

THE
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CHRONICLES
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PRELUDE

The Beings were gathered in a large place. There were many of them, stretching as far as the eye could see. They stood quietly, their wings vibrating ever so slightly, creating a wave like a breeze over a field of grain. Excitement, as had not been felt for over two thousand years, emanated from the place, and the wings of the Beings shimmered such that the excitement was seen as well as felt. There was no sound at first, yet anticipation of the great event served as a prelude.

Suddenly, a horn sounded—a loud, clear note which held within it a decisive tone, yet a hint of sadness. The Beings caught the sound—the monumental mixed with the tragic, and the shimmering of their wings diminished minutely.

A voice rang out, “The time of Joel’s prophecy has arrived! We will go out and labor as the Lamb That Was Slain has called us to do. Prepare your sickles, because the hour to reap has come! Harvesters, away!”

The old man awoke trembling. This dream had seemed so real! His dreams of late had all been magnificent with beautiful mansions and gardens. The night before, he had wandered alongside a crystal clear river with his wife. He sighed and held his head. The dreams

were wonderful, but waking up to reality was torture. His love, his beautiful wife, had been gone for two years. He always had thought he would be the first to die, but the heart attack had taken her swiftly and unexpectedly, and he was left to mourn and try to live without her. Part of him wanted to stop the dreams because they reminded him of what he no longer had, but he looked forward to sleep each night when he would “see” her and stroll in those beautiful gardens.

But, tonight was different. What had the voice said?

“The prophecy of Joel,” he whispered to the first signs of dawn coming through the curtains. He turned on the lamp beside his bed and reached for a well-worn Bible.

Funny, he thought, as he stared at the nightstand. The Bible lay open. *I’m sure I closed my Bible after I read last night.* He wearily dismissed this as he put his glasses on and pulled the Bible onto his lap. Then his eyes opened wide in disbelief as he looked into the open book.

“Joel?” His voice choked as he read the illuminated verse out loud. *“And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.”*

The Being moved its hand away from the Holy Book and the light faded.

“It has begun!” it whispered to the frightened old man who heard nothing. “Do not fear, but prepare yourself to labor!”

The old man looked down at the verse again. A look of peace came over his face, followed by a new, determined excitement as he sat up in bed and eagerly reread the passage.

The Being smiled at the old man, and then turned and walked through the wall.

Black clouds raced upon the city and its surroundings. People hurried to get inside, but the deluge caught many by surprise. Torrents of water flooded the streets quickly, and motorists pulled off to wait out the storm.

A group of Beings watched the storm approach near the edge of the city.

“He must know,” one whispered.

Another shook its head. “The times are well-guarded. He is just upset about the recent work done and the Lamb’s success. He does not know that the Joel prophecy will begin here.”

The Beings lingered for a few moments, and then they moved off toward the darkness. Thunder shook the ground and lightning lit up the sky. A few of the Beings headed toward a church parking lot where a few cars had pulled off. An older woman and a young girl sat in one car.

“Gramma, I’m scared,” a little voice called from the back seat.

The woman looked at the girl in her rearview mirror and said, “Why don’t we pray?”

The little girl nodded, and the woman spoke out loud, “Lord, please protect us during this terrible storm, even as we sit in the car in this parking lot. Keep us in Your Hands and give us Your peace. Amen.”

Smiling, the little girl sat back in her booster seat and told her grandma about her day as the storm raged outside.

The Beings approached the car. They seemed to be brighter and bigger than when they had first appeared near the city. One Being stretched out over the car and serenely closed its eyes. Two other Beings seemed to hover near a utility pole.

Suddenly, lightning struck the utility pole! It exploded with a shower of sparks. The two Beings held out their hands and absorbed the shock, catching pieces of wood that would have hit the car, and deflecting the debris to an empty part of the parking lot. Inside the car, the woman and little girl jumped.

“Wow! Gramma, that was close!” the little girl cried.

“Oh, it was honey, wasn’t it? But see, the pieces didn’t come anywhere near us. Remember, we prayed for God to protect us, and He did!” the woman replied reassuringly. “Thank You, Lord!”

The three Beings gathered outside the car and smiled, then they looked up and quickly were gone.

“Gramma, did the sun just peek out? Is the storm over?” the little girl asked. “I just saw something really bright.”

“Hmm . . . no, I don’t think the sun came out, but the rain is slowing down and I think we can go meet Mommy now.”

The woman started the car and headed out of the parking lot, thankful for their safety. The little girl smiled and looked up in the sky following three bright figures going up into the clouds, thinking some sun had shone through the storm.



CHAPTER 1

The park was quiet that morning. A group of Beings slowly came together by a playground. One Being sat on a swing and pushed into the air.

“There is a bit of thrill in this contraption. What do you call it?”

“A swing, He,” spoke another Being with a twinkle in his eyes.

“Are we prepared?” a Being interjected, seemingly annoyed with the playfulness of the other.

We are, Ayin,” the twinkle-eyed Being replied. “He will see me today to begin fulfilling the prophecy of Joel.”

“Have we been noticed? You know *he* is the prince of the air!”

Twinkle-Eyes turned to the Being that had just spoken and was about to answer when another Being spoke up, “I have placed the necessary shields around us, Qoph. I will alert you if they fail.”

Qoph gave a barely perceptible nod, then edged to the outer ring of Beings, held a palm up to block the rising sun, and peered away from the group.

“It is time,” Twinkle-Eyes spoke quietly. “You all know your jobs. The Joel prophecy must be fulfilled before we can begin the reaping. We need their help. So it is written . . .”

His voice drifted off as each of the other Beings echoed, “So it is written.”

The sun peeked through the curtains of the bedroom. Birds chirped their greetings to one another at feeders in the yard. A car slowed to put the Sunday paper in a box at the end of the driveway. The neighborhood was quiet except for a barking dog in the distance.

A phone rang in the house a few times before being answered. Shortly afterwards, a knock came on the bedroom door, followed by a voice calling, “Joel! It’s Kyle on the phone. Joel?”

The door opened, and a woman peered into the room. She walked over to the bed and nudged a mass covered in sheets. “Joel! Wake up! Kyle is on the phone.”

Something moved under the sheets and groaned. “OK, Mom.” A hand emerged from somewhere and grasped the phone his mom positioned into his hand. His mom retreated, stepping over pillows strewn around on the floor, and closed the door.

“Hey, Kyle . . .” a sleepy voice murmured into the phone.

“Joel! Aren’t you up yet? Remember, we’re singing at church and they wanted us there to practice before? You gotta get up! We’ll be by to pick you up in fifteen minutes, OK?” Kyle urged his friend.

A body rose up from the rumpled sheets and yawned into the phone, “Ahh . . . I’m up, I’m up. OK. I’ll be ready, Kyle. See ya.” Joel yawned again and stretched.

The fifteen-year-old sat up on the side of the bed, rubbing his brown, short hair and then his eyes. He stretched again and stood up, kicking pillows out of the way, and headed out the bedroom door. His mom, Kathy Stevens, was making coffee in the kitchen and looked up when Joel entered.

“Why’s Kyle calling so early?” she asked while grabbing a box of cereal out of a cupboard and setting it on the table in front of Joel.

He sat down, opened the box and grabbed a handful. “I forgot that the youth are singing for church today and we’re supposed to practice early. His family is picking me up in fifteen minutes.”

Mrs. Stevens nodded, “Oh, that’s right. I hadn’t remembered either. You know, Pastor Art is away and Pastor George has the sermon today.”

Joel groaned, “Not him! He’s so boring, and he never smiles. Pastor Art always has cool stories and we sing neat songs. Pastor George makes us sing those old songs.”

“They’re called hymns, and it wouldn’t hurt you to learn a few of them, you know,” Kathy Stevens admonished her son, but then sighed. “Pastor George sure hasn’t been the same since Mabel died two years ago. That was quite a shock to him even though he knows she’s in heaven. Do you remember Mabel?”

Joel smiled, “Of course I do, Mom. She babysat me and always told me neat stories from the Bible. We’d pretend I was David and she was Goliath, and I’d get to throw Nerf balls at her until I hit her in the head and she’d fall to the ground.” He paused. “She made the Bible and all this God stuff seem real and exciting.”

His mom gave him a concerned look, “What do you mean, God stuff? Is something going on, Joel David?”

Joel hated when his mom used his full name. He always felt like he was in trouble. “I don’t know, Mom. Sometimes, I just don’t feel like God is real. You know, I can’t see Him. I do all the things I’m supposed to do, but I’m not sure sometimes what it all means.”

Kathy Stevens reached over and put an arm around her son. “That’s why it’s called faith—believing when you can’t see, remembering the day you decided you wanted to believe what Christ did for you and just accepting that He did it.”

“I guess so,” Joel shrugged. “I’d better go get ready. Kyle will be here soon.”

Joel left the kitchen and his mom mouthed a prayer for the Lord to strengthen his faith and to help him not give in to doubt. Outside the window, a Being smiled. Things were going as planned.

In his bedroom, Joel quickly dressed and thought about what his mom had said. He just wished he was like his best friend, Kyle. Kyle was sure of himself and threw himself totally into everything he did. Neither boy was into most sports, but they both did karate. Kyle was great at that and had even done some tournaments, winning one recently. Joel had been there to cheer him on. Joel did sometimes wonder about Kyle, though. Kyle loved to be in the spotlight and would do anything to get there. Every once in a while,

Joel had noticed Kyle doing a move in karate that wasn't allowed. Kyle would make sure none of the instructors were looking and then hit his opponent. No one had noticed that the moves were illegal. When Joel had questioned Kyle, he had responded that it didn't matter, because he had won!

A car horn blew, shaking Joel out of his thoughts. He ran out of the house and called out, "I'm leaving!" before racing to get in the car with Kyle.

Kathy Stevens stood outside the door with another prayer on her lips, "Lord, he's Yours, I know, but help him to make good choices in this world and show Yourself to him today so that his faith in You somehow is made stronger."

The Being standing beside her seemed to glow with each word. "Your prayer will be answered today in a way you would never have dreamed," he whispered. "God has favored you and blessed you through your son this day. The road will be hard, but we will be with him, helping him. And he will have others who have been chosen, who will also walk the road with him."

Kathy Stevens gave a quizzical look around her. The neighborhood was beginning to come alive with people coming out for the Sunday paper and others walking dogs. But she had heard something different . . . and she felt glorious, like someone had given her a big hug.

The Being smiled as he finished hugging Kathy. He loved this part of the Lord's work. He watched Kathy walk to the end of the driveway and grab the newspaper—she was still smiling. He could sense her wonder with what had just happened and knew she was in for a surprise very soon.

Kyle Thompson and Joel chatted on the way to the church about the new song their youth group leader had written for them to sing that day.

"Pastor Eric sure is awesome!" Kyle exclaimed. "He writes the best songs!"

Joel nodded his head in agreement, "But, you know he'd hate you saying he was awesome, because 'Only . . .'"

Kyle interrupted him, “‘Only God is awesome.’ Yeah, I know. He tells us that enough times, doesn’t he?”

Joel barely had time to respond, “Yeah,” when Kyle nudged him.

“Here we are. Thanks, Dad!” Kyle called as he opened the car door.

“See you boys at the service, OK?” Mr. Thompson waved as he spoke and drove off.

Joel and Kyle joined a few other teens making their way into the church on that bright, sunny morning. They all headed noisily to the youth room in a corner of the building, some talking about their school teams and others remarking about national sports events. A few guys called to Joel and Kyle to join them sitting near the back of the room. As they started toward them, a voice called out, “Everybody in their places, please!”

Joel turned to see a smiling young man in his twenties motioning to the group. Joel smiled himself. He liked Pastor Eric a lot. The youth group had really picked up in attendance since Eric had come to their church four months ago. Pastor Eric seemed to be comfortable with everyone, and his wife, Jenny, was fun, too. They were expecting their first baby soon, and Joel could tell that Eric was so excited about being a father. He was excited about God, too, and Joel felt better about things when he was around Eric. They had had some good talks lately, and Eric had answered some questions that had been bothering Joel about his faith. Joel automatically turned to head toward the youth pastor, but Kyle grabbed his arm.

“Brad and Dylan got a new app; let’s go check it out!” Kyle urged.

Joel hesitated. Normally, he went right along with Kyle, but today he felt different. “Naw,” he shook his head. “Let’s get going with the practice. Pastor Eric is waiting for us.”

Kyle looked a little surprised, but actually turned with Joel and motioned for the two guys to come along to the front of the room with the rest of the youth who were forming into lines.

Pastor Eric strummed his guitar and tuned a few strings while the kids quieted down. “We’ve sung this enough times in youth

group, so I know you all know it. Let's just work on a little harmony, OK?" He nodded to a couple of girls in front. "Everyone sing like we've practiced before. When we get to the chorus at the end, I've asked Stacey and Rachel to do a little something special, so don't be surprised!" He continued to strum and the youth recognized the introduction. On cue, he nodded for them to begin:

Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.

My frame was not hidden from You,
When I was made in secret,
And skillfully wrought
In the depths of the earth.

Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.

Your eyes saw my unformed substance
And in Your Book they were all written—
The days that were ordained for me
When as yet, there was not one of them.

Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.

For You did form my inward parts,
You did weave me in my mother's womb.
I will give thanks to You
For I am fearfully and wonderfully made!

Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;

Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well;
Wonderful are Your works, and my soul knows it very well.

The youth sang and held the last note as the two girls finished the high descant that had been the harmonious surprise. Pastor Eric brought their voices down and then ended the song by pinching his thumb and forefinger together. He had stopped playing his guitar during the last chorus and the kids were pleased with the sound of their a cappella voices.

There was no noise for a second or two as the beauty of the song registered with the group, and then they broke out into spontaneous clapping and cheers.

Pastor Eric grinned and held up his hands. “I guess we’re ready. Let’s say a prayer, asking the Father to bless the message of this song and those who will hear it.” He bowed his head and led the group in an inspired prayer.

Joel felt weird. Something was definitely different today. He felt good but a different type of good. It was deeper inside him. The song had actually meant something to him this morning. He had sung it many times before—he knew it by heart, but today he understood it! He had a sense of how incredible the human body was, and God knew him before he was even born! Pastor Eric had said this song was from Psalm 139. It told that God knew each day of his life long before his birth! Why hadn’t this hit him before? This said that he was special to God! Joel remembered his mom telling him about faith that morning. Now, maybe he was starting to understand.

The prayer had ended, but Joel was still standing with his head bowed, thinking and basking in that warm feeling. He wondered if this was what it was like in heaven, with singing and praising God, when a nudge from Kyle brought him back to reality, and he lifted his head, smiling at his friend.

“Wasn’t that incredible, Kyle?” Joel could barely contain his excitement.

“Huh?” Kyle raised his eyebrows in mock disbelief.

Joel was undeterred. “That was great, wasn’t it?” he repeated to Kyle. “I mean, it sounded like we could have been angels praising God in heaven, didn’t it?”

At this, Kyle laughed and flapped his arms like wings. “Oh, look, we’re the Heavenly Heralds!” He poked at Joel’s arm, “Come on, flap your wings, too, brother, and we’ll fly right up to heaven!” Kyle bent over double laughing. Dylan and Brad burst out laughing as well, and a few other kids who were standing around joined them.

Joel’s face fell and he felt foolish. He began to think of a comeback remark to get him out of the stupid situation he had gotten himself into when he felt a hand on his shoulder and heard a calm voice steadily at his side.

“I agree wholeheartedly with Joel. That sounded great and I do believe that’s what it will be like in heaven when all we’ll want to do is praise God for salvation and His goodness to us,” Pastor Eric remarked. “Thanks, Joel, for encouraging us! OK, everyone, it’s time to go out to the sanctuary and sit in our spot. Let’s go.”

Pastor Eric herded them all out of the youth room, and no one had a chance to say anything more about Joel’s enthusiasm. Joel had to admit that he did still feel great about the song and its message. He couldn’t explain why, either. Normally, he would just blend into the woodwork and go along with Kyle. He certainly would not speak up like that and look crazy to the other kids. It was OK to like Pastor Eric and all, but saying it was like singing in heaven? What was he thinking?

As Joel followed the rest of the group down the hall to the sanctuary, a Being hovered close by with his hands on Joel’s back and shoulders.

Joel slowly took a deep breath. What was with him today? It was strange; he had never felt or acted like this before, yet he wasn’t that bothered about it. He liked how he felt, though. He stood up straighter as he walked. Kyle looked over at him curiously, and then smiled. Joel smiled back. He would talk with Kyle after the church service and tell him about his new-found confidence, or was it the faith his mom had talked about? Joel didn’t know, but he decided it was worth keeping the feeling he had right now. God was incredible, and he, Joel, was special!

The Being continued with Joel until the group had sat down in the front rows of the church, awaiting the start of the service. Many

worshippers had already filled the sanctuary. Joel turned around and saw his parents sitting in their usual spot. Kyle's family was behind them. Kathy Stevens looked up and caught Joel's eye then she smiled. Joel smiled back and gave a little nod. Kathy motioned with her right index finger a little sign she had used for years to tell Joel she loved him and God did, too. Joel grinned broadly and signed back to her the same, and then he turned around as the worship leader greeted the congregation.

"Good morning, everyone! Isn't it a blessed day in the Lord? While folks are still coming in, why don't we stand and sing praises to our God," a middle-aged man called out from the platform at the front of the church.

The youth group stood together as musicians played an intro, and then they all joined in singing. Joel listened to the voices around him and had a sense of joy fill him as he contemplated this very thing happening in heaven. He smiled to himself and put more effort into the song.

Kyle nudged him and whispered, "Hey! Why the choral push today? You're acting weird!"

Joel shrugged his shoulders and just smiled at his best friend. He wasn't going to let Kyle spoil this for him.

The service proceeded as usual, and soon it was time for the youth to sing. Pastor Eric led the kids up to the platform and then spoke to the congregation.

"The song we are going to sing has special meaning to me. It was one of the first songs the Lord gave to me when I asked Him to help me learn more Scripture. I'm not very good at memorizing, but I found I could learn verses if they were put to music. So, the Lord gave me this tune, and the next thing I knew, I had learned the verses of Psalm 139:13–16. May this song bless you as it has blessed me and the youth group." Pastor Eric then strummed the intro as he moved to the side of the platform.

The youth group burst into song, "*Wonderful are Your works . . .*"

Joel sang with all his heart, and for the first time the song had meaning to him. The group blended perfectly, and Joel closed his

eyes for a moment, taking in the harmony. He opened his eyes and gazed out at the congregation.

Suddenly, Joel's eyes caught something bright in the back of the sanctuary. He turned his head to look more directly at the brightness. It seemed to be a person, yet bigger. A face looked right at him and smiled. Joel's heart skipped a beat! He stopped singing, and his eyes widened in fear.

What, or who is that thing? he thought. He looked over to Pastor Eric, who still strummed his guitar, oblivious to the congregation.

Joel turned slightly to look at Kyle beside him. Kyle was singing with his head facing toward the bright thing, but he had no surprise or concern on his face.

By now, Joel's heart was pounding and his throat felt like he was being strangled. He looked again to the back of the sanctuary. It was gone! Joel moved his head around to see if it had moved to another part of the church, but he saw nothing. There was no sign of the bright person anywhere!