

# **TAKING<sup>THE</sup> MIDDLE EAST FOR JESUS**

**BY R.A. SHEATS**

Copyright © 2021 by Generations

All rights reserved.

Printed in Korea

1st Printing, 2021

ISBN: 978-1-7350719-8-5

Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations from original sources have occasionally been simplified for younger readers.

Cover Design: Justin Turley

Interior Layout Design: Sarah Lee Bryant

Published by:

Generations

19039 Plaza Drive Ste 210

Parker, Colorado 80134

[www.generations.org](http://www.generations.org)

For more information on this and other titles from Generations, visit [www.generations.org](http://www.generations.org) or call 888-389-9080.

# CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....9

## CHAPTER 1

James: A Servant of the Lord ..... 13

## CHAPTER 2

Peter and a Powerful God.....25

## CHAPTER 3

Paul: Bringing Jesus to the Gentiles.....35

## CHAPTER 4

Unbelieving Jews Fight against God .....45

## CHAPTER 5

Polycarp: Faithful to the Truth.....55

## CHAPTER 6

Maurice and His Brave Men: Soldiers of King Jesus .....67

## CHAPTER 7

Gregory Brings the Gospel to Armenia..... 79

## CHAPTER 8

God Builds His Church on a Very Cold Night..... 89





## CHAPTER 9

Ephrem and the Elephants..... 99



## CHAPTER 10

A Brother and Sister Serve the Lord .....111



## CHAPTER 11

A Hospital and a Time to Work ..... 121



## CHAPTER 12

Jerome: A Man Who Found God's Mercy .....129



## CHAPTER 13

Pastor John and the Angry Mob .....139



## CHAPTER 14

Hunting for the True Pearl.....149



## CHAPTER 15

A War with the Muslims.....159

## CHAPTER 16

A Pastor, a Printing Press, and an Evil Plot..... 171



## CHAPTER 17

Bringing the Gospel to the Jews ..... 181



## CHAPTER 18

Christians in Trouble: God's People in Turkey .....189

## CHAPTER 19

God Takes Care of Rose..... 201

## CHAPTER 20

A Fight about Land and a New Life in Jesus.....213

## CHAPTER 21

God Builds a Church in Israel.....221

## CHAPTER 22

From Hatred to Love: How Jesus Saved a Muslim.....231

## CHAPTER 23

A New Family for Muslims: Sharing God's Love in the Middle East.....241

## CHAPTER 24

A Dangerous Work in Turkey .....251

## CHAPTER 25

Safe in the Arms of Jesus .....261

LIST OF IMAGES .....335





# Introduction

**S**tudying the works of God in the past is always a fascinating and rewarding task. By studying history, we learn of God's mighty deeds upon the earth and how He uses faithful men and women in His kingdom work. Such studies inspire us to worship, honor, and praise our glorious King and to press forward in the work He has set before us. The present volume focuses on a small facet of this marvelous history: God's working in the Middle East.

Beginning in the early AD era with James, Peter, and Paul, *Taking the Middle East for Jesus* chronicles Christ's work in Israel and beyond its borders as the gospel spread toward all points of the compass in the first centuries. Readers will here discover tales of Turkey, Persia, North Africa, Armenia, and more as they follow the gospel's expansion into the Middle Eastern world during the early Christian period and into the present day.

Alongside stories of well-known Christians such as Polycarp, Jerome, and John Chrysostom, the reader will learn the exciting and lesser-known history of fearless followers of Christ such as Maurice of the Theban Legion, Ephrem the hymn writer, and the captivating tale of Yassir Eric, a staunch Muslim persecutor of the church who was brought to the feet of Christ by the powerful working of a loving, merciful God.

Children will read with wonder the intriguing tales of how God stopped an army of elephants, how He cared for a starving orphan boy, and how the story of a pearl lost at midnight was used to teach a Muslim world the truth of God's Word.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS IN EDUCATION

The study of history is paramount in a child's education. However, studying history is not an end in itself. Though children will learn much from this book, much more is required to truly instill in them an understanding of history and of their place in God's glorious work of redemptive history.

This book is merely a tool to be used. The primary means by which a young child will grow in the knowledge of himself, the world around him, and God is through meaningful conversations with their parent. This curriculum has been produced

with the intention of providing a suitable platform and opportunity to stimulate and foster such conversations. Parents are encouraged to discuss each chapter with their child, drawing out the principles contained in it and assisting their child in putting into practice the Faith Lessons included at the end of each reading.

## A NOTE ON QUOTATIONS AND HISTORICAL ACCURACY

Special care has been taken to preserve historical accuracy in the retelling of the stories contained in this book. However, the reader will note that dialogue often appears in these chapters. Though we do not possess the actual text of conversations involving many of the historical characters introduced in this book, the material for these dialogues has generally been taken from firsthand accounts and original documents. These quotes from primary sources have been rewritten in conversational form to render them understandable to young children. Though the content of these quotations remains unchanged, the original wording of the documents has been simplified or paraphrased to make the material accessible to a second-grade audience. For those who desire to study this material in its original form, a brief listing of key sources has been provided below.

In chapter five, Polycarp's words have been paraphrased from his *Letter to the Philippians* (chapter vii of that work) and his speech recorded in *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. In chapter six, Maurice's words are taken from his speech given in *Passio Sancti Mauricii*. The words of the unnamed soldier who speaks after him are taken from the same document and form part of the speech of Exuperius, the standard-bearer of the cohort. The conversations in chapter seven have been taken from Gregory and King Tiridates' words as recorded in *The Life and Times of Gregory the Illuminator*.

Conversations appearing in chapter eight are based on the account given by Basil of Caesarea in his *Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste* delivered in 373. Most of Ephrem's words in chapter nine are taken from his *Hymns on the Nativity* and John Chrysostom's writings concerning him. Quotes in chapters ten and eleven are drawn from Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina* and Basil's writings in Gerhary Uhlhorn's *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*. Gregory's words included at the end of chapter eleven are part of the advice he offered in a letter written to a Cappadocian abbot.

Jerome's words in chapter twelve are taken from his letter to Heliodorus (written in 373) and his letter to Laeta (written in 403). In chapter thirteen, John Chrysostom's

sermon has been condensed from his second *Homily on the Statues* preached Saturday, March 6, 387. Timothy's conversation with Al-Mahdi in chapter fourteen appears in his *Apology for Christianity*. In chapter fifteen, the Muslim Umar's words are derived from the *Shah Nemeh*, and Pope Urban II's words are taken from his speech delivered at the Council of Clermont in 1095.

George Hadjiantoniou's *Protestant Patriarch: The Life of Cyril Lucaris* provides the source of the conversations of Cyril and the Jesuits included in chapter sixteen. Material for chapter seventeen has been taken from Andrew Bonar and Robert Murray M'Cheyne's book, *Narrative of a Visit to the Holy Land, and Mission of Inquiry to the Jews*. The first scene of chapter eighteen was drawn from John Alston Campbell's firsthand account in his book *In the Shadow of the Crescent*. Details of Y. K. and Rose Rushdoony's lives have been derived from autobiographical notes kept by this couple. (These notes were provided by their grandson Mark Rushdoony, to whom we are indebted for the material included in these chapters.)

Stan Telchin's story and words in chapter twenty have been taken from his book *Betrayed* as well as from his foreword to *Come, Let Us Reason Together*, a work written by Baruch Maoz. In chapter twenty-one, details of the life of Maoz and the church he founded in Israel are taken from his unpublished autobiography. We would like to express our thanks to him for permitting us to make use of this material. Chapters twenty-two and twenty-three include material derived from interviews with Yassir Eric, information gathered from his autobiography *Hass gelernt, Liebe erfahren: Vom Islamisten zum Brückenbauer*, and personal correspondence with members of *Communio Messianica*.

The conversations in chapter twenty-four are paraphrased from material and letters included in James Wright's *Martyrs of Malayta*. And, finally, the material for chapter twenty-five has been taken from news articles and interviews concerning the Tamrazyan family. Use has also been made of the writings of Hayarpi Tamrazyan regarding her time in Bethel.

May the Lord use the stories of these faithful men and women of the past and present to inspire a new generation of believers to press forward in the race set before them, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

R. A. Sheats

The Generations Curriculum Team

February 2021







# James: A Servant of the Lord

1

---

[Jesus said] “I will build My church.” (Matthew 16:18)

---

**L**ong ago, Jesus was born. After He was born, His mother Mary had more children. She and her husband Joseph had four more sons. One of them was named James. James and his brothers grew up with Jesus. They lived with Him and played with Him as they grew. They were all part of the same family. But James and his brothers didn't know who Jesus really was. They didn't know He was God who came to save them.

When Jesus grew up, He started to teach people about God. He told them about their sins too. Then He told them that He was the Savior. He had come to save His people. This is very good news. It is called the Gospel.

James heard Jesus talk about the Gospel. But it didn't make sense to him. He didn't believe it. He said, “Jesus is only my brother. He can't be anyone special. His words about God can't be true.”

## VOCABULARY

Savior

Disciple

Jerusalem

Believe

Israel

Reign

Special

Earth

Arrest



Jewish families in Israel

## JAMES AND A HARD HEART

---

**I will give you a new heart . . . I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 36:26)**

---

Many people came to hear Jesus speak. They believed Him and followed Him. They were glad to hear the good news of God. Men and women came. Even children came.

Jesus chose some men to be with Him. These men were called disciples. Peter was one of these men. John was one too. They listened to Jesus. They believed that He was the Son of God.

Crowds and crowds of people followed Jesus. James saw the crowds. He saw how glad they were to hear Jesus. But James still



didn't believe. He shook his head. "Jesus is crazy," he said. "I don't believe what He says is true. He is only my brother. He can't be the Savior."

Then, one day, Jesus died. The rulers of Israel and the Roman soldiers killed Him. This was a very sad day. The people who followed Jesus began to cry. James was very sad too. He didn't want his brother to die.

But three days later, Jesus rose from the grave. He came back to life! The disciples were filled with joy to see Him. "Jesus is alive!" they shouted.

James heard the news and saw Jesus alive again. His brother had come back to life! Now James knew that he had a very spe-



cial brother. “Jesus is the Lord!” he cried. Now he believed too.

All people are filled with sin. They do not want to believe what Jesus says. They do not want to follow Him. They are just like James. They have hard hearts that will not believe. But Jesus is God. He has power to change a person’s hard heart. He took out James’ hard heart and gave him a new heart. Then James believed in Jesus. He fell down to worship Him. “My brother is the Son of God!” he said.

## JESUS REIGNS

---

**The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever! (Revelation 11:15)**

---

After He rose from the dead, Jesus stayed on earth for forty days. He told His disciples many things. Then He said, “God has given Me all power. Now I will send you to teach all people about Me. Go into all the earth. Tell all people about Me. I will be with you, even to the end of the world.”

Then Jesus went back up into heaven. The people saw Him go up. But Jesus had given the disciples a job to do. Now they had to tell all people about Him.

## “WE MUST OBEY GOD”

---

**But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29)**

---





Temple in Jerusalem





**Priests angry at Apostles**

James stayed with the disciples of Jesus. They lived in **Jerusalem**. This was a city in Israel. It was where people from Israel came to worship God. These people were called Jews. James was a Jew. Peter and John and the other disciples were Jews too.

James and the disciples began to teach the Jews about Jesus. Thousands of people believed. They turned from their sins and came to Jesus. Soon the church began to grow in Jerusalem. Men and women and even little children came to worship Jesus. They loved God and followed His teaching.

Every day, James and Peter and the others preached to the people. But the rulers of the Jews didn't like this. When they saw what the disciples did, they got angry. They didn't want anyone to listen to what Jesus said. They didn't want anyone to worship



Him. They told Peter, “Stop teaching people about Jesus! We will punish you if you don’t stop!”

But Peter didn’t listen. “We must do what God says and not what you say,” he told the rulers. “We must obey God.”

The rulers didn’t like to hear this. They took Peter and some other disciples and put them in prison. Then they beat them and said, “Don’t tell anyone about Jesus!”

But Peter and the other men were not afraid. Jesus had told them to teach all people about Him. They knew they must follow Jesus. They must not be afraid even if wicked people hurt them. So they kept preaching.

James saw what the rulers did to Peter and the other men. He knew he might get hurt if he obeyed God. Do you think he was afraid? Would you be afraid?

When the rulers saw the disciples preaching again, they got very angry. They took one of the men and killed him. His name was Stephen. After Stephen died, the rulers killed other people, too. They arrested men and women and put them in prison.

## A SERVANT OF GOD

---

**James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. (James 1:1)**

---

This was a hard time for the church. Many people were scared. They didn’t know what to do.

James knew the rulers might kill him if he told people about Jesus. What should he do? He told himself, “This is a hard time. People are getting hurt. Many people are scared.” But James



### Writing in a Hebrew scroll

wasn't afraid. He said, "I must remember what Jesus said."

Before Jesus went up to heaven, He said, "God has given Me all power." That means He has power over all things. He even rules over wicked people who want to hurt the church.

James knew he could trust God. If God wanted him to die, he would die. But if God wanted to keep him safe, no wicked person could hurt him. James knew he must trust God and obey Him.

James helped the church in Jerusalem. He told the Jews about Jesus. He explained the Bible to the people. Then he wrote letters to other churches. He wanted these churches to know more about God too.

James wrote in his letter, "I am a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ." Then he wrote, "Be glad when hard times happen. God

will use these times to make your faith strong. He will teach you to trust in Him even more.”

James wanted the churches to trust God even when bad things happen. He wanted people to love God and obey Him. This is what he wrote in his letter. God used James to help the church. James served the people of God for a long time. He was a godly man. He was a man of prayer. People called him James the Just.

But the rulers of the Jews hated him. They said, “We must kill James! He is teaching too many people about Jesus!”

One day, the rulers arrested James. “You are a wicked man!” they cried. “You don’t obey the law!” They made up lies about James. Then they killed him.

James died in AD 62. This was about thirty years after Jesus went up into heaven.

The rulers of the Jews wanted to kill all the people who followed Jesus. They hoped they could stop the church. But they were wrong. Jesus has all power in heaven and on earth. He rules over all things. And He would keep building His church.

James died. But God used his life to help the church. Even after he died, God still used James and his work. One of the letters that James wrote is part of our Bible. It is called the book of James. We live thousands of years after James died. But God is still using his letter to build the church. ■





Old City Jerusalem



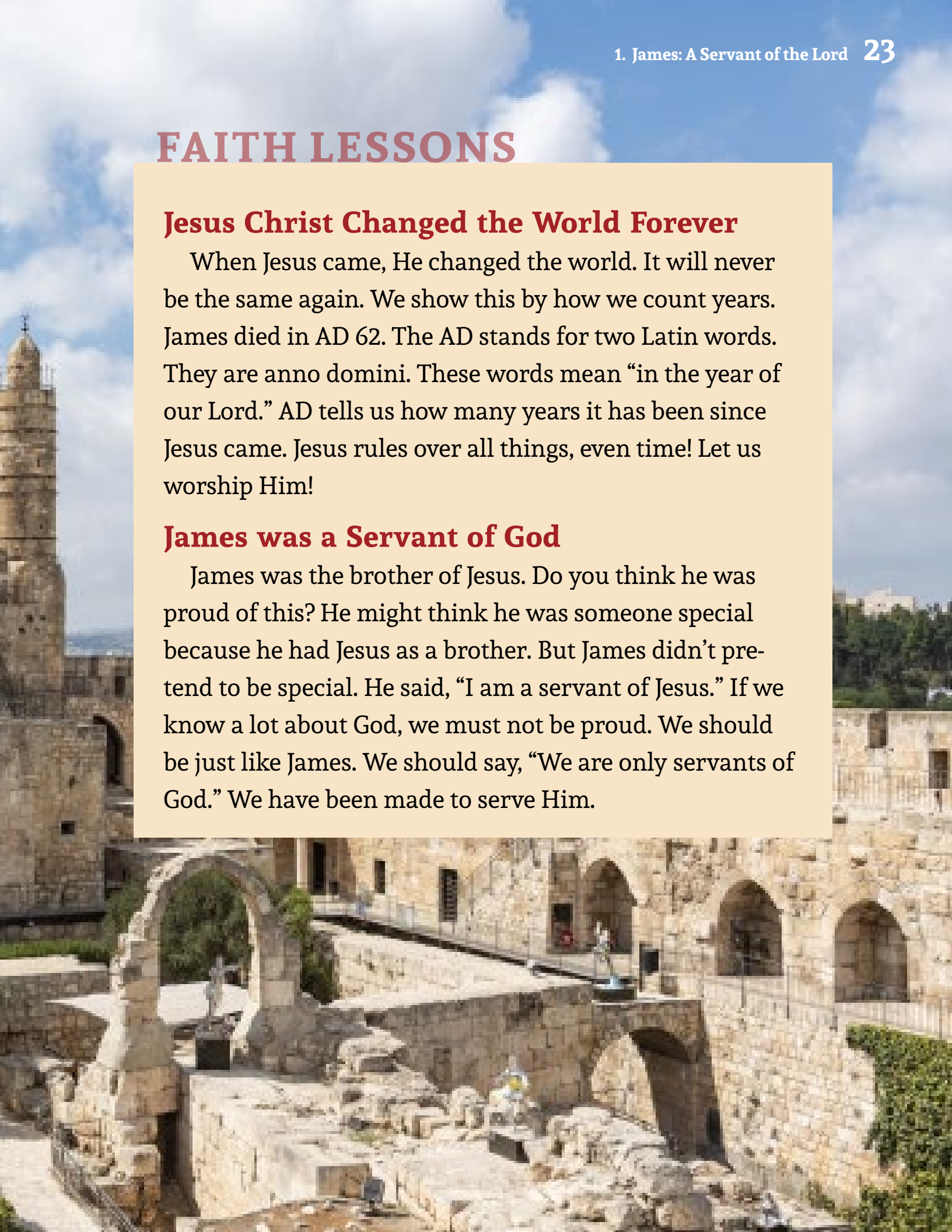
## FAITH LESSONS

### **Jesus Christ Changed the World Forever**

When Jesus came, He changed the world. It will never be the same again. We show this by how we count years. James died in AD 62. The AD stands for two Latin words. They are anno domini. These words mean “in the year of our Lord.” AD tells us how many years it has been since Jesus came. Jesus rules over all things, even time! Let us worship Him!

### **James was a Servant of God**

James was the brother of Jesus. Do you think he was proud of this? He might think he was someone special because he had Jesus as a brother. But James didn't pretend to be special. He said, “I am a servant of Jesus.” If we know a lot about God, we must not be proud. We should be just like James. We should say, “We are only servants of God.” We have been made to serve Him.







# Peter and a Powerful God

---

**We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,  
The One who is and who was and who is to come,  
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.  
(Revelation 11:17)**

---

**W**hen Jesus was on earth, He called people to follow Him. Then He chose twelve men to be with Him. These men were called **apostles**. Jesus **taught** His apostles many things. Then He sent them to teach other people.

Peter was one of the apostles. After Jesus went back up into heaven, Peter began to teach. He taught the Jews in Jerusalem.

Peter said, “God promised to send a Savior. He promised to send Him to Israel. Now this Savior has come. He is Jesus Christ. Believe in Him! He is the Lord God. He is the Ruler of the world.”

Many Jews heard Peter preach. Peter told them, “You killed Jesus Christ. You nailed Him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead. Now you must repent. You must turn from your sins and run to God. He will save you.”

## VOCABULARY

Apostle

Taught

Friend

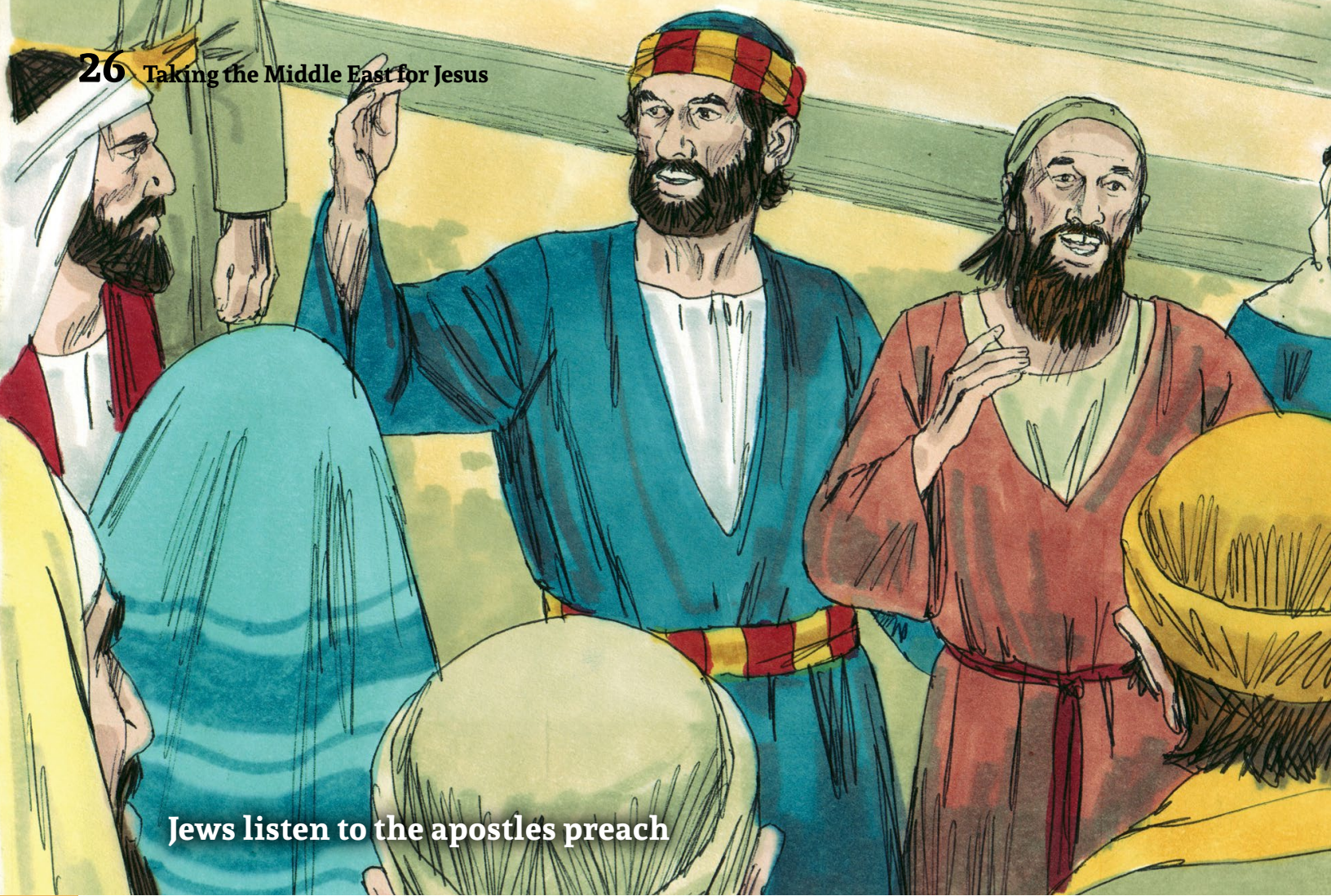
Compassion

Gentile

Cornelius

Spreading

Ourselves



Jews listen to the apostles preach

The Jews knew they had sinned. God opened their hearts to see their sin. Then He gave them new hearts to believe what Peter said. Crowds of people fell down to worship God. They praised Jesus Christ and worshiped Him.

## A SAD DAY WITH A HAPPY ENDING

---

**Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, . . . casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:6-7)**

---

Then Peter left Jerusalem. He went to other cities to teach people about God. One city he went to was called Lydda. Many Jews who feared God lived here. Peter stayed with them and



preached. While he was there, some men came to him. They said, “Peter, please come with us. Someone has died, and we need you.”

Peter went with the men. They walked for twelve miles. At last, they reached a city called Joppa. In this city a woman named Dorcas lived. Dorcas was a woman who loved God. She spent her life helping other people. She made clothes for widows. She also helped people who were in trouble. She was a woman full of mercy. But then she got very sick. Her **friends** tried to make her well, but they couldn’t. After a while, Dorcas died.

When Peter reached the house, he saw women filling the room. They were crying and weeping. “Dorcas is dead,” they cried. Tears rolled down their cheeks. Beside them on a bed Peter saw the dead body of Dorcas.

Peter looked at the women crying. Then he looked at the dead body. This was a very sad sight. All the people were sad.

Peter said to himself, “I can’t make these people happy. They are very, very sad that Dorcas has died. But God is full of mercy. He has **compassion** on sad people like this. He can take our sadness and turn it into joy. We must give all our worries to God. We must pray to Him, for He cares for us.”

Then Peter turned to the women. “Go outside,” he told them. “All of you, go outside.” When the house was empty, Peter knelt down. Alone with God, he prayed. He asked the Lord to heal Dorcas. Peter couldn’t make a dead person come back to life. But he knew Jesus could.

After he prayed, Peter turned to Dorcas. “Arise!” he said. Then the dead woman opened her eyes. She was alive! Peter helped



her to stand up. Then he called the other women back. Now they were filled with joy!

## JESUS IS A LIGHT FOR ALL PEOPLES

---

Indeed He says,  
 “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
 To raise up [the Jews] . . . of Israel;  
 I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
 That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.”  
 (Isaiah 49:6)

---

Peter stayed in the city of Joppa for many days. Some men came to see him there. But these men were not Jews. They were **Gentiles**. A Gentile is someone who is not a Jew. It is a person who is not from Israel.



The men said, “Please come see **Cornelius**.” Cornelius was a Roman soldier. He wasn’t a Jew, but he still worshiped God. Peter went to him and preached to his family. God saved Cornelius and all his family. Now God’s church was **spreading** into all the world!

When the Jews who believed in God heard what Peter did, they were surprised. “Why did you tell the Gentiles about Jesus?” they asked Peter. “Those people are not Jews. You should tell the Jews about Jesus. The Jews are the people of Israel. They are the people God chose.”

But Peter said, “God told me to go to the Gentiles, too. God sent us to preach the Gospel to all people. We should tell Jews about Jesus. But we should also tell people from other nations. All



An illustration depicting the biblical scene of Cornelius welcoming Peter. Peter, on the left, is shown from the back, wearing a brown robe over a white tunic. He is gesturing with his hands towards Cornelius. Cornelius, on the right, is wearing a yellow tunic and a red cape, with a brown headband. He is smiling and gesturing back. In the background, several men in various robes are watching. To the right, two Roman soldiers in blue tunics, grey armor, and helmets with white plumes are standing with spears. The scene is set in a room with a large arched window in the background showing a glimpse of the outdoors.

**Cornelius welcomes Peter**

people in every nation need to hear the good news about God.”

Peter said, “God had mercy on us. We are Jews, but we sin just like other people. Jesus had compassion on us. He will have mercy on the other nations too.” Jesus told His disciples to teach all people about Him. This was why Peter preached to the Roman soldier.

When the Jews heard what Peter said, they started to praise God. “The Lord has saved the Gentiles too!” they cried. “God is saving people from all nations!”

God’s church was growing. Now Jews and Romans and Greeks were all hearing the Gospel. God was saving people from all these nations.

But some Jews didn’t like what Peter did. “We should only preach to the Jews!” they said. “We should only teach people from

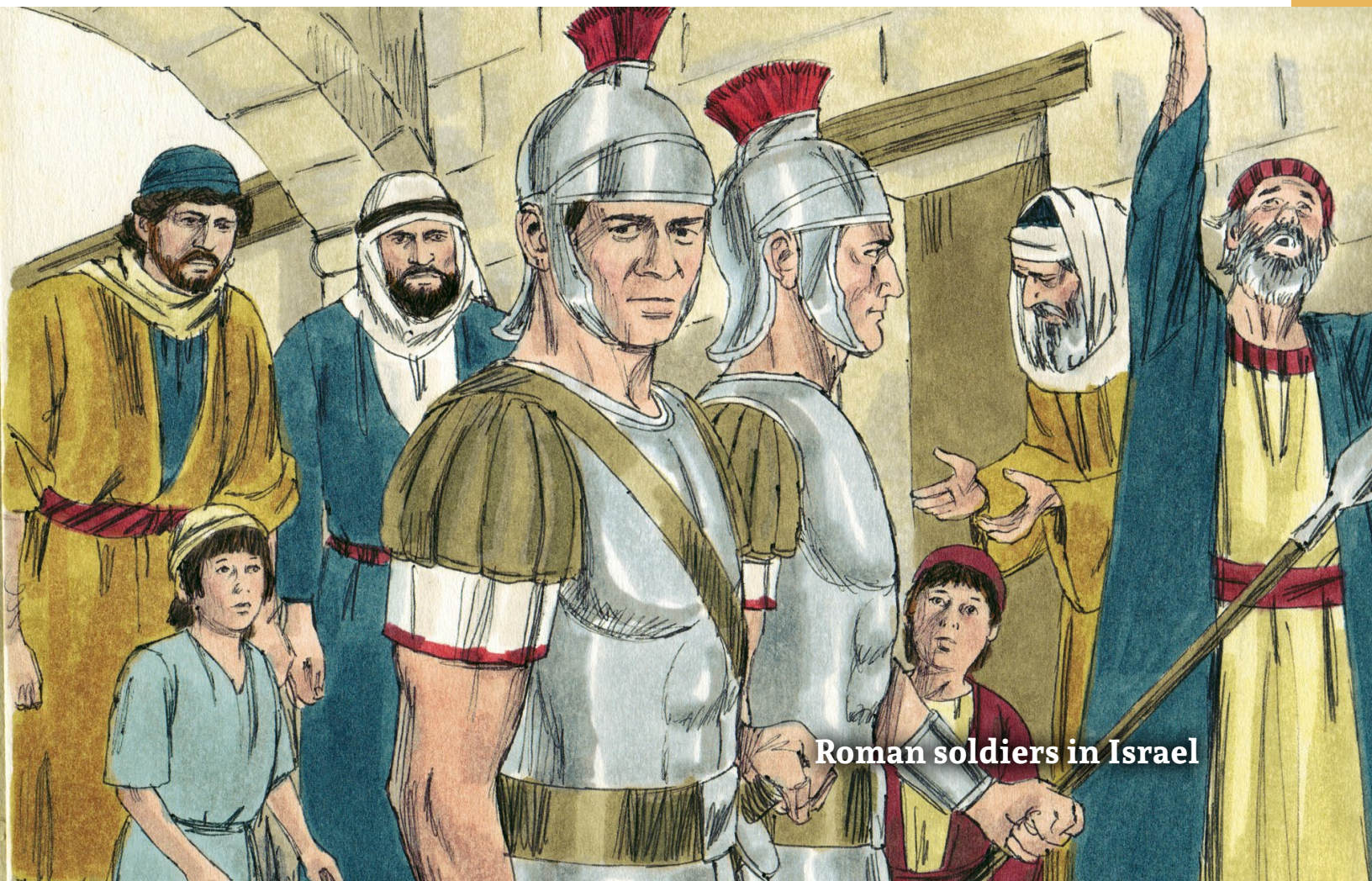


Israel about Jesus Christ.” These Jews were not happy. They didn’t like what God was doing for people in other nations.

## KING HEROD FIGHTS AGAINST GOD

**Power belongs to God. (Psalm 62:11)**

The rulers of the Jews hated Jesus. They didn’t want anyone to preach about Him. Herod the king knew this. He wanted to please the Jews, so he killed one of the apostles. Then he put Peter in prison. “I will kill Peter, too,” Herod said to himself. “That will make the Jews very happy.”

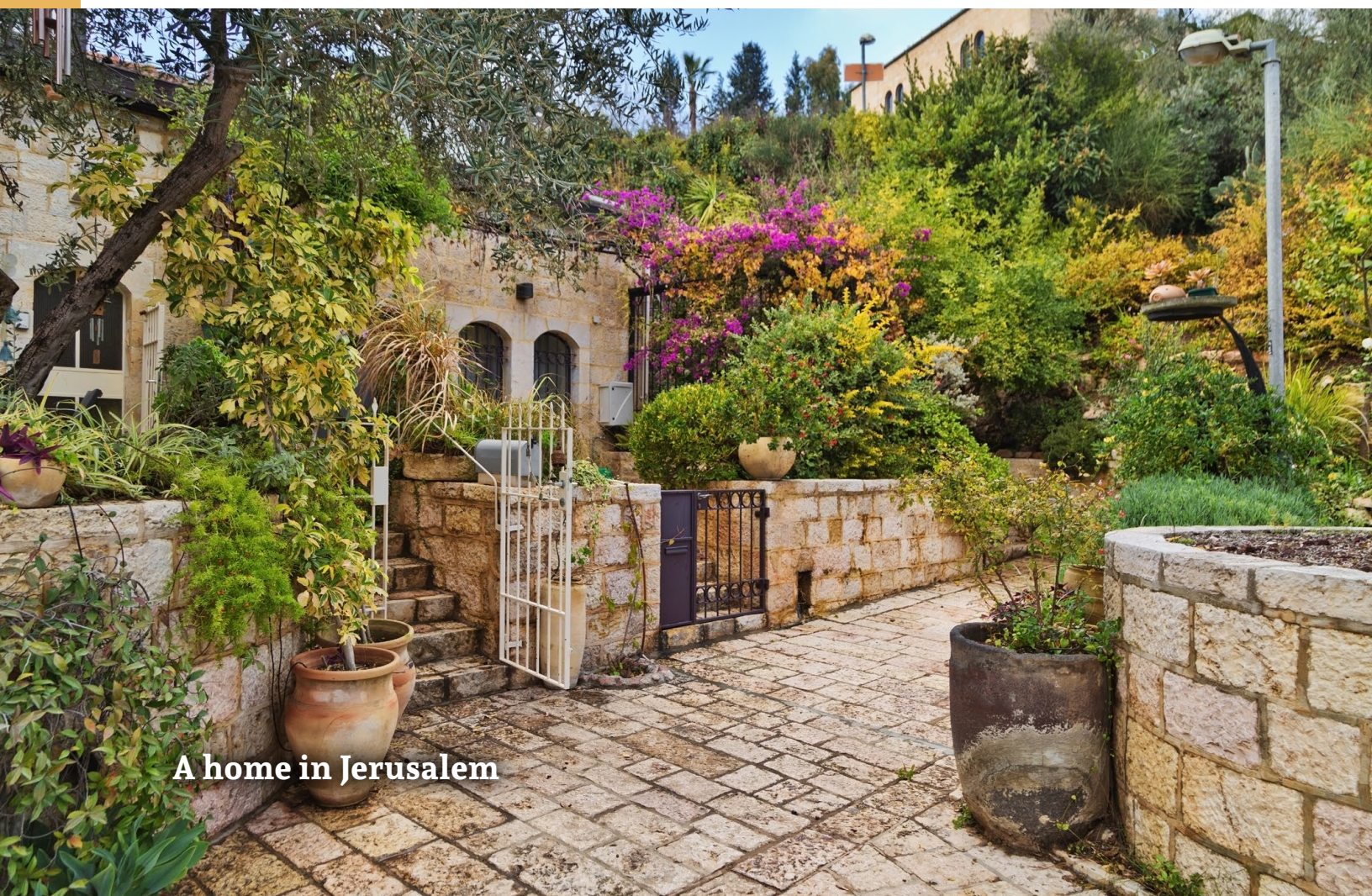


Roman soldiers in Israel



Herod planned to kill Peter. But God is stronger than Herod. In the middle of the night, God sent an angel. The angel went inside the prison and broke Peter's chains. Then he led Peter out of the prison. A strong iron gate blocked the way. Peter couldn't open the iron gate, but God could. He set Peter free.

All the disciples were praying for Peter. It was still dark outside when Peter reached the house where they were. The door was locked. "Let me in!" he called. But the disciples didn't believe it was Peter. Was he free? How did he escape the prison? Peter told them what God had done. Then they all praised the Lord. He had rescued Peter from King Herod. Jesus Christ is a mighty God! He rules over all the world! ■



A home in Jerusalem



## FAITH LESSONS

### **God is full of compassion**

When Jesus saw people who were hurt or sick, He healed them. He knows we are weak. We can't heal ourselves. We can't take care of **ourselves**. But He is full of mercy. He cares for us just like He cared for the women who were crying about Dorcas. When we are in need, we should pray to God. He is a God full of compassion for His people. Let us praise Him!

### **God chooses people from every nation**

God created the whole world. He made all the people on earth. He wants all people to hear the good news about Jesus Christ. This is why He sent people to teach all nations. God didn't choose only one nation or people to worship Him. He commands all people in all places to repent. He commands all nations to believe in Jesus. He is a good and loving Lord! Let us worship Him!

### **God is stronger than all kings and rulers**

Herod was the king. He said to himself, "I can do anything I want. I am the king." But God was stronger than Herod. Rulers are strong. But God rules all things. He rules over all kings and rulers of the earth. Peter wasn't afraid of Herod. We don't need to be afraid of wicked rulers either. God is stronger than all of them. He will rule over them just like He ruled over Herod.