat the flesh from your bones. So, you see, you have no hope—you are done for!”

“You’re wrong, Moloch!” shouts Immanuel as he points at him. “You are not God! There is only one God, and His name is Jesus; He will save me! I’m sick and tired of you killing people! You will not win. Not today!”

Moloch stands to his feet and steps back. “I’ve had enough of this insolent child. Seize him now so I can eat to my heart’s content!”

A black bipedal bull rushes toward Immanuel with a knife! Immanuel’s heart thumps violently inside his chest. The beast strikes the boy in the stomach with his fist, cracking a few ribs. The child gasps in pain. His stomach raps around the bull’s fist. From the bull’s gut-punch, Immanuel takes off into the air. The beast rushes toward the child, yanks him from midair, and slams him into the ground. Immanuel’s breath is caught in his throat. He struggles to stand up. The beast stands over him with a stern look in his eyes. The child stands and immediately falls to his bruised knees, unable to breathe and coughing up the salty taste of blood. His body coursing with throbbing pain, the boy tries to rise again, to no avail. Gripping the ground out of misery, he looks up and sees the beast with the large dagger in his hand. The

creature grips the knife and thrusts! A red flash blankets the air; the bull drops to the ground! The crowd gasps.

People in the crowd murmur as they try to find who killed the bull. They look amongst themselves and discover a person walking through the crowd to get to the front. Their jaws drop.

“Look! It’s the Christian outlaw,” someone in the group says.

Hezekiah steps out of the crowd as everyone begins to murmur with wonder. The Swordsman walks forward and stands in front of Immanuel with the Sword of the Spirit, ready to fight. Moloch and his gang of demons gasp.

“How DARE you oppose me, HUMAN!” roars Moloch.

Hezekiah points his sword at Moloch. “This will be the last child you will ever see, Moloch.” Hezekiah’s eyebrows draw together. He grits his teeth. “In the name of Jesus Christ, I WILL END YOU!” shouts Hezekiah.

People in the crowd smile and cheer as their hearts begin to flutter. The Spirit Warrior’s heart races; Moloch grinds his teeth. Pressure forms in his jaw. Moloch’s muscles tighten as thoughts of roasting Hezekiah alive race through his mind. They glare into each other’s eyes.

“Destroy him, and kill everyone in town!” shouts Moloch.

The demonic bulls gallop toward Hezekiah and the townspeople. Dust flies into the air from the bulls’ stampede. The Swordsman sprints toward them. He strikes the ground with the Sword of the Spirit unleashing a burst of yellow light; the blast travels under the ground causing a small quake and a tidal wave of rock and dust to ripple through the ground that slams into the bulls! They tumble backward in the upsurge of sand and stone. The tidal wave slams them into the ground. The bulls stumble back up and charge again toward Hezekiah, howling as they pursue him. Hezekiah rushes into the group, brandishing his sword as they swarm him from every direction. Hezekiah slices through each bull, dropping everyone he cuts. A bull rushes in, corners Hezekiah, and punches him in the mouth. The force sends Hezekiah sliding back. The demon sprints toward Hezekiah. Another

bull draws his fist. The Swordsman uppercuts him with his blade. The bull stumbles back. Hezekiah leaps in chase. Hezekiah swiftly twirls his blade on the bull's body. He adds fire with his sword strikes. He hammers the bull backward in a fireball, and the bull slams into the ground and explodes. Some bulls are hit by the blast while the others pursue Hezekiah. He leaps into the air and strikes with a burst of fire from his sword. The blast slams into the squad of bulls. The Swordsman lands and charges forward.

Moloch sends out the second wave of his demons. Hezekiah advances against the second wave. His muscles tighten as he thinks of Immanuel. Hezekiah slices at the bulls. A lightning burst breaks through the flank of bulls. From the air, raven-like demons shoot bolts of fire at Hezekiah. The Swordsman dodges the explosive bolts while fighting through the beasts on the ground. Hezekiah flays them as they swarm from every direction. Hezekiah leaps into the air. He uppercuts a raven. It roughly divides the creature in a single upward thrust, and the raven bursts into flames. The Spirit Warrior lands and slices the air. A lightning burst slams into the remaining second wave of charging demons.

As one of the ravens swoops down, he energizes his fist. Lightning escapes its fist. Hezekiah turns toward it. The raven cocks its arm. It shoots out its fist. Its fist slams into Hezekiah's face! Lightning flashes. Thunder booms. The crowd screams in unison. The man of God shrieks as he and the demon disappear into an explosion of light. People continue to wail as the blast blocks their view.

"Oh no! Hezekiah!" shouts Immanuel.

The light fades, and the entire town gasps. They see a man with nail pierced hands and with hair as white as snow.

The third wave of demons step back. Their bodies tremble as their eyes bulge. "You are Jesus, the Son of God!" the demons shout. The city cheers in excitement. Jesus gazes at Immanuel and back at the demons. He furrows his eyebrows. Jesus unsheathes a shining sword. Lightning envelops him. Jesus zooms toward the third wave of demons. He strikes

down each demon as He moves through the horde, His sword flashing like lightning. He strikes with a lightning blast from His sword. The burst surges through the third wave of monsters and burns them to crisps. The lightning surge travels upward and explodes, vaporizing the remaining demons in the sky.

Moloch's muscles tremble. He looks at his hands and they are shaking! Moloch grinds his teeth and turns his hands into fists. He looks at Immanuel and smells the scent of his blood and sees the smile on his face. Moloch roars. He pounds his fists into the ground. The force sends a shock wave and the crowd trembles to their knees. Moloch claps his hands together multiple times to multiply himself. He clones himself fifty times! Eyes seeing red; his clones paw the ground with their feet. The salty dust travels into the air and lays on the skin and teeth of the people. The Moloch clones snort hard and roar. The roar jabs into the crowd's ears. They cover their ears and quiver in silence.

Jesus, eyes blazing like fire, looks into Moloch's eyes, unmoved. Moloch roars. He and his clones stampede toward the people! Everyone screams. Jesus furrows His eyebrows. He lifts His arm and lets the sword go. It floats a short way away. "Be gone!" shouts Jesus. The Sword slices the air. A blast of lightning shoots out! The lightning rips across the ground. The ground quakes. The flash overtakes Moloch and he screams. His screams echo throughout the city as his body is ripped apart. The burst wipes him and his clones off the face of the earth.



The light fades. Hezekiah is where Jesus once was, and there's a trail of hot fire through the street where Moloch once stood. Hezekiah stares at the massive path of fire, quietly. The last few minutes felt like he was in the middle of a dream—fighting but not fighting. As he stares at the roaring flame, he has an epiphany: Jesus fought for him when

he could no longer compete. “Thank you, Jesus. I don’t know how you did it, but you did,” says Hezekiah.

The crowd gazes at the roaring flame and gasps. “Moloch is gone,” says James.

“I knew God would save me!” shouts Immanuel.

The entire town erupts into applause. Jesus had personally saved their city from devastation. Elation sweeps the metropolis as everyone watching, in person or by television, celebrates Moloch’s destruction. A massive weight of terror and dread disappears from everyone’s soul. People are shouting and dancing in the streets as they praise Hezekiah.

As the crowd cheers, Diablos and Deception, a short distance away, grit their teeth as they gaze at the happy scene.

“I can’t believe this entire city was saved in just TWO days! How could we let this happen! How is this even possible?” shouts Diablos, muscles tensing.

“We failed, Man. It’s over. We’re going to have to start over in another city,” says Deception.

Diablos stares at the crowd as they lift Hezekiah over their heads and chant his name. “Wait, it’s not over yet!” shouts Diablos. He grins from ear to ear. “The people in this city still have not decided about God!” says Diablos.

Deception furrows his eyebrows and turns his head toward Diablos. “What do you mean? Everyone loves the Swordsman.”

“That’s just it! Everyone loves the Swordsman! Look at how they idolize him as if he were a god! Ha, ha, ha! This allows me to tilt the scales of victory back in our favor!” says Diablos, stroking his chin.



25:

THE OTHER SIDE OF SUCCESS: PART ONE

AFTER THE FANFARE OF THE PREVIOUS DAY, Hezekiah left the city limits. He went to the beach, right at the edge of town, to get away because his ego started to swell. He spent the night at the beach and most of the next day. The sight of the emerald green water and warm white sand relaxes him. The ocean spray mists upon his skin. A few freshly cut palm trees along the shore, a few boulders, and a coastline of warm sand, adds to the ambiance. The air is crisp and clear as he breathes and gazes into the sunset. A fresh, crisp breeze blows across his face and skin as he sits on a white, sandy boulder looking into the water.

Hezekiah notices the sun is setting exceptionally fast. A strange, damp fog seeps in from the coastline. His eyebrows draw together.

“It’s night, already?” Hezekiah asks himself.

“Hezekiah!” shouts a familiar voice.

The man of God turns his head and sees someone walking through the cold mist. He gasps. It's the evil-Hezekiah from the cave of shadows.

Hezekiah rushes to his feet. "What? How? I thought I killed you?"

The evil-Hezekiah keeps walking toward him. "Well, you thought wrong. Now I'll finish what I started and kill you!" The evil swordsman unsheathes a long, thin sword from his side. He sprints at Hezekiah. Hezekiah sprints toward his foe with the Sword of the Spirit in hand. Hezekiah stops running, stands still, and bows his head. The evil-Hezekiah quickly leaps into the air at the man of God and his sword rips straight through him! Hezekiah awakes from his dream distraught. He gasps for air.



"That was ...that was a strange dream," he says, panting for breath. He worries about what the dream might mean. Shaking, he looks up and notices that it's still late afternoon. The sun is setting in the sky, and a beautiful array of colors follows it: orange, vermilion, ruby-red, and purple are set against the bright yellow of the sun. The Spirit Warrior turns his head in the city's direction and notices the city council members walking toward him.

"Hezekiah? Hezekiah? Are you okay?" asks Ahithophel, an old man with gray hair and brown eyes.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm okay." Hezekiah rubs the back of his neck. He squints at them, "What's going on? Is the town in danger?"

"No, no, no," says Ahithophel shaking his head. "We just wanted to thank you for what you have done for the city. Everyone's overjoyed because you vanquished Moloch yesterday."

"God saved this city, not me," says Hezekiah.

"Well, God used you to do it. In fact, the town is so overjoyed about what happened yesterday that we decided to make you city council leader," says Ahithophel.

Hezekiah's mouth drops as his heart skips a beat. "What? No. I couldn't do that." Hezekiah turns partly away from them and waves his hand. "I am only here to protect the city, not to govern it."

Ahithophel lowers his head and exhales. He lifts it back up. "Well, with all due respect, Sir, our most significant threats are gone, and we need new leadership. The best way for you to protect this city now, is to be a strong moral influence in the city's affairs, and to lead us into a better tomorrow."

Hezekiah exhales, "Okay, let me pray about it first."

"What's there to pray for?" asks James, throwing his hands up and letting them smack his thighs. "This is a good opportunity to do good for a lot of people in a big way! Surely, if God sent you to protect this city, He certainly would want you to be a positive influence as well, right?" asks James.

"Yeah, you're right," says Hezekiah, frowning.

"Also, wouldn't God want you to be rewarded for your services to the city?" asks Ahithophel. "We are prepared to offer you room and board with your new position. We will even pay you a great salary! After all that you've been through, don't you deserve to live in a nice place, versus living on the street?" asks Ahithophel, making strong eye contact.

Hezekiah chuckles. "Yeah, you can say that," he says.

"Then come with us and help us with our town. We will pay you a great salary," says James, smiling.

"Okay, I'll do it," says Hezekiah. He jumps off the bolder and walks over to them as they all smile.

Without consulting God, the Swordsman agrees to govern the city and goes with them.



City Hall is a large white marble palace on a hill at the base of the city's only mountain. As they walk up the path leading to City Hall, positive images of his old royal palace flash into Hezekiah's mind.

A smile creeps across his face. As they step through the large, reddish-gold, double doors of the palace, he notices that the building is lavishly decorated on the inside. There's polished white marble on the walls of the building and the floor. Multiple crystal chandeliers with gold frames hang from the ceilings. The ceiling itself is reflective glass, making the main hall sparkle in appearance. They give the Swordsman a tour of the palace.

On the ground level, there is a lobby and several administrative offices. In the entrance lobby is a large white marble staircase that leads to the palace's upper levels. Once on the third level, Ahithophel shows Hezekiah the boardroom. In the boardroom's center sits a large brown table, surrounded by twelve black leather chairs. At the back and along the sides of the room are windows with a view overlooking the city. They exit the boardroom and go to the dining hall. The walls of the dining area are twenty feet high and are dark blue. The dining room has a large brown dining table that seats fourteen people. The place is illuminated by a gold-plated chandelier that hangs from the ceiling. On the right side of the room are large windows that also have a view of the outside of the palace. The windows allow the natural light to flood into the room.

The group travels back to the second level of the palace. They view the guest quarters. The guest lodgings are for employees who elect to stay at the estate instead of their own home. They give Hezekiah a place to stay in and a brand-new wardrobe.

Ahithophel thumbs through the clothes as he shows them to Hezekiah. "These are the clothes you will wear to our council meetings," says Ahithophel. The uniform is black, shiny leather. It also has a luxurious long, white plush cape attached to the uniform's shoulders. Hezekiah recollects the dream he'd had earlier that afternoon. "Do I have to wear this?" asks Hezekiah, frowning.

"Yes. Every council member wears their uniform to the council meetings. Is there something wrong?" asks Ahithophel.

“Well, no, I guess not. Why am I the only person wearing a uniform like this, and everyone else wears black robes?”

“Because this is what head council members wear,” says Ahithophel.

“I guess I have to remember that clothes don’t make the man, huh.”

“Don’t worry; we have plenty of air conditioning inside the palace. So, you won’t get hot if that’s what you’re worried about. Anyway, your first day is tomorrow, so be ready. We have a lot to discuss. Your perspective about the city will be invaluable.” Ahithophel gives a slight wave and leaves the room.

Hezekiah prays: “Lord God, I thank you for exalting me to such a position. I don’t know why I’m here, but help me glorify you, in Jesus’s name, amen.”



James and Gene are talking in the hallway right outside the conference room.

“Don’t get me wrong, James; I’m glad that we’re no longer under Moloch. However, I’m not too big about Jesus either,” says Gene.

James squints and slightly throws up his hands. “What are you talking about? Jesus just saved this city from total annihilation. How can you not like Jesus? The entire town saw what happened yesterday. You cannot deny what happened,” says James, frowning.

“I know what I saw, but can this man be trusted? If Jesus were such a savior, why didn’t He choose to save this town before now? He could be setting us up for a fall, trying to trick us into believing that He is all good when, in reality, He could be just like Moloch. As far as Hezekiah is concerned, he may be nothing more than a puppet, setting us up for a great fall.”

James walks away from Gene, rolling his eyes in disgust.

“You can fail with him for all I care!” shouts Gene. He turns his back and faces away from him. “Because after I’m done, he will,” Gene says under his breath.



26:

THE OTHER SIDE OF SUCCESS: PART TWO

AS SIX MONTHS PASS BY, HEZEKIAH PROVES TO BE a dynamic leader. He arranged for new hospitals, schools, and modern city infrastructure to be built. Everything Hezekiah touched as the council leader was blessed. There were no more demonic attacks against the city, so everything in town flourished under Hezekiah's leadership. The more Hezekiah prospered, the higher his popularity became. The higher his reputation grew, the prouder of himself he became. The prouder Hezekiah became, the more he forgot the source of his strength. Disremembering the origin of his power, the man of God stopped relying on God. The less he depended on God, the less he knew how to use the Sword of the Spirit.

The council is in session in the boardroom. They're having a meeting because crime is rising at an alarming rate in the city. Cocaine had somehow been introduced into the metropolis, and the town leaders

are baffled as to its source. The people in the town are still in mourning over their lost children. While some are drinking alcohol, others use narcotics as a new crutch to cope with their grief. Debauchery saturates the metropolis, and people are stealing to satisfy their drug habits.

“Why is the crime rate so high? Where are these drugs coming from?” shouts Ahithophel.

“Don’t know, but we do need to stop this problem because it’s destroying our city,” says Drake.

“If we don’t stop this problem now, our town will become a haven for drug lords. We need to act now!” says Akron.

“What do you think we should do, Grand Leader?” asks Gene smirking, standing in the doorway. Hezekiah looks at him and grits his teeth. Gene had sharply opposed him for months. At every turn, Gene was there to be a thorn in the Grand Leader’s side.

“Here’s what we’ll do ...” says Hezekiah turning his back to Gene. “We set up an undercover task force to obtain information from the drug users as to where they get their narcotics. We find out who the cocaine dealers are and when they sell their products. We then follow the drug pushers to see where they get their supply. Afterward, we cut off the narcotics at their source of manufacture. Then, we use the police force to crush the drug ring and restore order to the city. Also, we need to set up rehabilitation centers for people who want to get off narcotics, so the demand for cocaine can stop,” says Hezekiah, the Grand Leader.

“How soon can we get started?” asks James.

“Let’s begin to look for candidates to work undercover tomorrow afternoon. We have already received many applications for rehabilitative specialists. So, we can start interviewing for the position of rehabilitative specialist tomorrow morning,” says Hezekiah.

As the meeting adjourns and Hezekiah and a few other council members leave, James walks up to Gene.

“Gene, it’s poor taste to keep attacking Hezekiah out of jealousy,” says James with a stern look.

Gene folds his arms. A burning sensation fills his chest. “Hezekiah walks around in that white, plush cape of his as if he were high and mighty. If someone needs to knock him off his high horse, it might as well be me—the real leader of this council!” shouts Gene.

“That’s enough, Gene! You haven’t been the leader of this council for months! Let it go!” shouts James. James walks away. Shortly after, Akron approaches Gene. He gently puts a hand on his arm and then pulls back.

“Gene, you need to stay calm,” he says softly. “When you were the council leader, you were the key figure in child sacrifice during the Moloch situation. At that time, you did what needed to be done to survive. The council applauds you for that. However, times have changed. People are mourning over the loss of their children, and they blame you for it,” says Akron pointing at Gene for a second.

Gene throws his hands up and lets them fall. “Why am I the only one to blame for this? Why did I have to be taken down as the town leader? I was not the only one responsible for child sacrifice,” says Gene.

“You were too visible trying your hardest to sacrifice Immanuel to Moloch. People were pissed off. If we didn’t take you down, the townspeople would have taken you out by force.”

Gene sneers, turning his head away for a moment.

“Also, I overheard the crowds talking and chanting that day about making Hezekiah a king. Not only that, but a few others in the council were bitter toward you and wanted you out altogether,” says Akron. “If we had not exalted Hezekiah to such a status, Hezekiah would be king, and we would have lost all power,” says Akron, softly.

“I’m aware of that, Akron. It was merely a rhetorical question. I am aware of the inner workings of this council. Not much gets by me, no matter how secret people try to be.

“Be that as it may, it’s hard living under another man’s shadow, even if it’s just for a little while. The only thing I like about him now is that he stopped talking about his God. It used to drive me crazy how much he talked about Jesus and how He can ‘save us from our sins’” he says

mockingly. “Now that the power of city council leader has gone to his head, we can take this city back! With him not relying on his God, it makes it easier to ‘get in his head,’” says Gene with a smile.



Hezekiah needs air after the meeting. Gene’s resistance to his authority is getting worse. But the Grand Leader sees Gene as an influential advisor in the city council, so it would be a mistake to do away with him, or so he thinks. It is a beautiful day outside; the sun is shining, the birds are singing, the city seems to gleam in the sunlight. However, crime had gotten so bad that it is dangerous to walk outside without a weapon.

“Surely, nothing can happen to me outside of the council building.” Hezekiah says to himself. As the council leader walks a little further, he notices someone hurt on the ground. Hezekiah gasps. He runs over to assist.

“Hey! Are you okay?” Hezekiah asks.

The man flinches as he tries to move his leg. “No, I need some help! I can’t—I can’t walk! Can you help me back to my house?” asks the stranger, frantic.

“Yeah, no problem. Let me get some assistance,” says Hezekiah.

“There’s no need! I need you to help me up! I got someone on the way,” says the stranger, wincing as he tries to move his leg.

As the Grand Leader bends to pick the stranger up, he sees a knife at his neck! His throat closes. Hezekiah quickly knocks the man’s arm back, pushes the guy away, and slashes with the Sword of the Spirit, but nothing happens. The sword goes straight through the thief without leaving a single mark. Hezekiah gasps. *Oh no I can’t believe I just did that* thinks Hezekiah. His stomach gets upset. The robber’s knife rips across his chest! The robber flees. Hezekiah is struck across the neck!



The Grand Leader wakes from his sleep inside the Palace lobby. The robber only managed to cut into his leather jacket, leaving his body unscathed.

“What happened?” asks Hezekiah, holding his throbbing head.

“You’ve just been robbed. I saw the whole thing. You were trying to help someone get up off the ground. That same guy cut you, and another guy knocked you over the head and took your wallet. I rushed over and brought you back to the palace. What happened? I thought you could take care of yourself,” says the security guard.

“I thought so too,” Hezekiah says under his breath.

Helplessness rolls down his spine like a cold sweat. Then he recalls what Jesus had told him. His sword only worked on demonic foes; it didn’t work on humans. The council leader thanks the security guard for carrying him back to the palace. Hezekiah goes back to his chamber to contemplate what to do next.



27:

THE UNBREAKABLE

THE NEXT DAY, AS HEZEKIAH GOES THROUGH HIS usual routine, he can't get the robbery out of his mind. He feels like a weak, spineless man. His pulse races and his body tenses. He thinks maybe he can't do anything to help himself and wonders, *demons were bad enough; I have to worry about humans too?*

He draws the Sword of the Spirit out of himself. Hezekiah looks at his reflection. He wonders why. He creates a makeshift sheath for it to be visible. But even using the weapon only for intimidation, he still neglects to use it. The council leader takes another walk outside the palace to clear his head. While walking outside, he notices a shop he didn't see before. A store called "Advanced Protection" has appeared almost overnight. Hezekiah walks toward the shop, and a few minutes later, arrives at the store's entrance.

The tan stone of the building's frame glistens in the sunlight. Curiosity takes over, and the Grand Leader walks into the weapons store. The doorway chimes as he walks inside. The aroma in the air is a

potent mix of gunpowder and steel. The building's interior is also tan in color. Gray shelves stretch from the front to the back of the establishment. The store's merchandise is divided into various sections of body armor and weapons. The shelves are so fully stocked that inventory is stacked on the ground. The armaments shimmer in the warm sunlight pouring in from outside. "Hello, Sir." The store owner says to Hezekiah, with a smooth and proper country accent. The shop attendant looks like an older tan skinned man in his sixties. His hair is completely gray; he's short and a little overweight. He is dressed in a white shirt, blue jeans, and brown shoes that click as he walks. "So, what brings you into the 'Advanced Protection' store today?" asks the shop attendant, who is also the owner.

"Well, I'm looking around because I was robbed yesterday."

"So, you're the one who was robbed yesterday! How unfortunate. Well, lucky for you I have a wide variety of arms here that can help you. However, I've got a weapon behind the counter that I think you will like," the store owner says as he pulls out a long, thin, steel sword from behind the counter. "This sword is called 'The Unbreakable.' It's made of solid diamond on the inside, and it's fused with titanium on the outside. This blade is razor-sharp and can cut through most targets while maintaining its flexibility. It's the sharpest sword ever constructed," he says, smiling. "Let's go out back and test it out."

"No. I'm not looking for another sword. I'm looking for a gun."

"Sir, trust me, this weapon will deliver a lot better than a firearm ever will. This weapon was designed for long-distance as well as—let me show you."

The store owner leads Hezekiah out through the back of the store into a grimy junkyard. A smell of wet dog, combined with the junkyard odor, pierces Hezekiah's nose; the fragrance clouds his lungs as he walks further into the outside air. As they travel into the scrapheap, he sees the source of the awful smell, and he can't believe what he sees. Two grotesque, gray, dog-like demons, caged in two giant, steel kennels, growl and bark! Hezekiah gasps and starts to tremble. The store owner

pulls a remote from his pocket and presses it, opening one of the cages. One of the mongrels rushes out! It rattles the cage as it zooms out; The hound closes in on them both! The attendant rushes toward the canine.

“No! Wait! What are you doing?” shouts Hezekiah.

The dog lunges into the air and opens its jaws. The owner leaps into the air and slices! A blast of fire explodes from his sword! The blast slams into the demon. The shock wave knocks the creature back into its cage, lifeless. It topples the giant cage to the ground with a loud thud. Hezekiah’s jaw drops.

The store owner walks back to Hezekiah. “Here, try it out,” he says. As the council leader touches The Unbreakable’s smooth handle, a surge of power bubbles through him. The store owner presses a red button on his remote. The other dog demon rushes out of its cage and races toward the Grand Leader! A surge of courage flows through Hezekiah from The Unbreakable. Adrenaline rushing, he sprints toward the demon. He slices the air. Fire bursts from The Unbreakable! The burst cuts the demon in half. It falls to the ground, lifeless.

Hezekiah stands in silence for a moment. He wonders what kind of power just rushed through his body. It was almost as if he couldn’t control himself. It seemed as if the sword had a mind of its own. He stares at The Unbreakable for a moment.

“So, do you like the sword?” ask the store owner, raising an eyebrow.

Hezekiah meets his gaze. “Yeah, this sword is nicer than I thought!” says Hezekiah grinning.

“Good,” says the owner with a gleam in his eye.

“Can this sword protect me from people?” asks Hezekiah.

“Yes, it can. I don’t see how it wouldn’t” replies the store owner, frowning.

“This is a great sword. How is it made to strike with fire as it did? Also, why did I get an adrenaline rush as soon as I touched it?” Hezekiah asks, raising an eyebrow.

“The designers of this weapon figured out a way to put gunpowder inside the sword. They created tiny pores in between the titanium and

the diamond. When you touch the blade's handle, mechanisms shift the gunpowder and ignition fluid to the sharpened part of the sword. So, when you strike, it explodes on whatever target you hit. The titanium is coated with a special fire retardant that protects the sword from the heat. Also, because the sword's core is made of solid black diamond, and the edges of the blade are black diamond-tipped, you can strike through virtually any target without the sword chipping or breaking," says the store attendant grinning.

"What about the adrenaline rush?" Hezekiah asks.

"The handle is also coated with a substance called epinephrine that naturally raises adrenaline levels. That way, you can fight without fear affecting you. This sword is in perfect condition, and there are only a few like this made in the world," says the store owner. The owner reaches for The Unbreakable and Hezekiah gives it back to him.

"It's a good quality sword, and I like it a lot," says Hezekiah smiling.

"Good. I'm glad that you like the blade. This sword is on sale for one million dollars. Are you interested in buying it today?"

Hezekiah chokes and coughs. "Are you serious? What makes you think I can afford a price like that?" asks Hezekiah.

The store owner frowns. "Well, I thought you were rich since you're the leader of the council."

"No, I am not. I am paid well but not that well," says Hezekiah.

"I'll tell you what ...I will give you this sword for \$666—tax included—if you subsidize this shop for a year," says the store attendant.

"I can't subsidize this shop! The council will never approve of it. Also, I can't pay you because I was just robbed yesterday. And, I don't get paid until tomorrow."

The store owner smiles. "That's okay. Because I see something that you could trade," says the store owner as he points to the Sword of the Spirit.

"No! I can't trade that!" Hezekiah protests.

"Sir, with all due respect, you were robbed yesterday. If the sword you have can protect, you wouldn't be here in my shop. This city is

dangerous now. You need to be able to protect yourself from any form of peril. Don't you agree?" asks the store owner, making strong eye contact.

"Yes, but ..."

"I'll tell you what ...I'll give you the sword for free today because you are a member of the council. You can pay me tomorrow. I don't want you traveling out of here defenseless. I'll hold on to your weapon as collateral, and we can work out a payment plan later. By tomorrow, you will be able to pay me, and I'll give you the sword back safe and sound. Then you'll have two swords! Does that sound okay?"The store owner asks.

"Yeah, that sounds okay," Hezekiah says with a half-smile.

"Great! I just need your sword now, please," the store owner cheeps. Hezekiah's muscles tighten as thoughts of sprinting out of the store race through his mind. Hands shaking, he slowly unsheathes the Sword of the Spirit. The sword shakes in his hands as he extends his arm to give the store owner the sword. The store owner takes it. Hezekiah exhales as a tear escapes his eye. The store owner hands the council leader The Unbreakable. They walk back into and through the store. Hezekiah's stomach rolls as his chest tightens. Pain settles in the back of his throat as thoughts of what he gave up run through his head. He exhales and walks on. They arrive at the front door and stop.

"Okay. Remember to come back tomorrow, and I'll give you the sword back safe and sound, okay?" says the store owner with a smile.

"Okay. I'll be back first thing tomorrow morning. First thing, okay?" says Hezekiah looking the salesman directly in his eyes. He turns and walks out of the door.

"Have a nice day!" shouts the store attendant smiling from ear to ear.



28:

EXPLODING SHARDS

THE GRAND LEADER FINISHES THE REST OF HIS DAY at work like a breeze. Everything goes his way as the day flies by. Even Gene is pleasant to him for the first time. On the way to his room, the council leader decides he wants some ice cream. So, he goes to the ice-cream parlor outside the palace. The ice-cream parlor is bright inside: the white walls and the sneeze guard covering the ice cream shines from the indoor lighting and the sunlight. The air is sweet and cold. Thirty-one flavors of ice cream are on display as the scent of sugary waffle cones being made fills the air. The aroma of chocolate, strawberry, and bananas tickles Hezekiah's nostrils.

"Hey, Hezekiah!" shouts a familiar voice from behind the counter.

Hezekiah walks up to the counter and his face brightens. "I can hardly recognize you. How are you doing?" asks Hezekiah with a wide smile. Immanuel is dressed in a white uniform with white shoes to match. Immanuel and Hezekiah had not spoken since he became chairman of the city council. The Grand Leader became so busy

with life that he didn't have time for friends. Immanuel motions for Hezekiah to have a seat. They both walk to one of the tables, take up a chair, and sit.

"I'm doing well. The last time we saw each other, you saved my life; I just wanted to say thank you," says Immanuel, smiling.

"Don't mention it," he says grinning. "Hey, what happened to you after Moloch was defeated?" asks Hezekiah.

Immanuel exhales. "Well, I went to the hospital. I suffered a few broken ribs from the monster that punched me in the stomach," says Immanuel, frowning.

Hezekiah frowns. "I'm sorry to hear that. I didn't know you were hurt that bad."

Immanuel exhales. "Yeah, well, it's okay."

"So, what are you doing now? I notice that you look clean and well-groomed," says Hezekiah.

"Mr. Pan took me in. So, now I have a place to stay," says Immanuel, with a tear in his eye.

"Congratulations!"

"It's hard work working for Mr. Pan, but I'm thankful," Immanuel says trying not to choke up.

"This is Mr. Pan's ice-cream parlor? I thought he owned a bar and grill."

"Yeah, he has several establishments in the area. Because I did so well working for him at the bar and grill, he's placed me in charge of his ice-cream parlor."

"You are very wise and smart for such a young child."

"I had to grow up fast living on the streets. The streets are very unforgiving."

"I know what you mean," replies Hezekiah. They are silent for a moment.

"Did you have a growth spurt? You seem to have grown some since the last time I saw you."

“Yeah, I guess. My associates say the same thing every time they see me.” Immanuel glances at Hezekiah’s side. “Hey, that’s a cool sword. Where did you get it?” Immanuel asks.

Hezekiah glances down at his side. “Oh this? I got this at the ‘Advanced Protection’ shop.”

Immanuel frowns. “There’s no Advanced Protection shop in this city. Where is it?”

Hezekiah raises an eyebrow. “It’s a new shop in town, right across the street.”

“How much did you pay for it?” Immanuel asks. Hezekiah’s stomach rolls and his chest tightens. He presses his lips together as pain settles at the back of his throat.

Hezekiah exhales. “I traded my other sword for it,” responds Hezekiah, almost under his breath.

Immanuel frowns. “Wait, what ‘other’ sword?”

“You know, the Sword of the Spirit,” says Hezekiah, turning his gaze away.

“WHAT!” shouts Immanuel leaping out of his chair.

“I just thought I needed a new sword; that’s all,” says Hezekiah with tightness in his chest.

“Sir, that other sword came from heaven. I was there when this happened. I don’t think you need a new sword. Where did you say, ‘Advanced Protection,’ is again?”

Tightening his jaw, Hezekiah snaps: “I don’t need a lecture from you about what weapon I should use!”

Immanuel’s face flinches at the rebuke, and tears wet his eyes. Immanuel runs out of the store. Hezekiah gets up and chases after him to apologize. When they both get outside, the council leader notices that Immanuel has stopped and is looking in the direction of the ‘Advanced Protection’ shop; there is nothing there but an empty lot! The glittering tan building is completely gone! Hezekiah gasps.

“Where did you say ‘Advanced Protection’ was located?” asks Immanuel with wide eyes. Before the council leader can answer, an explosion to their right jolts them off their feet.

A hot, orange gust of smoke from the blast rushes by. Some people are set ablaze by the blast. As people nearby start helping extinguish the other individuals on fire, a roar booms through the main street of town. Everyone gazes toward to sound. A giant, fiery red rhinoceros, with flaming red eyes, emerges from the dense orange smoke! Everyone in the area steps outside to see the monster and gasps. Time stands still, as the entire city, either by breaking news, on television, or in person, looks at the beast and trembles.

“Aren’t you going to do something? Aren’t you going to do SOMETHING?” shout a few of the townspeople, to the Grand Leader.

Hezekiah widens his stance, “Yes. I got this, don’t worry.” He stares at the beast. Hezekiah looks at *The Unbreakable*. “It’s time to see what this new sword can do!” shouts Hezekiah as he sprints toward the beast.

Hezekiah lets out a battle cry. The crowd cheers. Running at full speed, his white plush cape flutters in the hot wind. With adrenaline flowing through his veins, the Grand Leader unsheathes the long, steel sword, *The Unbreakable*. He leaps into the warm air. Cape fluttering in the wind, he strikes the beast with all his might. A white flash and loud crash, like thunder, echoes from the strike. *The Unbreakable* hits the fiery rhino and shatters into a thousand pieces!

Time slows to a crawl as Hezekiah sees the sword shatter before his eyes. The council leader’s hope breaks and scatters away like the shards of *The Unbreakable*. As Hezekiah’s hope shatters, thoughts of death and hell race through his mind. Everyone else gasps with bulging eyes as the Grand Leader’s sword shatters into a thousand pieces. They watch helplessly as their breath is caught in their throats.

The council leader’s foot touches the ground, and the beast slams him into a nearby building knocking him out cold! The great multitude of people watching the events unfold scream as they stampede away

from the monster. People watching the events unfold on television are held captive by the TV screen.

The old man from the 'Advanced Protection' shop steps out from behind the beast. He's wearing a black robe, a black and red cloak, and black boots. He morphs into Diablos! Deception steps out from behind Diablos, no longer disguising himself as an old man.

Diablos glances at Hezekiah's body. He sneers and barks with laughter. "This city is mine!" shouts Diablos laughing maniacally in the moment of his victory.



29:

CHOICES

HEZEKIAH AWAKES IN A COLD, DARK JAIL CELL with stone walls and a dirt floor for a bed. His skin crawls. Stripped of his council robes, he is placed in nothing but a pair of light gold prison pants. A heavy dull pain floods his body. Mental fuzziness blocks any thoughts of escape. A bitter tang develops in his mouth as he thinks about himself. He closes his eyes and tears stream down his face. Disgusted with himself and dejected, he can't bear to look up. He thinks of God and his throat thickens. He silently weeps in the darkness as thoughts of suicide fill his mind.

Hours before, Diablos and Deception paraded the unconscious Hezekiah around town, gloating over their victory. Assuming he was dead, they and some of the town's council bury him in an airtight cell in the dungeon under the prison. While still at the prison, immediately after entombing Hezekiah, Diablos announced that anyone caught trying to leave the city would be killed.

The other citizens, who did not try to flee the city, stayed and welcomed the fallen angels with open arms. After they buried Hezekiah in the former death row block under the prison, Diablos and Deception made their way to the town palace and kicked every human out. Currently, they relax in the palace dining room, sitting at the long table, waiting for nightfall.

“So, what’re we doing next, Diablos?” asks Deception. The dark angels are silent for a moment.

Diablos takes a deep breath and exhales. “I have waited for ten years to acquire this city. Now that our ascension to Satan’s right hand is secured, I just want to enjoy this moment,” replies Diablos.

Diablos sips his celebratory champagne, which bubbles in his throat. He looks out at the beautiful sunset as he considers his next move.



A warm gray mist sweeps through the city. The council members are conducting an emergency meeting in a hidden courtyard outside the palace. Trimmed bushes, tan stone arches, and walls surround the area as they stand on the white concrete of the walkway. The location was designed for emergencies as an escape route out of the city. Gene is standing on one side, and James is standing on the other, as the rest of the council members stand out of the way, watching them.

“So, what are we going to do?” asks James. He widens his stance.

“We are going to bow down and worship our new leaders,” answers Gene, calmly.

James frowns as his eyes bulge. “You want us to bow down and worship demons!” challenges James.

“What else are we going to do? The town hero is dead! This Jesus that everyone loves so much failed to help us. We have two new overseers in the town. We should learn who they are and serve them,” says Gene.

James gasps. “Don’t be ridiculous! How could you even think of something so stupid? They will destroy us all! They will finish what that tyrant Moloch started!” shouts James.

“Hey, Molech didn’t try to destroy us. He just wanted payment for his protection,” replies Gene.

James quickly steps back. He shakes his head as he gasps. “What’s wrong with you! We are blessed even to be here this long. Those demons are going to destroy us sooner or later, either slowly or all at once. But I’m not going to be around to find out,” says James.

Gene frowns. “What do you mean?” asks Gene.

“We have a choice to make ...either we can stay here and be destroyed, or we can follow the others who have already escaped,” says James.

“Are you mad? Those people didn’t escape; they’re now dead! For one, I am not going to risk my life for a God who has already proven unreliable! I go for the two who proved to be stronger than Hezekiah and his God,” says Gene.

James slightly puts his hands up as he closes his eyes. “Okay, choose this day, members of the council. If you are going to stay here with Gene and submit to the demons, go to Gene’s side.” He drops his hands and gazes at the other members of the council. “However, if you come with me, we will escape this city and seek after a God who has already proven that he is more powerful than any demon,” says James.

The rest of the council members huddle together. After a few minutes of debate, more than half the council sides with Gene, and the others go with James. As James leads his people away from the city, and Gene leads his people to the palace, neither group looks back.



30:

DARK CONSEQUENCES

DIABLOS AND DECEPTION ARE IN THE PALACE dining room, planning what they will do with the city when they hear a knock on the palace door.

“Who is that?” asks Deception, frowning. Diablos, the dark angel of armies, looks out the window.

“Ah! It’s my servant Gene! And look, he’s brought company with him,” says Diablos grinning a toothy grin.

“Oh yeah, I recognize him now,” says Deception as he strokes his chin. “He helped me set up that ‘Advanced Protection’ place to trick Hezekiah. Yeah, he is very deceptive.”

“Yes, he is. Gene also hired those two thieves to rob Hezekiah outside of City Hall and through that moment of the robbery, I found out Hezekiah’s sword did not affect people. He is very talented at tricking people.” Diablos grin turns into a frown. “However, he has now outlived his usefulness,” says Diablos, face stern.

The two dark angels walk down the marble staircase to the front door to meet Gene and the other council members. Diablos flings the massive front doors open, slamming them with a loud boom against the palace's outer walls. Gene and the council members flinch.

"Gene! How are you doing today?" Diablos asks with a smile. Gene bows to the dark angel of armies.

"We're doing well, Master. How are you?" asks Gene.

"We're doing excellent. What brings you here, Gene?" asks Diablos.

"Well, my colleagues and I want to discuss plans for the future of the city. Remember, you said that I would become the king of the city if you took control."

Gene's colleagues gasp. They had no idea that Gene was working with demons the entire time. They thought that conspiring with Gene to eliminate Hezekiah might make Gene council leader again. They had no idea it would cause another demonic influence over the city.

Diablos directs everyone to walk down the outer stairs of the palace. Diablos, Deception, Gene, and the rest of the council stroll down the outside white marble staircase; they go down to the palace's outer walkway.

"Do you see this city, Gene?" asks Diablos, as they look over the metropolis.

"Yes," replies Gene, smiling.

"This is a great and magnificent city. I have waited to acquire this place for ten years. Do you know why?"

"Why?"

"I'm going to rip this city apart and destroy everyone in it!" Diablos says grinning from ear to ear.

"Huh?" questions Gene, eyes bulging. Every decision Gene has made since allowing demons to run his life has led to this one moment. Now the demonic angel's sudden revelation of destroying the city rather than making Gene king is causing his heart to rumble.

“I’m in the process of summoning every demonic spirit under my authority to obliterate everyone and everything in this town,” says Diablos.

Gene and the remaining council members’ breaths are caught in their throats. They start to tremble, and an icy sweat slides down their backs.

“But ...But why? I thought you were going to use this city as one of your strongholds and place me as the king over it,” replies Gene, as he chokes and struggles to talk.

“I never had any intentions of sparing this city, Gene,” says Moloch as he puts his arm on Gene’s shoulder. Gene stiffens. “The truth is: I *bate* humans. I hate the fact that God created you. I hate even more that God created you in His own image. I can’t stand the sight of you. Every time I see you all, you remind me of the Almighty, which is why I take such pleasure when I see you doing evil. However, even then, I know you can still be redeemed, which is why I hate you still,” he snarls with the last statement.

“All I want to do is tear you humans limb from limb and suck the marrow from your bones,” says Diablos with a deep raspy cackle.

Gene and the other council members shudder. Their bodies are drenched by sweat flowing out of them like water.

“Oh, but don’t worry, I will keep one promise I made to you,” says Diablos.

“What?” Gene asks hopefully, his eyes widening.

Diablos removes his arm and graciously bows to him. “You are now king.”

Gene’s eyes widen. “Really?”

“Yeah, king of FOOLS!” shouts Diablos.

The angel quickly morphs his hands into bone claws and rips Gene to shreds! The other council members flee in terror.

“Deception, destroy them!” shouts Diablos, pointing at them.

The city council members run out of the city into a dry forest. Out of breath, they stop for a quick rest.

“Okay, I can’t believe we made it out of the city alive!” says Akron out of breath.

“So, what do we do now?” asks Eric.

“Let’s stop and rest awhile,” replies Akron.

“Good. I’ll start a fire,” says one of the other council members. As they rest in front of the campfire, they eat. With each bite, the former council members feel a slight pain in one of their limbs.

“The fire’s dying down. I’ll go get some more wood for the fire,” says one of the council members.

“Just hurry back,” says Akron.

“Okay, I’m going to set up the tent and go to sleep,” says another council member.

After a while, Akron notices that all of the council members are asleep. Not willing to share the food, he doesn’t bother to wake them.

“This food sure is delicious. It’s funny because I don’t remember packing any food.” Akron says to himself.

Becoming sleepy from the warmth of the crackling flames, Akron rubs his eyes. He looks down and gasps. His breath is caught in his throat. Akron blurts: “My ...my hand!” Akron is missing a hand! He lifts his other hand and discovers he was eating his own fingers! His stomach churns painfully with the awful realization. The crackling flames bursts and Akron snaps back to reality.

Akron discovers the shocking truth: Deception played a mind trick on them all, and he forced them to eat each other! Akron’s jaw trembles as he gasps. He sees the grotesque sight of his former associates. Akron screams as his body flops like a fish. The green deceiver, Deception, inhales and exhales a large stream of fire from his mouth and roasts them all to a crisp. Akron screams as he and the other council members disappear into the roaring flames. The evil angels look on, silently, as the consuming flames roar in front of them.

“Ready the troops,” Diablos says to Deception, still looking at the roaring fire.

“We are now going to level this city to the ground. Have every demon in the city search for the rest of the survivors. I will go outside the city gates and summon the rest of the troops. I will send them in like a roaring flood. Anyone left alive will be slaughtered,” says Diablos.

They both turn and walk away from the smoldering flames.



31:

THE LOVE OF GOD

HEZEKIAH WAKES AFTER CRYING HIMSELF TO SLEEP. A dull, heavy pain grips his body. He shivers and tears up as thoughts of crying out to God enter his mind. *Call to Jesus*, a voice from inside of him says. Meanwhile, another speaks to him pressingly: *You no longer deserve to live. You have failed God, and everyone in the city is dead. It's your fault. God doesn't love you. He hates you, and you will never see Him again! So just kill yourself.*

Hezekiah gets on his hands and knees. He grips the dirt with his fingers as tears stream from his eyes. "Lord Jesus, I'm so sorry for failing you. If you are still for me, please help me," cries Hezekiah softly. As the bitter tears fall onto the dirt floor of the cell, he hears a voice in front of him: "Hezekiah, I have been calling you for months," the voice says out of the darkness. Light creeps into the cell. Hezekiah gasps. The light becomes brighter and brighter, filling the room. Hezekiah gazes toward it.

"I told you I would never leave you nor forsake you," says a soft voice.

Hezekiah gasps and covers his mouth. He jumps to his feet. “Jesus, I’m so glad you’re here!” says Hezekiah, his face brightening. Hezekiah remembers his past sins and looks down in shame.

“Why have you ignored me for the past few months, Hezekiah?” asks Jesus.

“I don’t know, Lord. Well, actually, I do know. I thought I could handle things on my own as things became peaceful. I slowly began to distance myself from you because your way of living was not popular. The townspeople loved you for saving the city, but they didn’t want to accept your gift of salvation and follow you.

“They were too enraptured with the lustful lives they were living, so they had no interest in you for real. ‘Too religious,’ they said. I started to lean on Gene and the other council members for wisdom instead of on you. As a result, each decision I made took me further and further away from you.

“I started to cheat people on their taxes—from property taxes to sales tax. I harassed the police and forced them to write unjust tickets on people; I threw people in jail because they wouldn’t pay my fines. I justified cheating people by telling myself it was for the good of the city.

“But, in reality, after the first month of taking that position, I wanted to build a new kingdom for myself. I wanted to rule and reign as I did before. I wanted everything around me to be as bright and shiny as I remembered it back in the old kingdom. My flesh completely took over.

“By the time I realized my mistake, it was far too late to do anything about it. I even gave up the ...” Hezekiah starts to choke up, “the Sword of the Spirit, you gave me,” says Hezekiah, failing to hold back his tears of shame.

“You mean this sword?” asks Jesus. The Son of God reaches into Hezekiah’s chest and draws the Sword of the Spirit out of Hezekiah’s spirit.

“I don’t understand,” says Hezekiah in tearful confusion.

“Hezekiah, when I saved you, I saved you for eternity. I paid for your sins—past, present, and future. When I died on the cross for you,

I already knew that you would fail this way. 'I gave you eternal life, and you shall never perish; no one will snatch you out of my hand. My Father, who has given you to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch you out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'

"Furthermore, this sword you thought you gave away is really an extension of the Holy Spirit. So, it is impossible to lose this sword because the Holy Spirit lives inside of you. I love you, and I will never stop loving you! The only reason why you failed is that you walked away from me," Jesus explains.

"I know, Lord. I don't deserve you, Lord. Why do you even bother yourself with me?"

"I gave my life for you!" says Jesus, motioning with His hands.

"Will you forgive me?"

"I already have."

Hezekiah notices strength pouring into him like a gushing fountain of water. In fact, his power is spiking stronger than before. The Holy Spirit is flaring brightly inside his soul.

"This town has now been overrun by demons. You must still protect this city. Take this sword and make your way to the entrance of the town. The two fallen angels, Diablos and Deception, who have always been behind the city's evil, have taken over the metropolis. They will be waiting for you. 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord, your God will be with you wherever you go.' Remember, 'greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world,'" says Jesus. Light flashes in the cell and Jesus is gone, leaving Hezekiah full of rushing power, the white-hot inferno of the Holy Spirit.



32:

DECEPTION

WITH NEW HOPE AND DETERMINATION, THE MAN of God bursts out of the cell in a blast of fire. The demonic apparitions guarding his cell are full of alarm and surround him. Hezekiah raises the Sword of the Spirit and strikes with a blast of white-hot fire, and the demons are blown away. The Spirit Warrior steps further out of the cell into the dark underground dungeon. “He’s escaping! Sound the alarm!” says a guard with glowing red eyes.

Hezekiah sees that the people who are guarding him are demon possessed. Diablos and Deception learned that the Swordsman’s weapon could not harm humans. So, if he survived and broke free from his cell, they chose a group of people to guard the jail cell and gave all of them demonic powers. Twenty demon-possessed men surround Hezekiah at once.

“Father God, I know that you don’t want me to slay people with this sword, but help me to subdue them in Jesus’s name,” prays Hezekiah. They charge at once and tackle the Spirit Warrior to the ground. Amid

the tumult, Hezekiah shouts: “In the name of Jesus Christ, release these men!”

A shockwave of bright light bursts from Hezekiah’s sword. The men catapult into the air in various directions. They smack into the walls and tumble to the ground. The men start seizing in violent convulsions. Demons rise out of the men and swiftly advance to kill Hezekiah! The Spirit Warrior again draws the Sword of the Spirit and strikes with a blast of white lightning. The burst vaporizes the demonic apparitions. Hezekiah slices the air and a fire blast blows through the ceiling opening a hole that leads to the surface. As the Swordsman turns to leave, a hand grabs his hand.

“Thank you,” says a guard, as he struggles to stand.

“Thank God,” says Hezekiah.

“Wait! Don’t let those demons come down here. If they do, they will kill us!” says the man, trembling.

The Spirit Warrior leaps through the hole to the surface and lands in the courtyard. In the square, the man of God encounters more blue and black demonic apparitions in human form. Twenty demons stand between the Swordsman and the prison’s wall; they screech, shaking the ground, as they surround Hezekiah. Wind blows out of their mouths with great force, and the shockwave of their combined howls causes the earth to crack. Hezekiah is knocked off his feet and he slides backward from the rushing wind. He guards himself with the sword.

“Is that all you’ve got!” taunts Hezekiah.

The man of God regains his feet and sprints through the shockwave powering his way through the wind. He strikes with an explosive blast of fire from his sword. The fire engulfs the demons and incinerates them. But a few dodge the blast; they rush toward the underground dungeon to kill the guards! Hezekiah turns around and slices the air. A burst of fire shoots from his sword. The blast hits the demons and they explode.

The Swordsman sprints straight for the prison’s wall. His muscles flex in preparation for the jump. Hezekiah leaps straight up into the air; the hot wind rushes around him as he makes his ascent through the air.

He somersaults over the top of the wall and descends quickly, landing hard on his feet. On the other side of the wall, he rushes toward the road that leads into town.

Before he gets to the roadway, grotesque human-like demons, with bone claws, thrust out of the ground, attacking Hezekiah from all sides! The Spirit Warrior quickly attacks with a blast of lightning from his sword, vaporizing them all in a single stroke.

Another wave of zombie-like demons appear out of the distance and plunge toward the man of God. Hezekiah sprints into the crowd and, spinning like a top, strikes with another fire blast. The blast expands in all directions as the horde of monsters are destroyed from the inside out.

Hezekiah runs to the main street of town. The city's main road looks clear except for one lone figure standing in the middle of the street. The Swordsman sprints toward the strange character. The figure turns around and stares straight into Hezekiah's eyes. The man's green eyes flash!

The Spirit Warrior awakes in the palace. He feels fully refreshed from his dream. Conscious, Hezekiah scratches his head unable to determine if he was dreaming or not. His eyes dart around the room. He gets out of bed. The council leader walks to the window to gaze upon the beautiful city he's built.

Was that a dream? Was it about the future, or was it just a dream? Hezekiah thinks, mouth slightly open.

"Good morning, Grand Leader," says a beautiful soft-skinned woman, with short, blond hair and crystal green eyes and a green blouse, as she walks into the room.

"Hello Miss ..."

"I can't believe you don't remember. The council hired me as your new personal assistant yesterday."

"What's your name?" asks Hezekiah, smiling.

“Delilah,” says the young woman.

“So, what do we have planned for me today, Delilah?”

“We have a ribbon-cutting ceremony planned for the new H.R. building on Main Street at 9:00 AM. At 10:30 AM you’re giving a speech to the science department at the new college. At 12:30 PM, you have a leadership conference to go to. Also, you have a council meeting at 2:00 PM.”

“It’s 7:00 AM. What do we have planned now?”

Delilah pulls him by the hand and sits him down at the foot of the bed with her.

“I thought that we could spend some time together this morning, if you know what I mean,” says Delilah with a playful smile.

“What *do* you mean?”

“I have to admit. When I first saw you, I had a huge crush on you,” she says with a giggle. “I hope you feel the same way.”

“You do look beautiful, but I don’t know you that ...”

“We can get to know each other a whole lot better! Let’s have some fun before we leave,” says Delilah, giggling.

The young woman begins to caress his arm softly with her warm hands. His heart flutters.

“No, what are you doing?” asks Hezekiah as he stands up.

“I thought you liked me. Don’t I look good to you?”

“Yes, you do, but I will not do this,” says Hezekiah, fighting himself. Delilah reaches up and yanks him back to the bed.

“Come quickly and lay down with me while we still have time,” says Delilah, giggling with urgency. She continues to stroke his chest. She starts kissing him. Her lips are soft and sweet.

“No!” Hezekiah jumps back to his feet. “Thou shall not commit adultery!” shouts the man of God. The woman grits her teeth and frowns. She inhales and screams. She screams to the top of her lungs. She shrieks so loud everything shatters.

Hezekiah awakes distraught in a jail cell. Or so he thinks. His eyes dart from stone wall to stone wall. The walls spin all around him as his vision darts from wall to wall. He stands and screams.

“It was all a dream? NO!” shouts Hezekiah.

Hezekiah burst into tears. His chest tightens. He falls to his knees and grips the dirt in his hands. He recollects the moment The Unbreakable shattered before his eyes. Touching the tiny rough scratches caused by the shards of diamond exploding in his face with the tips of his fingers, Hezekiah’s hands tremble. The memory of him trading the Sword of the Spirit for The Unbreakable replays in his head. Suicidal thoughts again enter his mind.

Hezekiah screams. He pounds the ground with his fists. “My life is OVER! I don’t deserve to live!” Hezekiah yells. He chokes up as thoughts of suicide flood into his mind and seep into his pain-stricken heart.

“You have failed God too many times for Him to save you now. Just kill yourself,” a voice says to him from the darkness.

A soft light appears in the room. The light becomes brighter. Hezekiah looks at the source and he gasps. It’s a figure of light that is walking toward him in the jail cell. The figure stops in front of him. Hezekiah squints at the figure of light that just entered the room. “Jesus, is that you?” he asks, voice straining.

“Yes. It is I, foul one.”

Hezekiah gasps. His eyes tear up further.

“You have utterly failed me. I rescued you from darkness, and this is the thanks I get?” says the voice from the light.

“I’m sorry. Please forgive me for failing you,” says Hezekiah gripping the dirt.

“Forgive you? You are responsible for the deaths of everyone in the entire city! I gave you a simple assignment, and you couldn’t do that! Now I’ll give you what you deserve. A one-way ticket to hell!” says the voice sharply.

Hezekiah lifts his head and raises an eyebrow. He squints and stands. Everything about this voice from the light doesn't seem right to Hezekiah. Jesus forgave him for far worse sins. Why would his current failure be any more unforgivable? Also, Jesus told him that His forgiveness is forever. And Hezekiah remembered that 1 John 1:9 states: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." If anyone turned away from their sins, God will forgive them and make them clean all over again. Conjuring up the courage to speak, the man of God asks: "If you are who you say you are, then what is my assignment?"

"What do you mean what is your assignment? You're supposed to be a righteous person, and you failed."

Hezekiah frowns. "No, my assignment is to protect this city."

"How can you question God?"

Hezekiah tightens his fists. "I will defy you as long as God gives me breath, false god! Jesus is the truth, and the truth shall set me free!"

The voice from the light screams. Hezekiah covers his ears. The screams reach a high pitch, and the illusion shatters. Hezekiah is back, in reality, facing off against the demonic angel, Deception! The fine hot sand of the desert street is picked up by the wind. It rushes against Hezekiah's and Deception's skin as they stare into each other's eyes.

Deception chuckles. "You may have figured me out, *human*, but make no mistake, Hezekiah, you will die."

Hezekiah frowns, "I don't think so, Deception."

Deception multiplies himself and sends his clones to attack Hezekiah! Hezekiah raises the Sword of the Spirit and strikes with a blast of fire mixed with lightning and vaporizes them all. The deceiver morphs into a twelve-foot tall, scaly, green-and-black dragon. The dark angel lunges at the Swordsman with his sharp flaming claws! Hezekiah shouts: "'The Lord is my light and my salvation! Of who shall I fear! The Lord is the strength of my life of whom shall I be afraid!'"

Hezekiah charges toward the dragon, and they explosively crash! They both slide backward from the collision. The green dragon recovers

first and attacks with a barrage of fiery claw strikes; they clang thunderously as they clash sword to claw. The dragon swipes with his tale and swoops Hezekiah off his feet. Deception shoots his fist down to punch straight through Hezekiah's face! The Swordsman moves his blade to guard. Sword and claw clash! As Deception struggles with Hezekiah's edge, they stare into each other's eyes in the contest.

The dark angel uses his eyes to trap Hezekiah in another illusion. He transports the Swordsman to the top of a high mountain. The delusion is only half complete. Deception moves quickly to take control of his mind.

Hezekiah prays, "Lord God, release me from this illusion, in Jesus's name!"

The Sword of the Spirit explodes with light. The green dragon leaps away, but is blinded. Struggling to see, Deception lunges at Hezekiah with his fiery claws. The Swordsman leaps and strikes hard through his attack. Hezekiah uppercuts the dark angel off the ground and into the air! Hezekiah leaps to pursue. The Spirit Warrior slashes Deception with sword strikes. He hammers the green dragon out of the sky. Deception slams headfirst into the ground! His skull ringing with pain, the dark angel is in a daze. Hezekiah lands on the ground and rushes in for his next attack.

Deception leaps to his feet and sends Hezekiah through different illusions; they fight sword to claw as they pass through many different terrains. They pass through deserts, misty forests, dark mountain tops, fighting nonstop, as they both try to get the upper hand.

Deception takes Hezekiah to Antarctica. The Swordsman charges at the green dragon, but he slips on the ice!

"Yes! He is starting to believe the lies!" says Deception to himself.

The dark angel takes flight into the cold air and slams into the ground; the ice buckles, and Hezekiah plummets into the ice-cold water below! The water pulls Hezekiah deeper into the ocean's depths. His throat and lungs fill with pain as he struggles for air. He screams, but the water reduces it to gurgles. Thoughts of drowning fill his mind

as the sword falls from his hands. The water gets darker as Hezekiah is dragged further down into the deep.

“God, HELP!” Hezekiah screams in his head.

“Hezekiah, this is not real,” says the Holy Spirit.

“No, this is real! This is REAL!” screams Deception.

“God, I’m confused! Please, help me!” pleads Hezekiah.

“Yes, I got him! Now drown in a sea of despair!” shouts the dark angel as he turns the icy waters into a shining whirlpool. Hezekiah closes his eyes and prays: “Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.”

Hezekiah stops sinking. He can now feel the ground under his feet, but he can’t breathe! Choking on the water, the man of God calms himself and says: “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”

Suddenly, Hezekiah can breathe! The Holy Spirit echoes inside of his heart: “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Hezekiah shoots out of the water and soars high into the air like a blazing phoenix!

“What? NO! Impossible! How do I see this?” shouts Deception. “Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

The Spirit Warrior slices the air. A blast of fire erupts from his sword. The fire cascades across the ice; the green dragon tries to move but is caught by his own deception! The dark angel is hit by the explosion, and the illusion shatters!

Deception falls and roll across the ground to a stop. He reverts to the humanoid version of himself. The fallen angel slowly stands and rubs his eyes to get the gritty sand out.

“How did you? You broke through my deception!” He tries to place Hezekiah in another illusion with his eyes, but his powers don’t work. “You ...You broke my powers of deception!”

The dark angel grinds his teeth and frowns. “I don’t need the art of illusion to shatter your mind; I’ll just kill you!” shouts Deception.

“We will see about that,” says Hezekiah.

The dark angel screams as he morphs back into the green dragon. He jumps and flies high into the air and shoots a giant blast of fire from his mouth! Hezekiah counters quickly with a burst of fire mixed with lightning. The two explosions collide in midair with a loud boom! Blinding light consumes the entire area. The ground below quakes from the shockwave, which knocks Hezekiah into the ground. He is blinded by the blast! The light fades, but Hezekiah’s eyes are burning.

After a quick prayer his eyes stop burning. The man of God looks around and sees he’s the only one left standing. The great Deception, who deceived the townspeople for so long, is gone.



33:

THE DARK ANGEL OF ARMIES

THE SWORDSMAN SPRINTS TOWARD THE TOWN'S entrance to fight against the last dark angel. He slides to a stop at the town's entrance and gasps. An army of forces numbering 10,000 are in military formation poised to destroy the city!

"Nice of you to join us, Hezekiah," says a man. An older man walks from behind a fiery rhinoceros, the same rhino that slammed Hezekiah into a wall and left him for dead. "Do you remember me, Hezekiah?" asks the old man. Hezekiah rubs his eyes.

Hezekiah frowns. "It's you! You tricked me into giving you the Sword of the Spirit! How can I forget a snake like you!" shouts Hezekiah.

"I only gave you the protection you wanted, didn't I?" asks the old man with a sheepish grin.

"I was a fool to accept your kind of protection. God is the only protection I need!"

The old man holds a hand up. “Well, before we go any further, let me get comfortable. Without my angelic partner, I can’t keep this form anyway.” The man morphs into Diablos.

“So, you finally show your true colors, Diablos?”

“God must have told you my name because you humans are too stupid to figure out anything on your own! Let’s see how much your faith holds up when I overrun this city and destroy it!” Diablos points at Hezekiah.

The army charges toward Hezekiah. A group of chrome colored knight-like demons, armed with swords, draw their swords from their sheaths and slice at Hezekiah. Hezekiah blocks with his sword. Hezekiah sidesteps. The knight falls and Hezekiah strikes him in half. The second, third, and fourth knights corner him. Hezekiah slices the air and fire from his sword incinerates the group.

Red devils jump out from the ground surrounding Hezekiah! One of them cocks his hand back and punches Hezekiah in the face. Hezekiah is hit solidly, and he plows into the ground. Another devil energizes his fist in a fire ball. It leaps into the air. He directs his fiery fist and shoots it toward Hezekiah’s face. Hezekiah leaps off the ground sideways and twists through the air out of the way. The devil’s fist strikes the ground, and fire explodes in all directions. The force of the blast plows Hezekiah and his sword into another devil. The devil is impaled and they both slam into the ground. Hezekiah rolls across the corpse, yanks his sword out of the devil, twists through the air, and lands on his feet. The red devils advance. Hezekiah shouts: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water!”

The Swordsman slices through the air. A tidal wave of crystal blue water slams into the fiery red devils, crushing them.

Giant raven-like demons from the sky shoot fire at him. The fire burst slams into the ground. The blasts shoot out in all directions. The Swordsman crouches and gathers strength. He leaps high into the hot

air, energizes his sword, and says: “He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them!”

Hezekiah slices through the air. Massive bolts of hot lightning shoot from his sword. The blast of pure energy slams into the ravens, incinerating them.

The demonic army advances as the Swordsman lands on his feet. Hezekiah’s calves cramp up. He takes a step and stumbles. The fourth group of ravenous, green, ghoulish creatures, with long sharp yellow claws and teeth, rush Hezekiah and slice through the air with their claws. Hezekiah slashes through the air. A burst of light obliterates the group to a fine dust soaring through the air.

The army stops its advance on guard. Hezekiah’s chest and neck tighten. He exhales and falls to his knees. He gasps, “Lord, I don’t have any more strength left. I know you are all-powerful. I pray, for just this moment, you would give me the Holy Spirit without limit, in Jesus’s name.”

As Hezekiah finishes his prayer and opens his eyes, he sees Diablos looking to see if anything will happen. Nothing happens.

Diablos smiles and chuckles. “Looks like God didn’t answer your prayer, Hezekiah! Ha, Ha! He didn’t answer your prayer because He wants me to destroy this city! Think about it. You were called to be a ‘light’ to shine in this city, right? Do you honestly think you are the first Christian to witness in this godforsaken place? No! For ten long years, God has sent missionary after missionary to testify in this city for Him. Do you know what happened? These evil city people, the very ones you are trying to save, had them all killed! These people, whom you are trying to protect, are Godless sinners who have blasphemed God’s name year after year!

“They don’t deserve to live anymore. I am the judgment God has called to sweep this place away into destruction! You’re not a part of this Hezekiah. You just got here. You did a valiant job following God, and I applaud you. However, these people didn’t respond to your last call of repentance. You don’t have to be destroyed because of these

sinful people. So, step aside, and I'll let you walk away unharmed," says Diablos.

Hezekiah frowns. "The devil is a liar! 'Faith is the substance of things hoped for. The evidence of things not seen.' God has answered my prayer 'because it is not His will that any man should perish, but that all come to repentance.' You may have been waiting on God to destroy this city, but God chose me to protect this city from the likes of you!" shouts Hezekiah, standing to his feet and pointing at Diablos.

"If God is for us, then who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also raised, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 'For your sake, we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things, 'we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ' For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord! '"

The Sword of the Spirit cracks. Hezekiah's eyes widen. He gasps.

"Ha! I knew God wouldn't save you!" shouts Diablos.

The crack rapidly spreads through the entire sword. Hezekiah's jaw drops. "No, no, NO!" shouts Hezekiah. Diablos laughs and holds his side from laughter. The sword bursts apart in Hezekiah's hands and covers the ground in front of him. Hezekiah falls to his knees in front of the shards of the Sword of the Spirit.

"Ha, Ha!" Diablos points toward Hezekiah. "Kill him and everyone in town" he shouts. Hezekiah stares at the fragments of his shattered sword.

"God, why?" asks Hezekiah.

The fragments on the ground shake as the army rushes toward him. “The first one who cuts off his head becomes my lieutenant!” shouts Diablos. The demons roar as they rampage toward Hezekiah.

A tear forms in Hezekiah’s eye as he asks again, “God, why?” The fragments shake, and they begin to shine. Hezekiah’s eyes widen. The fragments explode with light! The demons shield their eyes as they slide to a stop. The light slightly fades and a sword of pure fire lies on the ground. Hezekiah gasps.

Hezekiah hears a voice tell him, “Pick it up.”

Hezekiah slowly picks up the sword and stands up. The sword roars like a jet engine. Hezekiah smiles.

The force of the sword’s flare sends shockwaves through the entire invasion force. The demonic army covers their eyes from the harsh light of the blade.

“How did you get this great power so fast? This is IMPOSSIBLE!” shouts Diablos, sliding backward from the earthshaking energy.

“With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible!” shouts Hezekiah, smiling.

“You think this power scares me! I will show you REAL POWER! I will show you why my name is Diablos!”

The dark angel shoots out his hands and grabs minions to the left and right of him. He shines a bright red. Diablos starts to absorb the demonic army within himself. He convulses as, one by one, the demons entering him fill him with power. He consumes half of the armada. Shaking, red fire overflows from his body. Diablos shouts. The flames explode! The inferno morphs him into a giant, scaly, red and black dragon! The dragon’s eyes flash bright red. He roars. The air shudders. Hezekiah flinches and stumbles to one knee. Hezekiah stands gripping his fire sword.

Diablos tightens his fist. He cracks his knuckles in the process. As Diablos slowly walks toward Hezekiah, each step pounds into the ground. “I will destroy you and this city in one massive blast,” snorts Diablos.

The black dragon sprints toward Hezekiah. His army follows. Hezekiah gasps. The combined sound is like a freight train headed his way. The black dragon takes flight. Diablos focuses a mass of fire and light in his mouth and shoots a massive fire blast from its mouth toward the Spirit Warrior! It rips up the ground as it surges through the air toward him!

Hezekiah draws his sword back. He strikes with a gigantic burst of lightning. The two blasts of energy slam into each other! Light flashes in all directions. Both flashes struggle for dominance as Hezekiah and Diablos add more power to the strength of their blasts. The dragon flexes his muscles. His face trembles. His eyes bulge. The dragon thrusts his head forward. The dragon's blast doubles. The burst explodes across the ground! Diablos puts all his demonic force into his fiery beam. The fire ray crackles with energy as it quickly pushes through Hezekiah's blast!

Hezekiah's eyes widen. He grits his teeth, declaring "I shall not die! I shall live and declare the works of the Lord!" Diablos's fiery shaft zooms toward the man of God. Hezekiah tightens his grip on his blade. Power flares from inside of Hezekiah. The Sword of the Spirit flares violently. Hezekiah shouts: "Greater is He who is within me, than he who is in the world!"

The Spirit Warrior strikes and an explosion of light bursts from his sword. The wave of light slams into the dragon's fire beam and punches through! Diablos's eyes widen as the blast rips across the ground and slams into the dragon! The dragon's body jerks backward. The burst levitates Diablos and sweeps through the dark angel's army, lifting them off their feet. Their bodies start to crumble. Scales and bones disintegrate from the dragon's face. His eyes bulge. Diablos grits his teeth and gasps. His life, from heaven to earth flashes through his mind.

"No! I ...I refuse to LOSE to the Lord! I will n ...not ...I will not ...AAH!" shouts Diablos.

The explosion of light bursts through the demonic hoard! The evil dragon and his army vanish into the great flash that shakes the entire city to its foundations. The explosion echoes throughout the open desert.

A few minutes later, the dust settles and vision returns to Hezekiah's eyes. The blast leaves a band of white fire for a mile outside of the metropolis. Diablos and his army of demons are no more.



34:

TWILIGHT

HEZEKIAH LOOKS AT THE FIERY SCENE BEFORE HIM. The mission that seemed impossible to start with is finally accomplished. With Diablos and Deception now gone, the city is finally safe.

Hezekiah smiles and gazes into the sky. “God, you are truly awesome; your power astounds the imagination.”

“Hezekiah,” says the Holy Spirit’s voice inside of Hezekiah.

“Yes, Lord?”

“It’s time for you to leave town.”

Hezekiah blinks a few times. “What? I thought I was successful.”

“You have finished your assignment in this city. You did a great job. I am very proud of you. Well done. However, some of the people here will not accept me until you leave. Some of them are too dependent on you to turn to me.”

“I understand, Lord.”

“Besides, I’m calling you to a new place where more people need your help. An unforeseen threat looms over their very existence.”

“I understand, Lord. But can I say goodbye?”

“Yes.”

The man of God turns back into town to look for the survivors, and to his surprise, most of the city’s populous survived the invasion. They are waiting to greet him at the city gate.

Hezekiah’s eyes widen. “Where did you all come from so fast?” asks Hezekiah.

“We all hid inside the fissure dividing the mountain,” says Immanuel.

“We quickly found out that the mountain was a perfect hiding place. For some reason, the demons couldn’t see any of us while we were there. Thank God the mountain split apart several months ago; if that had not happened, we would all be dead,” says Ahithophel.

Hezekiah nods. “So, that’s why God split the mountain in half ...to save the city!” says Hezekiah.

“What do you mean?” asks James.

Hezekiah smiles. “When I first arrived, God split the mountain in half. He did this before I came down the mountain and into the city. God knew, before I arrived, that the demons were going to invade the city,” says Hezekiah.

James’s eyes widen. “God works in mysterious ways. He came through for us when we needed Him the most,” says James as he smiles and strokes his chin.

“Yes, He did.” Hezekiah looks away for a second and blinks away a tear. He returns James’s gaze. “Well, I have to get going,” he says with his voice slightly cracking.

Immanuel frowns. “What? Are you leaving? But why?” asks Immanuel.

“God is calling me to another assignment,” says Hezekiah.

“But what about protecting the town?” Ahithophel asks.

“Jesus is going to take over protecting the city. So, don’t worry because you are in God’s hands.”

“But we’ll miss you,” says Immanuel.

“We will see each other again. If not in this life, then in heaven,” says Hezekiah.

“Who is going to lead the town council?” asks James.

“You are!” says Ahithophel pointing at James. “You have displayed great courage and leadership standing up for what’s right and fair. It is only fitting that you become our city’s leader,” says Ahithophel.

“Well, now that’s settled, I guess this is goodbye,” says Hezekiah.

Immanuel gets close to Hezekiah and hugs him.

“Thank you for saving me,” says Immanuel with tears in his eyes.

Hezekiah smiles. “Thank God. He is the one who saved you. I was just the instrument He used.”

“Before you go, Hezekiah, we want to know how to accept Jesus Christ into our hearts as you did. We all want to accept Christ, but no one knows how,” says Ahithophel.

The entire city rumbles in agreement as everyone asks questions concerning it.

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’ Confess Jesus as Lord and Savior and turn away from your sins, and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness,” says Hezekiah.

“Can you lead us in prayer?” someone asks from the crowd, as other people agree.

“Sure,” says Hezekiah.

In minutes, people give Hezekiah a microphone and set up a temporary platform outside the city gate. Everyone in the city waits in anticipation for what Hezekiah is about to say.

“Everyone, listen and repeat after me. Remember, you must pray this from the heart, or it won’t mean anything,” says Hezekiah.

The crowd bows their heads and closes their eyes.

Hezekiah presses his lips together and exhales. “Say: Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, and you died on the cross for my sins. So, I repent of my sins, and I accept your gift of salvation. I accept you into my heart as Lord and Savior,” says Hezekiah.

The entire metropolis prays simultaneously from the heart with the man of God. In an instant, the whole city is reborn from the Holy Spirit.

Hezekiah smiles from ear to ear. He looks over the mass of people and notices the smiles on their faces. The thought of him being the Grand Leader creeps into his mind. He frowns.

“I also want to take this time to apologize to everyone in this city for the way I behaved while serving on the city council. I made a lot of mistakes, and I ask for your forgiveness.”

James holds his hand up “Hezekiah, we forgive you. We all forgive you. God just used you to save the city! So, don’t concern yourself about what happened anymore. Because the truth is, we are all guilty of what happened in this town. So, don’t worry, we forgive you, and God has forgiven you too.”

The entire community erupts into applause as Hezekiah hugs James out of appreciation. A familiar voice calls out through the applause: “Hey, did you start the party without me?”

Hezekiah turns around and his face brightens.

“Jason! How are you doing, Man!”

Jason walks onto the makeshift stage and hugs Hezekiah. Two men from the crowd quickly rush the stage.

“There is a God!” This strange man hugs Jason hard. Jason’s eyes widen. “I thought I lost you when you ran into the cave of Moloch!”

It’s Captain Smith, Jason’s father, and Lieutenant Lee standing beside him. “It’s nice to see you again, too, Dad!” Jason says, hugging him back. Captain Smith notices the large light blue sword on Jason’s back. “And what’s this, you have a spirit sword too?” asks Captain Smith, smiling.

“It’s a long story, Dad; I’ll tell you later,” says Jason.

“Why were you gone for so long?” asks Captain Smith.

“Because I was watching over the children who were taken by Moloch,” says Jason.

“Wait, what children?” asks Captain Smith.

The entire community bursts into tearful applause as they see their children running in from the city gates! Lieutenant Lee leaps off the stage and rushes to hug his one son and two daughters who were taken

in the sacrifice. People laugh, cry, and fall to their knees as they embrace their children for the first time since they were surrendered to Moloch over six months before.

Immanuel is happy but sad because his parents didn't return. Mr. Pan's excitement over the arrival of his son drops as He sees Immanuel's long face. He walks up to Immanuel and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"Don't worry, Immanuel. I now have two sons instead of one! I know that I can't replace your parents, but I will be one in their place!" says Mr. Pan.

Immanuel's jaw drops. "You mean that?" asks Immanuel.

"Of course, I do. You helped me in my grief when I thought that my son died, so I will now be here for you. My son and I will be your new family," says Mr. Pan. Immanuel hugs Mr. Pan, and his son. He chokes up as he cries.

"We will be here for you, Immanuel," says Mr. Pan's pre-teen son.

Hezekiah looks at the happy scene and smiles. "Make sure you take care of him, Mr. Pan," says Hezekiah.

"I will," says Mr. Pan.

Hezekiah walks over and hugs Immanuel. "I will never forget you, Immanuel. Take care of yourself."

Immanuel looks up and Hezekiah and smiles. "God has always taken care of me, and He will take care of you too," says Immanuel.

With tears in his eyes, Hezekiah lets go of Immanuel and walks a short distance away. He says his final goodbye and leaves the city gates.

As he walks away, God pours out his Spirit on the entire city. Pillars of light are visible throughout the streets and neighborhoods as the people in the town receive the Holy Spirit. There is a gleam of light throughout the city. The lights from the metropolis, The City of Light, can be seen for miles. The Spirit Warrior walks a little further and turns back to see the gleaming city one last time. He then turns away and walks into the open desert, toward the setting sun.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE PAGE

This section highlights the scripture used in the book. The scriptural text in this section is presented in the order in which these quotes are found in the book. Happy reading! May God draw you closer to Himself.

“The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire” (Rev. 1:14 NIV).

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, says the Lord, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8 NKJV).

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last” (Rev. 22:13 NKJV).

“I shall not die, but live, And declare the works of the Lord” (Ps. 118:17 KJV).

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9 NIV).

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9 NIV).

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31 KJV).

“With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26 NIV).

“For whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13 KJV).

“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go” (Josh. 1:9 NKJV).

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid” (Ps. 27:1 NKJV).

“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, know that full well” (Ps. 139:14 NIV).

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (Deut. 31:8 NIV).

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37 NIV).

“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8 NIV).

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son. That whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16 NKJV).

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17 NKJV).

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:28–30 NIV).

“You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NASB).

“Thou shall not commit adultery” (Exod. 20:14 KJV).

“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (Ps. 25:5 NIV).

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Heb. 11:1 NIV).

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32 NIV).

“[E]veryone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:12–13 NIV).

“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38 NKJV).

“He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them” (2 Sam. 22:15 NIV).

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9 NKJV).

If God is for us, then who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For your sake, we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31–39 NKJV)

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