

S H A D O W ^{of} D E A T H

LYRICAL NOVEL #7

In the Series
THEY MET JESUS



KATHERYN MADDOX HADDAD

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Cover design by www.RoseannaWhiteDesigns.com
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NORTHERN LIGHTS PUBLISHING HOUSE



ISBN-13: 978-1508579861

ISBN-10: 1508579865

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Printed in the United States

DEDICATED TO

Everyone Who Has Ever Doubted



INSERT YOURSELF INTO THE STORY

Although the events take place shortly before and during the first century AD, this story is written to help you in our modern world identify with the characters who lived then. While true to the life of Christ in every known aspect, conversations often take a modern flavor as though the characters were speaking today. After all, did they not speak what was “modern vocabulary” in their day, even in the Aramaic language?

You will see places in the story where you are invited to participate either as an encourager or discourager of a character, as though you were there with them. This is your chance to become their friend. You will easily spot those places in the story. Instead of wondering who is talking, remember, it is you.

A COMMENTARY IN NARRATIVE FORM



1—PILATE

Soaring to Nothingness

6:00 AM

Thursday, about April 14, AD 30

Procurator Governor Pilate's Fortress

Jerusalem, Province of Judea, Palestine

“*S*ir, they're back. They're demanding to see you.

They've got that Jesus with them.”

“I've got real enemies of the kingdom out there to contend with,” Pilate responds, “and they waste my time with this fellow. Well, let's get it over with. I know they won't dirty their hands to come into my home. Not that I want them.”

If I don't get these Jews under control, Caesar will yank me out of this position and replace me.

Pilate walks out onto a balustrade followed by two servants with his portable throne, and his usual bodyguards.

He has a long, down-turned nose and bow-like mouth, with high cheekbones and forehead. He has red hair and is wearing a robe of blue and tunic of gold. He walks straight, head held high.

Upon taking office, Pilate had immediately realized what a self-willed people the Jews are. Since Caesar had abolished the Jewish monarchy some twenty years earlier, there have been rebels everywhere declaring themselves king—King Herod the Great’s successor—and calling for a revolution. All have been violent. So far, Pilate and his predecessors have managed to stop them. All have been powerless against the Roman occupiers.

The religious officials and their prisoner move to that part of the outer fortress where Pilate has consented to meet them without dirtying their holy day that starts at dusk tonight.

Jesus is still closely guarded, still being transported within his human cage—three temple guards in front, three in back, and three on each side. He is still tightly bound: Hands chained behind his back and chains attached to his ankles, both bloody.

Pilate is curious with this new movement. The fellow leading it is strange. He tells people they can have dual citizenship. That is because no one can see his kingdom. It is spiritual, whatever that means. Well, with all the crazies out there killing to take over, Jesus seems harmless enough. here had been an enormous cavalcade in his honor just a few days earlier. Governor Pilate had thought it rather amusing. An invisible kingdom, indeed...

Jesus walks slower now.

Clank, scrape.

Clank, scrape.

Clank, scrape.

Jesus is in both exhaustion and pain. He has been up all night. He has been questioned, ridiculed, scorned. He has been shouted at, laughed at, terrorized. He has been slapped, spit on, beaten, poked and cut.

Clank, scrape.

Clank, scrape.

Clank, scrape

Once in front of the procurator governor, the Levitical temple guards step aside so Jesus, once more, stands alone. The procurator watches the routine procedure. He sees now that Jesus’ chin and cheeks are covered with cuts and blood. He

realizes what they have done to him.

He senses pain reflected in Jesus' demeanor, though it is subtle and not obvious to the untrained eye. He sees it only because he recognizes the expression of the brave, the valiant, the fearless who almost successfully hide even the most excruciating experience. Almost, but not completely. Herod's royal robe is still on him.

"Come closer," Pilate commands.

As Jesus slowly shuffles his way closer to the throne, he stares at the governor procurator. Both see men of power. Neither feels threatened.

The sun is almost up, but only almost. There is a blue-gray glow on the lower edges of the eastern sky. In a little while, the glow will turn red. Blood red. The way it does before a storm.

"Well, what's this all about?" Pilate asks with a yawn. He turns to his servant. "Bring me some grapes and cheese. And where's my wine?"

He turns back to the crowd. "You wake me in the middle of the night over this harmless, this, well, what's left of this harmless man you call...what do you call him?"

High Priest Caiaphas is the first to speak. "Jesus of Nazareth."

"Oh, that's right," Pilate says, toying with his nemesis. And what province is that in?

"Galilee, sir," Caiaphas says.

"Yes, yes. They do a lot of fishing up there as I recall," Pilate responds.

"Sir," Caiaphas says, "we have returned to you because..."

Pilate looks down from his throne at the representatives of the temple.

"I don't care why you returned to me," he interrupts. "I told you before that I found this man not guilty, and Tetrarch Herod has backed me up."

"But, sir..."

"So I am going to give him a stern warning to not incite any riots," Pilate interrupts again. "Then you are going to release Jesus, let him go back to his family and friends, and let me go

back to bed. What time is it, anyway?"

Panic.

Desperation.

Leaving now means never another chance. Jesus will take over the temple and disbar the entire Supreme Council or execute them all. It cannot happen. Stand your ground.

"Never! You don't know this man! He is devious and dangerous!" Caiaphas declares. "We will not leave without a conviction!"

"Oh, not that again," Pilate responds.

They both remember when Pilate had first arrived in the territory several years earlier. The military standoff had occurred because the local leaders had refused to leave the fortress that was now his. It had lasted five whole days. These foreign rulers ruin everything. Why should the Jewish leaders have to bow and scrape and grovel to them?

"Bring the accused up to me," he announces standing. "I want to talk to him alone."

"It won't do you any good, one of the priests, Shlomo, shouts after him. "He refuses to talk."

Governor Pilate disappears back into his fortress. Several Roman legionnaires take over custody of Jesus from the Levitical temple guards. One on each side of him, and two in back. They prod him with the point of their swords to follow Pilate.

Jesus shuffles over to the steps leading up to the balustrade. He twists to the right so he can swing his left foot up, then twists to the left so he can swing his right foot up. He repeats the laborious and painful procedure until he has scaled the four steps. Then across the balustrade and inside.

Jesus does not care that he is entering the house of a Gentile. He made Gentiles. He does not care that he is entering the presence of a foreign governor. He made the governor.

Clank. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape.

He is led into a small but ornate room where the governor procurator sometimes receives private guests.

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“Leave us,” he tells the legionnaires.

“But, sir!”

“You heard me,” Pilate repeats.

“Yes, sir!”

Now two men of power stand facing each other.

Though Jesus’ hair is matted with blood and sweat, though one eye is completely swelled shut and the other half shut, and though dried blood cakes on his face and neck, Governor Pilate sees a man of honor.

“Sit down a moment,” Pilate says, pointing to a bench large enough for them both.

They sit side by side.

Pilate now sees Jesus up close. Skinny, but powerful. Injured, but harmless. Manhandled, but valiant.

“You have taken a lot from them in order to stand up for your principles,” Pilate begins. “You must really believe in what you’re doing.”

Jesus looks down at the floor and says nothing. The governor had not expected him to reply.

“They say you claim to be their king,” Pilate continues as he surveys the damage done to Jesus by his own leaders. “Are you?”

To his surprise, Jesus speaks. His words are slurred but his voice is commanding. He answers with a question. “Did you arrive at this conclusion on your own?” Jesus asks, his lips swollen, “or did one of my followers tell you?”

Think, Pilate. Search your soul. Did you believe this a long time ago when you had only heard about him? Are you reflecting what you would like to believe? It’s an invisible kingdom. It advocates peaceful co-existence with yours. Think.

Pilate stands and paces a short distance away. Slowly. thinking. He turns.

Roll reversal. The powerless seated. The powerful standing before him.

“How am I supposed to know? I’m Italian. I don’t understand how these people think. They’re your own people who have turned you in. I just want to know what you’ve done to them

that they're so afraid of."

"Governor Pilate," Jesus says looking up at him, "my kingdom is not part of the physical world. If it were, my followers would fight to get me released."

"Ah, ha! I knew it! So you are a king then." Pilate is delighted. "I could use a good man like you. Your brains and my brawn. We'd make a good team."

He grows serious and sits back next to Jesus. His voice is softer now "You really are a king, aren't you?"

"You are right." Once more Jesus has forced the opposition to say out loud what Jesus is. They have heard it from their own lips now. They have confessed it even though they hadn't intended to.

Jesus slowly stands. Pilate waits for him. Jesus looks at Pilate. "I AM."

"In fact," he continues, "this is exactly why I was born. This is why I entered this world from my own in heaven."

Jesus pauses and remembers home. How he longs for home and rest. But not yet. Not yet. "I had to testify what truth is," he resumes. "Everyone who sides with truth listens to me."

"What IS truth?"

Governor Pilate, used to being lied to and manipulated by everyone wanting their way in the government, is riled. He stands, goes over to the door, jerks it open, and walks out.

Immediately the legionnaires on standby in the corridor move in to take charge of Jesus and return him to the balustrade.

"You know he's innocent, don't you?" Governor Pilate shouts at the crowd of priests as he walks out and back toward his throne. "You do too," he shouts, pointing at Priest Itamar. "And you" pointing at Priest Gad. "And you," pointing at High Priest Caiaphas.

He seats himself and waits while Jesus is shuffled into place at one side of him. Side by side. Pilate, the procurator governor, seated on his throne. Jesus, the Deliverer, soon to be seated on his throne.

Pilate leans forward. His voice is low. "Gentlemen, this is my offer. Take it or leave it. For my annual Passover pardon, you

may have pardoned and released either Jesus or the notorious assassin Barabbas.”

Shock.

“He is blackmailing us,” Priest Jokam mutters to Gedor next to him.

“What did you say?” Caiaphas calls up.

“You heard me” is all the answer Pilate gives him.

“Well, we need a few moments to talk it over,” Caiaphas replies.

“Take all the time you want.” The governor stands and leaves the balustrade again.

High Priest Caiaphas takes the four steps up to the balustrade two at a time and turns to the members of the Supreme Council, the hand-picked ones.

“I am sending a message immediately to the temple to bring those witnesses over here from our own trial! The rest of you, go out and stop people on the street. If not enough are up yet, go to the taverns and drag them out by the hair if you have to. Some of you go over to the market. They’re setting up their booths. Quickly. Explain that Jesus is trying to destroy them, and they’ve got to come help stop him. It’s now or never. Captain of the guard, you warn as many Roman legionnaires as you can to get battle ready.”

Within moments, people start filing in off the streets. Shouting people. Angry people. The people who had tried to make Jesus their king just days earlier.

“He’s a fraud!”

“He didn’t do anything for us!”

“He just used us!”

“He’s too weak to be a king.”

“He’s a nothing.”

“He took advantage of our good will.”

“He’s a fake.”

On his way back outside to finish up the trial, Pilate receives a message from his wife. It is written on a small scroll. It has her seal on it. She has not revealed to any of the servants what she has to say.

He breaks her seal, opens the scroll, reads it.

You're deciding the sentence of Jesus the noble teacher, aren't you? You must release him. Tragedy will come if you do not. You must listen to me. Do not execute Jesus. You must not.

Roman Pilate holds the only power in the world to execute Jesus. But that power—the procurator governor's—continues to fight it. He does not want to execute the only man in the world willing to stand up to the hypocrite religious leaders. *I don't even have the nerve to do that.*

But Jesus must die to finish his life's work. Jesus must die so mankind can live. Irony continues to twist and turn and toy with providence.

Governor Pilate mutters aloud, "I wish I could, my sweet. I wish I could. I will come to regret this day."

He walks back out onto the balustrade and to his throne. The crowd takes a moment to calm down. He waits. It is much larger than it had been a few moments earlier.

How did they pull that off? I don't like it.

The mob stares at Jesus. Once again he is alone in front of the governor and the crowd. Once again Jesus is alone, fighting for the survival of their souls. Once again he is alone, a spectacle before men, demons, and angels.

"Look at him!" Pilate calls out. "Can you all see him up here?"

The mob is disgusted at what they see. Jesus is revolting to look at. How could they have declared him king?

"God didn't send him."

"God wouldn't let this happen to an innocent man."

"He was just using us. All of us."

"We almost let it happen."

"Thank God he only fooled us a little while."

Jesus, with his own blood smeared over his hair, his face, and his clothes, is repulsive to look at. How they hate him.

"All right, gentlemen," Pilate says. "What is your decision?"

"The citizenry and the temple wish the release of Barabbas," Caiaphas calls up.

Pilate's head jerks back. He squints. "What did you say?"

The assassin?" Pilate replies. "Are you insane? You want Barabbas freed to kill more of you?"

"Barabbas!"

"Barabbas!"

"Barabbas!"

The mob grows out of control.

"Barabbas!"

"Barabbas!"

"Barabbas!"

The procurator governor stands and motions to the legionnaires to move in around Jesus and relocate him within reach of his judgment seat. He motions for his personal bodyguards to join them. They stand in a circle around Jesus, side by side, their backs to him, protecting him with their swords.

Governor Pilate raises his arms. He bellows, "But what about Jesus? What about Jesus?"

"Crucify!"

"Crucify!"

"Crucify!"

"Crucify!"

Fists shaking. Arms pumping. Feet stomping. Veins pulsating in necks. Faced red.

Pilate motions for his legion commander to approach. He leans forward and whispers something that obviously puzzles him. The commander in turn whispers to one of his legionnaires, who also looks mystified, then disappears back into the fortress.

The crowd, deliriously chanting, pays no attention.

"Crucify!"

"Crucify!"

"Crucify!"

Pilate takes two steps toward Jesus. He stands at attention. He motions for the legionnaires to step aside. He faces Jesus, head high, body straight, and at attention. He clicks his heels together. And salutes.

Jesus blinks a slow blink in acknowledgment.

A hush comes over the priests in the front, and it works its way back until the mob hurried in off the early-morning streets is

hushed in perplexity.

A large brass basin is held in front of the governor.

“What is he doing?” someone whispers.

“I don’t know any more than you do.”

Behind the legionnaire, Pilate’s butler approaches with a large pitcher. He pours its contents into the basin. It is water.

Governor Pilate dips his hands in the water, glaring at the mob as he does. He holds them out dripping for the crowd to see. He tries to hide his own self-loathing. He raises his hands above his head.

“I wash my hands of the whole sordid mess you’ve created!” he bellows.

“Huh?”

“Does this mean we won?”

“Is he really going to do it?”

“I rescind all responsibility before Caesar and all the gods,” Pilate continues, “for this innocent man’s...”

Go ahead and say it, Pilate. Say the word for us. We have been waiting for you to say it. Go ahead.

“...death!”

Cheers rise from the blood-hungry mob like a hungry dragon.

“I’m putting it back in your hands!” Pilate shouts above the roar. “If this day’s events are questioned by Rome, it will be your necks!”

“We gladly take the blame, if that’s what you want to call it,” High Priest Caiaphas shouts back. “Even our children will be glad to take the so-called blame! To us, it is an honor. This is a great day for the temple! Hallelujah!”

“Hallelujah!”

“Hallelujah!”

“Hallelujah!”

A small table is rolled out to the throne. On it are two documents, one delivered by Pilate’s scribe and one by the Supreme Council’s scribe. Pilate looks at them. He picks up the pen, stares into nothing, dips it in blackener, and signs one document.

He looks over at Jesus. They both know what the governor procurator has done. Jesus does not panic. Jesus stands with shoulders back, head up, and eyes that watch everything. Swollen eyes. Blackened eyes. But eyes that say more than a thousand words.

“Here is Barabbas’ pardon!” he shouts over the noise of the mob.

Foot stomping. Whistling. Arms in the air. “Yes!”

“Who wants to go personally to escort this ‘innocent bystander’ out of prison so he can kill more of your people?”

With that, Pilate throws his pen down, turns, glances once more in Jesus’ direction, and returns inside. He has left the order of execution unsigned. Everyone knows it is all but signed and sealed.

High Priest Caiaphas goes up to the balustrade and faces the crowd. “Gentlemen, we have won! The temple has won! Jesus has lost!”

The mob cheers and whistles in approval.

“Kill Jesus!”

“Kill Jesus!”

“Kill Jesus!”

Pilate’s own legionnaires flank Jesus with drawn swords and march away.

6:30 AM

Citidel Courtyard of Pilate’s Fortress

Jesus is pushed down the four steps of the balustrade. He cannot manipulate them and falls on his face. He is jerked up by the chains behind his back. Now on his knees, he manages to put one foot in place, and then the other.

He is escorted around the building to a back entrance.

Clank. Shuffle.

Clank. Shuffle.

Clank. Shuffle.

They enter the barracks, walk down a dark corridor and

into a large enclosed yard where a band of legionnaires has gathered.

“Hey, there he is!” Basilius announces.

“Who?” Ursus asks.

“God! He says he’s God!” Janus answers.

“Oh, one of those,” Nereus replies. “He’s as crazy as they come.”

Jesus’ eyes adjust slowly to the bright sunlight. Gradually he realizes there are chains all along the wall with handcuffs attached to them.

“We can have him until they finish his execution arrangements,” Centurion Sergius declares.

“A dead man, huh?” Elpidius asks.

“Better watch out! Can’t go around killing God!” Helladius warns.

Laughter.

Nevertheless, Jesus stands tall. He will stand tall as long as he can. He must.

Then he notices a post about waist high in the middle of the yard. He is prodded in the direction of the post. He knows what is about to happen. He prays.

Oh, God, not this too.

Then he remembers the prophecy seven centuries earlier that Jesus has been relying on through the night:

He was beaten on and wounded for our sins...”

Yes, that’s it, Jesus. That’s the one. What else did it say?

*He was clubbed that we might have peace;
he was whipped,
and by those stripes our sins were healed!*

Yes, whipped. Remember, it’s for their sins. Theirs.

They rip his seamless robe off and push Jesus over the post, his hands still chained behind him. They release his hands only to chain them to steel rings coming up out of the ground.

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On the other side of the wall out on the street, they hear the remainders of a mob and their sadistic chant.

“KILL JESUS. Kill Jesus. kill Jesus...”

“They say he confessed to the Supreme Council, but not the military,” Cato says. “Maybe we should elicit a confession from him.”

“This should do it.”

Jesus sighs a prayer to his Father. The cup of torment is tipped a little more.

Oh, Father, he groans. His heart races in anticipation of the horror that awaits him. He clenches his teeth.

“Ahhhgggg!”

The leather whip tipped with two splintery chunks of lead is lashed across his naked backside.

“Ahhhgggg!”

His mind tries in vain to refuse acknowledgment of the pain. The excruciating pain. The forever pain...

The whip attacks again.

“Ahhhgggg!”

And again.

“Ahhhgggg!”

Cuts deep into his back. Deep into his heart. Bleeding. Both bleeding.

More slashing.

“Ahhhgggg!”

Deeper and deeper into his tormented body.

“Ahhhgggg!”

Through skin, underlying tissues, veins, muscles. All bleeding. Gushing now with holy blood.

“Ahhhgggg!”

“Ahhhgggg!”

Can he possibly live through it? Most do not.

“Ahhhgggg!”

“Ahhhgggg!”

“Ahhhgggg!”

“That’s enough, legionnaire,” Centurion Sergius calls out. “We’ve got to have something left to crucify. Unchain him.”

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Jesus slumps to the cold stone pavement near the death of shock. He lies still.

“Check his eyes. He’d better be alive.”

Instead, another legionnaire, Magnus, kicks him. “Get up, you swine.”

“Wait. He said he’s their king.” It’s Helladius.

“Well, well, well. Our emperor. Our commander. This is our superior officer, men,” Zeno announces.

“Hey, superior officer,” Rollo chuckles, “want to get up now?”

Slowly, agonizingly Jesus moves one hand, then another. He makes it to his knees, then to his feet. The blood from his back follows a stream around his rib cage toward his chest, though much of it flows treacherously down to his lowered tunic and become lost there.

“Well, look at that,” Janus says gleefully.

Jesus looks down at the ground by the post. His blood is spattered on it.

He fights to maintain equilibrium. He fights to straighten up his back. He fights to stand up tall. No longer can he.

“Got more spunk than I figured.” It’s Basilius.

You’ve made it through another prophecy, Jesus. You’ve taken humanity’s lashing for the healing of humanity.

“Guess we’d better do something before he bleeds to death,” Sergius warns. “He’s got to live long enough to be executed.”

Sadistic laughter.

“Gentlemen! Gentlemen! Since our king is among us, he must present himself in dress uniform, ready to lead us to battle! Uh, Zeno, what do you do with that royal robe he came in? Bring it here.”

Jesus cannot fight off the dizziness. His head reels and sometimes he feels he is falling, although he is not. He puts his foot out to catch himself, and in the process jars the awful wounds on his back. And his nerves cry out in hideous torment.

Zeno throws down his club and the noise shoots through Jesus’ throbbing head. He had forgotten the unbearable pain in his head, for his back is now on fire.

“What are you doing Saturday night?” Icarus asks Basilius.
Jesus uses this time to gather his thoughts and keep them from scattering. Scattering like lost sheep.

*The Lord is my shepherd...
he lets me rest...
gives me new strength...*

The young legionnaire returns with the royal robe.

“Well, we’d better throw it on him before he bleeds to death, Centurion Sergius declares. “After all, he’s our king.”

Laughter. Hypocritical laughter.

A legionnaire scrapes the robe along Jesus’ raw back and his wounds cry out in agony. Fire blazes amidst the blood and Jesus gnashes his teeth in unbearable pain.

And they stand back in satisfaction.

“Look! Our royal commander!” It’s Icarus.

More laughter. The centurion leaves his men to their fun and returns to report in to Governor Pilate.

“Hey, how about a battle helmet? He’s out of uniform,” Gentius says. “Anyone got a spare helmet?”

Sadistic excitement mounts.

“How’s this?”

Another legionnaire, Nereus, walks forward with one that had been bent in a skirmish. He holds it above Jesus’ head with both hands, leers crazily, gives out a hyena laugh, then shoves the helmet down on Jesus’ already injured head.

The impact vibrates through Jesus’ head like an explosion, raging and tearing it into shreds.

“Here! Here’s a broken spear. That should make a perfect scepter.

My Father, my God...

“That’s not right. He needs a crown,” Ovid interjects “Who’s got a spare crown?”

Sadistic excitement mounts as they remove the now bloody helmet and throw it in a corner.

The young legionnaire darts outside, breaks off a branch

from a thorny bougainvillea bush and rushes back in, shaping it as he goes. "This ought to do the trick!"

He goes over to the stooped, robed figure and crushes the thorny crown onto a dirty, sweaty, matted head. The hundreds of delicate blood vessels about his brow are dug open and weep freely of scarlet tears.

"Perfect!" Then laughter.

"Hail! Hail!"

Three of the legionnaires stand to attention and salute.

"Oh yes, hail to the commander! Hail to the king!"

The mocking laughter echoes through the Master's head, around the stone-cold courtyard, and up into the shadowy sunrise.

Another legionnaire stands at attention and sings the song of triumph. Others march in formation in step with the mocking cadence.

The sound of their heavy sandals reverberates intolerably in Jesus' head. He closes his eyes, but nothing goes away.

Think of another psalm. Think. Try to remember. Yes! Here's one:

*I'm standing silently before God.
I'm waiting for his rescue...rescue...rescue...*

They march closer and closer until each legionnaire in succession is able to turn and spit in Jesus' face. The spittle adds salt to the wounds. He flinches but makes no noise. He closes his eyes and prays.

Oh, my God, my Father. Give me strength.

God leans low. Jesus tries to imagine his Father embracing him.

"Hey, his crown is on crooked. Can't have that," Ursus announces. "Not with our king and commander."

The legionnaire walks up to Jesus, jerks the thorny crown off, forcing his head to one side, then thrusts the thorny crown

back down.

“Oh, sorry, king,” Gentius says with a smirk. “Didn’t mean to hit your ear.”

Jesus winces in pain.

“Give me that,” Magus interrupts “You don’t know how to put on a crown. Let me do it!”

The other legionnaire grabs the crown back off Jesus’ head, and thrusts it forward, hitting Jesus in his swollen eye.

“Uh, oh. I did the same thing,” Magus says. “Can you believe it?”

“Hey, someone said he was a prophet too.” It is Ursus.

“Yeah,” Velius says. “I heard he even performs miracles! Let’s see a performance!”

Jesus’ head is jerked back and he is blindfolded. One of the legionnaires, Decimus, slaps him with the back of his hand. “Okay, prophet. Tell us. Who slapped you? If you can, that is.”

“No answer? Well, maybe this will help you,” a second legionnaire, Ferox, declares. Ferox kicks Jesus, his legs weaken, and he falls to his knees. “Well, how about it, prophet? Who kicked you?”

“Hey, he’s on his knees,” says Tycho. “Maybe he’s praying.”
More abominable laughter.

He is, indeed, praying. *Oh, this cup...* His Father is his only strength as he drinks his cup of death. He must hang on to his Father as long as he is conscious.

“ ‘tention!”

The legionnaires in the yard snap to.

“The prisoner is wanted back in the fortress.” It is Centurion Sergius.

Four legionnaires immediately step forward at attention and salute. They walk over to Jesus, once more chain his hands behind his back, and remove his blindfold.

With two legionnaires in front and two behind, they begin a slow walk out the yard and into the fortress. Slowly. Slowly...

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Jesus is now stooped. He can no longer straighten what is left of his back. Excruciating pain has taken over. He feels as though he is walking through an inferno.

Every footstep jolts his exploding nerves like the quaking of a volcano.

Think of another psalm, Jesus! Try. You must try!

*They say God will never help me...
you're my only hope...
my head...
bowed in shame.*

Jesus slides his feet a few inches at a time. The pain enshrouding his entire body has taken captive all of his senses. Survival cries out and echoes through the halls of hell.

*If I die, I can't...
glory...
worn out with pain...*

Jesus' breath is short and shallow. He fights to remain conscious. He must remain conscious. To win, he must.

Slowly...
Painfully...
Agonizingly...

*Save me...
pounce...maul...heave...
no one to rescue...*

One of the legionnaires stops. "This is getting us nowhere. We'll have to drag him."

He and one other take hold of Jesus' arms and advance forward. He is grateful for the help, as degraded as it makes him look.

They go out of the courtyard, into a corridor, and start up a stairway. They have been told Governor Pilate is now in an

upper room above his balustrade. Jesus cannot manipulate the steps. One of the legionnaires grabs hold of Jesus in the middle, hefts him onto his shoulder, and carries him like a sack of barley.

7:00 AM

Procurator Governor Pilate's Fortress

They arrive at the door and it is opened for them. The legionnaire slides what is left of Jesus' body down to the floor. He lands on his feet. They give him time to steady himself. He must be able to walk on his own.

Governor Pilate stands in the doorway watching, his wife at his side. Claudia gasps in disbelief when she sees what is left of Jesus, and cries. "What have they done to you?"

"Over here, men" Pilate indicates. Put him in that chair. No, not that one. The silk covered one."

Jesus is taken across the room to a chair next to some windows.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape

Governor Pilate watches, amazed at Jesus' stamina. *There is something about this man. If indeed he is just a man. Something...*

The governor steps outside onto a balcony. The mob gathered in the courtyard below and those in the street outside the fortress gate assaults the air once again with their demands.

Kill Jesus!

Kill Jesus!

Kill Jesus!

Members of the Supreme Council rush up to regain their place at the head of the mob. They stand on the balustrade staring up at the balcony and their Roman governor.

Governor Pilate motions for silence. The mob complies in sadistic anticipation.

Did he die?

•
•

What's happening?

Have you killed him yet?

Governor Pilate raises his arms to motion for silence. "Attention, everyone." He waits for compliance and refuses to say anything more until the mob has controlled itself.

"He is still in my custody. I have found no evidence indicating any kind of treason!"

Not again. Governor Pilate, you cannot win. Just like Jesus. You can't win.

With that, Pilate motions behind him. Jesus shuffles out onto the balcony.

At first sight of the blood and mockery, the mob roars in delight. The same voices that had welcomed him to the city just days earlier. The same voices that had declared him their king.

The same voices. The same vigor. But not the same ardor. Love has turned to hatred. They had wanted to use Jesus to demand their way. He had never made his move. He had played them all for fools.

Their victim is now almost unrecognizable. But they would know him anywhere.

Jesus is still wearing the tattered kingly robe and the crown of thorns.

"Behold! Your man," Pilate declares, "or what's left of him."

Again the mob roars, this time with boos and hisses.

See the people, Jesus? Strain. Try to see them. You will have to become them in a few hours. You will have to become everyone who ever fought against good and right since the world began. Hear them, Jesus? You will be trading places with them soon. You will be dying in their place. Very soon.

The priests, call up to the balcony. "You must execute him! You must execute him!"

Pilate, repulsed, cries out in anger, "You do it! You execute him! I tell you he is not guilty and I won't do it!"

He turns to leave in disgust.

"Not according to temple law is he innocent! He's guilty of the greatest possible sin. He must die! Die for claiming he is God!"

Pilate stops abruptly, turns, and glares down at His

Rightness Caiaphas. He then looks over at Jesus and his pulse quickens. “A god?”

“Bring him back in here!” Pilate shouts at the legionnaires supporting Jesus. Jesus is led to a silk-cushioned chair.

Pilate and Jesus are together again, seated across from each other. Frantic, Pilate inquires, “You’re a god? Where did you come here from?”

Silence.

Pilate looks over at his wife who has just joined them, then back at Jesus.

“Give me some help here. Are you a god or not? Which one? Man or god?”

A messenger comes to the door. Pilate picks up a candle stand and throws it at the messenger. The messenger retreats. He turns his attention back to Jesus.

“Answer me, Jesus!”

Silence.

“You fool! You harmless fool,” he says deep in his throat.

He sits across from Jesus.

“Don’t you realize I’m the only one with the power to free you?” he growls.

“I know.”

Jesus has chosen once more to speak. But only to the foreigner.

“I know you’re trying.” Jesus coughs. “I know the endless nights you will wonder why you gave in to them.” Jesus’ chest is getting tight. Harder to breathe.

“But you were given this power by God.” His voice is hoarse with injury, pain, and exhaustion.

“The guilty one is that high priest who brought the charges against me.”

Pilate shakes his head. “I can’t let you go through this. There’s something about you. I’ve got to stop them. You’re part god, aren’t you? Or all god. Stay here a few moments. You need the rest.”

The procurator governor returns to the balcony, but this time without Jesus.

“Attention, everyone! I have come to a decision. This man will not be executed!”

The mob loses control. The riot begins. Some run out into the street and dare people to drive their animals into the bystanders. Others jump up on carts and wagons passing by, shaking them, trying to tip them. Others throw merchandise off peddler’s backs. Then the stones. The mob picks up stones. It’s Jesus’ fault.

The priests shout up at the procurator. “If he goes free, you are a traitor to Caesar!”

“What?” Pilate mutters.

“This man claims to be king,” Caiaphas repeats “Caesar abolished the royalty! You are Caesar’s enemy!”

They are hitting below the belt. They know it. The governor knows it. Jesus, listening inside, knows it. If they report Pilate to Caesar, he will not only lose his position, but possibly even be banished. Or worse.

The governor goes back inside but says nothing. He looks at Jesus. He looks in a mirror. He looks out at the mob now out of control. Indeed, Jesus has managed to incite the riot they had accused him of, and he has done it with his hands chained behind his back.

“Power!” Governor Pilate thinks. *“What power this Jesus has!”*

He has grown to like Jesus. Admire him. They could have been friends.

Jesus stands and shuffles over to the governor, each step shoving a myriad of fiery needles into his bloody ankles. He looks up the best he can despite the pain shooting through his back. “It’s okay,” he whispers.

Together, Pilate and Claudia leave the room and walk toward the stairs. Pilate stops and turns back to Jesus.

“We’re all spineless, Jesus, but you,” Pilate says. “And they’ve practically beaten the spine off of you. They’ll never do it. You’ll win, even beyond the grave, won’t you?”

Pilate descends the stairs and waits for the legionnaires to drag Jesus down after him.

“You men over there!” Pilate says to the first legionnaires he sees. Protect him with your lives. Is that understood?”

Twelve legionnaires on standby respond and surround Jesus and Pilate. Then, together the governor and the king walk slowly out onto the balustrade.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

Clank. Scrape. Scrape.

“Tell your priests I want to see them,” Pilate shouts into the mob.

As they wait, the two men look at each other in silence. Pilate, the only one Jesus has trusted to talk to during the whole trial. Jesus, the only one Pilate has ever thought he could trust with absolute truth.

“I’m sorry, friend,” Pilate says softly. “I’m about to become your betrayer.”

Just then the priests arrive. Pilate sits on his throne. His blood boils, his teeth clench, and he fights to control his anger at the impossible Jews. He is handed a familiar parchment, the execution order. He looks over at the priests.

“Here is your king!” he shouts. “Jesus is a much better man than all of you put together.”

“Get him out of our sight!” The high priest shouts. “Execute him!”

Unable to let go of what he knows is the truth, Pilate stands, raises his arms, and shouts back, “Shall I execute your king?”

Shock.

“We have no king but Caesar,” the High Priest of God says.

“Hail Caesar!”

“Hail Caesar!”

“Hail Caesar!”

The priests have sworn their allegiance at last. Not to God after all. It is to the one who gives them power and prestige. They have sold their souls for Jesus’ flesh.

Knowing he could change his mind, Pilate grabs up a pen and signs the execution order. He throws the pen onto the

pavement. He throws the bottle of blackener at the high priest. He turns to Jesus.

“I’m sorry, Jesus,” he whispers with his eyes. “I’m truly sorry.”



Governor Pilate will try to reconcile himself; for he, along with his wife, will become convinced that somehow Jesus was a god. He will personally request that Caesar and the Roman senate declare Jesus a god along with the others. He will fail.

It only makes the Jewish leaders more incensed against him. They bide their time. They will crucify Pilate too somehow. In their own way.

Eventually, the opportunity will come. He will execute one too many Jews for treason against Rome. They will report it to Caesar, and they will be believed. There will be more of them. Only one of Pilate. Just like there was only one of Jesus.

Not long after, Caesar will come to Jerusalem himself and burn the rebellious city down to the ground, and the temple with it.

Many legends will follow him. Yes, enshrouded in myth, but possibly, very possibly, founded on some truth. Every legend, even those from his own century, will infer that he eventually accepted Jesus, not just as a god, but as the God.

He will always be haunted by what he did to Jesus. And eventually he will no longer be able to face his deed. With self-loathing for what happened in that unholy, rebellious city far away and so long ago, he will put an untimely and abrupt end to his worthless life.

A Peter? A Judas?



LIFE APPLICATION

1. It is popular today to say there is more than one truth, and that it is egotistical of any person or movement or religion to declare otherwise. If there is only one cure for a disease, is it egotistical to use the one cure? Jesus said “I am THE way, THE truth, THE life (John 14:6). People who say they can accept Jesus' truth along with Buddha's truth and Mohammed's truth are really denying Jesus. The basic writings of each religion are available. Investigate each one for scientific, archaeological, and prophetic truths to see if any of these religions can be proven one way or the other.
2. Power often corrupts, even in religion where people usually start out very sincere. If you were a religious leader, how would you keep from using your power for your own ego? Are you sure?
3. What is the difference in being just and justifying a deed that is not just? Think about a time you justified yourself so you could do something that you knew deep down was wrong. If faced with such a situation again, how will you handle it truthfully?

CITATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER (In Order of Appearance)

NEW TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE: John 19:31; Acts 10:28; John 18:28; Luke 23:13-15; John 18:33-36; John 18:37-38; Matthew 27:15-23; Matthew 27:2-27; Matthew 27:28-29; Matthew 27:30; John 19:4-16

OLD TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE: Exodus 3:14-15; Isaiah 52:15; Psalm 2:6; Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 129:3; Psalm 23:1-3; Psalm 62:1; Psalm 3:2-3; Psalm 6:5-6; Psalm 7:1-5

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS: Wars of the Jews, Bk. 6, 4:2-5; Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 17, 10:4-10; Wars of the Jews, Bk. 2, 9:2;

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EUSEBIUS PAMPHILUS, The Ecclesiastical History, Ch. 2, The Ecclesiastical History, Ch. 7

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