

# Jedediah Webb: Frontier Pastor

## Chapter 16

January 1887

Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong's telegram informed us that all three of the Jenkins Boys were found in Lampasas - about 100 miles east of Coleman County. Henry had arrested them, and he and several rangers were bringing them back to Coleman. It is a full year since the attack on Jeremiah, and his recovery has been exceptionally long and slow. He lost several of his toes on his left foot which left him with a noticeable limp. Some of his wounds became infected and pneumonia set into his lungs. The remaining scars were all emotional – not only for Jeremiah but for his family as well. All of this has left him with little energy. The news that we will be facing the Jenkins boys soon was far from comforting. Rachel, especially, was revisiting the whole ordeal from a year ago in her mind. She began to fear for Jeremiah and her family all over again.

Sheriff Price had a jail cell waiting for the boys, and the county was preparing for a trial. The Jenkins boys will be charged with assault and battery as well as attempted murder. The town was already choosing sides. Some people felt that it was justified what the Jenkins boys did to Jeremiah. After all, hadn't Jeremiah attacked those boys earlier for paying attention to his daughter? Some thought that the Jenkins boys were in the wrong. First by harassing Jeremiah's daughter, Elizabeth, then attacking Jeremiah when he backed his daughter. Whatever side they chose, many of the townspeople agreed that this was a race-fueled problem. I could tell that the trial was going to open all kinds of bias, prejudice, and emotional wounds.

I knew the truth would come out in the trial. Jeremiah was only defending himself and his daughter against the vicious, prejudiced onslaught of the Jenkins boys. I could only hope the townspeople would be able to see the truth. Once the boys arrived in Coleman, they were charged in front of a judge, and they were locked up in the Coleman County Jail. The trial was set for July. All three boys were surprisingly quiet

and cooperative during the jailing process. That made me wonder what they were up to or what we might be missing.

The aftermath of the stampede this summer was mostly good news. Most of the cattle were rounded up and taken to Fort Worth. Henry and Paul helped with the cattle drive. They got to know Matías quite well, and they all became good friends. By Christmas, most of Matías' men had recovered from their wounds and were beginning to head home. Many of the townspeople of Coleman had come to know Matías and his men during the recovery time. We heard many wonderful folklore stories and songs from Mexico. We shared some American folklore stories and music with them as well. I found myself becoming more familiar with the Mexican Spanish language, and Matías' men were learning more English. The two cultures were growing closer together here in Coleman County. I am often amazed at how God can work a tragedy into a blessing. In our busy and self-absorbed world, we often do not recognize God's mighty hand at work in our lives.

### **Spring 1887**

I always knew the time would come when our community would have to face false prophets. In March, Reverend Zechariah Brown and his church came to town looking and talking slick. My God-given ability to discern truth from lies enabled me to immediately identify him as a false prophet, but many people were falling for his prosperity gospel. The Holy Spirit spoke to me and showed me that he was motivated by greed, lust for power, and feelings of self-importance.

Zechariah and his entourage set up a huge tent on the outskirts of town, and he began to entice the people to follow him. His messages to the people were as follows: "Love God; Be good to one another; Support my ministry with your money; Believe that God is a loving God and always forgives; God will not let anyone go to hell; God loves you just as you are, and you don't need to change; and Your monetary support of my ministry will result in you receiving 100x in return." He used Jesus' words to punctuate his promise, "*And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or*



*mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29).* Literally speaking, this verse says that if you leave your family to follow Jesus, He will increase your family by 100x. I for one do not need or desire 100 wives. In this scripture, I believe Jesus is merely stating that in following Him, our lives will be blessed in many ways beyond measure. Anyone who thinks that following Jesus is a get-rich-quick scheme will be disappointed.

Zechariah was quite well-dressed in the latest styles. He wore expensive jewelry, and he smelled good! He rode fine horses and kept a fleet of fancy wagons. During his services, he staged episodes of healing the sick and casting out demons to impress the people with his God-given powers. I asked the people during a Sunday service, "Have you ever seen any of these people before who are being miraculously healed? Are they people from around Coleman County?" or "Have you heard Zechariah talk about his past or know if he is an ordained pastor?" I discerned that Zechariah's wife, Evette, was beautiful on the outside, but not on the inside. I took notice that neither she nor Zechariah were kind to children or to people of lesser means. They seemed to focus on the affluent people in the community.

The Apostle Peter warns us about false prophets, *"But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed. And in their greed, they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep"* (2 Peter 2:1-3). Peter assures us that false prophets are headed to total-destruction, if not in this world certainly in the afterlife.

The bottom line is this. Spiritual leaders of God are either good shepherds or hired hands. God has told us the difference between the two, and the Holy Spirit helps me to discern which is which. Jesus tells us, *"A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they do not belong to him, and he is not their shepherd. And so, the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock"* (John 10:12). A hired-hand preacher will follow the money and hit the road when things get complicated

or when people need him most. A good shepherd preacher will give his life up for his people.

When the people confronted Hezekiah about his hoax healings and exorcisms of demons, they suggested that he return some or all their donations back to them. They expected him to do as Zaccheus the tax collector did in the Bible story. Zaccheus was truly repentant after he met Jesus, and he told Jesus, *"Look Lord! Here and now, I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount"* (Luke 19:8). Hezekiah assured them he would make amends after he separated their donations from donations from other communities. The next morning, we saw that he lit out of the county so quickly during the night that he left his tent and some of his belongings behind.

### **Summer 1887**

In July about a week before the trial for the three Jenkins boys was about to start, Matthew and Mark escaped from the County Jail. Angela and I were visiting Sheriff Price in his office when one of the deputies ran into his office. He reported, "At the jail, several of the guards were just found wounded and unconscious, and the doors to the Jenkins boys' cells were open. Luke Jenkins was lying in his cell beaten and unconscious. When he was revived, he told us that several of his cousins from Lampasas had broken Matthew and Mark out of their cells, and they beat him when he refused to go with them. He was beaten so badly, I think they wanted to kill him. When we questioned Luke of his brothers' whereabouts, he told us he figured they are headed to Lampasas, but first they said they had a score to even." Sheriff Price and I knew exactly what those boys meant. They had gone after Jeremiah!

Sheriff Price, two of his deputies, Angela, and I galloped to Jeremiah's home. As we reigned up, we saw Jeremiah lying in the front yard. He had so many bullet holes in him, we knew he was dead. Inside the house we found Rachel and Elizabeth. Both were savagely beaten, and Elizabeth was only partially dressed. Angela immediately began to doctor the two while the rest of us surveyed the scene. It was obvious that



Jeremiah was riddled with bullets well after he was dead. It looked like multiple shooters stood over his body and emptied their guns into him. It truly was a hate-filled, brutal killing. Evidence showed that Rachel had been beaten by multiple weapons as she tried to protect Elizabeth from their sexual assault. Sheriff Price told me he needed to stay with the crime scene, but that he would swear me and others in as deputies to form a posse to go track the boys down.

I raced over to Paul's and Matías' places to gather some help. Paul and his son Talako as well as Matías and his brother Alejandro eagerly joined up with me and my brother Jimmy to go catch those men. I wished that Texas Ranger Henry was with us, but he was off to the north making the world safer for other people. Paul immediately picked up on their trail. The assailants were headed toward Lampasas, and they left an obvious trail. These boys must have been confident that they were so fierce and intimidating that no one would dare follow them. They were wrong.

Paul said the tracks were of eight men on horseback, and they had about a half a day head start on us. That meant that we would face Matthew, Mark, and six other men once we caught up with them the next day. We were confident that we could take them...dead or alive. At the time I honestly did not care which. They had murdered my best friend and possibly his wife and child. I was not in a praying mood to ask God for anything. Anger and revenge had taken over my whole being.

We did not camp overnight. We stopped once to rest, but we relentlessly kept to the trail. The full moon gave us the light we needed. We caught up with them the next morning. They were still encamped when we rode up on them. It was a brutal encounter. We rode into their camp on horseback and had an immediate advantage of surprise and being mounted. I shouted, "Get to your feet with your hands up!" Of course they went for their guns. I do not believe any of us were trying extremely hard to take prisoners. We returned their fire as soon as they let loose on us. In a matter of a minute, they were all dead. Not one of us took a wound of any kind. We gathered up their horses and gear and any identifying information to take back to the sheriff, but we left their bodies to the scavengers. I suppose that a Christian burial was not on our minds. These men had given their souls over to the devil, and they were already paying the

price of eternal suffering and damnation in hell. I would pray over them sometime...but not today.

We headed west back to Coleman, and we pitched camp a few miles away from the skirmish site so we could rest up. Paul and Talako excused themselves and returned to the skirmish site, and I followed later with the idea of digging shallow graves for the men. As I approached, I heard singing and drumming. I witnessed what Paul later described as the "Comanche Scalp Dance." Paul and Talako were dancing and chanting as they waved several scalps suspended on long poles in the air. Later, they told me that this was a traditional dance celebrating victory over one's enemies. I was not supposed to see that dance, and they asked me to keep it secret. I said that I would, and we proceeded to dig a shallow mass grave in which to dump the bodies. Paul buried the scalps with the bodies. After the scalp dance, he had no need for them or desire to keep them.

Once we returned to Coleman, we discovered that Elizabeth had died from internal injuries. Rachel was in stable condition, but she was heavily sedated going in and out of consciousness. Each time she came to consciousness, she would cry out for the loss of Jeremiah and Elizabeth. She mournfully expressed a desire to join them in the afterlife. She often lamented, "I am bone-tired of having the wrong color of skin to live in this society." I cannot say that I knew exactly what she was going through, but I do know that the Holy Spirit will provide comfort and peace for us in times like this. Jesus tells us, *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world"* (**John 16:33**). When a person is deep in mourning, it is hard to take these words to heart. But the Holy Spirit is determined to take care of us by wrapping us up, comforting us, and stilling our minds until time goes by and lessens our grief and pain.

It seemed that the entire county of Coleman attended the double funeral for Jeremiah and Elizabeth. They were buried side-by-side in the cemetery outside of town. We selected a spot on a hill that overlooked the town. The graves received shade from a huge live oak tree - Jeremiah's favorite kind of tree. I know the resting spot was not important for Jeremiah and Elizabeth because they are in the garden right now at Jesus'



feet. However, it is a good resting spot for us to sit and contemplate the wonderful life they led and the love that they shared.

I spoke at the funeral as best I could. My throat kept tightening up on me... something that almost never happens. I chokingly said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for being here to lay Jeremiah and Elizabeth to rest. They are in paradise right now with our loving God. They are at peace, and they are experiencing joy like never before. Jeremiah was a good man, a child of God. He gave us a good example of how to live – kind, gentle, patient, forgiving, and loving. He walked the high, narrow road which very few travel. As Jesus told us, *'Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it'* (Matthew 7:13-14). Elizabeth was a beautiful young woman who gave us much joy. She was artistic, musical, and creative. She gave much to the world and had so much more to give. We grieve their absence from us, but we rejoice in their entry into eternity to be with God. What we need to do now is keep moving forward in this world knowing that if we walk that narrow road as they did, we will be reunited with them soon in eternal joy and perfection. May God grant us the strength and courage we need to live in this world and continue to follow His commands that we love and serve others in His name. Amen."

Rachel was able to recover from her physical wounds. The emotional wounds would linger much longer. She demonstrated no joy or satisfaction over the death of the men who killed her husband and daughter. She only lamented the evil that occurs in this world when Satan gains control of people's souls. She found solace in getting back to her school teaching and surrounding herself with children who love her and worship the ground she walks upon. It took a while, but one day as I passed the school, she was visiting with a student on the playground, and I saw something I had not seen in a while...a smile on Rachel's face. I ran to her, hugged her, and cried with joy just a little. She must have thought I had lost my mind.

As I reflect on what has happened, I know that my heart and mind is not right with God. I need to forgive and love my enemies, but I am not there yet. That frightens me because a spiritual leader must be able to live Jesus' commands to teach them to

others. I cannot genuinely teach the concept of loving your enemies unless I can achieve it for myself. I pray continuously to the Holy Spirit to lead me on the path of emotional and spiritual healing.

In August, The Episcopal Methodist Northwest Texas Conference sent me instructions to examine an area west of Coleman for a possible preaching circuit. The area to check included the towns of Paint Rock, San Angelo, Sweetwater, and Big Spring. This was the new edge of the Wild Texas Frontier, and it needed to be settled and populated with churches. I was told to go immediately, and I assured them that I would... knowing that it would be next Spring before I took that assignment on. I suppose I am not very anxious to follow these sudden orders from the conference as there is a lot of work for me to do right here and right now in Coleman County. When I go, I will be sure to ask Henry to go with me since San Angelo has a reputation for being a wide-open town with lots of immoral entertainment such as drinking establishments, gambling halls, and soiled doves. I am told that even soldiers in nearby Fort Concho hesitate to be caught in town after dark.

Another sad event occurred in Coleman this fall. Clarence Goodman, owner of the dry goods store and stepfather to Angela, died suddenly when his delivery wagon overturned while on a service run. His death left Angela's mother, Saphronia, a widow once again. "That's it," she said, "I will not marry again - too much trouble." She now had a full-time job as the owner of the dry goods store. She hired my mother, Mary, to manage the store. Clarence was mourned by the community. He was well-loved by all, and he demonstrated his love for the community through his generous donations to many community projects. He was a believer in God and a man who was always ready to share his faith in Jesus.

### **Fall 1887**

There has been so much death and evil in our town this year. We were all weary and worn. So, it sure was good to see the "P.T. Barnum's Grand Traveling Museum" come to town. Many of our children and some adults had never seen a circus. There is



nothing else like the circus: the wonder, the awe, the colors, the food, the animals, the music, the rides, the acrobatic stunts, and the interesting people. Willie Sue (6 years old), Henry Augustus (3 ½ years old), and DJ (1 year old) were mesmerized by the whole circus world! Willie Sue was excited to see elephants, bears, and lions, while Henry Augustus enjoyed the popcorn; and DJ just wanted to be in his mama's arms. He did take a special interest in the clowns. While the clowns terrified some of the children, DJ was laughing and reaching out to be held by the clowns. I have a feeling this boy will grow up to be fearless!

One thing I noticed about the circus atmosphere was that it was not all fun and happy. I witnessed some of what I thought was mistreatment of the animals – whipping, chaining, caging, and just general neglect all in the name of training wild animals. I also noticed that some of the people portrayed as oddities or freaks were ordinary people suffering from genetic disorders. Angela shared with me some of the disorders afflicting people such as giantism, dwarfism, obesity, albinism, microcephaly (pinhead), hypertrichosis (werewolf syndrome), and others. She explained to me how genetic deformities and genetic diseases happen. I know that God engineered the human body to be perfect, and because of Adam's sin, we are now subject to diseases and abnormalities that God never intended. Disease and abnormalities are not inflicted upon us from God. They are the results of our own sinful rebellion.

God does not want us to suffer. God mourns when we mourn. Jesus wept when his friend, Lazarus, died, *"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' he asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!'"* (John 11:32-36).

It appeared to me that some of these people were being exploited or mistreated for the sake of money. I spoke with the manager of the travelling circus, Daniel Williams, about my concerns. I detailed the mistreatment of people and animals I had witnessed and asked him to make some changes. He told me that I would have to take it up with

P.T. Barnum in New York if I wanted to institute changes in the way the circus operates. I realized that I was up against a powerful and quite unreachable authority. I looked at Mr. Williams and said, "I realize that you are following orders, but the ultimate judgment from God lies with you. God tells us that we will reap what we sow, '*Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap*' (**Galatians 6:8**). God also tells us that if we are unjust to others, we will be harshly judged. '*Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity*' (**Proverbs 22:8**). Mr. Williams, you can lay the blame on Mr. Barnum, but you will face judgment for how these people and animals in your circus are treated. You can reap the joy of heaven if you treat others with love, or you can reap eternal damnation and suffering for mistreating others. The decision is yours. I cannot make it for you."

As I mounted Rahab to leave, I looked back at Mr. Williams. He was looking at his feet in contemplation. He wiped his forehead and looked up at me with tears in his eyes. I gave him one last "I hope you make the right decision" look, and I spurred Rahab on. On the way back to town, I celebrated in my heart because I knew that I was able to open his heart just enough for the Holy Spirit to get into his soul and convict him of his sinful behavior toward others. This conversation just might have turned his life around.

In October, Matías approached me with news that his father, Miguel Diego Ruiz Castillo, was coming to Coleman for a visit. I asked if he was coming alone. Matías said, "No, he is bringing my mother, some other members of the family, and many of his men." I asked if his father wanted to meet Henry, and Matias said, "Yes, that is the main purpose of his visit. What that specific purpose is, I do not know." I thanked Matías for letting me know, and I went looking for Henry. Of course, I found him with Victoria. We talked about their future. Henry and Victoria were determined to get married. "Well, you will get your chance to ask her father for her hand," I said. "Let's just hope her father and his men do not cut your hand off."

The Texas Rangers have a reputation of ruthlessness toward law breakers. There are many stories circulating about how Texas Rangers dispatch Indians and Mexicans without a second thought. I knew this was not true of Henry's attitude. Henry



has great working relationships with men of all races. He has never demonstrated racial bigotry in my presence. I figured Henry would need time to prove his good character to Senor and Senora Castillo as being worthy of courting their daughter. It would take some forward-thinking and open-mindedness on Senor and Senora Castillo's part to accept Henry as a suitor for their daughter. So, I figure being an Anglo and a Texas Ranger both work against Henry. One powerful thing in favor of Henry was Victoria's deep love for him.

A few days later, Senor Castillo arrived at Matías' ranch with his family and many of his men. Matías found me and asked if I would accompany Henry as he met with his father. I wholeheartedly wanted to meet Matías' family, so I consented to attend. I found Henry and talked with him about the meeting. I told him, "I know that you respect me as a chaplain for you and your men. So, let me advise you to keep your cool even if those around you are losing theirs. We do not know what is on Senor Castillo's mind or what kind of mood he will exhibit. This first impression you give as you meet him will last a lifetime in his mind. You have always been good at being considerate and strong at the same time, so show him those qualities."

Angela wanted to attend as well, so we all headed to Matías' ranch. Senor Castillo was waiting for us on the porch. He stepped up to Henry, offered his hand said, "You must be Texas Ranger Henry Armstrong. I am glad to meet you." He then turned to me, offered his hand, and said, "You must be Jedediah 'Firewalker' Webb. I have wanted to meet you both since I heard the story of how you dealt with those evil vigilantes. I understand that you two and Matías have been taking turns saving each other's lives ever since." At the exact same time, Henry and I both let out a sigh of relief that Senor Castillo was glad to meet us.

We made introductions, and we sat down to get to know one another. Senor Castillo told us the history of his family and how they began their cattle ranch. We shared with the Castillo family our history as well. Senor Castillo was particularly interested in Henry's exploits as a Texas Ranger. I could tell that he was feeling Henry out as to what kind of man he is and what principles he stands for. Henry did an excellent job of presenting himself. All this time, Victoria sat to the side very quietly and

only spoke when someone asked her to speak. This was not the Victoria I had come to know. She has always been talkative and willing to boldly share her opinions on any topic.

Victoria and the cooking staff had prepared a feast for all of us. We sat around the table and got to know one another quite well. We met some more of Matías' brothers and sisters. Senor Castillo was quite a gentleman and traditional aristocrat, and Senora Rosalia Castillo was every bit a gentlewoman and sophisticated lady. Not one word was mentioned about the relationship between Henry and Victoria. As Angela and I left for the night, we bid everyone farewell and signaled "good luck" to Henry.

The next morning, I met Henry and Victoria on the way to the Post Office. They were smiling big and walking hand-in-hand. I said to them, "It looks like the meeting must have gone well after we left because you two are exhibiting a public display of affection!" Henry replied that he and Victoria had a heart-to-heart meeting with her parents about their future, and Senor and Senora Castillo were not opposed to their desire to court one another. They wanted some time to get to know Henry better. Henry was fine with that, but I could tell that Victoria was not happy about delaying their marriage. I suggested that we throw a party to celebrate their engagement.

Later that day, Henry had to put a pause on the planning of the celebration because he received a message from Texas Ranger Headquarters in Austin...

**The Chiricahua Apache tribe is on the attack.**

Matt Stephen

March 2025