

Six

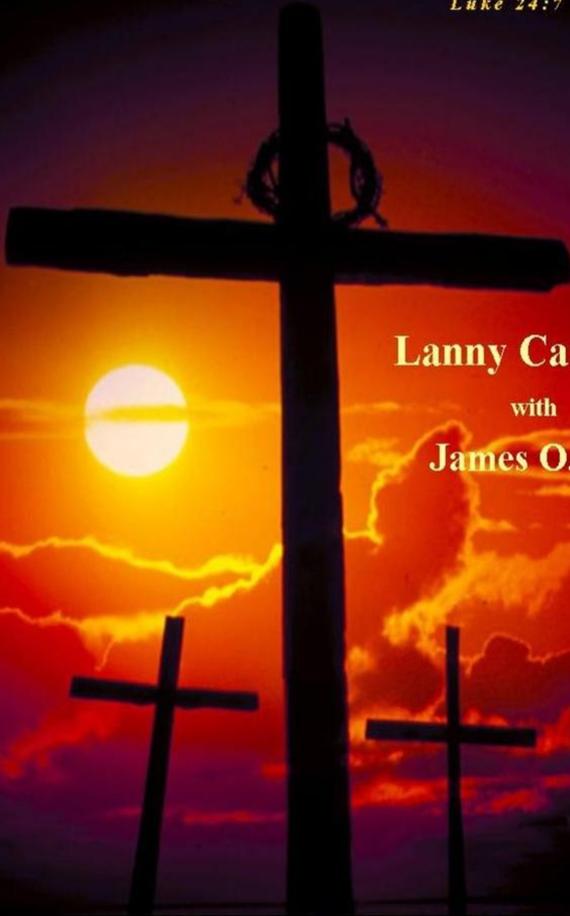
Hours

Of

ETERNITY

“The Son of Man must be handed  
over to sinners and be crucified.”

*Luke 24:7*



Lanny Carpenter

with

James O. Jones, Jr.

*Six Hours of  
Eternity*

Written By

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With Story Concept By

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# **Light of Life Ministry**

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## Foreword

What you are about to read is classified as Christian historical fiction as there will be thoughts and conversations of some of the characters that are fictional, meaning that we have no way of knowing they actually occurred. The story, however, is true and taken directly from the Bible, with some one hundred twenty scripture references cited by number in the text of the story and matched with the End Note references in the very back of this book. We invite you to read this book with a Bible by your side in order to verify these references.

The story develops around the characters and events surrounding the cross of Jesus on the day of His crucifixion. The Bible tells us that Jesus was placed on the cross at 9:00 am on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the Jewish religious calendar, Aviv, and that he died on that same day at 3:00 pm. Thus is derived the name of this story, *Six Hours of Eternity*.

Those familiar with the story will notice that we have Jesus' crucifixion occurring on a Thursday rather than on the traditional Friday. Scriptural proof for this is presented in the *Addendum Three* section in the back of this book. You might also be interested in reading how this book came about, and how we believe God has directed its development. That short story can be found in the *Addendum Two* section, also in the back.

But as interesting as all of this may be to some, the real purpose of this book is to show why Jesus had to die on that Roman cross in the city of Jerusalem almost two thousand years ago. Even more, it is our purpose to reveal what His death means to each and every person who will hear and believe the good news it provides. For this reason we strongly suggest that after reading this story you go to *Addendum One* which immediately follows the Epilogue. Here you will find how to receive the benefit of what Jesus did during those *six hours of eternity!*

We believe you will find this story enjoyable, educational, and inspirational. It will likely answer many questions, solve a few mysteries, and reveal the eternal purpose of God for the event called the 'atonement' of Christ. It is our prayer that you will be touched by this story, and perhaps personally discover what those six hours of eternity provided for you.

Jim Jones, Editor

## Notes to Help Your Understanding

In this story God is called by His Hebrew name,  
*Yahweh.*

The Jews used two kinds of lunar calendars:  
The *Civil Calendar* was the official calendar  
of kings, childbirth, and contracts.  
The *Sacred Calendar* was the religious calendar  
from which festivals were computed.

In this story the month Aviv is the first month  
of the Sacred Calendar.

It corresponds with the modern  
calendar months of March –April.

Passover always occurs on the  
14th day of Aviv at the full moon.

Today the Jewish month of  
Aviv is more widely known as Nisan.

Passover is the first feast of the Jewish religious calendar.

This feast was instituted by God through Moses  
while Israel was in Egyptian bondage.

It was to commemorate the tenth plague,  
the death of the firstborn throughout all Egypt  
of those who had not placed the blood of the  
Passover lamb on the doorposts and lintel of their homes.

This Feast of Passover was celebrated each year  
on the 14th day of Aviv (Nisan).

At the time of Jesus,  
large numbers of Jews came to Jerusalem annually  
to celebrate this most special Feast of the Lord.  
It is still celebrated today by Jews around the world,  
and by many Christians as well.

## Introduction to Characters

Following is a brief description of the characters in this story.

**Abraham** – Father of the Jewish people, through whose line Jesus was born.

**Adam** – The first man created by God

**Andrew** – One of Jesus’ twelve disciples; brother of Simon Peter

**Annas** – Father-in-law of Caiaphas and the former High Priest

**Barabbas** – A Jewish criminal who was set free instead of Jesus

**Bartholomew** – One of Jesus’ twelve disciples

**Caiaphas** – Jewish High priest during the time of Jesus; son-in-law of Annas

**Claudia** – Wife of Pontius Pilate

**Christ** – Transliteration of the Greek word for Messiah; means “*Anointed One*”; applied to Jesus as the One prophesied in the Old Testament to come from God

**Daniel** – Old Testament character through whom prophecies concerning the Messiah were given

**David** – Greatest king in Israel’s history; received the promise that the Messiah would be born through his descendants

**Elizabeth** – Mother of John the Baptizer; relative of Mary, mother of Jesus

**Gabriel** – Messenger angel of God; visited both Mary and Joseph to inform them of the birth of Jesus

**Isaac** – Son of Abraham

**Isaiah** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah

**James, Son of Alphaeus** – One of Jesus’ twelve disciples

**Jeremiah** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah

**Jesus** – The Second Person of the Triune God, God the Son, who became as man to pay the penalty of death for man’s sin by; also called Messiah or Christ

**Joel** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah

**John** – One of Jesus’ twelve disciples, son of Zebedee and Salome, brother of James

**John the Baptizer** – Son of Elizabeth; cousin of Jesus; the one prophesied in the Old Testament to prepare the way of the Messiah

**Joseph** – Husband of Mary the mother of Jesus; the earthly, but not the biological, father of Jesus

**Joseph of Arimathea** – Member of the Sanhedrin; secret believer in Jesus; buried Jesus in His own tomb

**Judas Iscariot** – One of Jesus’ twelve disciples; betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin for thirty pieces of silver

**Lazarus** – Close personal friend of Jesus; Brother of Mary and Martha; was raised from the dead after four days by Jesus

**Lucifer** – Original name of the Devil, or Satan; once an angel of God, but rebelled and was banished from heaven

**Malachi** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah

**Martha** – Sister of Lazarus and Mary from Bethany

**Mary** – The mother of Jesus

**Mary** – Sister of Lazarus and Martha from Bethany

**Mary Magdalene** – had demons cast out by Jesus; visited the tomb of Jesus with Salome and Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses

**Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses** – Visited the tomb of Jesus with Salome and Mary Magdalene

**Matthew** – One of Jesus' twelve disciples

**Messiah** – transliteration of a Hebrew word, meaning "*Anointed One*"; name applied to Jesus as the one prophesied in the Old Testament to come from God; equivalent to the Greek "*Christ*"

**Micah** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah

**Michael** – Archangel of God; warrior angel

**Moses** – In Old Testament, the one chosen by God to lead Israel out of Egypt; the one through whom God gave His law to the Israelites

**Nathaniel** – One of Jesus' twelve disciples

**Nicodemus** – Member of the Sanhedrin; secret believer in Jesus; helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus

**Philip** – One of Jesus' twelve disciples

**Pilate, Pontius Pilate** – Roman procurator in Jerusalem

**Salome** – Wife of Zebedee; mother of James and John; visited the tomb of Jesus with Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses

**Sanhedrin** – Religious ruling body of the Jews, consisting of 70-72 men

**Simon** (Simon Peter, Peter) – One of Jesus' twelve disciples, brother of Andrew

**Simon the Zealot** – One of Jesus' twelve disciples

**Thaddeus** – One of Jesus' twelve disciples

**Yahweh** – Transliteration of the Hebrew word for God

**Zebedee** – Husband of Salome; father of James and John

**Zechariah** – Old Testament prophet who prophesied of the coming Messiah



# *SIX HOURS OF ETERNITY*

## *Introduction*

*THURSDAY MORNING, 14 AVIV, JERUSALEM*

The ambitious early morning activity in the sun-warmed market was only a small indication of the events of this day. Myriads of weary travelers have invaded Jerusalem, Jews from every province of the Roman-controlled world. Soon these pilgrims will flood the City of God on this fourteenth day of Aviv for the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for today is the Passover preparation day. The mood is festive, yet everyone is keenly aware of this day's importance. The Passover has been religiously celebrated by generations of the Hebrew people, passed down through the writings of Moses and the rabbinical teachings, but especially through the oral traditions of Jewish families.

Though this is to be a time of great celebration, frustration reigns as the painstaking preparations turn into monotonous chores. As always, prices are inflated, space is limited, and the hordes of people gathered here have produced chaos. Only a few truly grasp what this day will bring, and even they are blind to the eternal significance! It is assured that this Passover will be like none before, for this one was planned in detail by Yahweh, the Almighty God, since before the beginning of time.

The time is now 9:00 a.m., and above the din of the crowd is heard the dull thud of hammer on nail. It has begun....



# CHAPTER 1

THURSDAY, 9 AM, 14 AVIV

The brightness of the early morning sun is momentarily blotted out by the upraised hammer, and Jesus can see the strain on the face of the burly Roman soldier. He steels himself for what he knows is coming, yet his body convulses with searing pain as the hammer finds its mark. The large spike tears through the flesh of his wrist, splintering the wooden beam beneath. Anguish comes in waves, and Jesus is again reminded of the reason he is in this situation: *I must suffer, Jesus thinks, so they will not.*

Jesus is keenly aware of the sounds around him: the ringing of the hammer, completing its task; the piercing cries of the two criminals, cursing their captors; the gruff shouts of the Roman centurion, barking his orders. But the one sound that penetrates the cacophony into Jesus' ears is the cheering and jeering of the crowd gathered for this spectacle. The only words Jesus can whisper are, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>1</sup> And just when it seems the pain is bearable again, the big Roman soldier steps over Jesus, stoops down, and readies himself to perform his task once again.

Watching in bewilderment from the edge of the crowd are the followers of Jesus. Fear grips them with icy fingers, preventing them from moving forward.

"Simon, you must be still, or we will be discovered!"

"I cannot help it, Andrew; I must see what is happening."

"You are going to have an ant's view if you are recognized. They will have you up there with Jesus."

“Andrew, if you do not quiet down, you will also alert them that we are here. Besides, I thought I saw John.

Matthew, wide-eyed and taking in everything, speaks so softly his companions barely understand him. “John *is* there, and he is with Mary.”

The quintet of Andrew, Simon Peter, Matthew, Nathaniel, and Bartholomew are mesmerized by the dramatic scene playing out as if in slow motion before their eyes. Their hearts rend with each swing of the hammer. But as they cower, fearing reprisals if discovered, their fellow disciple, John, is just cubits away from the cross on which Jesus hangs. They stare with cautious jealousy at their friend. Nathaniel finds his voice first.

“Does John not fear being caught?”

“He does not seem to care,” says Peter. “He is much braver than I am. How could I be such a coward?” Peter sobs.

Andrew quickly steps to his brother’s side. “You were not the only one, Simon, we all ran and hid.”

“But I was the one who denied him, and three times at that!<sup>2</sup> I should have been stronger.”

“Then you would be up there with him.”

A movement to their left freezes them. They let out a collective sigh of relief as they recognize their friend, Lazarus. But Lazarus is unaware of their stares as he intently gazes at the surreal scene. He seems not to notice as the little band of men gravitates toward him. His eyes are transfixed on the suffering man on the middle cross. The thoughts in his head swirl in confusion. *This is what he meant! Why must they treat him so cruelly? His poor mother; her heart must be breaking! I hope Mary and Martha are not here!*

As Lazarus continues to watch, he finds his mind drifting back, back to a much more joyous occasion just days ago, and the events of the following days as witnessed by him or related to him by the disciples.

*FRIDAY, 3 PM, 8 AVIV (six days before)*

“Martha! Lazarus! They say he is on his way! Come quickly! Let’s not wait. Let’s go meet him!” Mary’s shrill voice cut through the early afternoon haze, and Lazarus could not keep the smile in his heart from reaching his face. Mary’s enthusiasm was contagious, not to mention loud! A glance at Martha’s exasperated expression signaled Lazarus that he must head off the coming storm.

“Now Martha, you yourself were saying a week ago that you wished Jesus would visit again. And I saw the joy in your eyes when you heard he was coming this day before the Sabbath.<sup>3</sup> Do not be hard on Mary.”

“Mary should be in here helping me prepare for our company.” Martha’s stilted reply bothered Lazarus.

“Have we not been through this scene before, Martha? Do you not remember?” he chided.<sup>4</sup>

The pain suddenly emitted from Martha’s eyes caused Lazarus regret for the sharp rebuke. “I remember,” she said. “Would you forgive me, brother?”

“There is nothing to forgive. I am sorry, too, and must ask your forgiveness.”

Martha admired her brother, and at this moment was reminded that she could not imagine life without him. “You know I cannot hold a grudge against you. All is well, Lazarus.”

“Then let us join Mary, and go out to meet our guests as they are arriving.”

Arm in arm they strolled out the door. Squinting, Lazarus searched for their exuberant sister, but, alas, she was far ahead of them. Just as they reached the middle of town, they spotted a group of people moving en masse in their direction. Leading the parade was Mary, arms flailing and mouth moving in excited chatter. And there was Jesus, eyes bright and alive as he listened attentively to Mary. *How regal he looks!* thought Lazarus. *He looks like a king holding court for his closest friends.* Just then Jesus looked up, and his eyes locked with Lazarus’ eyes. With Mary finished telling her latest story, Jesus headed toward Lazarus.

“Lazarus!” Jesus beamed. “How good to see you, my friend! You look absolutely wonderful!” The close relationship these two men share is evident for all to see.

“Thanks to you, Jesus, I feel more ‘alive’ than ever,” Lazarus replied.

Jesus laughed heartily, and slapped his friend on the back. Then he turned to Martha. “Martha,” Jesus whispered, “you are a sight for my weary eyes. But your worry lines indicate you are too concerned about Mary. You know how she loves to be around me. Do not fret, Martha; you work much too hard, and you must take some time for yourself.”

Martha hung her head, her words barely audible. “You are right, my Lord. Please forgive me. My brother has already scolded me.”

Jesus cupped her chin and raised her head, forgiveness showing in his eyes. “Then rejoice, Martha, for I am here with you now. There will be time later for sadness.”

Lazarus' head jerked toward Jesus, and his mind began to ponder Jesus' words. *What does he mean?* Lazarus finally found his voice and said, "You and your disciples must be weary from traveling. Let's move this reunion to our home, where Martha has labored long and hard on your behalf. I think you will find your favorite meal has been prepared."

"Oh, no," Martha wailed, "the meal! I must go check on it! Mary, come quickly and help me."

Mary looked at Jesus, but Jesus knew her heart, and anticipated her question. "Go on, Mary. We will have plenty of time later."

Mary immediately turned, and ran to catch up with Martha. As the men watched the retreating women, it was Lazarus who broke the silence. "Jesus, I hope you do not mind, but we have invited some friends to join us for dinner.<sup>5</sup> There are so many who want to see you. Your fame spreads more with each passing day."

"Why, Lazarus, you know I do not mind," replied Jesus. "But I am just as sure they desire to see you as much as me. It is not everyday they see a man that has been raised from the dead!"<sup>6</sup>

"That may be true," countered Lazarus, "but you can do more for them than I can. Come; I know you are tired. You will want to rest before entertaining guests."

The weary travelers followed their host with renewed vigor, as thoughts of rest and a warm, delicious meal prodded them onward.

*SUNDAY, 7AM, 10 AVIV (two days later)*

The dawn broke free from the dark captivity of night, bringing exciting promises on its fresh wings. What a glorious

morning! It was the beginning of a new week and Passover would soon be upon them, and, as always, there was much to be done. Lazarus, lying awake on his bed, knew he must get up, but he lingered a little while longer. He thought of the events of the last couple of days. He thought of his sister, Mary, who bathed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume and wiped them with her hair after the dinner given in Jesus' honor. What started out as a simple gesture took on great significance after the challenge of Judas. And then there were Jesus' words. "Leave her alone," Jesus had said. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."<sup>7</sup> *What did he mean? What did the perfume have to do with Jesus' burial? Why would he speak of his burial?*

Then there was the synagogue service of the previous day. The teacher for the day had read from the prophet Isaiah. *What was that Isaiah had prophesied? Was it really about the Messiah? Could my perceptions of the Messiah be wrong? Isaiah said the Messiah would suffer and be 'cut off' from the land of the living.<sup>8</sup> A suffering and dying Messiah? If Jesus really is the Messiah, as so many of us want to believe, will he have to suffer, and even die? He has hinted at that very thing, but could it be true?*

Lazarus knew what it is like to die, to feel life's breath slip from your body. He knew of no one who could say the same. He had spent some glorious time in Paradise. But then Jesus commanded life back into his lifeless physical body. *Would Jesus see Paradise also?* he thinks. *I understand as no one else can what that means.* Of course, Lazarus had discovered he had been dead for four days. He knew it must have bothered the Jewish authorities, because they believed the spirit of a man left after three days, and thus life could not be restored. For Jesus to have raised Lazarus only proved that he was who he said.<sup>9</sup>

Lazarus smiled to himself at the thought. But he quickly sobered as he remembered Jesus' words as they had been reported to him: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."<sup>10</sup> He could understand the meaning of those words, since he had been dead and then brought back to life; and he believed that if Jesus died, he would see him again.

Still puzzling over the meaning of these things, Lazarus arose. The sounds he heard told him that Martha was already hard at work preparing the morning meal. He knew he needed to attend to his guests, so, reluctantly, he left his warm bed.

*SUNDAY, 10 AM, 10 AVIV*

The trip to Jerusalem from Bethany was pleasant, even if it was a little uphill. Jerusalem is uphill from everywhere, perched as it is on Mount Zion. The group of men and women conversed as they traveled. The center of the crowd was Jesus, everyone wanting to hear his latest teaching, hanging on his every word. His easy gait, his animated gestures, and his lyrical voice had the men and women enthralled. As they neared the small village of Bethphage, Jesus suddenly halted. Calling several disciples to him, he quickly spoke to them, and then dispatched them on an errand. Lazarus was too far away to hear Jesus' words, but he was unconcerned. He grinned as Mary ambled up to him, her face alit with her latest news.

"Brother, did you hear Jesus' words?"

"No," Lazarus answered, "but I know you are going to report them to me."

Mary blushed at her brother's good-natured ribbing, but continued anyway. "He sent his disciples into the village ahead. He told them they would find a young donkey there, and they

were to untie it and bring it to him.<sup>11</sup> What would he want with a young donkey?”

“Mary, I do not know yet, but I imagine we will discover the answer soon.” Lazarus’ words did not sound convincing, even to himself. But he had a feeling another significant event was developing before their eyes. The group of pilgrims, on Jesus’ cue, continued toward Jerusalem.

At Bethphage, the disciples Jesus had sent off returned, leading a donkey colt behind them. Bringing it to Jesus, they reported that everything had been just as he had told them. Jesus smiled at them, and then turned to the young colt. Asking for assistance, Jesus mounted the donkey. With a determined look in his eyes, he turned toward Jerusalem. He gently nudged the donkey, and began the final ascent to the Holy City.<sup>12</sup>

Absorbing all of this, Lazarus’s brows furrowed. *What is he doing? Why the donkey? Is he tired? That must be the answer. Why did he not stop and rest?* But, then again, there must be another answer.

On the road ahead of this little group, another crowd has appeared. This group was following a priest, heading away from Jerusalem toward Bethany. As the two groups pass each other, Lazarus noticed that Jesus turned his head and followed the other group with his eyes. As he surveyed the scene in front of him, Lazarus came to a dead stop. His friend, Thaddeus, sidled up to him, concern etched on his face.

“Brother Lazarus,” Thaddeus inquired, “are you okay? What is wrong?”

Lazarus slowly turned toward his friend. “Did you see that group that just passed?”

Thaddeus nodded. “Sure I did, but I have no idea who they are or where they are going.”

“I know,” Lazarus informed him.

“Well, please tell me!” Thaddeus replied.

“That priest is headed to Bethany. There he will choose a lamb from the Temple flock, one without spot or blemish. It will be paraded back to Jerusalem for all to see and kept at the Temple for four days. Then it will be sacrificed on the 14<sup>th</sup> as the Passover lamb for all the people.”

“Of course” answered Thaddeus. “I had not even thought of that!”

Lazarus, unsure what came over him, reflected for a moment. Claspng his friend’s shoulder, Lazarus said, “We better hurry if we are going to catch up. They have gone ahead without us!”

A thought gnawed on the back of Lazarus’ mind as he and Thaddeus stepped up their pace. But he just could not put a finger on it. *What is the idea that aches to get out?* He did not know, and so remains silent rather than voice his concerns.

The little group quickly approached the gate leading into Jerusalem. As they drew closer, it seemed that the city was noisier than usual. As they came even nearer the noise swelled. Lazarus grew suddenly pale as he remembered that the enemies of Jesus wanted him dead. *Oh no*, he cried within himself, *is this a mob to turn Jesus over to the authorities?* As he continued to walk and listen, though, he realized that people were . . . cheering. *That’s strange! Why are they cheering?*

Methodically Jesus rode the donkey colt toward the gate, and right into the welcome of this mob. Some in the crowd were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Others yelled,

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Still others responded, “Hosanna in the highest!” As they cheered they spread their garments on the road in front of Jesus, as if he was some kind of conquering hero. They waved cut palm branches high in the air.<sup>13</sup>

Like lightening a thought flashed through Lazarus’ mind. *Of course! How could I be so stupid? Going to Jerusalem from Bethany . . . the tenth day of Aviv, the day Yahweh instructed Moses to choose a Passover lamb, to be sacrificed on the fourteenth<sup>14</sup> . . . John the baptizer’s revelation of Jesus as “The lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>15</sup> It all fits! Jesus is the Passover lamb, and he is being paraded through the holy city for all to approve! And, Zechariah prophesied that the Messiah would ride to Zion on a donkey colt!<sup>16</sup> As all the thoughts settled, Lazarus’ eyes watered. It is true, just as he prophesied. He has come to Jerusalem as the Passover lamb to die.*

The latter thought slammed into Lazarus like a punch. He rubbed his temples, as if in pain, trying to will the thoughts to stop. The damage was done, however, and he could not curb the thoughts rolling in like a flood. It all made sense to him now. *Look at Jesus! It is almost as if he is enjoying this. But I am sure that he knows what is about to happen. And I am powerless to stop it.* Lazarus knew that if this was God’s will, he could not stop it even if he tried.

***TUESDAY EVENING (beginning of Jewish Wednesday), 13 AVIV, BETHANY***

“I have never heard him speak with such authority as he has the last few days!” said Simon the Zealot to the others who had gathered in a corner of Lazarus’ house after returning from the evening meal. “It is as if he is on a mission.”

James, son of Alphaeus, agreed. “I was sure we had heard him teach on nearly every subject imaginable, but he has taught so many new and exciting things.”

“He has had much to say about the Temple,” chimed in James, son of Zebedee. “Did you see the indignation on his face when he upset those tables? You could hear the anger in his voice when he said they had turned God’s house into a den of robbers.<sup>17</sup> And what about his prediction about the temple being destroyed?<sup>18</sup> Do you think he meant it?”

Peter was the first to respond. “Oh, he meant it alright. He doesn’t say anything he doesn’t mean. I was just wondering when it would happen. It is such a beautiful Temple, and the thought of it lying in ruins bothers me.”

Lazarus, who had been reclining in the corner, was watching Jesus as he entertained Mary and Martha on the other side of the room. Without looking away, he entered the conversation. “What about everything he said concerning the end of time? Was it not with the authority of some of our own prophets?”

“Why, I have never heard anything so revealing about the latter days,” retorted John. “But I am not sure I quite understand all of his parables.”

It was Philip’s turn to add his thoughts. “I keep thinking of our time at Simon the leper’s house tonight. You know, about the woman anointing his head with oil.<sup>19</sup> To think that she used such expensive perfume!”

Lazarus lowered his head. *They still do not understand. Did none of them hear Jesus again mention his burial?*<sup>20</sup> The thought of their seemingly innocent naivety made Lazarus shake his head in disgust.

Matthew was speaking now. “Did anyone notice Judas Iscariot leave just before the dinner ended? I wonder where he was headed. Do you think maybe Jesus sent him to give some alms to charity? After all, he does hold our money.”<sup>21</sup>

“I rather doubt it,” said Peter, “for it was late. Perhaps the Lord sent him on an errand of some kind. Or maybe he had some personal business which needed attending.”

“Well,” countered Matthew, “he has not returned yet, and I . . . .”

Just then the door swung open, and Judas slinked into the room. All eyes were on him, and he appeared somewhat uneasy.

“Ah, Judas my brother,” Peter said. “It is good to see you back. I trust all things are well?”

After a cursory glance at Jesus, Judas answered, “All is well, my brother.”

Lazarus was watching the scene carefully, and he was sure he had seen the hint of a smirk on Judas’ face. *Now what was that all about? Why did he glance at Jesus before he spoke? And his voice . . . did it give evidence of fearfulness?* Lazarus continued to watch Judas cautiously, feeling as if Judas was a part of something much bigger than even Judas himself knew.

Lazarus realized that things were falling into place. He reflected on the many occasions in recent days when the Jewish authorities had tried to verbally trap Jesus, only to have seen Jesus sail through the testing unscathed. *Wait a minute! That’s it! The Passover lamb has been in the temple being inspected, but so has the true “Lamb.” Jesus has been carefully and meticulously inspected, and no blemish has been revealed! He is the perfect Passover lamb!* He was about to speak his revelation aloud, but checked himself. *Will they understand? Or do they*

*really want to know?* Lazarus, giving it a second thought, decided the best recourse was to remain silent and let things unfold.

**WEDNESDAY EVENING (beginning of Jewish Thursday), 14 AVIV**

The first cup of wine of the Passover meal, the Cup of Sanctification, had been passed among the disciples. It was in this setting Jesus announced that he would never again eat the Passover meal with them on the earth.<sup>22</sup> The disciples stole questioning glances at each other, unwilling to believe what their ears were hearing. Then, as head of this most unusual household, Jesus led them in dipping the *karpas* into the salt water. This leafy green vegetable represented the hyssop, used during the first Passover in Egypt to sprinkle the lamb's blood on the doorposts and above the door of each Jewish home. The salt water symbolized the tears shed by the Israelites during their long tenure of servitude in Egypt. Now it was time to explain the true meaning of being a servant, and Jesus chose to do so in a most unusual way.<sup>23</sup>

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After some time Jesus arose to his feet, arching his spine to stretch out the muscles in his back. After stooping for so long, the ache in his lower back made him wince. Jesus had washed their feet as a menial servant, and had accompanied it with teaching on humility and service. As he stepped out of the room to put away the basin and towel, the disciples began to argue yet again.

“Peter, you really should have thought of washing everybody’s feet,” exclaimed James, the brother of John.

“Me!” countered Peter. “Why didn’t *you* think of it?”

“I could never do anything so humiliating,” whined Matthew. “That’s why I had servants!”

“Do you see any servants?” Thomas enquired. “I certainly do not, and you are just as capable as the rest of us!”

Judas waited a minute before asking, “Why did Jesus not hire someone to do it? That would have been easier.”

Andrew, ever the voice of reason, spoke up. “Brothers, this is not benefiting us at all. What we need to realize is that we are all guilty of neglect. We should not have been arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom.<sup>24</sup> Who are *we*, after all?”

“Andrew you are right,” agreed John. “We should not have allowed Jesus to do this. Why did he not ask one of us?”

The group fell silent again as Jesus entered the room. Their condemning leers toward one another did not escape the notice of Jesus. When he finally spoke, he reminded them of their responsibility to be servants to one another, even as he, their Lord and Master, had served them. Their leers turned to a guilty dropping of their heads as the truth of Jesus’ words struck home.

Then, without further delay, Jesus continued with the Passover feast.

Shortly thereafter, he encased some bitter herbs into a fragment of bread, and readied himself to dip them in the charoset. The sweet mixture resembled what it symbolized, the mud used by the Israelites to make bricks in Egypt. Jesus knew the sweetness of the mixture tends to lessen the tartness of the herbs. But while the bitter herbs were in his hand, bitterness was in his soul.

“I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me,” Jesus announced.

The pronouncement hit the men like a lightning bolt. Immediately they were questioning each other on who would do such a deed. Each one thought themselves incapable of such treachery. All except one.

Peter, who was reclining behind Jesus, could not, no, dared not, ask Jesus the question. This was a delicate situation, requiring more tact than Peter was capable of using. He caught the eye of John who, though reclining with his back to Jesus, had turned to look at Jesus with amazement. Peter, unseen by Jesus, motioned John to lay the question before their master. John nodded, and looking into Jesus’ eyes, inquired, “Who is it, Lord?”

“It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish,” Jesus answered. Then dipping the bread into the mixture, he passed it to Judas Iscariot. Jesus commanded him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” Judas, visibly shaken, excused himself and departed, leaving the others with puzzled expressions and no answers.<sup>25</sup>

Afterwards, he passed around the second cup of wine, the cup of judgment, to his disciples. He took two loaves of unleavened bread, broke one, and laid the fragments upon the other. He then broke the bread, gave thanks, and handed it to his disciples.

“This is my body given for you,” Jesus said. “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Then he took the cup in his hands, and after blessing it, he passed it around to his disciples. He said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”<sup>26</sup>

**THURSDAY, SHORTLY AFTER 9:00 AM, 14 AVIV, (the scene at the cross)**

*Kuh-thunk!* The cross beam that held Jesus is set in place, and Jesus wails as the spikes in his wrists and feet rip his flesh. The pain is intolerable, yet it must be tolerated. He casts his eyes downward at the Roman soldiers who stand glaring at him, and in a raspy whisper says, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

The centurion, who is within earshot, jerks his face upward to behold the face of Jesus. As he looks at this beaten figure of a man on the cross, he remembers words spoken to him earlier. His friend, also a centurion, had related to him how this Jesus of Nazareth had cured his servant when no one else could. And he did it with just a word, without even seeing or touching him.<sup>27</sup> *Who is this man?* he asks himself. *Who has the authority to heal with just a spoken word, and also the humility to ask forgiveness for those who harm him?* He can only wag his head as no clear answer comes to him.

Jesus, with great effort, raises his head to survey the crowd around him. He sees and hears the jeering, mocking crowd. Mustering all of his strength, he lifts his eyes heavenward, and begs, “Father . . . forgive them . . . for they do not know . . . what they are doing.”

The crowd becomes suddenly and strangely quiet as they contemplate the words of Jesus. But in the quiet comes another sound, not audible to human ears. It is laughter . . . an evil, eerie laughter. The spiritual realm echoes with the sound. Satan believes it is his greatest moment, as he watches the pain and suffering of the Son of God. It is time to rejoice, and rejoicing seems so sweet!

## CHAPTER 2

**THURSDAY, SHORTLY AFTER 9:00 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

The members of the Sanhedrin, the religious ruling body of the Jews, are bemused as they watch Jesus on the cross. “This man is nothing,” one says. Another opines, “He is only a false rabbi, and this is proof.” Still another joins in, asking, “Where are his followers now? Why do they not come to his aid?” But their joyful demeanors fade to anger when they hear Jesus utter, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

“Who does this man think he is?” one rages. “Asking forgiveness for us, when he is the blasphemer!”

“Who is his father?” intones another. “He is the son of the devil himself, that is who he is!”

The one question that burns in the back of every spectator’s mind is this: Who is this man? To his followers he is many things. Lazarus, Jesus’ close friend, knows him to be the best friend in the world, one with power to raise the dead. Peter, the bold disciple, is of the opinion that Jesus is the Messiah, though doubt has now dampened his dreams. Mary Magdalene watches as the man she knows as the healer is not in a position to even heal himself. On him hangs the hopes of many men and women who faithfully followed him, but now their hope is hanging on a cross.

To his enemies, the man on the middle cross stands for all they were against. The Jewish authorities heard his declarations to be God, and so view him as a blasphemer and a threat to their religion. And the way the crowd followed him is even a bigger threat to their own authority. Of course, to the Roman authorities he is a troublemaker, stirring up dissension among a people who were already difficult to control. And to the soldiers he is just

another criminal, deserving the worst treatment and punishment they could muster.

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Lazarus hears the prayer of Jesus, and remembers the Psalm of David, “In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.”<sup>28</sup> *How could he pray for these people, who have accused, beaten, and crucified him?* he thinks. *Yet there he is, always a man of prayer!* He closes his eyes momentarily, as if he can forever block out the cruelty before him.

But when he reopens his eyes, he blinks back the tears that have formed. He watches as the big, burly soldiers are gambling for the seamless garment that had belonged to Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Again, Lazarus remembers a verse from one of the Psalms he has heard so many times: “They divided my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.”<sup>30</sup> *Could these verses coursing through my mind be prophetic?* he wonders. *I was sure they referred to David and others, but could they be speaking of Jesus?* Lazarus can only stare in amazement at the surreal scene while he ponders its deeper significance.

#### **BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN**

“I don’t know how much more of this I can watch,” cries more than one of the angels who has gathered to survey the events on earth.

“Why does he not call us to help?” inquires yet another. “He knows twelve legions of us would come at his command.”<sup>31</sup>

The angel Gabriel has slipped in among them, and he begins to speak with such authority that the others grow silent. They regard him reverently as he speaks. “Fellow servants of our Most High God, you know that it was I who was given the privilege of announcing that God would come to man in human

form.<sup>32</sup> The One who is God, the Son, the second Person of our triune God, the eternal One, went to live among men as a man. We watched as he created all things, and then formed man from the dust of the earth. We beheld as Jesus breathed into man the spirit of life and made him in the very likeness of God.<sup>33</sup> Jesus, the Living Word of our Triune God was to become flesh and be born as a man.”

Gabriel pauses to make sure he has their attention. He does. They wait anxiously for him to continue. “The One we know well, the human race knows poorly. Since the rebellion of Adam in the Garden of Eden, mankind has no longer been able to have a personal relationship with the Almighty.<sup>34</sup> Listen even now to the seraphim as they cry continuously, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy.’ You all know that He is Holy and no sin can come into His presence. Mankind was the crown of God’s creation, yet because of sin there was separation between God and man.”

From the rear of the gathering speaks another, “But why did God not destroy all of them when He sent the Great Flood?<sup>35</sup> Surely He knew that this race of men would not change!

Gabriel continues. “Yes, He knew. But we must remember that Yahweh is not only a God of holiness, but also a God of love.”

“How could He love people who would do such a thing to His own Son? They don’t deserve His love!”

*THURSDAY, 9:15 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)*

Mary holds on tightly to John. She feels as if she might fall if she does not cling to someone or something for support. John is such a good friend to her son . . . her son . . . . She closes her eyes tightly, trying to block out the image of her own flesh and blood, suffering on the cross. She knows if she opens her eyes that he will still be there. She allows the muscles in her face

to relax at last, and her mind floats to a time long before, when her son was just a baby. *He was such a good baby*, she reflects. *From the very beginning I knew he was special.*

Mary shifts her weight from her now numb foot and John looks at her questioningly. A faint glimmer of a smile assures him that she is okay, but she continues her daydream. *Joseph and I were so proud.* Then her memories took her to the Temple, when Jesus was only forty days old. As was the Jewish custom, she and Joseph had gone there for two reasons. The first reason was to offer a sacrifice for her purification. *We were so poor we could barely afford the two doves we offered*, Mary remembers. The second reason they went to the Temple was to present baby Jesus to Yahweh. They knew that they were required to dedicate their firstborn son to the service of Yahweh all his life.<sup>36</sup> *He fulfilled that himself, for he has certainly served Yahweh*, she ponders.

She smiles to herself as she reflects on meeting the old man, Simeon, in the Temple court. Her brow wrinkles. *What was it he had said? Let me think . . . oh yes, he thanked Yahweh for allowing him to see the 'salvation of Israel' before he died.* She pauses in her thinking. *If he saw Jesus now, what would he think? Would he believe that Jesus was going to save Israel? And if I remember correctly, he also said Jesus would be 'a light for revelation' for the Gentiles and 'glory' for Israel.* She opens her eyes and looks at her son. *Is this the way to achieve Simeon's prophecies? How can this be a revelation to anyone? How is my son's death glory for Israel?* She can only shake her head and wonder at the unanswered questions swirling in her head.

### **BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN**

As the angels continue their discussion, a voice soft yet powerful permeates the gathering of angels, resulting in all of them prostrating themselves. Yahweh Himself speaks, with an inflection of calmness and peace. "My angels, do you not

understand? I love them not for what they are, but for what they can be. They are made in my image...made to be my children. You see them distorted by sin, but soon you will see them restored to their original creation – and victorious over sin!”

The angels slowly rise. They try to understand, and yet can not. One of them, after studying the scene, timidly asks, “Master, who is responsible for his death?”

Another angel interjects his thoughts. “My Lord, the people you called unto yourself, the children of Abraham, are they not the responsible ones? They are the ones who have rejected their promised Messiah. It is they who have charged him with blasphemy against your holy name. See how the people taunt him, saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!’<sup>37</sup> They also mock him, saying, ‘He saved others, but he can’t save himself! He’s the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.’”

“Oh Eternal One, Will you not let us destroy them? Are they not deserving of your judgment and wrath?”

The Father’s voice is marked with both kindness and sadness. “The children of Abraham are my people. I love them with an eternal love. Yes, they have rejected him, but they are not entirely responsible for his death.”

“It is the Romans!” shouts another angel. “They are a vile, blood-thirsty people. They have cruelly mistreated your people, Lord. And now they have nailed your Son to a cross! What is more, they seem to enjoy it! Listen to their mocking, as they say, ‘If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.’<sup>38</sup> We will gladly destroy them for you, O King, and relieve your Son from this misery and pain.” Bowing before God, he adds, “We await your bidding.”

“The Roman people are indeed an evil race,” speaks God firmly. “Their act of crucifixion is a vile act, one that I abhor. But neither are they completely responsible for my Son’s death. They have played a part, but there is much more to it.”

**THURSDAY, 9:15 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

John looks down at the thin, frail body of the woman he is supporting. *Mary is much like my own mother, he mused. Small of stature, strength being sapped with age, but still mighty in will and character.* He notices that Mary has squeezed her eyes shut. *Does she think that will help? She must feel as if all of this is a wicked dream. My heart aches for her so much!*

John’s head comes upward, until once again Jesus, his friend and teacher, is in sight. He is barely recognizable because of the beatings he has received. John’s eyes widen in amazement. *The passage in Isaiah’s prophecy – what did it say? He wills his mind to bring to memory the Scripture he has heard on many occasions. ‘His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.’<sup>39</sup> That passage spoke of the Messiah, but . . . his eyes travel up and down the battered body of Jesus . . . it sure seems to be fulfilled here!*

John’s mind wanders back to when he was a boy. He loved to sit at his father’s feet as Zebedee recited his favorite Psalms to his two sons, John and James. *There was one he loved more than the rest . . . how did it go? Hmm . . . oh, I can only remember part of it! ‘Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One.’<sup>40</sup> Let’s see, there was something about dogs, reminded me of Capernaum . . . I remember! ‘Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men have encircled me, they have pierced my . . . my hands and . . . and . . . my feet.’<sup>41</sup>*

The quiver that went up and down John's body alerts Mary, so John smiles to reassure her. But inside he is quaking, for he has partially realized the truth of what Jesus has been trying to tell him and the others the whole time. And it is very disconcerting to him, for he has never wanted to believe it, but now the evidence is overwhelming. He looks around at the brutal Roman soldiers and the conniving Jewish authorities. *They would definitely qualify as 'evil' men!* John eyed the hands and feet of Jesus. *Those spikes . . . they are piercing his hands and feet . . . just like the Psalm said. Jesus tried to tell us it would come to this, but . . . there must be more to it than his dying.* John forces his mind to think no longer on this subject. It is too painful as he beholds the scene before him. But he knows he must return to these thoughts at another time.

#### ***BEFORE THE THRONE OF GOD IN HEAVEN***

Michael, the great archangel, approaches the chorus of angels, stopping beside Gabriel. He, like Gabriel, is highly respected among the other angels. All eyes turn to him when he begins to speak. "I have listened with interest to your conversation. With my Lord's permission, I will attempt to answer your question. You all know how I have faithfully defended the glory of our God against our enemy. I would go even now and lead you to rescue the Son, if that were the Lord's will. But it appears to me all of you have missed who is to blame for his death."

Driven by their curiosity, the angels move closer to Michael, clinging to his words. He continues. "As Gabriel has already shown you, a close examination of human history will give you a clue as to who is really responsible for the Son's death on the cross. Remember how man became willfully disobedient, going against God's instruction? That sin separated him from God, and became a part of his very nature. That nature has been passed down to each generation, so that all are inherently sinful, and they all sin by choice. Do you now comprehend? All men

are sinful; all men are responsible for the Son's sacrificial death. It was neither this group nor that group; it is the entire race of man that stands guilty of his death."

At this the voice of God again speaks, confirming the words of Michael. "The Son is not being killed, but is laying down his life as a ransom. He must not be rescued, for he is willingly offering himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of man. The time is now upon us; soon you will understand!"

After these words, the angels again lay prostrate before God, for He has spoken, and there is nothing they can do.

***THURSDAY, 9:20 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)***

The red, tear-damp eyes of the disciples continue beholding their friend hanging on the cross, but their minds seem to be detached, thinking, remembering, wondering. Bartholomew's mouth is the first to formulate the thoughts in his mind, but his voice can barely speak the words.

"I do not understand. We have witnessed the wonderful miracles he has performed. We saw him raise the dead, heal the crippled, even feed thousands of people with just a few fish and a few loaves of bread.<sup>42</sup> I just do not understand."

Doing an about face from the cross, Matthew turns to Bartholomew. He wills himself to concentrate on his friend instead of allowing his thoughts and attention to return to Jesus.

"Wh . . . what?" he stammers. "What do you not understand?"

"I do not understand how this could happen, or how Jesus could let it continue," replies Bartholomew. "With the power we have seen him display, surely he could put a stop to it, come down from the cross. Yet he doesn't. Why?"

Matthew's head slumps, and his shoulders shrug. "I do not know either. I wish I did. Besides that, if he is the Son of God, why does he not ask his Father to intervene? He could call down legions of angels to rescue him, to destroy those responsible for this cruelty. I, too, would like to know why."

The growing aggravation Lazarus feels because of the disciples' lack of comprehension has reached its boiling point. He spins around abruptly and confronts them. "How can you not understand?" he says loudly.

Those in the crowd around them turn to see the cause of the disruption. The consternation plastered on their faces causes Lazarus to blush in embarrassment, so he gulps and holds up his hands apologetically. When they have turned away he lowers his voice and begins where he had left off.

"Just who do you think is responsible?" queries Lazarus in a hushed tone.

"Why it is obv . . . ," starts Bartholomew.

"There is only one ans . . . ," Matthew begins.

Each man stops and turns toward the other. Matthew finally motions for Bartholomew to speak.

"It is rather obvious to me. We Jews, God's own people, have as a whole rejected His Son. Our leaders have accused him of blasphemy, and turned him over to the Romans for punishment. We are responsible! What could be plainer?"

Nathanael grabs Bartholomew's shoulder. "Careful what you say, my friend. Our enemies are everywhere."

"You know it is true, though," he replies more cautiously.

They all nod in agreement, yet Matthew has more to say. "I agree with all you say, brother, I do, but what about the

Romans? You know Roman law does not allow us to execute anyone. They should have seen the foolishness of these charges and set Jesus free. They didn't, however, and you see the result. They have nailed him to one of their crosses, nailed him! They have treated him as if he were a common criminal, like the two hanging beside him. Barbarians, all of them, and they deserve God's judgment!"

Grunts of agreement are the only response to Matthew's tirade. But Lazarus can not be silent for long. His growing anger is transformed into compassion as he witnesses the heartbreak expressed verbally and visually on the faces of his fellow followers of Jesus. His voice is now calmer, though some exasperation at his friends' lack of discernment drips from his words.

"Don't you remember what Jesus said about his life? 'No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.'<sup>43</sup> Jesus told us many times that he had to die. And some of you were there when his cousin, John, the baptizer, declared him to be the lamb which would take away the world's sins.<sup>44</sup> You see, do you not, that it is for our sin that he is there? He is not dying because he did anything wrong. He is dying for our transgressions."

Astonishment is etched on the faces of Jesus' disciples, and one by one they slowly and deliberately turn to face their dying master. Each man appears to be inwardly fighting his own mental battle, armed with the truth of Lazarus' words. Lazarus knows he has struck a chord with them, and prays that God will open their blinded eyes to an unveiling of this truth.

***THURSDAY, 9:45 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)***

The sun is blistering as it steadily rises in the eastern sky. Its scorching heat only intensifies the suffering of the men on the

Roman crosses. The crowd mills around, appearing to grow bored, as familiarity produces some dissatisfaction.

The little band of disciples huddles near each other, taking small comfort in their joint participation in grief. Lazarus drops to one knee, the pangs of grief weighing on him like a camel's burden. He has watched Jesus for nearly an hour, and already it seems as if it has been an eternity.

Lazarus is keenly aware of not only Jesus, but the other two men hanging beside Jesus. *I wonder what their names are, Lazarus pondered. They are somebody's children; do they have anyone here for them? I only know what has been rumored about them. Some say they are robbers, probably tried to steal from the Romans since they are being punished like this. I have heard others say that they were insurrectionists, maybe even cohorts of Barabbas himself! They must be deserving of condemnation, but does anyone deserve such barbaric treatment?*

Lazarus listens more closely as he realizes that the two criminals are continuously shouting.<sup>45</sup> Pain drives them to curse the courts who condemned them, the soldiers who put them there, and even the people who are standing around watching. They rant and rave until they are exhausted. A few minutes of respite soon strengthens them to unleash their anger all over again.

Soon the two men pick up on the fact that most of the crowd is here to see the man on the middle cross, the one called Jesus. Pilate had commanded the soldiers to nail an inscription above Jesus' head. It reads: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."<sup>46</sup> As they writhe in pain, they hear the people and their leaders taunting Jesus. They are challenging him to rescue himself, to leave the cross. The two criminals also begin to rail on Jesus, mocking him and cursing him.

*Wait!* Lazarus thinks, as he turns to better hear the two criminals. *What did that one say?* He strains to make out his words.

“Aren’t you the Christ?” screams one of the men. “Save yourself . . . and us!”

“Did you hear that?” Lazarus is not cognizant that he spoke aloud until one of his friends answers him.

“Hear what?” questions Matthew.

“I heard it.” Nathanael says. “Can you believe the nerve of that man? He was mocking Jesus, asking him to save them.”

Peter is steaming. “He deserves to die, the rogue! Jesus shouldn’t even be up there. He has no right to even suggest that the Christ should save him. He is not worthy to be in the presence of the Master!”

While the others try to calm Peter down, Lazarus lifts his eyes toward heaven and prays. *God, help my brothers to understand.* Bringing his gaze downward, he locks eyes with Peter. The rage that is there only causes more pain in the soul of Lazarus.

**THURSDAY, 9:45 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the temple)**

The bustle around the Temple has reached a maddening pace. Hundreds of innocent lambs are being sacrificed as atonement for the sins of the Jews, one for each family, as prescribed by the Levitical law.<sup>47</sup> Priests are scurrying to their duties, all the while serenaded by a symphony of incessantly bleating lambs. Because this is the day of the Passover sacrifice, the priests’ other duties are but a prelude to the day’s most important commemoration.

To the observer of this scene, one thing seems almost out of place. There, tied to the altar, is a lamb, standing perfectly still and quiet. This is the lamb that has been specifically chosen,

without spot or blemish, to be the Passover sacrifice for the whole nation.

This single, lonely lamb has not escaped the notice of one priest, who pauses from his hectic duties to wonder thoughtfully at this small sheep soon to be sacrificed. His mind reflects on the lamb, one not unlike the many Passover sacrifices he has seen in his long years of service in Herod's Temple. *Look at how calm he is, not knowing his own destiny. He stands there so humble and meek. Soon his life will be given in sacrifice on that very altar to which he is tied, that we might have atonement. So many sacrifices for so many years; innocent blood being shed, allowing our sins to be covered again for a short time.* This old priest has grown weary after so many years, so many sacrifices, so much blood shed. *If only there could be one final perfect sacrifice . . . .*

Then suddenly a thought caresses his mind, and a realization is caught up in his daydream. *That man, Jesus, the traveling rabbi, said he was going to give his life as a ransom for many.*<sup>48</sup> *He sounded so sincere that I almost believed him. But it cannot be true; for today he is . . . he is . . . .* An unnerving feeling sweeps over him. Leaving his servile duties behind, the priest runs from the Temple, through the Court of Women, through the Beautiful Gate, through the Court of Gentiles, and into the city. He runs as fast as his priestly garments allow, northward along the road leading to the place called Golgotha. Winded, he slows his pace long enough to allow his quickening heart rate to decelerate, then continues on his quest.

When he finally reaches the gate leading from the city, he stops just outside and raises his gaze to look at the dreaded hill of Roman execution. As was usual with crucifixions, the two men on either side of Jesus are yelling curses at their executioners, screaming at the top of their lungs. But in the middle, fastened to the wooden altar called a cross, is Jesus, in humility and meekness remaining silent before his captors.

The priest's eyes widen in recognition of the irony of what he is witnessing. *The Passover lamb tied to the altar . . . Jesus, called by John the baptizer 'the Lamb of God,' fastened to the cross . . .* the eeriness of the moment causes the priest to fall to his knees, his eyes steadfastly fixed on Jesus. And in that moment of understanding, he believes, and bows his head and prays.

## CHAPTER 3

THURSDAY, SHORTLY AFTER 10:00 AM, 14 AVIV (*scene at the cross*)

“Hey . . . you . . . Jesus! Your inscription . . . says you are . . . ‘The King of the Jews!’” The man on the cross to the left of Jesus pauses to get a breath. “If that is true . . . command your subjects to get you down . . .” After taking another breath, he rasps, “And how about getting me . . . and my partner over there . . . down from these accursed crosses?” Pain soars through his body as he speaks, causing even more anger and hatred to rise up in this man whose fate is the same as Jesus. His wrath lashes out at Jesus. “King? You’re no different from me . . . your Highness!” Coughing, he looks directly at Jesus: “They say you saved others . . . but you can’t even save yourself! You’re pathetic!”<sup>49</sup>

These words cut the heart of Jesus as much as the nails cut his wrists. Jesus eyes him sympathetically, which only serves to intensify the man’s anger.

“Why do you look at me that way?” the man bellows. “Your sympathy does me no good!” With the pain and anguish intensifying, he cries, “I am still hanging on this cross. If you really want to help . . . get me down! Well . . . say something!”

On the right side of Jesus the other criminal has ceased his verbal torment of Jesus. He hangs there, his mouth agape, just looking at Jesus. The bewilderment plastered on his face speaks loudly of the thoughts spinning through his head.

*Just who is this man? he wonders. I am in such pain that I can barely keep silent, but he utters not a word! The Jewish authorities have accused him, the Roman soldiers have crucified him, and my partner and I have ridiculed him. Yet he just hangs there! His attention is momentarily diverted as his partner intensifies his berating of Jesus.*

*Why does he continue?* he thinks to himself. *I know him . . . and he is no better than me!* Reflecting on his past, his mind confesses, *We deserve to die, after what we did! I am not proud of my life. What do I have to live for? Here my life will end; what will I have to show for it?*

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Lazarus searches the faces of the men on the crosses beside Jesus. *I know their pain must be tremendous,* thinks Lazarus, *but why must they ridicule Jesus? Why can't they just leave him alone? They are in the same predicament, but unlike him, they are screaming and yelling.* But as Lazarus checks the men again, he notices what he hadn't before.

*That man on the right . . . he is no longer hurling insults at Jesus. His face . . . it has a different countenance about it. What sort of look is that? It is almost as if he is seeing Jesus for the very first time.* Lazarus' interest is peaked, and he listens more closely.

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A great wave of remorse sweeps over the man on the cross to the right of Jesus, and for the first time in his adult life, he feels utterly helpless. *Is there nothing anyone can do to help me?* He glances at Jesus. Then Jesus deliberately turns to him, and compassion shines from his very soul. A yearning for . . . something . . . gnaws at the man's heart. His eyelids slowly close; something at the back of his mind is trying to dig its way out, until finally, for a short moment, he is transported back in time to an event in the home of his uncle brought to his attention by his younger cousin . . . .

**CAPERNAUM, ALMOST 2 YEARS PRIOR**

“My young cousin, why can’t you just tell me what is happening?” he asked. “Why does my uncle want me at his house?”

“Okay, I’ll tell you,” answered his cousin, “but you must promise to come after I tell you.”

“Alright,” said the older cousin, “I’ll come. Just please tell me. You have made me very curious.”

“Well, you know that traveling rabbi from Nazareth, the one they call Jesus? He has just returned to Capernaum from Gadara, where it is reported he healed those crazy men who lived among the tombs!<sup>50</sup> And he is a guest in OUR house, right now . . . and he is preaching!”

He stopped in his tracks. His younger cousin, urging him to hurry, reminded him, “Now, now, you promised!”

“But you know how I feel about those traveling rabbis! I don’t care where he is from or what he has done!”

“But you promised you would come!” With a little nudging from his excited young relative, he reluctantly trudged onward.

Arriving at his uncle’s house, he realized that he was not the only one they had invited. He had never seen so many people in this house. As he entered the large room where his uncle held banquets, he marveled at the way the man in the middle commanded everyone’s attention. He knew this must be the one that had his cousin enthralled. As he stood and listened to Jesus teach, a sudden noise overhead drew his sight upward. Someone was removing a portion of the roof! Now everyone, including Jesus, was gazing up at the hole in the roof.<sup>51</sup>

The outline of a head appeared, and then it was gone again. The hazy sunshine shining through the roof was now

blocked, but this time, whatever it was, moved downward. Recognizing that it was coming all the way to the floor, being let down with ropes, those in the middle of the room, especially Jesus, began to back up. As the top of it came into sight, all those present collectively gasped. On the pallet lay a man, plainly paralyzed, and appearing to be in great pain.

Wondering what his uncle was thinking, he looked back up at the hole. *Someone will have to pay for this*, he theorized. Suddenly, four heads popped into view, concern for their friend carved on their faces. They were waiting to see what Jesus would do. *They sure went through a lot of trouble*, he thought as he shook his head.

Looking at the scene in front of him, he watched as Jesus looked knowingly at the four men on the roof. He walked over to the paralyzed man, comforted him with a smile, and said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

His knees buckled at the power and authority which issued forth from the words of Jesus. *Your sins . . . forgiven?* He questioned within himself. *Who is this man who forgives sin?* It was soon apparent that this rabbi knew the question in most of the people’s hearts, because he began discoursing on how it was just as easy for him to tell the paralytic his sins were forgiven as it was to command him to get up and walk. And those were the very next words he uttered: “Get up, take your mat and go home.”

Without hesitation, the paralyzed man stood up, and with his eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, stopped, gathered up his mat, and started for the door. Stopping, he turned again to Jesus, and without spoken words thanked him for the precious gift he had received – the ability to walk, but even more, the forgiveness of his sins. While everyone else watched the former paralytic leave, the reluctant cousin was staring into the eyes of Jesus. *What is that look in his eyes? It is a look I have never seen before now. That must be what forgiveness looks like! Oh, how I wish Jesus*

*would look at me like that!* Burning in his heart was a desire to know forgiveness, and to be able to trust someone who might have the answers to the problems ripping out his own heart.

**THURSDAY, 10:20 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

His mind returning to the present, the man transfixed on the right cross knows what he must do. But first things first. Looking past Jesus, he glares at his comrade. Fortifying himself with all the strength he can find within, he bellows, “Don’t you fear God . . . since you are under the same sentence?” Drawing a deep breath, he continues: “We are punished justly . . . we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man . . . has done nothing wrong.”

Taking advantage of his friend’s stupefied silence, he gasps as much air as his tortured lungs can hold, and whispers to Jesus, “Jesus, remember me . . . when you come into your kingdom.”

Jesus directs his eyes toward him and says, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in Paradise.”<sup>52</sup>

*There it is!* his soul proclaims. *That look – the same look in his eyes that I saw before in my uncle’s house! I am forgiven! FORGIVEN!* His whole being wants to cry it to the world, but his crippled and broken body is too weak to even whimper. Inside, however, his soul rejoices!

**SOMEWHERE IN PARADISE (the abode of the righteous dead)**

Abraham, the old patriarch, perks up his ears. *Did I truly hear that pronouncement? Could this be He for whom we have been waiting?* He beholds his son, Isaac, as he saunters to his father’s side.

“Father, did you hear that,” Isaac asks, “or did I only imagine it?” Seeing his father’s acknowledgement, he says, “Who was that? Why could we hear him? Did he mention Paradise?”

Abraham knew this day would come. Yahweh had promised He would send the Messiah – the One who would pay for the sins of all men. This place called Paradise was where all those who were faithful and believing went after death. It was truly a place of paradise where they must await the perfect sacrifice – the Lamb of God – who would take away their sin. Until He was sacrificed no man could enter into the presence of Yahweh. Abraham reflected on what this meant. *Even now the debt for our sin is being paid. Soon we will all be able to enter into the throne room of heaven! Soon we will be in the presence of Yahweh!*

“Father!” interrupts Isaac again.

Abraham responds to his son’s question in a soft voice, “I cannot say for sure, my son, but I believe with all my heart that it was the voice of Yahweh’s Promised One.”

“You mean,” Isaac counters, “the one through whom Yahweh promised to bless the whole world?”

“Yes, it was!” interrupts the prophet, Isaiah, before Abraham can answer. “It was the Messiah, whom Yahweh prophesied through me would come. NOW, He HAS come!”

King David has now joined the many souls who are gathering around Abraham. He enters the excited discourse, saying, “It is the Heir to my throne, the One who is the Great Ruler. Yahweh has been faithful to remember His promises!”

Unable any longer to control his jubilation, Moses speaks. “It is the Lawgiver, come to fulfill the law. Yahweh has not forgotten! Glory to His Name!”

“Yahweh foretold through me that this day would appear,” chimes in Daniel. “And, the Anointed One will soon be cut off from the land of the living, to join us here. But he will not be here long.”

Excitement swells to a feverish pitch in Paradise. The long-awaited, long-expected, and long-anticipated event is near at hand. The saints can barely contain themselves as they wait on the arrival of the Messiah.

Abraham knows that when the Anointed One will appear all the saints in Paradise will bow in worship. Their voices will be as one as they proclaim, “Worthy are you, O Lord, to be worshiped and glorified. Praise be to Yahweh, who has not forgotten or forsaken His own!”

Abraham can already anticipate the words the Messiah will speak - the words he has waited so long to hear. *The voice of Jesus will reverberate throughout Paradise as he speaks to those bowed before him. “Arise, you who were righteous and faithful, and see the salvation of Yahweh. My work has been completed; the payment for man’s sin has been offered; reconciliation with Yahweh has been accomplished. Now I take you to your promised rest in the presence of My Father. For there I must go to prepare a place for those who will follow. Arise, I command you, and rejoice!”* And in the twinkling of an eye, this honorable company of faithful saints will be ushered into heaven. Abraham knows the time is close at hand. His mind whirls with the thought, *Just as Yahweh promised, all the world will now be blessed through my seed.*

#### **HADES (the place of torments – the abode of the wicked dead)**

Though a great gulf separates his place of torment from Paradise, where he longs to be, the wealthy man can still hear the whirl of excited voices. *I wonder what is going on over there,* he thinks, as he grimaces from the pain inflicted upon him. *I would*

*be over there now, should be over there now, if I had only listened! But no, I was greedy, cared only for myself, thought I did not need God, and look where I am today! Why did I not treat that beggar better? I could have taken him into my home, given him food and a place to stay. But, alas, I did not care then as I do now.* The pain he experiences only magnifies the misery in his soul.<sup>53</sup>

“Hey,” he shouts, “what is happening?” No one answers, but he thought he heard someone say something about the Messiah. *The Messiah! Has he come?* The thought explodes into his consciousness. *It has to be!*

“Help me, O Anointed One, I need relief!” he cries out. “I believe, I do, help me!” But no relief comes, for it is too late for him, and his torment continues.

A hearty laugh rings through Hades. Satan knows the rich man is not wealthy here, and that amuses him. *His money and possessions cannot help him now!* he snickers. But his amusement rapidly fades as reality sets in. *I heard what Jesus said! He speaks as if he is so sure he will make it to Paradise! Not if I have anything to do with it! I will stop him if I can!*

Satan realizes he has much work to do if he is to spoil the plans of Jesus. *It is time for me and my demons to increase our efforts, for he must be stopped!* He is not sure he himself believes it is possible, but he will not quit until he has at least tried!

#### **THURSDAY, 10:20 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

The ground has been trampled by the many people who were assembled around the crosses. Lazarus knows this because he is staring down there now. His eyes are not really focused on the ground, though; his mind is focused on what has just transpired. *Had he really heard Jesus tell the man on the right*

*that he would be with him in paradise . . . today? Could Jesus have truly forgiven him so easily?*

He focuses his eyes again, and then raises them to look upon the three crosses. With new vision he understands what he is presently beholding. And what a contrast it is! There on the middle cross is Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, dying for sin. On the left is the man who was loud, rebellious, and unrepentant. He is dying in sin. But on Jesus' right is the other man: sorrowful – repentant – believing. He is now dying as a man without sin – a man forgiven. It is a sight that Lazarus' will hold in his mind throughout the rest of his life.

#### **SOMEWHERE IN HEAVEN**

Gabriel focuses intently at the scene on earth. Without looking at Michael, he says, "Do you think they understand the eternal significance of what is taking place?"

"Not really," Michael replies. "Some of them will shortly, others in time, but, right now, no, they really do not comprehend."

Gabriel's eyes dart toward Michael. "You believe they will soon understand? I hope you are right." He nodded toward the earth. "I am just not sure if they will ever realize what the Almighty has done for them."

Michael observes the sad countenance of his fellow angel, and then speaks. "We must trust our God Yahweh, for we know He is sovereign. I believe they must understand, because that is the only way that what Jesus is doing makes sense. God's holiness demands justice, and Jesus is providing that through His death. The only way it can be applied to any man's account is if he understands that truth!"

The twinkle in Gabriel's eyes is like that of a star. "You are right! Praise Yahweh, I know He is in control and knows what He is doing! I never questioned that, but I only now can visualize how it all fits together."

That revelation brings silence on the part of both angels, for nothing else needs to be said.

**THURSDAY, 10:30 AM, (scene at the cross)**

The ashen face of Andrew twists as if he were the one on the cross. In some ways he feels as if the pain has been transferred to him. But he recognizes that his Lord is experiencing much more pain than he ever could.

Just then he hears what seems to be the sound of crying. Turning to his right, Andrew notices his brother, Peter, kneeling on the ground and sitting back on his legs. He is . . . weeping. *Weeping?* thinks Andrew to himself. He squats at Peter's side, familial concern overcoming him.

"Peter, what is wrong?"

Quiet sobs rack Peter's body, but still he finds his voice. "How could I do such a thing? I wanted to be so bold!" Sadness emanates from him as he faces his brother.

"Peter, it is okay!"

"It is *not* okay, Andrew! You don't understand. I am the one who answered our Lord's question about who we thought he was. 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!'<sup>54</sup> I said. It was I who stood to his statement about the shepherd being stricken and the sheep scattered and proudly proclaimed, 'Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.'<sup>55</sup> Don't you see, Andrew? I am not as courageous as I thought."

“Oh, Peter, I know you are courageous, and so does everyone else. Stop torturing yourself about it. After all, weren’t you the only one who pulled out a sword to defend the Master when the soldiers came?”

“A great deal of good that did!” Peter responds. “All I did was swing wildly and cut off some poor servant’s ear! And, Jesus told me to put up my sword!”<sup>56</sup>

“But Peter . . . .”

“And then, remember what Jesus said about me disowning him three times before the rooster crowed? Let me tell you about that.”<sup>57</sup>

By this time the partial band of disciples has encircled Peter. Their curiosity is heightened, and they encourage him to continue his story.<sup>58</sup>

“Well, I wanted to hear what was going on in the house of Caiaphas, the High Priest, where Jesus had been taken. They had him in an upstairs room, so I slipped into the courtyard below. A number of people were warming themselves by a fire, so I sidled up next to them. A servant girl was standing nearby, and she kept staring at me. I tried to hide behind someone else, but she came over closer. Suddenly she raised her finger and pointed at me, accusing me of having been with Jesus.”

Nathaniel speaks up. “What happened next, Peter?”

Drawing in a steadying breath, Peter says, “I didn’t know what to do, so I . . . I . . . .” He shamefully hangs his head. “I said I didn’t know what she was talking about.”

The others are taken aback at Peter’s confession. Matthew lays a hand on Peter’s shoulder, squeezes it firmly, and says, “It’s alright Peter. We were all frightened.”

Peter turns to Matthew with an almost crazed expression. “I keep telling you, it is NOT alright! It’s not even the end of my story!” Calming down and collecting his thoughts, he begins again. “I moved closer to the gate so as to not draw attention to myself. But someone told the men near me that I had been with Jesus. And . . . I denied him again!”

“No, Peter,” Andrew says in disbelief.

“I am telling you the truth, brother. But you must hear me to the end. I must get this off my chest.” He pauses, and then goes on. “I finally moved away from those men, and no one bothered me for a long while. Then someone who had heard me speak accused me of being a Galilean. You know what I did? I swore and called down curses on myself. I denied him again! Three times I was put to the test, and three times I failed! And to top it off, at that very instant, that stupid rooster crowed. You want to know what happened next? Jesus was being led away from Caiaphas’ house, and he stopped and looked at me! I felt so dirty under his gaze, so unclean! I just ran away and cried, because I then remembered his words concerning me.”

The other disciples stand in awkward silence. No one can rectify the situation with any words of comfort for Peter. So they just support him with their presence.

Lazarus listens to Peter, and compassion fills his heart. But in the process of listening to Peter’s story, another person crosses his mind. *Where was Judas during all of this? Is it just a rumor, or did Judas really . . .? Surely not! Why would he do such a thing?* He wonders . . . .

#### **THURSDAY, 14 AVIV, HOURS EARLIER**

*This is not what I bargained for! I did not want this to happen! I would not have done it had I known it would come to this!*

Judas fingered the thirty pieces of silver as if they were precious jewels.<sup>59</sup> While his fingers turned the silver, his mind was turning over the events that had so rapidly transpired over the past day. Hurrying toward the Temple, those activities crashed over him like an avalanche of boulders.

*How did Jesus know I had made a deal with the chief priests? He seemed to delve into my soul with his eyes when he gave me the bread dipped in the herbs. I am sure none of the others knew what was occurring. But he knew! All I wanted to do was make a little extra money. I expected so much from him, and he disappointed me. And if he really was the Messiah, this should have forced his hand and made him lead the revolt against the Romans. But I never dreamed they would crucify him! I thought they would just beat him and turn him loose.*

Judas' journey through the side streets of Jerusalem brought him closer to his destination. He couldn't get there fast enough, yet it appeared to be taking an eternity. He couldn't stop his mind from straying to last night, in the Garden of Gethsemane.

*I knew he would be there. He went there quite often to pray. When they asked what sign I would use to reveal which one was him, whatever possessed me to do it with a kiss? I could have used any kind of sign, and I used a kiss! Again his gaze cut to my very soul as I stepped up to him. Why did he have to do that?*

His arrival at the Temple caused him to become apprehensive and anxious. *What am I going to say?* He slunk in ashamedly, hoping no one would recognize him for the coward he was. Remorse overshadowed his spirit like a storm cloud, causing his heart to race erratically. Finally he arrived at the room where the chief priests and elders were convened. Their heads swiveled in his direction when he entered the room. Their questioning faces forced Judas to speak.

“I have sinned,” Judas moaned, “for I have betrayed innocent blood.”

The faces of the Jewish leaders contorted into smirks as they leered at this man now invading their privacy. One of them replied to Judas: “What is that to us? That’s your responsibility.”

Judas backed against the wall at the response. *So what am I supposed to do? I have to make this right.* The silver practically burned his hand as he gripped it tightly. Time slowed to a crawl for Judas, perplexed at his predicament. At last, raising his right hand high into the air, he cast the silver onto the cold Temple floor, and rapidly exited the building.

As quick as eagle’s wings his feet carried him away from the Temple and outside the city. His troubled conscience propelled him forward, until he could go no further. Surveying his surroundings, he found an old piece of rope, threw it over the limb of a tree, tied it off, and in an attempt to chase away his torment, hung himself.<sup>60</sup>

**THURSDAY, 10:40 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

Nicodemus, though standing some distance away from the crosses, nevertheless has a good vantage point from which to ascertain all the activities. As a member of the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus had rightly gauged the feelings of his fellow leaders towards Jesus. And he knows he was powerless to stop them.

*They were going to do as they pleased, he hypothesizes. I wish each of them would have sat and talked with Jesus one-on-one just as I did. They might have reached a different conclusion about him if they had. His teaching on the new birth was radical! I have never heard that sort of doctrine, and certainly never with that kind of authority! I still wonder at how a man can be ‘born again.’ I understand Jesus spoke of a spiritual birth, but how can that be? I wish I had another chance to ask him more.*<sup>61</sup> He

meditates on their meeting for a brief span of time, then promptly rejoins the present.

Looking again at Jesus, he whispers under his breath, “I could not – I did not – vote for this!” His eyes turn heavenward as he remembers the early morning proceedings. *The false witnesses, the unwarranted accusations . . . it was all a farce! And there was absolutely nothing I could do!* His frustration grows as the minutes drag on.

Unexpectedly, down in front of the cross, Nicodemus notices a commotion. Where he is located allows him to have a decent view of the crosses. He is able to determine that someone in the crowd has evidently fainted. *Who is that?* he wants to know. Recognition sets in; it is Mary, the one pointed out to him as the mother of Jesus. *Poor woman! Fortunately for her, someone was close by to catch her and help her regain her composure.* He strains his eyes to learn who her rescuer might be. *I know him! He is related to one of my friends who serves on the Sanhedrin with me. He once introduced him to me. That is John, the disciple of Jesus. It is my understanding that he is quite loved by Jesus.*

Nicodemus swallows these words bitterly. He can see Jesus in his mind’s eye from that night when they conversed together. *What love his face portrayed! What was it he said? ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.’<sup>62</sup> How could God give His Son so that man could have eternal life? And if this Jesus is God’s Son, then has God failed? I wanted to believe in him as our Messiah, but look . . . he is dying! A dying Messiah makes no sense. What did he say? ‘Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.’<sup>63</sup>*

After a few moments of reflection, Nicodemus knows there is only one recourse for him. He doesn’t care who notices

him or what the consequences are. Dropping to his knees and lowering his body to the ground, he cries inwardly to God, *Yahweh, I do not understand all that is happening, but I do believe on your Son. Let me be born again!*

## CHAPTER 4

*THURSDAY, 11:00 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)*

The crowd closes in around the woman who has collapsed. Their demeanors exude concern and compassion. Someone says something about a doctor; others whisper questions concerning who she is and whether she is alright.

Finally, John impatiently asks everyone to step back. Fanning Mary with one hand and supporting her with the other, he begins to speak to her quietly. After but a moment, Mary's eyelashes flutter, and she awakens, staring into the kind eyes of John.

"What . . . what happened?" she stutters.

"Mary, you are alright," John says gently. "You just had a fainting spell. Everything is okay. I'm here."

Mary seems confused for a second, as she gathers her senses. Then suddenly reality hits her like a hammer, awakening her to her present surroundings. Though she knows what she will see, she raises her head anyway. *This is not a dream*, she realizes. *He is still there, clinging to life on that old rugged cross*. And he IS still alive, causing Mary to ponder the measure of suffering Jesus can handle before he gives up his claim on life.

Knowing John is concerned, she turns to him. *He is like my own son*, she reflects. *He has spent so much time with me, he seems as one of my children. I can see why Jesus spoke so highly of him*.

Nodding her head and weakly smiling, Mary tells John, "I am alright, John. Will you please help me to my feet?"

"Of course, Mary, but not too fast. I don't want you to faint on me again." He smiles, but she knows he is not joking.

“I am okay, John. Don’t worry so much.” She does take his advice and, slowly, she stands to her feet. Though her legs feel weak, she determinedly wills them to hold her. The crowd has crept back a little, giving her room to rise. If she stands here just a few moments, maybe she will regain her strength.

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He stands there defiantly, but the portrayal of human will in the midst of suffering playing out in front of him has somewhat softened his heart. Speaking to his comrade, Joshua, Barabbas declares, “I am a free man, thanks to Pontius Pilate’s decree at the behest of the people. I know I escaped execution only because the Jewish authorities hated Jesus so much.”<sup>64</sup>

“You are right, my friend,” says Joshua. “I heard them whispering to the members of the mob, encouraging them to ask for your release.”

“I had no qualms with the fact that they were not really concerned for me,” replied Barabbas. “Any path to freedom is not to be questioned!”

Nevertheless, witnessing the exchange between Jesus and his former cellmate, who hangs to the right of Jesus, has Barabbas a little shaken. “Who is this man?” he wonders aloud. “The chief priests and elders hate him, the Romans despise him, and he appears to have a love-hate relationship with the common people. They say he is from Nazareth, of Galilee, but I have never known anyone of any good who came from that city.”<sup>65</sup>

Joshua shrugs and shakes his head, no answer forthcoming. Barabbas shuffles his feet, shifting his weight from one to the other. He pulls his cloak tighter around his face, unsure whether he should allow himself to be seen. But his curious questions about Jesus keeps him here, the driving force as to why he is not on the way to his own hometown.

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Suddenly there is a stirring in the throng. Mary and John look around to determine the source of the crowd's murmuring. Everyone is looking . . . up. They follow the group's unconscious gaze until they, too are staring into the red, hollow eyes of Jesus. He is looking at the two of them, and it appears as if he is trying to speak. Mary's feet feel stuck to the spot where she stands, but John gently guides her forward, until they are standing very near to the cross.

Jesus must use most of his strength just to remain conscious, raise his head, and open his eyes. But he strains to send what little power he has left to his voice. With a burst of energy he speaks to the two humans dearest to him. Looking first to Mary and then to John, he declares, "Dear woman . . . here is . . . your son," then "Here . . . is your . . . mother."<sup>66</sup>

A wave of realization washes over them, and they turn to each other. Then, together, they smile at Jesus and nod, a sign to him that they understand. But they both are sure that this is an indication that Jesus may not be able to hold on to life much longer. The appearance is that of a man putting his affairs in order.

Mary is no longer smiling but instead is heartbroken. She knows her son is dying, and this gesture serves to reinforce that reality. As she slumps down to the ground in John's care, her mind races backwards to a time, which now, seems so long ago. She is remembering the first time she knew . . . .

### **OVER THIRTY-THREE YEARS EARLIER**

"Dust. Could it get any thicker?" This single idea perplexed young Mary, for at this stage of her life, what else was there to ponder? *All I ever do is dust.* She moved around the room with grace which belied her young years, humming as she went.

There was a reason for her happiness, despite the dusty room and gloomy weather. *Joseph is coming by today, and he promised to wave to me.* She had fallen in love with the young carpenter the moment she saw him.

“Of course, convincing my parents he was a good match for their only daughter was another thing,” she thinks aloud. She was constantly watching out the window, hoping for but a glimpse of the man to whom she was promised, and would soon wed.

Mary was alone in the house; her mother had gone to market, her father was working as usual, and her brothers were in school at the synagogue. Yet she was not afraid, for she knew Yahweh was watching over her with care. Her faith in Him was as big as she was.

An ominous feeling passed over her, as if there was a presence nearby. Whirling around, she came face-to-face with a blazing figure, one that invoked fear in her heart. Hesitantly, she fell to her knees, unsure what to say or do.

The angel spoke first. “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was troubled. *What have I done that the Lord would favor me?* she questioned innocently. *I must admit, I am a little afraid of this being.*

“You will be with child,” the angel continued, “and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Mary listened as the angel instructed her to not be afraid. She relaxed; a little anyway. But as she hearkened on, her heart soon bubbled with joy and excitement. *He said I was going to have a baby! And his name will be Jesus! What did he say? Son*

*of the Most High? Throne of David? Could it be that I have the honor that all young Jewish women like me dream about? Am I to be the mother of the Messiah?*

She swiftly sobered when she realized her marriage was yet months away. *He speaks as if it is about to happen.* She put her fears and doubts into the form of a question to the angel.

“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

The angel’s straightforward answer set her in shock. “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God.”

Her first reaction was one of amazement, but faith quickly took over. Mary knew only Yahweh could accomplish this, and she rejoiced that He had chosen her. The angel’s next words were spoken to be a comfort to her.

“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month.”

*Elizabeth? I have not seen her in a while. She has been barren for so long! Can it truly be that she is with child?* The final statement of the angel caused Mary to worship Yahweh.

“For nothing is impossible with God.”

Her tongue, which had seemed locked, loosened again. “I am the Lord’s servant,” answered Mary. “May it be to me as you have said.”<sup>67</sup>

With Mary’s acknowledgement, the angel disappeared from before her eyes. Mary was not sure whether she should laugh, cry, or remain silent in worship. *Imagine that! The “Son of God” will be my child!* She gasped suddenly, and her hand flew to her mouth. *Joseph! What will he think about all of this? Will he believe me?*

She rushed to the window, just in time to see Joseph and his father walking down the road, going to a job. Mary was unsure if she could bear for him to see her now. *What should I do?* Joseph would be expecting to see her.

Bashfully, she headed to the door, and cracked it open. Joseph and his father chatted gaily, but, as if on cue, he shifted his gaze her way. His eyes brightened when he saw her, and he threw his hand into the air in greeting. Mary gave him a brief wave, and then shut the door. She worried her bottom lip with her teeth, resuming her household chores. *If this is truly of God, then He will prepare the way.*

**THURSDAY, 11:15 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

Mary abruptly leaves her reflections and reluctantly returns to the present. *Those were hard times, she remembers. Joseph wanted to give me a divorce when he heard my story. He was so afraid everyone would find out and shame would come to his family name, and he did not want me exposed to public humility. But then the angel, Gabriel was his name, appeared to Joseph, and he had at last understood the truth I had been telling him.*<sup>68</sup>

Mary blinks in the sunlight, a memory racing into her mind. *That trip to Bethlehem almost took everything out of me, she remembers. The journey had never seemed that long, but, of course, I had never made it while being with child. Every hill, every rock, and every craggy spot was very trying on my body. But I had to make it. And, oh, how Joseph fretted! He was so worried, and so loving in how he cared for me. What a relief when the village came into sight! It appeared so peaceful and quaint.* She sighs as she pictures the little village in her mind.

*Then I became worried, remembers Mary, when that innkeeper told us he had no room. I was so tired, and I knew my time to deliver was near. Joseph searched and searched, until he finally found a stable we could use. It smelled foul, but at least it*

*was warm and dry! The rest was just what I needed, but it was short-lived as the contractions began. Mother had prepared me for this event as best she could, but I was not prepared for the pain! It was worth it, though, when I saw my little boy. Jesus.*

She is about to look up at the cross again, but decides against it. She wants to savor the memory of him in her arms that first night, Joseph by her side.

Mary coughs, her mouth and lungs dry from crying and weeping, as well as from lack of nourishment. She cannot remember when she last ate or drank since this whole ordeal began. It all is so unimportant when one's child is dying. Her child.

Her mind again sails back to the time of Jesus' birth. *Those shepherds, she muses. They were almost comical the way they came stumbling into the stable. Their actions and their story were serious, though. They spoke of being terrified in the fields as a bright light shone all around them. They spoke with fear about how an angel had told them they would find the Messiah in Bethlehem, that very night! And the sign! Their sign was a baby wrapped in cloths, lying not in a nice soft bed, but in a cattle trough. It was the only object we could find in which to place him.*

*And their story of how the great host of angels spoke in unison to them was spine-tingling! They amazed me when they fell down and worshiped my baby. I guess I was too tired to remember that he is indeed the Son of God.<sup>69</sup>*

Mary sighs, and relaxes her tense muscles. John massages her shoulders, freeing her from her memories, but springing her back to the stark reality of the present. Gazing again towards the cross, she wishes she could have remained in the past.

The exchange Jesus had with Mary and John has not gone unnoticed by Lazarus. He had met Mary on one occasion when she came to Jerusalem for a Passover celebration; Jesus had introduced them to one another. Lazarus has heard the stories that have been told, especially of Mary having conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit of Yahweh. *They say Mary was not even married yet when Jesus was conceived*, he reasons. *I understand that she and Joseph were pledged to be married, which is just as binding according to our laws as if they were married, but they had not taken their vows yet. But what difference does that make?*

His eyes travel first to Mary, then to Jesus, lingering a while on his friend. He looks back to Mary, but something in the distance behind her catches his eye. He focuses, and realizes it is a group of priests who have come to watch the events. He is unsure at first why they have caught his attention.

*Those priests are here to watch a show*, he gathers from their facial expressions. *They think they are so superior, since they are priests! They are sinners like the rest of us! Why, before they can offer sacrifices for the people, they must first offer one for themselves!*

The answer to his previously unvoiced question comes tumbling into his mind. *Jesus being born of a virgin does make a difference! If he had not been, he would have the same sinful human nature we do. Yet in all the time I have known him, I have never witnessed him committing an act of sin! Others have reported the same to me. His gaze moves to Jesus.*

*He has stated often enough that he was offering his life as a sacrifice for others, to save them from their sins. That sounds remarkably like the language of a priest about to sacrifice a lamb! But if he were a sinner, how could he offer a sacrifice for others without first offering one for himself?*

He tries to make sense of it all. *But if he is the sinless Son of God, he would not need to offer a sacrifice for himself, and*

*therefore could offer himself as one for the people . . . the  
Passover Lamb! Of course! Only in this manner could he  
represent our sin before Yahweh.*

The cross of Jesus has taken on a new meaning for Lazarus. His eyes quickly survey the sea of people who are here on this day. It consists of Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, young and old, religious and irreligious, believers in Jesus and unbelievers, those who love him and those who hate him. With a heavy heart he realizes that few, if any, have a grasp on the importance of this day. And Lazarus knows that will not change.

*It is a crucial day for these people, and there are only two  
sides. No middle ground exists. But a scan of the crowd shows  
that to most it is just another day, perhaps a bit unordinary, but it  
will be business as usual when all is said and done.*

Lazarus observes that some have brought along a lunch with them, while others are gathered to discuss the consequences of living a life of disobedience to the law. A few are weeping, but theirs is the minority on this occasion. Many are just spectators, with no interest either way, merely here to pass the time of day. But, conscious of it or not, today is for all a decisive day, and they will choose one side or the other.

## **SOMEWHERE IN HEAVEN**

Many of the angels still have their attention honed in on the scene on earth in Jerusalem. Watching the physical suffering of Jesus, whom they know to be the Second Person of the Trinity, finally takes its toll. One angel begins to weep, then another, and another, until none can contain their grief. They see the pain in Jesus intensifying, and their emotions cannot be checked.

These servants of God know that the sin of the whole world is about to be placed on the Sinless One. On earth it is almost noon, and they sense that the time is at hand. But they fear the repercussions when God Himself takes on human sin.

With that thought pervading their understanding, their sorrow increases, and their weeping continues.

Michael, the archangel, speaks loud and clear to the assembly. “My brother angels, I understand your sad countenance. It is indeed difficult to watch He who is our Lord going through such agony. But it is necessary for the humans that He does so.

“Do not be sad for Jesus, but for those humans who do not comprehend the magnitude of what they are witnessing. Let your concern be for the ones who have no desire to change their lives and bring them in line with Yahweh’s commands! Wail for Yahweh’s chosen ones, who have forsaken the spirit of His commands for the letter of the law! Sing your dirge of lament for those who willingly reject the way of Yahweh! But do not let your hearts break for Jesus. What He is about to do will be the single greatest act of love humankind has ever, or will ever know. But many will not embrace it for themselves.”

While he sympathizes with them, Michael is sure that he has done the right thing. They must be made to understand the enormous love that is about to be exhibited through the death of Jesus on the cross. But it will come at great cost.

**THURSDAY, 11:45 AM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

*Father, whispers Jesus inwardly, I know what is coming. I know it is for this reason, at this time, on this cross, that I am here. It is this very event about which I prayed to you only last night. I understood then what must be done, as I prayed there in the Garden of Gethsemane.*

*This is why last night I asked if there was some other way to accomplish man’s redemption, the pain reminds Jesus. I asked the Father to let this cup of suffering pass from me if possible. But that was my humanity speaking. To accomplish my mission,*

*for the price of man's sin to be paid, I must suffer and die. It is the Father's will.*<sup>70</sup>

Raising his head heavenward, Jesus converses with his Father. *I am aware that this is your will, Father. I am now ready, and I will be obedient to your will. Even though it means that I must die on this cruel cross. It is time, and I am ready!*

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Someone bumps him, and Barabbas and his friend move further away as a precaution. He is still afraid of being recognized, maybe even arrested again. He is not known for being a very kind man, but instead has a reputation for being hard and mean. His enemies would like nothing better than to have him dragged to jail again. But right now he is focused on the crosses on the hill called Golgotha – on one cross in particular.

Barabbas recalled hearing the man on the cross to the right of Jesus say that this man Jesus had done nothing wrong. Barabbas whispers to Joshua, “That cannot be true! My own experience assures me that all men have a little wickedness in their hearts. Some are better able to control it than others. Unlike me. I have been in trouble since I was born!”

Joshua meditates on the reports he has heard about Jesus. “All I have ever heard are the good things he has done. Oh, sure, what he taught was a little controversial. But they say he always speaks the truth, even in condemning others. Some have called him a prophet; others have called him a rabbi; still others called him Messiah.”

“Messiah!” spat out Barabbas. “The Messiah is supposed to set up our rule again. That is what I have worked so hard to accomplish. This man never even mentioned overthrowing the Romans, as I hear tell. He spoke about love, compassion, mercy, and . . . .”

His head jerks up, and his eyes draw a bead on Jesus. The other word he was formulating in his mind was: forgiveness. At that moment, a shadow of comprehension passes over him.

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“For three long hours these people have watched the three men suffering on their crosses. Most believe that death will soon overtake them, and so no one is in any hurry to leave. Some will not be satisfied until they have seen Jesus finally die. Few will not be happy to see him die.”

These words were pronounced by Lazarus as he observed the crowd around the cross. The five disciples of Jesus who surround him are listening intently.

“Our religious leaders are hoping for a rapid conclusion to these events, thinking only of the many preparations to accomplish before the beginning of the Special Sabbath.” The disciples know that the next day is a special day, a Special Sabbath day.<sup>71</sup> This Sabbath day differs from the regular weekly Sabbath, and occurs on the day after the Passover sacrifice. The Passover lamb is about to be sacrificed in the Temple.

Nathaniel speaks. “You’re right. The Special Sabbath being followed by the regular Sabbath means extra work. Since no work can be done on the Sabbaths, all must be completed ahead of time. Included in the necessary labor are the preparations of meals, the tending of animals, and the wrapping up of any unfinished work that cannot wait.”

The small clan of men watch as the unsuspecting throng has settled in to see the finale of this ordeal, and nothing will sway them from their desires. It will not be long, they hope, for some are growing tired of the idleness. Some are now making plans to go to their homes, bored because it has not yet ended.

In their own little snit they ignore the signs all around them. Without warning the birds stop singing, and start to take

flight. Even the insect world stops their chirps and usual sounds. These signs are being ignored, but they are indicators that an unsuspected incident is on its way.

Suddenly, there is a rumbling, and the ground begins to tremble. Shrieks ring out, and people try to steady themselves, uncertain what is happening or what to do. Women are crying, men are shouting, and confusion reigns.

Another phenomenon is also occurring, adding to the chaos. The sky is darkening! It is as if the afternoon sun has skipped out and left darkness in its wake. Blackness rears its ugly head, and strikes the earth, injecting its poison of fear into every heart. It wraps its powerful tail around everyone and everything, constricting the earth into inactivity. It has left an ominous feeling in the hearts of all, a feeling of dread that something of great importance is about to occur.

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In the confusion of the darkening sky a voice rings out, and an accusing finger points toward Barabbas: “Hey, you there, aren’t you that rabble rouser, Barabbas?” Alarm tenses his body, and he grabs Joshua and fades swiftly into the crowd, an art he has perfected. On and on he pushes, finally running, running, trying to escape the demons which haunt him. But while he eludes his physical pursuers, there is no relief from the torment of his mental ones. Questions flood his mind: *Who is this man? Why is he dying in my place? Why do I care?* For Barabbas it is a pivotal moment, as his own soul hangs in the balance between belief and unbelief.<sup>72</sup>



## CHAPTER 5

**THURSDAY, JUST AFTER NOON, 14 AVIV (around Jerusalem)**

Darkness! It clutches Jerusalem tightly, and it squeezes the very soul from the terrified assembly. People are shouting, crying, cursing, tripping, and blindly seeking their way to safety. Those on the grand stage which is Golgotha are transfixed with fear, causing them to finally become still and immovable.

The burly centurion's shout pierces the darkness. "Soldiers, hear me! Find those torches and light them. Now, on the double!" Soldiers scurry away to obey their superior's bidding.

Two warriors solidly collide into one another. "Ouch!" yells one painfully. "Watch where you are going!"

The other spits out irately, "How can I, you fool, in this blackness!" The two become thoughtfully silent, and then resume their search for the torches.

Finally, good sense prevails, and lanterns are being lit. As soldiers regain themselves and begin to fire torches, the assembly looks first to their own safety and then to the welfare of others. The light alleviates the qualms of many, and relief and calmness wash over the throng.

John, who has been assisting Mary, gradually relaxes his grip on her, realizing how tightly he is clinging to her. "Mary, are you alright? I hope I did not hurt you by squeezing you so hard."

Mary smiles up into the face of John, nodding her affirmation to his question. "No, John, I am okay. But what is this darkness?"

"I do not know, Mary, but maybe it has something to do with the crucifixion of Jesus."

Both renew their gaze upon Jesus, finding him still alive, but very much weakened. Their concern for him remains firm, and their hearts break painstakingly slow as they observe his torturing death.

Everyone's minds are unified on two questions: *Why is there darkness in the middle of the day, and what does this all mean?* Few, however, combine in their minds the awfulness of the darkness with the misery transpiring on Golgotha. No one truly comprehends the immenseness of the situation, or how the two affairs could possibly be related.

No one on earth but one, that is: the one on the middle cross. Darkness only signifies to him what this great sacrifice of himself really means in the Father's grand scheme. To this end, he is here willingly, and continues to persevere until all is accomplished.

And in one place the significance is not diminished, and is, in fact, welcomed.

## **SOMEWHERE IN HEAVEN**

Absorbed in the scene upon earth, the angels are quietly subdued. Even Michael silently surrenders to the moment, fixedly staring at the earthly scene.

In the very mind of Yahweh there is no consternation, no confusion, no doubt, and no fear. *For this purpose my Son had to descend, take up the earthly robe of flesh, and suffer the massive cruelties of man. For this reason Jesus hangs in the balance between heaven and earth, like a bridge of hope across a chasm of hopelessness.*

Yahweh knows that man could never save himself. *Not that he has not tried. The futile efforts of selfishness, the sincere yet erroneous attempts to be righteous, and the mistaken ideas concerning godliness can only be attributed to the ignorance of*

*man and his blindness to my undying love. Have I not tried to enlighten them, to reveal my way to them?*

And so it had to be in this manner and no other. *Man cannot atone for his own sins. He has neither the capacity nor the ability to do so. That is why my Son now hangs on the cross in Jerusalem. He, the Sinless and Holy One, now secures through his suffering and death the atonement of man. That which my holiness requires no mortal man can pay. The sin of man only separates him from me, and the judgment is death.*

At this moment, Christ represents the sin of man, and his death alone, as the perfect man, can atone for it. This is the reason why Yahweh does nothing to assist his Son. It is the reason all of heaven only looks on while Jesus is suspended on the cruelly constructed cross. To the angels, it is as if Yahweh is turning his back on His Son. In reality, He is, for God can have no fellowship with sin; hence the darkness of the moment upon this tiny, life-bearing planet.

At last the eternal penalty for man's sin is being paid. Yahweh does nothing to alleviate His Son's suffering because this has been His wise and good arrangement since the creation of man was only a thought in His eternal mind.

For this reason, and this reason solely, Yahweh and all of heaven appear to be only spectators upon the grim and grisly act being portrayed on God's created habitat for mankind. Yahweh does nothing because He cannot interfere in the consummation of His will to provide grace and mercy for undeserving humans.

The angelic host cannot believe this is happening. Though Gabriel and Michael have given them the exact explanation for this event, they have a tremendously difficult time pulling it all together in their thought processes as they watch the Royal One of heaven limply hang from this implement of brutal torture. This is their King! This is God, the Son of God, Second Person of the blessed Trinity, the Lord of Hosts, the Mighty God, Prince of Peace, and Ruler of the nations. But as

they observe His final human act, he earns yet another title: Savior of mankind.

So the angels watch on, determined to see this through, yet awaiting any instructions their Lord and Master may speak to them to assist Him . . . but inside another realm a different scene unfolds. . . .

### **HADES (the place of torments – the abode of the wicked dead)**

The demon horde gathers around its evil leader. It appears that their dreams are coming true. Jesus, supposedly the one who is to deliver man, hangs on a cross. Their dirge of hate and wails of victory peal out over this spiritual realm. But something is amiss.

Some of their numbers are wondering about this whole sight playing out before them. Truly their hearts' desires and wildest visions are being realized before their very eyes. But it seems too easy. They expect Yahweh to put up more of a fight. Even Lucifer is uneasy, and his roar resounds throughout the assembly of his fiends.

“This is our greatest hour. There is my rival, the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus the Messiah, hanging on a cross,” he cries hoarsely. “I have at long last defeated Yahweh.” His evil companions cheer devilishly, jeering again at Yahweh.

Inside the mind of Lucifer a battle rages. Like his demons, he has doubts. *Just what is it you are doing, Yahweh? He asks within. Why are you not sending your army of angels to deliver your son? I expected more of you. What trick is this? Is this the end? I know how much you despise me for my rebellion against you. But you haven't defeated me yet, and I pledge myself anew to destroy you and take your throne!*

Lucifer smiles a devilish grin, shakes his fist toward heaven, and once more considers the fate of the one who hangs on the cross. He sincerely believes it is the end of the road for

Jesus. *You cannot escape me now* almost sings out from his being. Believing he has won brings irrepressible joy, and yet he suspects that the actors upon this grand stage have yet to act out the concluding scene in this melodramatic play.

With that thought Lucifer releases an eerie laugh that reverberates throughout Hades, and the occupants there shudder.

**THURSDAY, 1:00 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

Jesus finds breathing laborious and tedious. Yet he holds on, conscious of the fact that his time is near, but not yet come. As he lists helplessly on the cross, he surveys the mass of humanity that stands before him, illuminated by their torches. At this juncture he sees them not on individual terms, as friends or foes, but for what they really are. *They are my creation, my crowning joy, created as greater than all other created things. I gave them supervision over the entirety of creation on earth, and made them a little lower than the angels.*<sup>73</sup>

Reminding himself of this fortifies his soul for the task at hand. The light of the torches cast his mind back to the teaching he had given to the crowd at the end of the Feast of Tabernacles. *Each afternoon of the feast the people had gathered to dance and sing in the Court of the Women in the Temple. This celebration had taken place under the light of four huge oil lamps which illuminated the court. On the final day, as the lamps were being extinguished, I declared, "I am the light of the world."<sup>74</sup> I tried to inform them that I am the "Great Light" who was to come, whom the lamps symbolized. Bittersweet memories flood over his soul as he recalls the rejection by most who heard and the acceptance by so few.*

But the darkness also serves as a reminder of why he is here. Jesus had indicated to all who would listen that darkness represented sin. Now he is engaged in the sole action that will release them from the guilt and punishment they face. As he

hangs here on this Roman-made cross, he who had never sinned pays for the sin of the world.

During this dark, dismal hour Jesus faces not punishment from the Romans or Jews, but rather the punishment from God for mankind. His Father has turned away, no longer able to gaze upon him as a Son, but now as a substitute, the sacrificial Lamb that on this day assembles the whole of the Jewish atonement system unto himself.

With that thought in mind, Jesus painfully lifts his head toward heaven. Through inhuman strength he cries out in Aramaic, “Eloi . . . Eloi . . . lama . . . sabachthani?” Interpreted it means, “My God my God why have you forsaken me?” His head droops again, life slowly ebbing away.

The excitement of the pitch-black hour nearly causes the multitude to forget the reason they are on this craggy rock. As eyes adjust to the light of crudely formed torches, the mobs of people are excited and annoyed. Hearing Jesus speak brings reality crashing back. Confusion reigns among those who have heard his sob. “What did he say?” “Did he call for Elijah?” “Is he dead yet?” “No, he lives still.” “He must be delusional.” This consternation concerning his words virtually roots them where they are, clearly no longer concerned about the darkness.<sup>75</sup>

**THURSDAY, 1:30 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Praetorium, Pilates’ residence)**

*Finally!* she broods. *Light enough to see by. This darkness is too unnatural.* She gropes her way around, searching, longing to see her husband.

“Pilate, Pilate, where are you?” she calls. Onward she plods, turning corners, utilizing the light the servants have provided. “Pilate! Pilate!” Frantic are her calls, and her steps hasten. Suddenly she rounds a corner and collides with a brute force that soon envelops her. Before her fear can be choked out into a scream, a voice fills her ears.

“Claudia.”

With that one word she relaxes the tenseness of her body into the loving clutch of her husband. Lifting her head, she quickly gazes into his adoring face, and just as quickly her face burrows into his chest.

“Claudia, you are shivering,” Pilate intones. “Whatever is the matter, my dove?”

“It is this infernal darkness,” she mumbles. “It scares me out of my mind. Just hold me for a minute.” His strong embrace chases away the dread that shrouds her soul. Minutes pass as the couple stand in sweet reunion, reveling in each other’s warm hug. Finally, Claudia’s voice is restored and her fears calmed. Pushing herself away from Pilate, she looks into his face and voices her opinion to him once again.

“Pilate, this is entirely your fault” she boldly asserts. Her accusation infuriates him, and roughly he shoves her away.

“What are you speaking, woman? With what charge do you indict me? I am the only one who can pass judgment,” he reprimanded.

With a newfound bravado she pulls herself erect, and defiantly squares off with him. “I tried to persuade you to leave that innocent rabbi alone. I relayed my dream about him to you, and you just shrugged it off. Now we are all being punished!”<sup>76</sup>

A smile played at the corner of Pilate’s mouth, but thinking better of that, he sternly rebuked her. “Are you serious? You really believe that this natural phenomenon is the result of my execution of that Jewish vagabond? Ha! He could no more cause this than any other man. My advisors tell me this is an unexpected eclipse of the sun.”

“Lasting this long?” she queried. “Do you seriously believe your advisors? I told you about my dream, and you know how my dreams are extremely accurate. There is something

unique and strange about this man. I believe he is possessed by a god.”

“A demon is more like it!” replied her irritated husband. “I did my best to release him. I found no fault in him when I questioned him.<sup>77</sup> I would have been happy to acquit him and turn him loose. But I couldn’t! I have my reputation to consider. I absolutely cannot allow the Jewish leaders to see me as a weak proconsul. Already my enemies appeal to Rome to replace me. The only recourse I had was to crucify him. Besides, why should I believe your silly dreams over the scientific knowledge of my advisors?”

Stepping toward him, she exclaims, “Silly? Silly is it now? In former days you believed in the validity of my dreams. You bragged that you would judge my dreams more believable than all the wisdom of your counselors.”

Determined to placate his charming yet sensitive wife, Pilate softens his tone. “Claudia, my dove, you know I love you. I am sorry I called your dreams “silly,” so will you please forgive me? You know how much I respect your dreams and intuitions.” He reaches out and takes her by her hands, raking the back of them gently with his thumbs.

Subdued at last, Claudia relaxes and tightly squeezes her husband’s hands. “I forgive you, my love, as I always do.” Holding him close again, she glances over his shoulder toward the window, only to be reminded again of the darkness that distresses her.

#### **THURSDAY, 2:00 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Temple)**

The Temple area bustles with activity as final preparations are made for the sacrifice. Annually, on this day, 14 Aviv, at 3 p.m., the Passover lamb is sacrificed. Priests are scurrying through their responsibilities, knowing everything must be in order. The darkness, however, is making their jobs more

difficult. They question each other mercilessly concerning the reason for it. Their answers only serve to throw further confusion into their searching minds.

Their activity is varied. Some have secured the wood that has been placed under the Bronze Altar, and even now they stoke the fire as they ready it for the sacrifice. One priest hones a sharp edge onto the blade of the knife that will pluck the life from the selected lamb. Others, as hornets stirred from their nest, dart around the courtyard to fulfill the duties of their priestly profession. The torches, lit to provide light in this dreadful darkness, cast dancing shadows upon this entire scene.

Time hastens onward, yet the tiny lamb tied to the altar blankly stares at the whole surreal scene. Chewing its cud, it almost seems as if it is pondering its fate. Its small tail switches back and forth rather nonchalantly to ward off the annoying insects. Still it lies, awaiting patiently it knows not what. Little does it realize that soon its life will be stricken from it in one single blow of the knife, thereby meeting God's requirements through the Mosaic Law for atonement. Of even less concern is the fact that on a weather-beaten hill to the north the perfect sacrifice has been given to take its place . . . .

**THURSDAY, 2:30 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

Lazarus shakes his head. Never would he have believed the events of today would have unfolded the way they have. That his dear friend, his Messiah, would be hanging upon a Roman cross outside the city of Jerusalem on the hill called Golgotha is the farthest thing that was on his mind as he arose on this morning.

The black hue of the sky seems to inject itself into his soul. As everyone else, he is bewildered as to the nature of such darkness in the midst of the day. It was just another item in a long list that made this day one of confusion and puzzlement. His quick survey of the faces in the crowd reveals the many

emotions under which they are laboring: fear, uncertainty, anger, perplexity, and even unconcern.

He strains to discern the face of Jesus. *He is not dead yet, he muses. Oh how much he has suffered! I am not sure how he has endured for so long a time.* His thoughts trail off to the events of the day, until one question invades his mind: *What time is it?*

With great deliberation he recounts the experiences as they have unfurled. *If memory serves me correctly, he was nailed to the cross about 9 a.m. I know that he hung there for several hours before this darkness fell. Maybe it was about noon when the sun ceased. It seems that about that same length of time has elapsed until now. That should make it somewhere around 3 p.m. But without the sun, who can tell for sure?*

Without warning the bright sun returns to its duties, chasing away the unwarranted blackness and blinding the inhabitants and visitors of the city of Jerusalem. People fall to the ground, covering their eyes and crying out in pain due to the brightness. It seems an eternity since the sun hid itself from view, and its sudden return is welcomed, though begrudging its brilliance.

Lazarus slowly regains his sight, and he swiftly returns to a standing position, helping his companions around him to gain their footing. Around them gratitude is mumbled, some shout curses at the retreating darkness, and others are just relieved that they can finally see again. Among the small band of Jesus' followers there appears to be relief and yet concern. Like one giant head they turn in unison to once again observe their Lord on the old rugged tree.

Lazarus lowers his head to return to his previous line of reasoning. *What was I thinking before the sun shone again? The sun! That was it! I was wondering what time it is!* Looking into the bright, hazy sky, he mentally checks the height of the sun to the horizon. Calculating instinctively, his mind determines it to

be nearly 3 p.m. *3 p.m.? It is almost time for the Passover lamb to be slain in the Temple. Wait! The Passover lamb . . . the Bronze Altar . . . 3 p.m.* Wrenching his head upward, he fixates on Jesus. *You really are the Lamb of God! Amazing how all things are transpiring, coinciding with the Passover feast.*

Remembering his comrades, he looks from one to the other, praying they can comprehend as he does. He shakes his head slowly, and again joins his brothers in standing on this rugged hill and staring at the sight before them.

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In the Temple the priests are also caught off guard as rays of sunlight burst through the gloomy countenance of the solar deprived day. Rubbing their eyes, they pause only momentarily, then recommence their activities. It is practically time for the sacrifice.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, strides out of his chambers. From inside he noticed the change from dark to light, and comes out to scrutinize the situation. *That's more like it, he reflects. It will be easier to see what I am doing now. At least I will be better able to find my way to the altar.*

Already the crowd is gathering in the Temple courts, joyously awaiting the consummation of this Passover feast, the slaughter of the Passover lamb. Caiaphas is repulsed by their common revelry, their anxious anticipation of this event. *Do they not realize that this is just another sacrifice? Every year the same routine. Nothing changes except for the lamb.* He smiles weakly at the crowd, playing the part he is forced to play, but caring not at all for it.

As he walks along towards his duty, he is drawn to the idea that the crowd is somewhat thinner than usual. Then he contemplates why: the crucifixion. He aimlessly wonders if Jesus, the traveling rabbi who claimed to be God, is dead. *Serves him right if he is. Who does he think he is? God? Bah! He is a*

*man, a common laborer, a carpenter with no pedigree at all, from Galilee of all places. He fancies himself a rabbi. We showed him! Even if the trials were illegal, what does that matter to me? Good riddance, I say! It is a pity he has to be crucified on this day, such an important one in Jewish ritual. But we will make an example of this rabble, and better contain the strong spirit of our people.*

He reaches the final gate leading into the Court of Priests, after proceeding through the gates of the Court of Gentiles and the Court of Women. The priests have completed their duties, and now stand at ready attention to once more watch him swing the knife upward, then downward into the body of the lamb. He glances at the lamb, which is leisurely chewing its cud, unconscious of the fact that it will soon breathe its last breath.

With a start, Caiaphas pauses in the quietude of the moment. *What was that noise?* he asks himself. He turns to first one side, and then the other, silently questioning the priests who are standing near. Their response is one of stupefaction, for they heard and saw nothing out of the ordinary, and are uncertain concerning his puzzled glance. The old priest lifts his head, closes his eyes, and strains his ears. *There it is again! Am I hallucinating? Am I going mad? No! Whatever it was sounded like rejoicing, like a celebration of some sort.*

Shaking his head to clear it, his head swivels rearward, and he glances behind him through the Temple gate. But the people are reverently awaiting him, preparing themselves for the cleansing and atonement that will occur when once the sacrifice is accomplished. What the clamor was, he cannot say, but he knows that whatever it was, it was a unique sound in his ear.

### **SOMEWHERE IN PARADISE (the abode of the righteous dead)**

The righteous throng stands in unison, anticipating the coming earthly event. Anxious has been their wait, wondering

when this day would come. As the crowd remains motionless, a number of them break out in prophecy.

Adam asserts God's plan, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."<sup>78</sup>

The voice of old Abraham creaks out the promise Yahweh offered him, announcing, "Through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."<sup>79</sup>

David regally decrees, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.' I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"<sup>80</sup>

Isaiah lifts his gray head and incessantly cries out, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."<sup>81</sup>

The jubilant affirmation of Jeremiah is: "The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."<sup>82</sup>

Tears stroll down the face of Joel as he joyfully rings out, "And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."<sup>83</sup>

The old prophet Zechariah stands erect, proclaiming zealously, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation."<sup>84</sup>

Malachi speaks forth his message, as he did when treading the earth: "Behold, I am going to send My messenger,

and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,' says the LORD of hosts."<sup>85</sup>

Together the whole host of paradise saints thankfully and ceaselessly exclaims, "Hallelujah! Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised!

## CHAPTER 6

THURSDAY, 2:55 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Temple)

As Caiaphas uninterestedly traipses up the steps to the Brass Altar, he is struck by the lamb waiting for him at the summit. In other years the lamb has been timid, pulling on the ropes, seeking its escape as if it knew its doom. But this one is different.

*Why does this lamb seem almost willing to die? he wonders. He takes a long glance at the creature. Just look at him! He has a regal yet humble air about him, as if he is most privileged to be the sacrifice! He has no idea this will be his last day on earth.*

Even the other priests notice the lamb, and many begin to smile, though reservedly so, for the solemnity of the occasion must be maintained. A stern look from their superior serves to drive away the temporary joy created by the small lamb.

*Why are they smiling? They need to keep their mind on their duties, and remember how formal this occasion is, and their own privilege at being a priest of the Most High God.*

The old priest trudges over to the lamb, and deftly checks the knots that are keeping it secure. As he does so, the lamb stares up at him, and its eyes penetrate into his very soul. For a brief moment, he sees himself reflected in the eyes of the lamb, a sight which startles him. He is taken aback by the realization of what transpired.

*I have been priest for a while now, but never has a lamb looked me in the eye! What is that I saw? It was as if I saw my sinful self! But I am a good Jew. I pray, at least sometimes I do. I fast like others, at least every once in a while. I give to the Temple, at least I give as much as others. So what if I only do it dutifully! But I see something else in the gleam of its eye, almost*

*as if it is communicating with me, trying to indicate something important.*

Like being struck with a sucker punch, Caiaphas steps back as the realization hits him. *Forgiveness! That is what I behold in the eyes of this animal. It seems it was communing with me to indicate my forgiveness! But forgiveness for what? I am as good as many and better than most. This is ridiculous!* Assured of the security of the lamb, he makes his final preparations.

**THURSDAY, 2:55 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

Now that the darkness is over, Jesus turns his head toward the soldiers. His glazed look has their rapt attention. Haltingly, and with a throbbing ache all over, Jesus' humanity is on display as he chokes out, "I . . . am . . . thirsty." In this cry, he signifies the end of the darkness enveloping the land, as well as the darkness clouding his soul.

Earlier the soldiers had offered him a wine mixed with a gall, a sedative. The women of Jerusalem prepared this mixture for those hanging on crosses as a narcotic for the pain. Wanting to be fully conscious until his death, Jesus had refused. But now he needs a soothing, cooling drink in order to finish his task.

One of the soldiers near him, hearing his request, turns to another soldier and commands, "Hey, bring that wine over here! The man says he is thirsty!" His hearty laugh booms across the hill. The man spoken to lazily turns around and grabs the jar of wine vinegar.

This concoction is the cheap version of wine, often used by common laborers and soldiers. These men had been enjoying the dregs of this drink as they impatiently waited for this ordeal to be over. Another soldier spies a sponge, and grabs a nearby hyssop plant. "Hold on a minute," he says to the one with the jar, "I have an idea." Jamming the sponge onto the end of the stem

of the plant, he soaks the sponge in the wine vinegar held by his comrade. "This ought to do it," he declares, and hands the newly formed contraption to the soldier closest to Jesus.

Stepping as close as possible, the Roman raises the wine-soaked sponge up, up, until it eventually arrives at the lips of Jesus. Jesus takes only a sip, enough to soothe his dry, chapped lips, and turns his head away.<sup>86</sup>

Reflecting on the past six hours, Jesus whispers in His spirit, *At last, fellowship with the Father has returned! Thank you, Spirit, for making that possible. This is it, Father. Through the Spirit I have accomplished the work you sent me to do. There is only one thing remaining; the Passover Lamb, the true Lamb, is ready now to be sacrificed . . . .*

**THURSDAY, 2:55 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Praetorium, Pilates' residence)**

Pontius Pilate sat statuesquely upon his judgment seat, cognizant of the events of the day. Already he was tired and wanted to nap, but his duties inhibited his own desires. The job he had so zealously desired now weighed on him like a burden too heavy to bear.

*This is the job I wanted, he chuckled derisively. Whatever possessed me to want to be anywhere near these aggravating Jews? It must have been the spirit of adventure that drove me to request this assignment. I am sure of one thing: I did not know what I was getting myself into, despite the warnings of some of my allies. Even my wife portended the evilness of this place. I should have listened.*

Looking out at the newly revealed sun, he assays the time as around 3:00 p.m. *Will this day never end? These Jewish feast days must be the longest days of the year! I will be glad when things have settled down, the visitors have returned to their native lands, and some form of normalcy returns, whatever that may be.*

Just then one of his captains approaches him, saluting in honor. “Yes, Captain, what is it?”

“A group of the Jewish Pharisees to see you, sir.”

“Tell them I am too busy to bother with them just now,” he replies.

“Sir, it is old Judiah and some others. Begging your pardon, Sir, but I do not think they will be put off so easily.”

Pilate’s sagging shoulders and rolling eyes are an indicator of how the Jews so often perturbed him. “Fine, Captain, show them in, but tell them I have only a few minutes for them.”

The captain salutes, turns, and leaves, obeying without hesitancy. In a moment he returns, leading a group of somber – looking men in Jewish garb. The leader steps forward to confront Pilate.

“What is it you desire, Judiah?” questioned Pilate. “I have pressing matters of state to which to attend.”

Pressing his hands together, Judiah says, “We are sorry to interrupt you, but we have an appeal to make. It is about those men hanging on crosses outside the city.”

A wave of remembrance ripples through Pilate at the words of the old Pharisee. “What is it? Hurry with your request.”

“As you know sundown begins a High Sabbath for us, and, well, it is nearly 3:00 p.m. now. It will take some time to get those men off the crosses and buried before sundown. We solicit you to move ahead with the procedure of breaking their legs to hasten their deaths, in order that our special Sabbath not be violated.”

Pilate deliberately arises from his seat, stroking his chin as he paces in front of this cluster of influential Jews. *I certainly want to placate them, and this may help my image to do so*, he reasons. Coming to a standstill before them, Pilate pastes a friendly smile upon his visage, and responds, “What an excellent idea! I was just considering their fate and wondering if they were still alive. We definitely want to finish this affair before sundown. I will issue the command.”

The Pharisees, shocked at such cordiality, can only mumble their gratitude. The men beat a hasty retreat out of the hall, and return to their families. The captain, standing nearby with helmet in hand, promptly steps before Pilate at his silent bidding. “You have heard their request,” intones Pilate, “now make it so.” The career warrior salutes and departs to execute the order.

*Well, muses Pilate to himself, I must remind them of my willingness to obey their request the next time we have a disagreement. It will undoubtedly be to my advantage to have done this favor on their behalf. Besides, it also eases my conscience, for I can yet hear the words of the man Jesus, when he said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.’<sup>87</sup> I am not certain as to his meaning, but I do not want a rebellion.* With that thought a shudder courses through his body.

#### **THURSDAY, 3:00 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Temple)**

Caiaphas readies himself to perform the task required of him. He is still shaken by the revelation seen in the eyes of the lamb, and that lamb now lies on the altar, peering up at the priest.

*I wish that lamb would not stare at me! It is unnerving.* Shaking visibly, he takes the ceremonial knife in hand. He glances around him at the priests who stand at attention, observing this most somber occasion.

At this moment, all focus is upon this act, and he relishes the attention. He plays it for all it is worth, basking in the glory that is his in being the High Priest of Israel. *This is my stage, he glories, and they are looking to me as their leader. I am the most important person here right now, and they know it.*

But another perusal of the faces of the priests reveals that it is not he at whom their attention is riveted, but the lamb! Twisting back around, the High Priest glares at the lamb, and it appears to be . . . to be smiling! Disheveled at this strange sight, the priest raises the knife and slits the throat of the lamb. Thankful to have completed this task at last, Caiaphas turns to the crowd, and as so many before him have done, declares loudly, “It is finished!”

**THURSDAY, 3:00 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

“It . . . is . . . finished!”<sup>88</sup> These words from the lips of Jesus are said with his dying strength. They do not go unnoticed by those around the cross this day. Lazarus, surrounded by the small band of disciples, hears the dying words of Jesus, and he attentively jerks his head upward to again gaze at his friend. The words of Jesus arouse him from contemplation. . . . Those words, *‘it is finished,’ I have heard those words from another’s lips.*

Awakening his mind, he searches its inner recesses for the answer. He is startled momentarily as the blast of the shofar, the ram’s horn, is heard from the Temple. *Oh, that is just the sound which designates the completion of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.*

Lazarus’ abruptly turns and stares toward Jerusalem, and his sudden movement alarms his friends. He then returns his gaze toward Jesus. The shock of it all hits him squarely, and again his mind races. *The sacrifice of the Passover lamb . . . those words of Jesus . . . the same words uttered by the High Priest when the lamb has been slain! It all makes sense! Just as that lamb was tied to the Great Altar at 9:00 a.m. and killed at*

*3:00 p.m., so Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 a.m. and now is sacrificing himself at 3:00 p.m.! He is indeed the Passover lamb of God!*

The gasps of the crowd indicate that something is happening. Everyone is staring down the hill, so Lazarus obliges by looking in the same direction. The object of their apprehension is soon revealed as a band of soldiers, leaving the city gate, comes into view, heading in their direction. They are obviously in route to Golgotha.

As friend and foe alike contemplate the significance of this group, the final words of Jesus fall upon their ears. “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” All eyes return to Jesus as he inhales his last breath, and then life passes from his body. In this terse moment no one speaks. Those opposed to Jesus are inwardly glad, but do not give utterance to their joy. The friends of Jesus weep silently, sad and afraid at the passing of their only hope. The only sounds are those coming from the mouths of the two hanging beside Jesus as they moan and groan in their own throes of death.

Again, Lazarus is staggered by the words of Jesus. *His life was not taken away by Jew or Roman. Instead, he has willingly given his life as the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. He gave himself to be beaten, ridiculed and crucified. Now he has given his life. What wonder we are beholding today!* Armed with this knowledge, his sadness becomes mingled with an unspeakable peace.

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Birds are no longer singing their afternoon songs, and wing their way to faraway places. Crickets have ceased their incessant chirps, quietly skipping away. The natural world knows what no man on this little part of God’s earth knows: a catastrophic event is coming. Heaving up from the bowels of the earth is a low, dull rumble, arising in a crescendo of thunderous roaring.

“E-A-R-T-H-Q-U-A-K-E!”<sup>89</sup> The long, drawn-out warning drops heavily on the ears of those inhabiting this skull-shaped hill. Panic overcomes them as the ground first trembles and afterward shakes violently. It is much too late to run to any kind of shelter, which may not be a great idea anyway. Shrieks of terror spill out into the afternoon sun; bodies are falling to the hardened ground, unable to stand upright. Friends and relatives grab for each other, or anyone nearby for that matter.

John is sitting on the ground, Mary beside him, and they cling tightly to each other. The small band of disciples is kneeling beside Lazarus, huddled in a frightened bunch. Elsewhere, husky soldiers are reduced to frightened boys in the great upheaval.

As suddenly as the great cataclysm began, so the climax swiftly comes to an end. Relief deluges the crowd, and the resultant sobs fill the air.

The centurion in charge of the crucifixion detail has watched this entire scene with keen interest. Taking it all in, it is having quite an effect upon his conscience. *This man is undeniably different than anyone I have ever known, Roman or Jew. His suffering was so brutal, and yet he was so meek in the way he endured it. And then, in his final breath, he appears to be the one in control. Even the earth trembles at his death!*

With that final thought, the centurion cannot corral the idea which escapes his mind and forms itself into words: “Surely this man was the Son of God!”<sup>90</sup>

#### **THURSDAY, 3:01 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Temple)**

Following his grand pronouncement and the blowing of the shofar, Caiaphas becomes suddenly aware that all is not right. The sudden convulsion of the earth throws him against the altar where the slain lamb lies lifeless. Regaining his footing and fixing his eyes on the Temple, he is aware that there appears to be

much confusion among the priests. Some are running out of the building, while others are standing in bewilderment. *What is happening?* he wonders. The High Priest comes down from the Altar, and grabs a younger priest who is hurrying by him. “Where are you going? What is happening?”

The priest, fear etched on his face, stutters, “Th. . . the veil! The veil! It is ter . . . terrible! Oh, what will happen now?”

Caiaphas shakes the man, then demands, “Speak plainly! What happened to the veil in the Temple? Tell me quickly!”

Struggling for breath, the priest continues: “I was in the Temple, performing my activities. I heard you say ‘It is finished,’ and all of a sudden, a loud ripping sound flooded my ears. I turned around just in time to watch the veil being rent in two, starting from the top and going to the bottom.<sup>91</sup> No hands were upon it; it just seemed like God Himself was doing it. We all soon became conscious of the fact that the Holy of Holies was exposed! I was so afraid at being struck dead that I just ran!”

Caiaphas can hardly believe his ears. *Can this be true? Why would this happen now, today, at this time?* The priest wrenches himself from the grasp of Caiaphas, and resumes his journey. Shaking his head to clear away the impending cobwebs of disbelief, the High Priest heads towards the temple, unsure why his feet are taking him in that direction, and even more uncertain of what he will do when he arrives there.

He is confronted by a familiar face, an old priest he has served with for many years. This priest has bewilderment written all over his face. He seems to be mindlessly moving away from the Temple, anywhere away from the great upheaval occurring there. Caiaphas speaks to him, but he hears nothing, and continues his dazed journey.

Finally Caiaphas reaches the Temple door and looks into the Holy Place. The sight which meets his eyes is a scene he will never forget. Some of the priests are backed up to the two sides

of the split Veil, and with their hands they are bringing the two sides of the veil together so that the Ark of the Covenant will not be exposed. Other priests are attempting to sew the veil together, closing the rip permanently.

Caiaphas is perplexed by this occurrence, and decides to depart to his own residence so that he can hopefully puzzle this mystery out. *What could all of this possibly mean?* he reflects. “I WILL NOT believe that any of this has anything to do with that man Jesus” he unknowingly speaks out loud! *There must be a reasonable answer.* But he has doubts that this mystery will ever be solved.

#### **THURSDAY, 3:30 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

While the band of soldiers heading to Golgotha is temporarily delayed by the events surrounding the quake, a man is noticed running up the hill toward the crowd. Lazarus recognizes him as a friend and neighbor. Hailing him, Lazarus signals him to come over to where he and his friends are standing. The man stops beside Lazarus, placing his hand on Lazarus’ shoulder for support as he bends to catch his breath. Finally, he stands erect, his eyes wild with excitement.

“What is it, my friend?” asks Lazarus.

The words of the man come rapidly and barely intelligible. “I was in Jerusalem, near the Temple,” he began. When the High Priest had slain the Passover lamb and cried, ‘It is finished,’ and the shofar had sounded, chaos broke loose in the Holy Place. Priests were running, shouting, crying, falling . . . oh what madness!”

The disciples had moved closer to hear the man’s tale, and curiosity is evident on their faces. Lazarus voices their question when he asks, “What happened to cause such panic?”

“The veil, the veil!” replied the man. “They say it tore in two, right in the middle, from top to bottom! No human hands

had touched it. You know it is about 15 feet high and 3 feet thick anyway, so no human could have accomplished such a feat. The priests in the Temple were fearful of the consequences of peering into the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant rested, so they either fled or immediately turned their backs to it.”

Lazarus, dumbstruck, staggers from the middle of the small gang as the man repeats his story to the fresh faces that have joined him. This latest development again has his mind reeling. *The veil . . . entrance to the presence of God . . . only High Priest has access . . . veil split from top to bottom . . . entrance to the presence of God . . . Could Christ not only be the sacrifice, but the High Priest as well, opening the way to God?* Legs weakened, Lazarus falls to his knees, and like steel to magnet his eyes are again averted to the man on the middle cross.

**THURSDAY, 3:45 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

At last the small detachment of soldiers with their captain arrives upon the scene. The captain assesses the crowd. The soldiers assigned to crucifixion duty quickly find their helmets and weapons, which had been set aside in their merriment, and come to attention. With only a gesture, the captain motions his detachment to their duty.

First they step to the man to the left of Jesus. Noticing that he still lives, one of the soldiers raises the club he has brought to fulfill this ghastly duty. The man, realizing what is about to take place, cries for mercy. “Please . . . please . . . don’t do it.” But his pleas are unheeded, and the club crashes into first one leg, and then the other. With no means to push upward any longer in order to catch a breath, death is imminent.

The same procedure is followed as they walk over to the criminal on the right of Jesus. He also pleads for mercy, but none is given. The blows insure that his death will be hastened along.

Then this mob arrives at the foot of the cross of Jesus. The soldier with the club automatically assumes that his work

must be carried out, so he raises the club. But his hands are stayed by the hand of his commander, who is steadily gazing at the lifeless body of Jesus. “Hold your club,” he commands, “this one is already dead.” The small crew of warriors gawks in surprise, for they had expected this one to also be alive.<sup>92</sup>

Suddenly, almost as if by compulsion, a soldier lifts his spear, and pierces the soft flesh of Jesus’ side. Blood and water gush outward, for the pericardium has been punctured, and then the heart. This act gives assurance to the soldier that this man Jesus is indeed already dead, for the pooled blood issues forth first, followed by the built-up fluid around the heart. As Jesus’ blood flows down and drips upon the ground each person who surrounds the cross deals with their own emotions – but for this Roman whose garments are now stained by the blood of Jesus, there is a sudden and fearful recognition that he himself is a man of sin.

**THURSDAY, 4:00 PM, 14 AVIV (scene at the cross)**

The entire drama played out during the last six hours has been encapsulated into the mind of Lazarus through his senses. Everything he has seen, heard, touched, and smelled has wafted its way into his very being, and now his soul seeks comprehension for it all. And that understanding seems to be predicated on the Jewish Scriptures that Lazarus has heard over and over these many years. Just now they return as chickens to the roost, resting one after another in orderly fashion upon the perches in his intellect.

*What was the Psalm of David<sup>93</sup> that the old scribe Jacob used to plead with me to understand as a Messianic prophecy? Can I remember it? Oh, yes!*

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” *The very words spoken by Jesus as he hung on the cross!*

“But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl

insults, shaking their heads: ‘He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.’” *The illegal trials, the mocking of the soldiers, the call of the people for him to be crucified, and even the derision of the fellows beside him fulfill those words!*

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.” *His cry of thirstiness! Fulfilled!*

“They have pierced my hands and my feet.” *Amazingly accurate! How can it be? This was written hundreds of years before Roman crucifixion was even known.*

“They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.” *Why, the Roman soldiers have unwittingly completed prophecy!*

Lazarus strains his memory, attempting to recall the passage in Isaiah that one of the men in his local synagogue had discussed with him not so very long ago. *He believed it was perhaps a prediction of the coming Messiah, but I disagreed. Was he right? I believe it said . . .*

“Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”<sup>94</sup> *No doubt that could refer to Jesus; he hardly resembles a human at all!*

“He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”<sup>95</sup> *Well, he is not what most would call handsome, and it was not his looks that attracted the crowds!*

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.”<sup>96</sup> *Again, a prophecy of such suffering beyond compare!*

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”<sup>97</sup> *It was foretold that his sufferings and death would benefit us!*

“He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”<sup>98</sup> *Yes, the Passover Lamb was slain for us!*

With that last realization, Lazarus’ shoulders droop, but his spirit soars. A last, long glance at the limp form of Jesus on the cross convinces him that he has witnessed enough. As he becomes once again conscious of his surroundings, he hears the animated discussion of the disciples.

“I know they will come looking for us, now that Jesus is dead. They were ready to take me, remember?” Peter asks.

“Do you really think so, Simon?” inquires Andrew. “After all, it was he who taught and healed and raised the dead, not us!”

Matthew speaks up. “But we are his disciples, the ones who have followed him and received training from him. They must know our names by now! We must immediately find a place to hide.”

Nathaniel nods his head in agreement, while Bartholomew only winces as if in pain. The group is startled when Lazarus speaks to them from outside their close-knit circle.

“My friends, have you learned nothing from the events of today? Can you not see how all things have been fulfilled? Do your minds not comprehend the meaning of what we have experienced?”

“All I know,” interrupts Peter, “is that Jesus, our Lord, is dead. He hangs there on a cross. Everything we have dreamed

and anticipated is gone, and we will all be just as gone if we stay here in the open where we can be recognized.”

“Yes, I know Jesus is dead,” counters Lazarus, “but have you forgotten his words? Remember when he spoke of the ‘sign of Jonah’? He said, ‘For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”<sup>99</sup> Don’t you know what that means?”

Nathaniel now adds his own thoughts to the conversation. “I know it means he will be buried, but beyond that, it means nothing to me. Let’s go. Hiding ourselves is the only recourse we have now, and the sooner the better!”

Off they run into the city, their robes flapping in the breeze. Lazarus watches for a short while, thinking on what he has witnessed. *They still cannot grasp the words of their Lord. As often as he had hinted at being in the grave three days and three nights, they should have gotten it! Maybe in three days they will fully know.*

Wearily he turns and begins the short trek to his uncle’s home in Jerusalem where he will join his sisters. There they will observe Passover with family, just as they have done for years. As he walks he smiles, imagining what will soon transpire in Paradise where the righteous abide. After all, he spent four days there with Abraham before he was resurrected by Jesus. *Perhaps I am the only one in Jerusalem who knows this is not the end!*



## CHAPTER 7

**THURSDAY, 4:30 PM, 14 AVIV (in the Praetorium, Pilates' residence)**

Joseph paced impatiently just outside the Praetorium. *What if he will not see me? He is not required to give me the time of day. What if he sees me, but does not grant my request? Can I beg? Should I beg?*

Joseph, who was from Arimathea, had come to ask Pilate to allow him to bury the body of Jesus.<sup>100</sup> As a member of the Sanhedrin, he had the respect and the prominence to request a meeting with Pilate, but he was still unsure as to whether such a meeting would be granted. As a secret follower of the teachings of Jesus, he knew his predicament was one of peril. If anyone found out that he was a sympathizer with this crucified rabbi who was conceived to be a threat to both the religion of the Jews and the authority of Rome, his place of honor would not be enough to maintain his freedom.

Inside the Praetorium Pilate was being informed of the arrival of this visitor.

“He says his name is Joseph, of Arimathea, and that he is a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin. He says it is quite urgent.”

Pilate sighs heavily. “Oh, very well, then, show him in to me.”

The soldier disappears into the outer corridor, then reappears shortly. In his footsteps walks Joseph somewhat timidly.

With a wave of his hand Pilate dismisses the soldier, and then with the same hand beckons Joseph closer. He strides a couple of steps, but stops short of the seat in which Pilate has made himself comfortable.

Authoritatively, Pilate demands, “Why have you come here? Haven’t you Jews done enough for one day? Besides, is it not nearly the Special Sabbath?”

Clearing his throat, Joseph responds, “Yes, your grace, the Sabbath approaches. It is for that reason I have come.” He pauses slightly.

“Well, man, spit it out! I have much to do.”

“You know that as the High Council of the Jewish people we have always requested that crucified criminals be taken down before the Sabbath begins. I . . . I would like to request the body of Jesus of Nazareth so that I may bury it.” The hesitancy in his voice has not gone unnoticed by Pilate.

“Is that so? You, a member of the Sanhedrin, want to bury this man you have condemned?” More questions come to his mind, but he is unsure what to make of this man and his request.

“Yes, sir,” replies Joseph. “I want to make sure that it is properly buried before the Sabbath begins.” The questioning by Pilate is causing him much anxiety, for he dare not give himself away.

Pilate, considering the request, remembers the guard detail he had sent to hasten the death of the three criminals. “I just sent a detail to Golgotha to insure the quick death of those men. You must wait until they are dead before I can answer.”

But, sir, he is already dead.”

“The raised eyebrows on Pilate’s face betray his surprise. “Dead? Already? I must make sure.” Turning to a servant, he says, “See if the captain of the guard detail I sent has returned, and send him to me.”

Immediately the servant obeys, and makes a quick exit. The minutes that pass seem like hours to Joseph, standing

apprehensively here in the presence of the Roman procurator. Pilate busies himself with some documents brought to him by yet another servant. The first servant returns shortly, and whispers to him as he bends near. As Pilate straightens, the captain of the guard strides in, salutes, and bows.

“Captain,” says Pilate, “tell me, is Jesus of Nazareth dead already? Or does he live still?”

The captain pulls himself to his full height, and reports. “He is indeed dead, sir. We did not have to break his legs. We verified his death with a spear. He was dead before we arrived. The other two will be dead within the hour, because their legs have been broken, just as you ordered, sir.”<sup>101</sup>

Pilate is accustomed to men hanging on their crosses for as many as two or three days, so he is amazed to hear that Jesus is so soon dead. With a salute he dismisses the captain, who turns and marches from the room. Addressing himself once again to Joseph, he says, somewhat disdainfully, “I guess your criminal is dead, as you indicated.” After brief reflection, he continues. “Do with the body as you wish. After all, it is of no more concern to me.” His words are a dismissal, and Joseph, seizing the hint, bows reverently and leaves the room.

#### **THURSDAY, 4:40 PM, 14 AVIV (in Jerusalem)**

Standing outside waiting for Joseph, is his friend and colleague, Nicodemus.<sup>102</sup> These two men, who serve together in the Sanhedrin, are secret admirers of Jesus, waiting patiently for the Kingdom of God as promised by Jesus. The two of them, glancing around to insure that they are alone, steal silently into the soon coming dusk. It is a few minutes before Nicodemus can find his tongue to ask the question weighing heavily on his mind. “I must know, what did he say?”

“Careful, my friend, we must not let others know of our mission. Pilate has, however, released the body of Jesus to us.

We must make haste to finish our task, for the Sabbath approaches swiftly, and the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread will break upon us soon.”

“Where will we take him?” questions Nicodemus. “He must not be put in a pauper’s grave!”

“Not to worry, friend. Everything is arranged. I have recently had a tomb hewn for my family, and as of yet it is unused. We will bury him there.”

As they hurry along, Nicodemus is thinking about the preparations needed. “We do not have time to do the customary preparation of the body for burial. But we can do something. If it will help, I will buy seventy-five pounds of myrrh to anoint his body. That will have to do for now.”

Joseph stops suddenly, smiling at his friend. “Bless you, Nicodemus, that would be wonderful. You go and buy the myrrh while I go and get the linen needed to wrap his naked body. It may not be all that should be done, but it will have to be enough.”

The two friends quickly embrace and instantly part their way to care for the business to which each has committed himself.

#### **THURSDAY, 4:50 PM, 14 AVIV (at the cross)**

Mary and John continue to stand near the cross of their beloved Jesus. Neither of them is ready to admit that he is gone, so neither of them desires to leave this place of death. As they stand embracing each other, a small band of women have now moved up through the dispersing crowd to arrive near them, each of the women grieving in her own way. They recognize the women as followers of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene weeps openly, recalling the day when this man miraculously relieved her body of seven inhabiting

demons, freeing her from their slavery.<sup>103</sup> Incessantly she wails, “Oh, my Lord, my Lord! Oh, my Lord, my Lord!”

Mary, the mother of James the younger and Joses, cries silently, her eyes fixed upon the limp body of her Lord and teacher. “It cannot be, it cannot be!” she whispers.

Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of the disciples James and John, sheds occasional tears, preferring to remember the good things about this man rather than the horrendous death he has endured. Seeing her son John clinging to Jesus’ mother, she can only speak from the mother’s love that is in her heart: “Poor Mary, poor, poor Mary!”

After several minutes, as they watch, two disguised men approach the cross upon which Jesus is nailed, followed by a several men who appear to be common laborers. Showing some official document to the soldiers, the men await the reading of and then obedience to the orders. The centurion, after reading the document, turns and calls to his men to lower the body of Jesus from the cross. At once the soldiers leap into action, and soon the body of Jesus rests on the hard ground. Turning again to the two men, the centurion says sadly, “There he is, take him, and . . . and . . . give him a good burial!”

The two men nod, trudging toward the lifeless body of Jesus. The friends of Jesus who are stationed around the cross recognize the two men as Joseph and Nicodemus, though they have endeavored to conceal their identity. Now the two men call their hired help over, and bid them to carefully and gently lift the body of Jesus. After some struggle, they began their trek away from Golgotha.

Mary, frozen by the entire scene, throws off her dazed response to what she has witnessed, realizing that she has no idea where they are taking him. Weakly she calls out, “Where are you taking him? Where? Please, where?” But the group has quickly moved beyond hearing. John, recognizing Mary’s agony, calls to

the women who are standing beside them. “Mother . . . Mary . . . Mary Magdalene . . . do you know where they are going?”

Mary Magdalene is the first to catch her breath and speak. “No; we want to anoint his body properly, but there is no time.”

The other Mary, nodding her agreement, is thinking quickly. “Though there is no time now, we could do it after the Sabbaths are completed, on the morning of the first day of the week, the Feast of Firstfruits. But how will we know where to find him?”

An idea flashes into the mind of Mary Magdalene. “We must follow them, and see where they lay him.<sup>104</sup> It is our only recourse. If we hurry, we can catch up with them, and yet stay out of their sight.”

John nods his approval, and says, “Will you let us know where he is, so that we, too, might visit his grave?”

Mary smiles and answers, “Of course. It is the least we can do for the mother of our Lord.” Jesus’ mother beams at the three, then whispers to John, “Take me home, please, John.” The three women move quickly to catch up with the burial detail, while John and Mary turn stoically toward the city and begin their short, yet tiresome, journey.

The trio of women have now slowed their pace, having come ever nearer the slow-moving burial detail. Constantly checking their surroundings, the women plod onward, wanting to be sure they will remember the way to this tomb.

Their silence is finally broken by the words of Salome, who has been quiet for some time now. “We must decide on how much spices and oils we need. I am sure my husband, Zebedee, will help us. After all, his two sons were called to follow Jesus.”

“I have never done this before,” replies Mary, “so I have no idea. How will we know?”

Mary Magdalene, sadness filling her eyes, responds to her two companions. “I know, because I have buried my mother and father. I am more concerned about how and where we will get the supplies.”

“That is no problem,” says Salome. I have a cousin who is a merchant in Jerusalem. He will open for me anytime. But we must wait until after sundown on Saturday, because the laws concerning the Sabbath will not allow us to buy it before then.”

Mary Magdalene has drawn the abrupt attention of the other two due to her head bobbing and hand gesture. It appears to them as if she is . . . counting. As they observe her peculiar behavior, she suddenly blurts out, “Three days! Do you realize that Sunday will be three days?”

“Yes, so what?” answers Mary.

“Don’t either of you remember what Jesus said? He told us he would be in the tomb for three days, and then he would live again.”

Salome, somewhat doubtingly, answers, “Who will raise him? He raised Lazarus and others, but who will raise him? I respected him and miss him as much as anyone, but I do not want to get my hopes too high.”

Now the three are contemplative as they watch the group with Joseph slow down and then stop in front of a newly hewn rock tomb. They memorize their surroundings as if their lives depend on it. Satisfied they will easily find it on their return trip Sunday morning, they turn their weary bodies toward the city of David, rushing to get to their homes before sundown.

**THURSDAY, 8:30 PM, 15 AVIV (a house somewhere in Jerusalem)**

With the coming of sundown, the inhabitants of Jerusalem have come to their homes for the Special Sabbath. Those who did not eat the Passover meal the previous evening are now

enjoying the festive meal. But in one house in Jerusalem, there are no festivities, and certainly no joy.

Huddled together at a table with dim lamplight are eleven of Jesus' disciples. The door is tightly shut and locked, for in fear they have gathered to share their woes. The fear that has seized their hearts stems from their relationship with Jesus and his troublesome rapport with the Jewish leaders. Having seen what these leaders did to their master, they now cower in this secluded room, hoping to not be found. Only Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, is missing from among them.

Silence is broken as Peter addresses the group. "Men and brothers, it is a sad day for us. Jesus is dead, and we are here, afraid for our lives. I do not know what to say, except that I am sorry that I denied him." His sadness permeates his soul, manifesting itself in his demeanor.

"Peter, do not blame yourself," says Andrew. "It was Judas who is to blame." The others concur with nods and murmurs of affirmation.

Matthew speaks up. "I know when he was with us I was brave, but now I am a coward. My name is well known among the Jews. I do not want to show my face."

"They probably know us all by face, as many times as we have been seen with him in Jerusalem," huffs Nathanael.

"This is getting us nowhere," advises John, "and the more we talk about it the more depressed we become. It also will not bring him back."

John's harsh tone and piercing words quiet the men briefly. But Andrew is considering John's last statement, and soon he cannot help but spill out what has encumbered his mind.

"You know, brothers, he did say he would come back."

“Listen, I believe in the resurrection as much as the rest of you, but who knows when that will be?” questions Peter.

“No, you don’t understand,” replied Andrew. “Remember he said several times he would return in three days.”

“HE’S DEAD!” exploded Peter. “Dead people do not just come back to life!”

“Peter, you must quiet down,” cautioned John’s brother, James. “Someone will hear you, and we will all be in trouble.”

A little calmer, Peter speaks again. “I am sorry, but I am so upset with myself and this situation that I have trouble controlling my temper. Forgive me, brothers.”

“Peter,” says Bartholomew, “you might have verbally denied him, but we have all in reality denied him, as our presence here proves.”

Thomas, who has been quietly reflective, speaks pensively. “I long to see his kind face again, to listen to his authoritative voice. But, alas, I fear we will see him no more. We must brace ourselves for the worst.”

Andrew doggedly determined, continues his previous subject. “What did he mean by ‘three days and three nights,’ and ‘on the third day,’ and ‘in three days?’ Sunday, the Feast of Firstfruits, will be three days. Maybe that is symbolic in some way.”

“Andrew, give it up!” cries Peter. “It is over! As soon as these Sabbaths are over, I will return to Capernaum and my fishing business. I have nothing else.”

At this the men hang their heads, each believing that with the death of Jesus, so died all their hope.

**FRIDAY MORNING, 10:45 AM, 15 AVIV (in the Praetorium, Pilates' residence)**

Tired and ready for a break, Pilate lazily stretches, casting the documents he has been perusing to the side. Unable to concentrate any longer, he contemplates the events of the preceding day. Convincing himself that he will no longer be productive on this day, he stands and readies himself to leave this place of stringent and never-ending business for a place of quiet repose. But before he can take two steps, he hears the approaching footsteps of his attending secretary. He stops, leisurely turning to meet his visitor.

“What is it? I am ready to go to my quarters to relax.”

The man advances, his head bowed and eyes averted. “I am sorry to bother you again, sir, but there is a contingent of Jewish chief priests and Pharisees outside to see you.”

*Not them again*, he thinks to himself. “Bring them to me. I will give them five minutes.”

“They will not come inside, because it is their Special Sabbath, and to come inside a Gentile residence would make them unclean. They respectfully request your presence outside, sir.” This last statement was made almost fearfully, as if the servant expected Pilate to throw a tantrum.

Instead, Pilate wearily starts for the door. *I wonder what it is this time. Sometimes I wish I was back in Rome, for the Jewish people can be so cantankerous.*

Pilate blinks in the mid-morning sun as he steps out into the courtyard. *It would have been a great day to be outside, if only I did not have to contend with these Jewish leaders.* Walking further he espies the Jewish leaders, and they are not such a welcomed site. Studying their faces, he figures they are fretful about something.

He approaches them, and smirks, “What do you want? Did someone stir your people up again with kindness and healing?” Their discomfiture pleases him.

“Sir,” they say, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.”

He considers the request for a moment. “Take a guard,” Pilate answers. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” Looking squarely at the nearby soldiers, Pilate indicates that they must go with this solemn faction. This newly-formed group tramps off, and Pilate, having placated the Jewish leaders once again, returns to his quarters for his long-awaited rest.<sup>105</sup>

#### **SOMEWHERE IN PARADISE (the abode of the righteous dead)**

Suddenly there is a flash of light, and the inhabitants here are temporarily blinded in awe. The adjustment of their eyes to the light brings a moment of wonder, as a magnificent personage stands before them. When he speaks, they remain silent.

“Peace unto you, you who are God’s righteous ones. I come to bring you tidings of good news.”

Though overcome with incredulity at the sight of this one, their thoughts are as one: *Who is this man?*

Knowing their thoughts, he continues. “I am the one prophesied to come. I am the Messiah. I am the Son of God. I am Jesus.”

As one they all fall to their knees in His presence. Old Abraham affirms, “Ah, the Blessing of the nations!”<sup>106</sup>

Jacob jubilantly rejoices: “The One to whom belongs the scepter!”<sup>107</sup>

Moses cries aloud, “The Prophet of Israel!”<sup>108</sup>

David declares, “The One who will sit on David’s throne!”<sup>109</sup>

Isaiah, beside himself with joy, insists, “He is the Judge of the nations,<sup>110</sup> great Light,<sup>111</sup> Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace,<sup>112</sup> Root of Jesse,<sup>113</sup> Stone in Zion,<sup>114</sup> and suffering Servant!”<sup>115</sup>

Jeremiah joyfully shouts, “He is the Righteous Branch of David!”<sup>116</sup>

Daniel deliberately announces, “He is the Ancient of Days,<sup>117</sup> the Anointed One!”<sup>118</sup>

Micah mouths aloud, “He is the Ruler over Israel!”<sup>119</sup>

Zechariah zealously proclaims, “He is the Branch!”<sup>120</sup>

John the baptizer bellows, “He is the Lamb of God!”<sup>121</sup>

All of paradise is bursting with joyfulness. The Messiah is here! Together they begin to sing, “Hallelujah, the Messiah is come! Blessed be the name of the Lord!”

Jesus finally is able to calm this crowd of saints, and speaks to them again. “I have come to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of Yahweh’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”<sup>122</sup>

“I have given my life as a sacrifice to ransom the souls of men. I will go shortly unto the Father, and you will go with me, forever to be in the presence of Yahweh. I will arise from here on the first day of the week on earth, the Feast of Firstfruits. I am the Firstfruit of those who will be resurrected unto glory.”

The group erupts with praise. Jesus watches them, and turns slowly to look down at one man who stands nearby. This man, his smile spread across his face, is the thief who hung with Jesus just hours before! Here he is, in paradise with Jesus, just as he was promised! Looking into the eyes of Jesus he understands that he is here only because of God’s grace. He had done nothing to merit such forgiveness. He had simply believed in his heart that this Jesus was who he had claimed to be, and he had trusted that he would do what he had promised. With perfect love he mouthed the words, “Thank you, Lord!”

#### **HADES (the place of torments – the abode of the wicked dead)**

“Aaaaarrrrrrgggghhhh! I cannot believe it! It cannot be true!” Satan is allowed to hear the words of Jesus across the great gulf and is in a rampage. His demons know him well enough to leave him alone. The only other time they have seen him with this much anger is when he tried to set himself above God, but failed.

Shaking his fist heavenward, the old Devil declares, “You knew! You tricked me! I coerced those Jewish and Roman leaders into killing Jesus, and I incited the mob to call for his crucifixion! That should have been the end! But, no! You wanted this to happen!”

Wagging his head in disbelief, he trembles with the pent-up wrath that pervades his being. “You knew he would conquer death! Why did I not see! His death was on purpose, so he would come back to life. His life means life to all who believe! I am a fool!”

*The end is not yet, he muses, and I am determined to foil God's plans and I will turn men away from the Son of God. This is a huge setback, yet one from which he believes he can recover. "My time has not yet come" he growls. "I will win!"*

**FRIDAY, 9:15 PM, 16 AVIV (Caiaphas' house in Jerusalem)**

The cup of wine from which Caiaphas sips rests now on the table. His father-in-law, Annas, the former High Priest, relaxes in his home with him. This is their first time of fellowship since Passover, and they have been earnestly discussing the events of that fateful day.

"I tell you, Caiaphas, that Jesus the Nazarene was a fraud," says Annas frankly. "Men like him have been coming and going for many years, and will until the true Messiah comes."

"Well, you surely are right," replies Caiaphas. "I am just happy to be rid of him. He made my life miserable while he was alive."

Annas agrees. "None of us had peace while he was around, especially on his trips here to Jerusalem. It seemed he always excited our people, and it always meant hardship for us."

"I was so tired of hearing his name. It seemed everyone had an opinion of him, and his name was on everyone's lips. Fact is, I am somewhat surprised that he did not incite a rebellion," reflected Caiaphas.

"I am still concerned about those disciples of his," says Annas. "I am afraid they might plan something sinister. It would be just like them to steal the body and proclaim to all that he had come back to life!"

"No worry there!" rejoins Caiaphas. "We handled that problem. We asked Pilate to give us a guard for the tomb for that

very reason. I understand they also sealed it with the Roman seal. Anyone whom breaks it will be punished with death!”

“Fine, fine!” answers Annas. “Then I believe we have nothing to worry about. Jesus is dead! Let us talk no more of him, but instead enjoy this delicious wine. Maybe Jerusalem will return to normal again now.” With that final word he props up his feet, exhales a deep sigh, and imbibes deeply.

**Saturday, 6:05 PM, 17 AVIV (On the road to Bethany)**

The Special Sabbath and the weekly Sabbath are now over. Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, who have spent the Passover in the home of their uncle in Jerusalem, are now headed back to Bethany, a journey of just a little over two miles. Martha, always the busy one, is at the front and chattering away, occasionally glancing behind to be sure her siblings are following. Although her own heart is broken, she desperately attempts to recover some semblance of normalcy.

“We must get along home now. We have been gone for so long, and there will be so much to do to get the house in order. We will need to wipe away the dust, wash everything down, and do a general overall cleaning of the whole place! Mary, do you hear me? Have you heard any word I have uttered?”

Mary, usually bright and cheery, on this day shuffles along in sadness. She barely hears the words of her sister, and certainly pays her no attention. Her mind is beset with gloom as she remembers Jesus and his suffering and death.

“Lazarus, what do you think will happen now? I mean, with Jesus dead, our hopes are dashed to pieces. Those poor men who followed Jesus must be heartbroken. And what about all the sick, and lame, and blind – who will heal them now? I just cannot believe the events of this week; what are we going to do? Lazarus? Lazarus! Answer me!”

But Lazarus hears and sees no one. Bringing up the rear, he appears to be in no hurry. He is strolling along the road with his hands clasped behind him. However, there is one feature about him that is incongruously out of place. He is . . . smiling! Not just a grin, but a full-fledged ear-to-ear smile! Mary, who has been speaking to him, now turns to find why her questions have gone unanswered. She is dumbstruck by her brother's smile.

“Lazarus, why are you smiling? What have we to be so happy about? Martha, oh Martha, what could be wrong with Lazarus?”

Martha, upon hearing her sister, quickly turns to see what is happening. She, too, is struck by the smile plastered on her brother's face. Coming beside him, she asks, “Lazarus, are you okay? Is something wrong? Answer us!”

It is at this point that Lazarus has realized that his sisters have stopped in front of him with worried lines on their brows. He suddenly understands that they have been speaking to him.

“Wh . . . what?” stammers Lazarus. “I am sorry, but I did not hear you.”

“That is obvious,” declares Martha. “Are you well? You have a funny look on your face. You are not sick, are you?”

“Sick, why no, of course not. I feel grand.”

“Then why are you smiling so,” queries Mary. “There is truly very little to be happy about.”

Lazarus flashes a grin at his sisters, but shakes his head knowingly. Placing his arms around them, he ushers them forward toward Bethany. “I wish I could help you to understand what I know. If you did, you would smile also.”

Lazarus says no more, but continues to chuckle as he recalls the words of Jesus. Lazarus knows that all is not bleak.

In just a few hours Jesus will rise again, as he said he would!  
This is why he smiles!

## *Epilogue*

*EARLY SUNDAY MORNING, (before daybreak) 17 AVIV, JERUSALEM*

To the home of Mary Magdalene, Salome and the other Mary have come. Salome shows the spices she has obtained with which to anoint the body of Jesus. They discuss the route they will follow to the tomb, and wonder how they will roll away the heavy stone which blocks the doorway.<sup>123</sup>

The disciples have slept fitfully through the night, all of them aware that something looms on the horizon. Peter is wide awake, startled by every noise, fearful of what it may mean. John and James are quietly discussing their return to Capernaum, doing their best to disturb no one else. Matthew lies wondering if he should return to his old job, or just what the future may hold for him. Nathanael and his friend, Philip, are heatedly arguing in loud whispers concerning whether the Sanhedrin are searching for this band of disciples. But none dare move from their beds, afraid of what the start of this day may bring.

In Paradise there is continual rejoicing as preparations are made to vacate their current place of abode. All are brimming with excitement, ready to enter the presence of their beloved Yahweh. They can barely contain themselves, because their joy is nearing completion.

In heaven the angels are preparing to receive Jesus and his great company. They ready themselves with gladness, at last comprehending the difficult scene they have witnessed on earth. With the morning of a new day on earth blossoms a hope as no human has ever experienced, and they now know that all will be as planned. The feast of Firstfruits is come, and death will be swallowed up in victory!

On the outskirts of Jerusalem, stillness fills the air. Again, as it did three days prior, the earth rumbles. At a tomb hewn out of rock, soldiers quake and faint as though dead.<sup>124</sup> Two angels clothed in white roll away the massive stone hiding the tomb of Jesus. As Jesus steps across the threshold, the culmination of Thursday's six-hour episode has come. . . .

**Victory is Complete!**  
**JESUS IS ALIVE!**

# ADDENDUM ONE

## Who Is Jesus?

By Jim Jones

It is impossible to give a completely adequate answer to this question in such a limited time and space. But since the purpose here is to simply help you understand who Jesus is, and not an attempt to reveal the entirety of His being, we will simply give a few Scripture references with a concluding summary concerning the person of Jesus. This will provide for the reader a basic Biblical understanding of the person of Jesus.

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made* (John 1:1-3 NIV). Jesus is the Word (logos) of God who has existed throughout all eternity.

*For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together* (Col 1:16-17 NIV). Jesus is the Creator and the sustainer of all things. He is above all things, and all creation will answer to Him.

*And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth* (John 1:14 NASB). Jesus, who existed in the glory of the Trinity, left heaven and brought the glory of God to the earth.

*In his very nature he was God. But he did not think that being equal with God was something he should hold on to. Instead, he made himself nothing. He took on the very nature of a servant. He was made in human form* (Philippians 2:6-7 NIrV). Jesus, who was and is God, was willingly born into this world in flesh to become a servant even unto death.

In these few short verses we can see that Jesus has always existed with God, in fact He is God. Jesus is referred to as the second person of the Trinity...God the Father, **God the Son**, and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Living Word (logos) of God, and it is the Word of God that created all things. Jesus left the glory of heaven and became a man; the Creator became like His creation. Therefore, Jesus is referred to as God the Son, the Son of God, and the Son of Man. There is much more to learn about the person and nature of Jesus. But this brief description lets you know exactly who He is. He is both God and man. He is God in the flesh. He is one with the Father. As he told His disciples in John 14:9, "*He that has seen me has seen the Father.*"

## **Why Did Jesus Become Man?**

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*  
(John 3:16-17 NKJV)

Every person is born with a sinful nature; we all have personal sin in our lives; God is a Holy God who has pronounced judgment on sin; judgment on sin results in the eternal spiritual death of the sinner. We are also told God is not only Holy, He is also a God of love. While God's holiness and inability to compromise concerning sin is absolute, the fact that He loves His creation is declared repeatedly throughout His Word. Therefore, God in all of His wisdom devised a plan whereby the sin of man could be punished, while the sinner (you and I) could receive forgiveness and be restored into a loving relationship with our Creator. This plan required that God Himself would pay the penalty for sin. But in order for this to be accomplished, He would have to become a man Himself. This is referred to as the Incarnation.

God announced His plan through the prophets in the Old Testament. One such announcement was through the Prophet Isaiah, "*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel*" (Isaiah 7:14 NASB). In Matthew 1:21-23 we have the promise fulfilled with the announcement of the angel to Joseph that Mary would bear a son, "*She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. Now all this took place to fulfill what*

*was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL, which translated means, GOD WITH US."* So we see that the plan of God was that Jesus would be born to the Virgin Mary, letting us know that this child would not be conceived by the seed of man, but by the Spirit of God. He would save His people from their sins, and He would be called Immanuel, which interpreted means, "God with us"...in other words, God in the flesh as man.

So the second person in the Trinity entered into the human realm as a man, born without a sinful nature (was not of Adam's seed) and without sin, that He might accomplish the purpose and will of God. The penalty for the sin of man would be paid by God Himself in the form of man. It would require one who was both God and man... He must be God to have the ability to pay for the sins of all mankind, and He must be man to have the right to pay for their sins. This is known as the doctrine of the Kinsman Redeemer, but for now you only need to know that Jesus had to become a man to fulfill the plan of God to pay for the sin of mankind. There was no other way to restore the relationship between God and man that sin had destroyed.

## **Why Did Jesus Have to Die?**

In Genesis 2:17 God declares to Adam that if He eats of the fruit of the forbidden tree, on that day he will surely die. It is not stated whether or not Adam even knew what death was at this point. But the sentence was established, that sentence being death... not for eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, but death for choosing to disobey a Holy Creator God. In essence, this was a test for Adam, and Adam failed! We understand that Adam and Eve did not die physically that very day, but physical death would be the result. Mankind was not created to experience death but to live forever, but on the very day that Adam and Eve sinned, they died spiritually. The most basic definition of spiritual death is "separation from the presence of God." Because of sin, they could no longer live in God's presence.

Because man would live eternally, the penalty for sin would have eternal consequences. And since the ability of man to pay an eternal consequence is limited to man's duration of existence, he would have to pay for his sin by being eternally separated from God. The result

would be eternal death. On the other hand Jesus, because He is God, is infinite. He fills all of time, from everlasting to everlasting. He is also infinite in capacity. He could pay an eternal punishment for sin, not in duration of time, but in His unlimited capacity to suffer the required penalty. In effect, Jesus would suffer an equivalent eternal penalty for every person who would ever live. His suffering would be infinite!

Now please understand what this means. As great as the physical suffering would be to have thorns driven into your head, whips of bone and glass rip the flesh from your body, spikes driven into your hands and feet, then to be placed to slowly die in the blazing sun, this is not why Jesus prayed on the night before the crucifixion, "***My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.***" The cup Jesus spoke of was the Cup of Redemption as found in the Feast of the Passover. Jesus was asking the Father that if there were any other way for God's will to be accomplished, let Him not have to drink this cup for the redemption of man. It was not just the physical suffering, but the spiritual suffering that Jesus did not want to face. But there was no other way; Jesus would have to pay the eternal penalty for sin.

We are now at the cross. Jesus was nailed to the cross at 9:00 a.m. At noon, darkness covers the face of the earth. Jesus cries out, "***Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?***" that is, "***My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?***" (Matthew 27:46). Jesus now carries the sin of the whole world. His Father, who can have no relationship with sin, turns away from the Son. For the next three hours Jesus suffers the penalty for my sin and your sin. In His infinite capacity, He experiences the suffering of eternal separation from the Father. In essence, Jesus experiences eternal death. But then comes the cry of victory, "***It Is Finished***" (John 19:30). Light returns to the darkened world. The debt is paid! Jesus has purchased the redemption of man. Then came the final words of Jesus, having the relationship restored "***Father, into your hands I commend my spirit***" (Luke 23:26). At this point Jesus has experienced both physical and spiritual death for sin. "***For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him***" (II Corinthians 5:21 NKJV).

## A Deeper Understanding How Can Jesus' Death Pay for My Sin?

This question often comes up, "*How can Jesus' death pay for my sin?*" This is indeed a fair question! God is a fair and just God. He does not play games with sin. If sin is important enough to God that He would allow His own Son to suffer its eternal consequence, then there must be some legal and legitimate way to apply Jesus' payment for sin to my account. Otherwise, we are just playing word games! So we need to see what happens when we accept Jesus Christ as Savior. What do we do? What does God do?

### What Do We Do?

The question is often asked or implied in the New Testament, "What must I do to be saved?" The simplest answer was given by Paul and Silas in Acts 16:31 when the Philippian jailer asked this question. Their answer was, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, you and your household.*" Now, I am sure they went on to explain to him and to his family who Jesus was and why they should believe in Him. But the point is that salvation comes by believing in Jesus. So let's examine what is involved when we believe in Him.

**B**elieving in Jesus involves much more than simply acknowledging His existence. That is what John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, called giving "mental assent" to some fact or facts. Believing in Jesus means to not only acknowledge He exists but to by faith accept who He is and what He has done as the sacrifice for sin. It means to trust Him with your life and with your salvation. "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12 NASB).

**B**elieving in Jesus means that we are aware of our sin and are ready and willing to repent of that sin. Many people think that to repent is to just say you are sorry. But true repentance involves much more than being sorry for sin. It involves the willful decision to turn away from that sin and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The Greek work translated "repent" means "to think differently," "to turn away," or "to reconsider." In other words, when we repent, we think differently about our sin; we turn away from sin, and we turn instead toward God.

If we continue to practice sin, there has been no repentance. *"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish"* (Luke 13:3, 5 NASB)

**B**elieving in Jesus means that we are willing to die to self and to surrender our will to the will of God. Jesus cannot only be our Savior; He must also be our Lord! Jesus said to His disciples, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matthew 16:24). And then there are the classic words of Paul, *"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me"* (Galatians 2:20 NASB).

**B**elieving in Jesus means that we are not ashamed to be numbered among those who are called by His name. We will be ready and willing to confess Him before men. We will refuse to deny Him in word or deed. Jesus makes this very clear: *"But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 10:33 NASB). And in another classic passage dealing with salvation we read, *"that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9 NASB). Believing in Jesus also means we are confessing Him!

In summary, **Believing** in Jesus requires that we put our faith and trust in Him to receive the salvation He has provided. We must repent of our sin and be willing to turn from our sinful habits. As we grow in faith and knowledge, we must be willing to progressively die to self and surrender to His perfect will for us. We must be willing to confess Him before men in word and deed. Until we have done these things, we have not truly believed!

## What Does God Do?

You have been convicted by the Holy Spirit of your sin. You have been drawn by the Holy Spirit to acknowledge Jesus as the Savior who died for your sin. The seed of faith grows in your heart to believe in Jesus, to repent and turn from sin, to surrender to His will, and to confess Him before men. You turn to God and sincerely pray the only prayer a sinner has assurance that God will hear and answer, *"Father, forgive*

*me and have mercy on me a sinner!"* When this prayer, prayed with a sincere heart of faith, touches the ear of God, a miracle takes place and a legal transaction occurs in heaven. You and Jesus become one. At that moment you die and are resurrected with Christ. Your sin is washed away by the blood of Jesus and your sin debt is marked "paid in full." Your sin has become the sin of Jesus, and the righteousness of Jesus has become your righteousness. You are not only declared holy, at that moment you are holy...you are without sin! The Spirit of God that has been with you now indwells you. You are a holy temple unto the Lord, His sanctuary. You are a new creation in Christ. Old things pass away; all things become new. You have just become an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. That means you are God's child, and Jesus is your brother! You still have the old earthly sinful nature, but you now also have the new heavenly spiritual nature. As you learn to walk in and be obedient to this new nature, you will be able to say "no" to sin. That is what God has ordained for you... for you to become like your brother, Jesus. The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth as you read and study God's Word; truth that the natural mind cannot comprehend because it is spiritually discerned. He will also discipline you when you allow the old nature to rule in your life, because those whom God loves, He disciplines. God gives you access to His throne. You can now come before Him anytime as a child comes to a loving parent and cry out "Abba Father" (a term of close relationship, like "daddy"). You have passed from death into life, from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. You are now a child of the King!

You are right...there are no Scripture references given for these declarations! And while a few of these statements are inferred from certain passages, most of the statements are direct quotes from Scripture. But these statements are but a few of the promises of God for those who believe. You are encouraged to begin to read the New Testament to search for these promises. They are there for you to discover like precious jewels. But these have been cited here to show what takes place when you believe. God not only declares us to be righteous, He makes us the righteousness of Christ. Your sin debt is legally paid. Jesus actually suffered the pain and anguish of your sin. He experienced the separation from the Father so you will never have to. This is why salvation is a gift. This is what God does for us... we could never earn it for ourselves! Now I trust you understand the many reasons why **Jesus is the answer!**

## **Are You Ready to Repent and Believe in Christ?**

Since salvation is a free gift from God by His grace, and it is received by faith in Christ and cannot be earned with good works, you must receive it by faith. This means you truly desire to repent of your sin (meaning to turn away from), to believe that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God who died as your substitute, and to confess Him as your Lord and Savior. If you are ready to ask God for the gift of salvation, then pray from your heart a short prayer similar to the one below - not from your head, but from your heart.

**Dear Father, I know that I am a sinner. I know that I have sinned against you. Forgive me for my sin. Allow me to become a new creation in Christ. I believe Jesus died on the cross for my sin. I believe He was resurrected that I may have life. I accept Him now as my Savior. I promise to make Him Lord of my life. From this day forward I will serve you. Thank you for the gift of salvation. I ask that I may experience the new birth that I might receive the Holy Spirit. Thank You, Lord. Amen.**

If you have prayed this prayer, then the first thing you need to do is to tell someone about your decision for Christ. God's Word says that if we believe and repent, we are born again spiritually (John 3: 1-21), and that you are a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). As you read the Bible it will now take on new meaning as you have the Holy Spirit helping you understand it (John 16:13).

If you have read this book as a part of a group study, tell the group leader about your decision and share your decision with those in this study with you. If you are reading this by yourself and have no one to tell, then call or email me. The Ministry phone number and email address is listed below. Light of Light Ministry will be glad to send you additional materials and to help you find a good church home. May God bless you richly as you now begin this new journey with Him.

**Light of Life Ministry Phone**

**615-973-8359**

**Light of Life Ministry Email Address**

**[jjones@lolministry.org](mailto:jjones@lolministry.org)**

# Official Record of My Decision To Become a Follower of Jesus

On this date, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
month day year

I, \_\_\_\_\_

print your full name

did believe in my heart that Jesus Christ is the living Son of God, that He died on the cross for my sin, and that on the third day He was resurrected to eternal life by the power of God, where He today sits at the right hand of the Father. I believe this to be true, and will confess it with my mouth. I am now forgiven of my sin, and I am a new creation in Christ. I pledge to make Jesus not only my Savior, but also the Lord of my Life. I sign this so that all beings on earth, all the angels in heaven, and all the demons of hell may know of my decision!

\_\_\_\_\_  
your signature here

*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*

(Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)



## ADDENDUM TWO

### **The Story of *Six Hours of Eternity***

**By Jim Jones**

This is a story of God's providence, God's patience, and God's provision. It is a true story, an ongoing story, and a story whose conclusion cannot yet be written. Perhaps it will be a story that will inspire you in some small way. I will share this story in three parts. Part One simply sets the stage for what I believe God has done, and is about to do!

#### **PART ONE: God's Providence**

In 2005 I became very restless, feeling led by God to reenter full time ministry. In January 2006 I left my secular employment to do I knew not what. The following three months were a time of seeking and praying for God to show me what He wanted me to do. In March 2006, following a time of prayer, the Spirit whispered into my heart John 8:12, "*Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*" Immediately, in the spiritual realm, Light of Life Ministry (LOLM) was born.

In April 2006 I left for my first trip to Israel with Dr. David Reagan and Rev. Gary Fisher. I experienced a mighty move of God in my life on that trip. I returned home excited to begin the process of establishing LOLM. During May and June all the legal paperwork was completed. By the end of June we were established as a legal non-profit corporation in the state of Tennessee, a recognized 501(c)(3) non-profit religious institution by the IRS, and had held two organizational meetings of the newly elected Board of Directors of LOLM. Our established purpose was to devote ourselves to Christian Education and Evangelism. I began immediately to write a booklet on being an effective witness. I had never done much writing outside of Bible College 25 years earlier, but for some reason I knew I must write.

Early in the beginning days of LOLM, I was awakened in the middle of the night. It is a rare occasion for me to awake during the night, but on this night it was the Holy Spirit who awakened me. I had an idea for a book - rather, He gave me an idea for a book that should be written. I went to the study, sat down and for the next two hours wrote as if copying from a script the basic outline, the characters, the plot, and even some of the dialogue that would make up this book. The title was also given, "*Six Hours of Eternity*." It was to be the story of Christ's Atonement as seen through the eyes of those around the cross, a Christian fiction novel based on sound Biblical teaching. As I said, I was not a writer, and what I did write was in the form of study material, not conversational novels. I tried several times to put it on paper, but each time it wound up sounding like a doctrinal study. I laid it aside temporarily, praying often for the Lord to show me how to write this book He had placed in my heart.

I recall thinking that perhaps it would be through this novel that LOLM would be financed and gain the exposure needed to get our training materials into the marketplace and have them accepted and used by churches. I had left my work, and along with it, my salary. There was no money coming into the ministry at this time, and we had to rely on what Barbara, my wife, made teaching. It was tight, but workable, at least for a short while. Being the loving and supportive wife she has always been, she agreed to her role as primary supporter during this time. The Lord confirmed this decision when she received a really good increase in her pay at the beginning of the new school year. She had been asked to take on several leadership roles at school, but had received little financial benefit from this, but much praise. It seemed that the administration recognized her efforts, and made the decision to reward her financially - just at the right time!

In the July-August 2007 issue of *The Illuminator* newsletter, I made an appeal for help in writing training materials. I mailed it and left for the Eastern Annual Conference of the Southern Methodist Church to be held in Bowman, SC. I had written a couple of studies by this time, and was given permission to promote them in our churches by the General Conference Board of Administration. I had mailed the newsletter on Friday, driven to South Carolina on Saturday, and was at the opening service of the Conference on Sunday evening. After the service, an old friend from Bible College days, Lanny Carpenter, came up to me. I had not seen Lanny in 20 years or more. He attended

Southern Methodist College in Orangeburg, SC the same time I attended Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, TN. We had both been pastors of Southern Methodist churches, but in different Conferences, so we seldom met. Lanny had heard about what LOLM was attempting to do, and he asked if he could help. I wondered how he had received the newsletter so quickly, only to find out he had not seen it. We set a time in August for Lanny to come to Nashville to discuss how he might be involved with the writing and training material being produced.

Lanny came. It was obvious to me that while our lives had been lived apart, there was in many ways almost a mirror image of events in our lives, in our hearts' desire, and in our spiritual gift mix. Lanny was hired. To make it official, I paid him his one year salary in advance - a LOLM check in the amount of \$1, and told him if he did a good job, that salary would be doubled the next year! I felt certain that God had brought Lanny to LOLM to help with the vision of Christian Education and Evangelism Training. I looked forward to the time when he could be hired full time. He said that with six children at home, he would need more than \$2. I understood, and told him to pray toward that end. I truly believe that in **God's Providence**, He had brought all of this together in a relatively short time, and I was excited!

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.*

Proverbs 3:5-6

## **Part Two: God's Patience**

Part One, God's Providence, simply set the stage for what I believe God has done, and is about to do! In this part of the story we will look at **God's Patience**.

When Lanny approached me about joining in the work of LOLM I had asked him about his writing experience. He told me how he had just recently submitted a fictional short story about Christmas to an Internet writing contest, and to his surprise he had won first place. I asked if I could read the story, and as I read it, I realized that the style in which it was written was the style I had envisioned Six Hours of Eternity being

written, but sadly had not been successful in accomplishing that style myself. It had now been a year since I had last tried to write chapter two, partly because chapter one sounded so dry and doctrinal. I believed Lanny was God's answer to my prayer for help in this area. I shared the story with him and he immediately agreed to give it a try. He returned home and after a short while he submitted a newly written chapter one - telling the same story as was in the original outline, using the same characters, and the same plot. But his submission sounded like a story and not a study. It was really good! Each time he sent a couple of pages I was excited as I could see that he had a definite talent for this type of writing. Over time chapter two was completed and work on chapter three began. Several weeks had passed since our first meeting, and I was working on the second study in the LOLM Bible and Ministry Training Curriculum. The twelve lessons had been determined, but I knew I could use some help on a couple of them. I talked to Lanny and asked if he might be interested in working with me on these two lessons and he said yes.

I told Lanny the direction I wanted to go with the one of them and asked him to just work on it and send me the results. He did, and I discovered that his writing on this type of study was as good as or better than his fictional writing. I gave him a second lesson assignment, and eventually a third. He did all three and did them very well. Soon after the completion of that study I began the book, *A Study of the Christ*. Again, twelve lessons, and I asked Lanny if he would like to write four of these lessons. He jumped on the idea, and off we went. We made a really good team, and have these two co-authored studies to show for it. And most of you could not determine which lessons I wrote and which Lanny wrote as our styles are so similar.

Now, understand that it was never my intention for us to lose focus on the novel, but writing study material was my new focus. Over the months I was asked to serve as Director of Christian Education for the Southern Methodist Church, and a couple of years later to serve as the Continuing Education Director for Southern Methodist College. Lanny took on an assignment of producing a study book on Religions and Cults, a subject he had taught to high school students in his employment as Bible Teacher at Dillon Christian School. Along with that, he was also asked to submit articles for *The Illuminator*. Perhaps I forgot to mention that he was also the pastor of one of our Southern Methodist Churches. And yes, I even talked him into joining me in taking Master level course work offered at SM College.

Each time we talked we would discuss how God was moving, how doors were opening, and how much need and potential there was for what we were trying to do. Now, as a partner with SM College in The Wesley Institute program, our initial eight courses had grown into 22 courses (we now propose 30 courses). There were several educators who accepted assignments to produce studies in the areas of their expertise. Things continued to look good for the future work we had envisioned. But in the process, both of us had lost the vision for completing the original novel. Three years passed without one page being written. It was all but gone from my memory!

Now, I must say this for the sake of the story, so please do not think it is for any other reason. Everything had gone extremely well. I had one man who wanted to work with LOLM full time, one who wanted to work with us part-time, and both highly qualified for the work we are doing. I was doing all I could, and the volunteer help was great, but I knew I really needed a paid staff to get the job done the way it needed to be done. There were way too many opportunities being missed for lack of time and personnel. We needed finances. But so does every ministry I know of. And the timing of trying to get a newly formed parachurch ministry off the ground in the middle of a national recession is a daunting task. But I also knew that God was not suffering a recession.

We have several faithful supporters. We have also received several occasional or one time gifts at exactly the time we really needed them. All of this was enough to pay our ministry bills, keep our material printing up to date, and for me to begin to draw a regular housing allowance. However, after six years, there is still enough but for one part time salary, so there was certainly no way to hire staff. I have prayed and waited, and prayed and waited some more - still, no real financial breakthroughs. There have been times when my patience grew thin. I really do trust God completely. I even trust in His timing. But at times I, like Job in the Bible, simply wanted God to tell me why - why are finances such a struggle? At one time I even asked God to stop giving me ideas and desires for ministry if there was no way to finance them! Dare I say it? Had I grown impatient waiting upon God?

I have left out much important information, such as God providing for my travel expenses through my position as Christian Education

Director for the denomination (no salary but travel expense budget given) and a part-time salary through my position as Continuing Education Director of Southern Methodist College, and recently some help from the General Conference Home Missions and Evangelism Board. That with housing allowance through LOLM and Barbara's retirement has met all our personal needs. Oh, that is right, Barbara retired from teaching in the summer of 2011, and she now also works with me in this ministry. She is and will be a tremendous help in much of the office work that has to be done. God has been faithful all the way to supply for every need we have.

But from my perspective the ministry has suffered because of a lack of sufficient funding that would allow us to implement most of the things that I believe God has been showing me. I have people who can do the work, but no money to pay them to do it. And if they could I am sure they would do it without pay, but they have families to support and as Lanny said, it takes more than \$2 a year. So, if I am honest this has been more than a little frustrating. But who am I to be frustrated with? Myself? OFTEN! People? OCCASIONALLY! God? NEVER! Wait, I said I would be honest, so yes, I guess I have been a little frustrated and impatient with God too. And yes, that is sinful, and I have had to repent!

Do you recall that not much has been said lately about that initial assignment from God some six years ago - you know, the one He woke me up at night so I could write it down? The one He sent Lanny to complete until I was able to sufficiently get him off task along with myself so that the very first assignment God gave to this newly founded ministry called Light of Life - write *Six Hours of Eternity*, has now been setting idle on the shelf for almost four years? Well, that is no longer true! As is usually the case, when we think that we are waiting on God, the truth is that it is He who is waiting on us. Our God is not only a faithful God. . . He is also a very **Patient God!** In Part Three the conclusion of this story with what I believe is a very exciting "Punch Line!"

**The Lord is not slack concerning His promise,  
as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us,  
not willing that any should perish  
but that all should come to repentance.**

2 Peter 3:9

## Part Three: God's Provision

Part One, God's Providence, simply set the stage for what I believe God has done, and is about to do! Part Two, God's Patience, once again showed how easy it is for us to "get off track" and miss God's direction. Often this leads to frustration as we seem to be waiting for God to get on our schedule, while all along it is God who is patient, waiting for us to get back on His! In this part of the story we will look at *God's Provision*.

I ended Part Two of this story with the realization that the first and original "assignment" God had given to me as the founder of the newly formed Light of Life Ministry was to complete a book titled, *Six Hours of Eternity*. Without any doubt God had laid out the path for this book, a Christian fiction novel about the atonement of Christ and how it was viewed by those around the cross. The book was to be both educational for believers and evangelistic for non-believers. It would tell very simply the plan of salvation through the conversations and thoughts of all who witnessed the events of those six hours in which Jesus hung upon the cross as God's perfect Passover Lamb.

The writing style was to be much like the Left Behind series of books, a style I could not seem to master. God already knew that I was not to be the writer and He moved onto the scene Lanny Carpenter - a writer who was gifted enough to write such a book. We were both excited, especially as chapters one, two, and then three were completed. This was not a fast process. I would share with Lanny my research on the Passover, the order of the events of the Passion Week, and the concepts for each chapter. He would in turn write, send me a few pages, I would respond with questions or suggestions, he would rewrite where necessary, and so went the process. That is until I decided to benefit personally from Lanny's writing ability, having him help me write certain lessons where I was lacking in knowledge or expertise. And for the reasons I explained in Part Two, the Six Hour project was gradually put on a shelf for close to four years.

Recall the dual purpose of LOLM - Christian Education and Evangelism. Now there is a definite plan for Christian Education, and we are working that plan the best we know how, expecting it to grow and flourish as we have more personnel and finances to move it forward. A part of Christian education is Discipleship. We have a discipleship ministry plan of action that frankly has yet to get off the

ground, but I have all confidence it will. And of course, evangelism should always be a primary objective of the believer and the church as a whole. I even developed a plan for that - reaching 3,000 new people for Christ during this decade.

But those of you who have been receiving (and reading) my emailed daily thoughts for the past year have already heard how that on June 25, 2011 on a trip by myself from Orangeburg to Nashville I earnestly prayed and asked God what He wanted to do through the various ministries of which I was a part. I had been telling Him for months, no years, what I wanted to do for Him, but due to two specific words from two different speakers in June of last year, Dr. Richard Blackaby during Pastor's School, and Dr. Eddy Beaver during the Masters Apologetics class at the college, I changed my prayer, and simply asked what it was that God would do through us if we would allow Him to. Then I listened (something I am not very good at!). Again, in a still small voice I heard in my spirit, "***I would use you to reach 1,000,000 people for the Kingdom!***"

I was dumbfounded - but excited! I called Barbara and told her. I called Lanny and told him. I think I called one or two more and told them. They all thought I was crazy (in some ways they are right, but that is a different story). God wants to use us to reach 1,000,000 people with the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. Right away I knew that I neither had, nor would have, any plan to bring that about. It all had to be God if that was to happen! Now, I have shared this story with the four Annual Conferences of the SMC, the various churches I have been in, through *The Illuminator*, and in the daily thoughts for almost eleven months. And all the while most folks just listened, and if not outwardly, at least inwardly wagged their respective heads as if to say, "It can never be done!" That was Okay, because I was simply telling them what God wanted to do through us if we would but be willing to be used. This wasn't one of my plans - it was God's plan!

I hate leaving things out, but for brevity I must. Recently, while in the haste of driving to SC and then to FL, back to SC, and then home, with classes, meetings, and a sick granddaughter in between, dealing with many of the same issues and thoughts of how to get it all done, still wondering when it would be that God would open financial doors that would allow us to go forward, and in some small way feeling a little

self pity, I got a phone call from my best male friend (Barbara being my best all-round friend) and my Pastor, Jack Davis. He was doing some personal study and was reading from Ezekiel 36. He was reflecting on the passage that declares that God wants to hear and answer Israel's prayers and do a work in them they cannot do for themselves, restore them to the land, purify and sanctify them, and increase them in number. Verse 36 says, "I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it." And when people have seen the mighty work of God, He declares in verse 38, "Then shall they know that I am the Lord!" Jack simply said to me something like this (in paraphrase), "Jim, I have to admit that I have been very skeptical about the 1,000,000 people you have been talking about. But the Spirit of God has impressed me that if that is what God wants to do, and we will allow Him to use us, then it will be done for His glory!" Praise God! I was getting discouraged, but God sent an encourager with the message, 'Don't lose the vision.'

I came home and began to go through my files to prepare for all the summer 2012 activities. I pulled out the small booklet with the first three chapters of *Six Hours of Eternity* and thought to myself that it was a shame we never finished it. The very next day I received an email from Lanny asking if I still had the electronic files with the outline. He had lost the file in a computer crash months back, but was thinking about working on the story some during the summer. I asked him what made him think of it. He responded that it was perhaps due to the conversations we have had concerning finances for the ministry, and that perhaps this book, if commercially successful, could be a means for meeting the financial needs. Another encourager! I had thought the same thing back in the beginning - the ministry would be funded by the book! I grew excited again at the prospect. "Renewed vision . . . funding for ministry. . . salary for staff . . ." I kick into my planning mode. What do we need to do to market the book? Who should we submit it too? How long would it take to go through the process? It was Saturday and I had some errands to run. I am praying riding down the road, "Lord, please guide my steps in this process. Show me how you want us to market this book for the best benefit financially for the ministry and in the education and evangelism of people. Show me what you want us to do!"

***"FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE."***

*"Lord, What does that mean?"*

*"The book is the message of salvation. It is not to be sold, but freely given. It was never the intent of the book to just provide financially for the ministry. I will do that through my people. The purpose of the book is to reach people with the message of salvation. Simply trust, and I will show you."*

So here we are, late in the year 2012! Lanny has completed the seven chapters of this book. I have edited some of it. Barbara and I have proofed it three times. Several times I had to stop reading to hold back the tears. I believe the book is powerful. I believe it holds the anointing of God for salvation. I believe God gave the plan for reaching the 1,000,000 long before He ever gave the vision. As I have stated, while we thought we were waiting on God, it was God waiting on us. In His Providence He calls us to the work, and gives us all we need to accomplish it. In His Patience He allows us to stumble through on our own until we return to His plan, and in His Provision He supplies our needs all the way through. But when the time is right, He will *"open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it"* (Malachi 3:10).

Let us pray for the bearing of much fruit as this project goes forward, not for our glory, but for His!

***If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you,  
you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.  
By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit;  
so you will be My disciples.***

John 15:7-8

# **ADDENDUM THREE**

## **Christ and the Passion Week**

**James O. Jones, Jr.**

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### **Introduction**

#### **A Look at Tradition**

The word "tradition" according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (meaning number one) is "*an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action, or behavior (as a religious practice or a social custom.*" The word itself is neutral. There is neither good nor bad, right nor wrong. There are traditions in almost every aspect of life...in our families, our schools, our workplaces, and our churches. Many times traditions exist long after the reason for the tradition has been forgotten. Still other traditions are grounded in very definite instructions or events of the past that have been handed down generation to generation in writing or by word of mouth. As this study will be addressing certain religious traditions, let us define the word as "*an inherited, established, or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior pertaining to the beliefs and practices of the Church.*"

There are countless stories about "church traditions," most of them less than flattering. The truth is, however, that church traditions, for the most part, are good. They can help us to remember and practice those things important to pass down to our children and our children's children. But one thing is certain - any change of tradition can be a difficult task. Are there ever traditions that are not good for the Church? The answer is "yes." A tradition based on faulty information should be corrected if truth is discovered contrary to the tradition. While one may see no noticeable harmful effects in a faulty tradition of this type, truth should always win over error. A more serious problem exists, however, when a tradition of man replaces or diminishes a command of God. Read the following passage from Mark where Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees concerning their faulty traditions:

*The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were “unclean,” that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.) So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?” He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men. You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.’” And he said to them: “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: ‘Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban’ (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that” (Mark 7:1-13 NIV)*

The underlined emphasis above is this author's. Notice that it was the traditions of men nullifying the commands of God that caused Jesus to rebuke the Pharisees. When this occurs, God is not pleased, and correction is needed to make sure that God's commands take precedence over our traditions. In this study we will examine traditions of both types as they relate to the Passion Week of Christ (those that are based on faulty information, and those that are in conflict with the command of God). Many of you may, at this point, be tempted to read no further, and to disregard this study as simple foolishness. Let me encourage you to press on. If at the end of this study the evidence presented here can be refuted with Scripture, you can continue to keep the established traditions of the Church, as they pertain to this topic, with a clear conscience. If what follows in this study is perceived as truth, then it will still be you alone who will be responsible for what you do with that truth. And at the very least your mind will be challenged, and hopefully your heart will be stirred, as you see the magnificent way in which God has provided for our redemption!

## Approach to the Study

The approach in this study will be threefold: 1) To present the truth of the Scripture as it relates to the events of the Passion Week of Christ, 2) to briefly state and refute opposing views and/or interpretations, and 3) to give commentary as needed. The reader must also understand that this writer holds the Scripture in the highest regard, believing that it is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God. It is the final authority in everything to which it speaks, and while it does not contain all truth, all that it does contain is truth. I believe that God has revealed Himself to man in this Book on several levels, some of which we may never discover in one lifetime of study. While the plan for the redemption of mankind is simple (John 3:16), and can be understood by the least educated among us (1 Corinthians 2:14), it holds such depth of knowledge and wisdom that even the angels cannot fully grasp its magnitude. Therefore, as we proceed, I trust that God the Holy Spirit will lead our hearts and minds into His truth concerning this subject (John 16:13).

**All Scripture is quoted from the KJV or NKJV  
unless otherwise noted.**

## Understanding Two Old Testament "Types"

Let us begin by looking at two very important foundational "types" in the Old Testament that must be understood to properly interpret the events of the Passion Week. An Old Testament type is an example or illustration that points to a person or event in the future. There are numerous types in the Old Testament. The Scofield Study Bible defines a "type" as a "*divinely purposed illustration of some truth. It may be: (1) a person (Rom 5:14); (2) an event (1 Cor. 10:11); (3) a thing (Heb 10:19-20); (4) an institution (Heb 9:11-12); or, (5) a ceremony (1 Cor. 5:7). Types occur most frequently in the Pentateuch, but are found, more sparingly, elsewhere. The antitype, or fulfillment of the type, is found generally in the New Testament.*" Scofield then proceeds to detail 128 types, shadows, and symbols in the Bible. So the concept of types is widely known and studied by Bible students, and is detailed here for the reader who may not be familiar with the term. The two types that will be discussed here are the Passover Lamb and the Feasts of the Lord.

In Exodus 12, we have the first type...that of the Passover Lamb (you are strongly encouraged to read Exodus 12:1-36 before continuing). God gave instructions to Moses and Aaron concerning the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. God was about to send the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of every creature in Egypt, as a final judgment to persuade Pharaoh to let the children of Israel leave Egypt. Moses is to tell all the congregation of Israel that on the 10th day of the month Nisan every household is to choose a young male lamb without spot or blemish, and separate it for four days, until the fourteenth day of Nisan. On the evening of the fourteenth day, the lamb is to be sacrificed (a lamb for each household), and the blood of the lamb is to be placed on the doorposts of the house:

***For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments-I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt (Exodus 12:12-13).***

They are also told how they are to prepare and eat the flesh of the lamb, and that none of it shall be left till the morning:

***They shall eat the flesh that same night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled at all with water, but rather roasted with fire, both its head and its legs along with its entrails. And you shall not leave any of it over until morning, but whatever is left of it until morning, you shall burn with fire. Now you shall eat it in this manner: with your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste--it is the Lord's Passover (Ex 12:8-11).***

This is all to be done that Israel not be judged with the plague and judgment that is to befall Egypt. God gave specific instructions to Israel in regard to both the blood (spiritual) and the flesh (physical) of the sacrifice. The result of obedience to the command of God concerning the Passover lamb: The applied blood protected against the judgment and wrath of God; the eaten flesh brought health and strength to all of Israel as we are told in Psalm 105:37, "***...and there was not one feeble person among their tribes.***" (For more on the subject of health, strength and healing tied to the Passover, read the author's study titled, *Healing in the Church Age*).

The second type is introduced when God continued to instruct Israel: *This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and you shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; you shall keep it a feast by an ordinance forever (Ex 12:14)*. It is apparent that God placed great importance on this event, the symbolic meaning of this event, and the remembrance of this event for all generations to follow, not just Israel. God knew that one day the perfect Lamb of God, without spot or blemish, would come and offer his body and blood for the redemption of man. God wanted the people to know and understand the symbols instituted on this night so when the Messiah came, they would know and understand His role as the Passover Lamb. A few understood, but most did not. It is interesting that Passover is the first of the seven feasts listed in Leviticus 23 as "*the feasts of the Lord*" (not the feasts of Israel). God declared that these feasts should be remembered and observed as "a statute forever" (Leviticus 23:14).

I believe it is the heart of God that we observe "*His Feasts*," as these seven feasts of the Lord are all tied to God's redemptive acts in the past, present, and future of mankind. They were given to Israel to share with the world, just as the Scriptures were given to Israel, the prophecies were given to Israel, and the Messiah was given to Israel. These are the "*Feasts of the Lord*", and in the opinion of this writer, it is the Church's loss that they are not known, studied, and observed today. A very brief description of these Feasts will be presented here. For a complete study of the Feasts of the Lord, I would refer you to a book entitled, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* by Eddie Chumney. It is an interesting and easy to follow work giving Scriptural and historic details on this subject.

### **The Four Spring Feasts**

1. Passover (Pesach) - Occurs in the first month of the Jewish religious calendar (Aviv, also called Nisan), on the fourteenth day (Leviticus 23:5). This is the day Israel was instructed to sacrifice a lamb for each household. Fulfillment is in Christ, the sacrificial Lamb of God without spot or blemish.
2. Feast of Unleavened Bread (Hag HaMatzah) - Begins on Nisan 15, the day after Passover (Leviticus 23:6-7). It lasts for seven days, with the first and last days being Sabbath days. Leaven, symbolizing sin, was removed from each home, and not consumed throughout the Feast. On

this day Israel left Egypt. Fulfillment is in Christ's taking away of our sin.

3. Feast of First Fruits (Bikkurim) - The day after the regular weekly Sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, making it always on the Sunday following Passover (Leviticus 23:9-14). It celebrates the first of the barley and wheat harvest. Israel crossed the Red Sea on this day. Fulfillment is in the resurrection of Christ, the "Firstfruits from the dead" (I Cor 15:20).

4. Feast of Weeks / Pentecost (Shavuot) - Fifty days from the Feast of Firstfruits, also always falling on Sunday (Leviticus 23:15-22; Exodus 34:22; Deut. 16:9-10). God gave the Torah (the Law) at Mt. Sinai on this day. Fulfillment was the giving of the Holy Spirit and the founding of the Church fifty days after the resurrection.

### **The Three Fall Feasts**

5. Feast of Trumpets (Rosh HaShannah) - First of the fall festivals occurring on Tishrei 1 (Tishrei is the seventh month of the Jewish religious calendar, and the first month of the Jewish civil calendar) (Leviticus 23:23-25). It begins with the blowing of the shofar (trumpet) to call Israel to repentance. This day is actually two days combined into one, and begins the Days of Awe leading up to the Day of Atonement. Also referred to as the "Day of the Awakening Blast" it has yet to be fulfilled, but is believed by many to symbolize the Rapture of the Church (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

6. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) - Ten days after Rosh HaShannah (Leviticus 23:26-32), this is the day the High Priest atones for the sins of the people through the offering of a sacrifice. He then enters the Holy of Holies with the blood to sprinkle on the Mercy Seat covering the Ark of the Covenant (Leviticus 16). This Feast has yet to be fulfilled, but is believed to be the day the Lord will return at the end of the tribulation to begin the judging of the nations.

7. Feasts of Tabernacles (Sukkot) - A seven day feast beginning 5 days after the Day of Atonement on Tishrei 15 (Leviticus 23:33-43). Following the somber Day of Atonement, this feast is a time of great joy. Its fulfillment is believed to be the Millennium, when the Messiah will "tabernacle (dwell) among men" (John 1:14). It is also believed by many scholars that it was during this feast that Jesus was actually born.

## Fulfillment of the Types

Just a brief review of these Feasts shows that all are connected to God's plan for the redemption of man. We are currently in the "summer" months (referred to as the Church Age) between the Spring and Fall Feasts, drawing ever closer to the "Day of the Awakening Blast!" Only God knows for sure when the sound of the shofar (trumpet) will be heard, and the Church, both dead and alive, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. But most prophecy scholars agree that we are in the "season of the Lord's return." Now that we have shown how these two types relate to Jesus, though only scratching the surface of all the symbolism, let us examine the Scriptures concerning the Passion Week of Christ. We have already stated that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover Lamb. There really is no dispute from any Christian source as to this claim, although there are many who do not understand its real significance. Nevertheless, let us document this with Scripture:

1) John the Baptist proclamation, "***Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world***" (John 1:29).

2) Peter the Apostle declared, "***But with the precious blood of Messiah, as a lamb without blemish and without spot***" (1 Peter 1:19).

3) John the Apostle in the Revelation refers to Christ 25 times as the "Lamb," including these verses, "***And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain...***" (Rev. 5:6a). "***After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,***" (Rev. 7: 9). "***And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship Him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world***" (Rev. 13:8).

4) Paul writing to the Church at Corinth, "***Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us***" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Again, let me emphasize that this writer believes that every part of the Scripture is inspired (*theopunestos*, i.e. God-breathed), therefore, nothing is left to chance or circumstance when it comes to the fulfilling

of the "type." If Jesus is the fulfillment of the type of the Passover Lamb, then He will fulfill the type completely! The same is true concerning the Feasts of the Lord. All Scripture must be fulfilled completely and accurately. The problem arises with our human attempts to know, understand, and apply correctly the perfect Word of God. We must deal with the original language and how it has been translated, the customs and practices of the nation of Israel (especially as it pertains to the Jewish roots of the Church), take into account the various reports of the witnesses to the events (the Gospel writers), and finally, try to avoid making the Scripture support our preconceived ideas on the subject.

### **Is Church Tradition Correct?**

As everyone knows, Church tradition holds that Jesus was crucified on Friday, being laid in the tomb late Friday afternoon (before sunset), and was resurrected sometime prior to sunrise on Sunday morning. This tradition was basically unchallenged for centuries, and for most of Christianity, still remains unquestioned today. However, there are now many who do question the accuracy of this tradition, and they have given numerous replacement theories as to the day of the crucifixion, and the day of the resurrection. This writer has spent many hours reading and rereading numerous articles on the subject by many different authors, seeking out various authorities on ancient calendars and the reckoning of time prior to our modern calendar, and most importantly, reading the eyewitness reports themselves (the Scripture!). This was an ongoing study for close to five years, and I became convinced that Jesus was not crucified on Friday. Of those who hold to the view of an other than Friday crucifixion, there is a division as to whether His crucifixion was on a Wednesday or a Thursday, and as to whether His resurrection was on Sunday morning or on Saturday evening. For those who ask, "What difference does it make?" I would reply, "The difference between truth and error concerning Christ and the Scriptures!"

### **The Beginning of the Passion Week**

*Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was*

*one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, "Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always." Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him and cried out: 'Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' The King of Israel!" (John 12:1-13)*

We are told here that Jesus and the disciples came to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (whom Jesus had raised from the dead) six days before Passover. We are not told what day of the week it was, nor are we told if the six days are inclusive or exclusive of the day of Passover itself. Commentators argue their positions, ranging from a Friday arrival to a Sunday arrival. Another question arising out of this passage is on what day Jesus entered into Jerusalem. The text says "on the next day" which offers little help in determining what the exact timing might be. The few commentators who hold to a Sunday arrival in Bethany are so out of touch with proper interpretation that we will not take the time or space to review or refute their arguments here.

As to a Saturday arrival, there are some problems with having Jesus arrive on the Sabbath day, and having Martha prepare and serve a meal on this day. Both tradition, and Jewish law, at the time would have forbidden this kind of activity. A Sabbath day's journey was approximately one half mile, and to travel a longer distance than this would have been to break the Sabbath. To fix a meal on the Sabbath was also forbidden, thus the weekly "day of preparation" was on Friday when all that would be needed would be prepared prior to the Sabbath. However, we know that Jesus and his disciples often did things contrary to man's Sabbath laws, much to the frustration of the Pharisees. Therefore, it could be possible that Jesus arrived on

Saturday, and if Jesus' triumphant entry were to be on Sunday (the next day), it would at first appear that a Saturday arrival would be the correct interpretation. Six days would make Passover on the following Friday, Passover day inclusive. But before deciding on Saturday, the possibility of a Friday arrival should be explored!

It is logical that the arrival into the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus could have been on a Friday, prior to the weekly Sabbath that began at sundown on Friday. The meal preparation would have already been underway, as this was the weekly day of preparation, and no Sabbath restrictions would have been in effect. A problem arises, however, for those who hold to a Friday crucifixion...there is no way to get from one Friday to another Friday in six days without both days being exclusive, Friday to Friday is a week, and even in Jewish culture, a week is seven days. It would also seem unreasonable to assume that Jesus triumphant entry into Jerusalem would occur on the Sabbath, as not only would Jesus and his disciples be breaking the Sabbath laws, but so would all the people running into the streets to meet Him. In all four Gospel accounts of the triumphant entry, not one time are we told that the Pharisees rebuked Jesus or the people for breaking the Sabbath laws (as they had on so many other occasions), and it seems very likely they would have!

Some proponents of a Saturday entry to Jerusalem state that Jesus entered Jerusalem after sunset (end of the Sabbath) but before dark. This is a time period of about thirty minutes at the most, and does not allow enough time to travel from Bethany on foot, find a donkey, ride into the city, and go to the temple, all before dark. However, for those who hold to a Thursday Passover and crucifixion, the six days work out quite nicely -Friday to Thursday, Passover day inclusive. So, another option should be considered, an alternative interpretation that solves all questions. The following is offered as a reasonable understanding of the passage, and a perfect fit for the rest of the week, as we shall see!

### **Most Likely Interpretation of John 12:1-13**

Jesus and his disciples arrived in Bethany on Friday. Martha had prepared a meal, as it was the day of preparation. As was the custom, the meal was eaten after sunset, which was the beginning of the Sabbath, or in our time Saturday (the new day always began after sunset of the old day). The meal and fellowship among Jesus, the disciples, Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and other friends who had gathered

lasted well into the night...Sabbath night. After a night's sleep, they observed the remainder of the Sabbath together, and "the next day", which would be the first day of the week, Jesus made his entry into Jerusalem. No Sabbath laws broken, no traditions for the Pharisees to oppose, and the six days before Passover would put Passover (day inclusive) on Thursday, Nisan 14, the day of the sacrifice of the Passover lambs in Jerusalem. Thus begins the Passion Week of Christ.

### **The Triumphant Entry**

All four of the Gospel writers mention the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. You might want to read the accounts in Matthew 21:1-9, Mark 11:1-10, Luke 19:29-44, and John 12:12-19. In order for Jesus to fulfill the type of the Passover lamb, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the presentation of Himself at the Temple would have to be on Nisan 10. This is the day the High Priest would select a lamb without spot or blemish for the nation of Israel, and set it apart for observation for four days. Then on Nisan 14, the lamb would be slain in the afternoon, at the traditional time of 3 p.m. Thus, Jesus' presentation of himself to the priests at the Temple on the 10th of Nisan was in fulfillment of the chosen lamb being set aside for observation on this day. Jewish tradition states that at the time of Jesus, the High Priest would make the journey to Bethany (the place Jesus left, the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) to select the Passover lamb. He would then lead it back to the temple while thousands would gather in the streets (pilgrims who came to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover), singing the Hallel (Psalms 113-118) as the lamb passed by.

Thus, Jesus' triumphant entry to Jerusalem, and the presentation of Himself at the Temple, would have been on the same day that the High Priest would have selected the Passover lamb and led it to the Temple. Jesus went to the Temple for "inspection" each of the four days in fulfillment of the type. During these four days, Jesus was questioned by the chief priests, the elders, the Herodians, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and finally on the day of Passover, the High Priest, Pilate, Herod, and Pilate again. Yet, no one could find fault with Him. He had proven that He was indeed without spot or blemish, and met the requirements to be the sacrificial Lamb.

There is no one Gospel that gives the details of the entire week day by day. It requires the study of each Gospel in connection with all others to get a proper understanding of the order of events of the week. It is

interesting to note that in the late 1970s while attending a very conservative Bible College, one of this writer's professors gave each student a handout titled, *Jesus' Final Week of Work At Jerusalem In 40 Events*. The original source of this handout is unknown, but at the time it was a great tool for a young preacher boy, listing the days of the final week, the events of each day, and the references for each event. Strangely, there were no entries for Wednesday, and this day was called "Silent Wednesday." Looking back, the list had obviously been compiled forward from Sunday through Tuesday, and backward from Friday (the traditional day of the crucifixion) to Thursday. Since no event could be found for Wednesday, it was assumed that on this day Jesus kept to himself, probably at the Mt. of Olives in prayer. Twenty years later I rediscovered this handout, and after five years of study, I now know why there was nothing listed for Wednesday. The Passion Week events of Thursday and Friday on the handout were actually the events of Wednesday and Thursday. There was no "Silent Wednesday."

### **The Sign of Jonah**

If Jesus entered Jerusalem on Sunday, Nisan 10, then Nisan 14, the day of the preparation of the Passover, would occur on Thursday. If Jesus, the Passover Lamb, was crucified on Thursday how would that fit with Scripture? The answer, as we shall see, is "very well!" One of the problems that must be resolved concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus is the "sign of Jonah."

*Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:38-40)*

Jesus statement that He would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights must be taken literally. Granted, Jewish custom allowed for any part of a day to be considered a full day. Thus we have the reasoning that Jesus was buried just prior to sunset on Friday (day one), was in the tomb on Saturday (day two), and was resurrected on Sunday (day three). This would be possible if only Jesus had said three days. But Jesus said plainly, "three days and three nights." There is no way to get three nights from Friday evening until Sunday morning. A

Thursday crucifixion, however, would give three nights and part of three days, having Jesus being raised "on the third day." There are twelve references in the three synoptic Gospels where we are told Jesus would rise on the third day. Following are three, one from each Gospel:

*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day (Matthew 16:21).*

*For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed He will rise the third day" (Mark 9:31).*

*Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (Luke 24:5-7).*

While this would seem to answer the problem with "the sign of Jonah," there are those who believe a literal interpretation would require a period of exactly 72 hours. This would require Jesus to be crucified on Wednesday, buried at sunset, and rise 72 hours later, at sunset on Saturday. To defend this view they note that when the women went to the tomb before light on the first day of the week, Jesus was already resurrected. It does not say He was "just" resurrected, so He could have been resurrected the previous evening. Still others argue that in Matthew 28:1 (*Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb*) the word translated "dawn" could mean "approach." In other words, "as the first day of the week began to approach." This totally ignores the related passage in Luke 24:1 where it states clearly: *Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulcher, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them.* It also ignores John 20:1 which states: *The first day of the week came Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher...* Even more exact is Mark 16:2 which states: *And very early in the morning of the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulcher at the rising of the sun.*

The women definitely went to the tomb before daybreak on Sunday morning. Jesus had already risen, and we are not told how long it had been since His resurrection. However, one hint might be found in Matthew 28:11-15. It states that while the women were running back to tell the disciples about the resurrection, the guards at the tomb were coming into the city to tell the chief priests "*all the things that were done.*" I doubt that the guards would have waited almost twelve hours to report this incident! Finally, in defense of a Sunday resurrection, we must not forget the Feast of First Fruits, the third feast given by God. Jesus was crucified on the Feast of Passover, was laid in the tomb at the beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the feast where sin was purged), and He was resurrected on the Feast of First Fruits, which always occurred on Sunday following Passover during the seven day Feast of Unleavened Bread. "*But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep!*" (I Cor. 15:20 NASV). The resurrection most definitely occurred on Sunday, the first day of the week, sometime prior to sunrise.

### **Problems with a Wednesday Crucifixion**

Let us now deal with what I consider to be two serious problems with the idea of a Wednesday crucifixion. The first is tied to our previous conclusion that the triumphant entry to Jerusalem was on Sunday. For Jesus to fulfill the type of the Passover Lamb, there would have to be four days from the presentation of Himself at the Temple until the Crucifixion. Counting backward, if Wednesday were to be Nisan 14, Sunday would be Nisan 11. If Jesus' crucifixion was on Wednesday, His entry to Jerusalem could not be on Sunday!

It is the second problem, however, that I consider a deathblow to the entire argument that Jesus was crucified on Wednesday. Read the following passage from Luke 24:13-31:

*13 Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 And they talked together of all these things which had happened. 15 So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. 16 But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. 17 And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" 18 Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" 19 And He said to*

them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. 21 But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. 22 Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. 23 When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. 24 And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." 25 Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. 28 Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. 29 But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. 30 Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.

Look closely at verse 21. This conversation between the two disciples and the risen Christ occurred late in the day (verse 29, "*abide with us; for it is toward evening...*") on the same day as the women had gone to the tomb (Sunday, the first day of the week). And it was plainly stated, "*...today is the third day since these things were done.*" If Sunday afternoon is the third day, then there is no way the crucifixion was on Wednesday, for then Sunday afternoon would be the fourth day. Thus...

***the only day that fits all of Scripture is Thursday!!!***

### **The Passion Week in Review**

By now you may be confused and not certain where this leaves us. A review might be in order at this time to make sure everyone is on the same page. Jesus is the fulfillment of the types of the Passover Lamb and the Feast Days. As such, He presented Himself to the priests at the Temple on Sunday, Nisan 10 and went there daily for the four days of observation. His Last Supper with the disciples occurred on Wednesday evening after sunset (which was in Jewish time the

beginning of the day of Passover). After supper, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane for prayer. He prayed there three times, and sometime early in the morning, before sunrise Thursday, Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. Jesus was then taken before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, then before Pilate who sent Him to Herod, who in turn sent Him back to Pilate. After finding no fault with Him, Pilate gave in to the cries of the people to crucify Him. Jesus was whipped, beaten, and forced to carry His cross to the place of the crucifixion, where at 9:00 am (the third hour Hebrew time, Mark 15:25) He was nailed to the cross and placed between two thieves. At the temple, at 9:00 a.m., the High Priest led the Passover Lamb up the steps to the altar and tied it there. At noon (the sixth hour, Mark 15:33-34) darkness fell upon the face of the earth, and lasted until the ninth hour, or 3:00 p.m. This is seen as the time Jesus became our sin, and the Father turned away from the Son. At 3:00 p.m., "knowing that all things were accomplished" (John 19:28), Jesus cried out, "**It is finished.**" At the temple, at 3:00 p.m., the High Priest would sacrifice the Passover lamb, and according to Jewish tradition, declare to the congregation, "It is finished."

Joseph of Arimathea sought Pilate for the body of Jesus, and it was hurriedly prepared for burial, as the day of preparation was almost over, and the Sabbath day approached. This was not the regular weekly Sabbath, but as John 19:31 declares, this was a High Sabbath, the Sabbath that occurs on Nisan 15, the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Passover was called the day of preparation of the sacrifice, which was to be eaten after sundown, the beginning of the High Sabbath. On this week, there would be two consecutive Sabbath days, the annual High Sabbath on Friday, and the weekly Sabbath on Saturday. Jesus lay in the tomb through these two Sabbaths, and the women waited for the first day of the week to arrive so they could go and anoint the body. But when they arrived, Jesus was not there. He had been in the grave for three nights, and had risen on the third day (on the Feast of First Fruits), just as He had said. All things that had been written of Him, and all things He had declared of Himself, had come to pass... completely, literally, perfectly! Jesus would appear several times to his disciples before his ascension to the Father forty days later. Before He ascended, He told them to go and wait for the promise of the Spirit who would come. Ten days later, on the Feast of Weeks, (i.e. Pentecost), the Holy Spirit came, and the world hasn't been the same since. What love! What wisdom! What power! Can you still ask, "What difference does it make?"

## Church Tradition vs. Scripture

Considering all of this, a question should arise in your mind, "If it can be shown with Scripture that Jesus was crucified on Thursday (as we have just shown...with Scripture), then why has the church taught for centuries that the crucifixion was on Friday?" Remember where we started back in the Introduction of this study...with tradition? The tradition of the Friday crucifixion has been passed from generation to generation. Some may believe there is more to this false tradition than simple ignorance. They suspect something far more sinister, and as for the origin of this tradition, they may be right. Personally, I have found so much ignorance (which simply means, "lack of knowledge") on this subject among educated people that until more is proven, I will simply accept ignorance as the reason. When the church decided to eliminate everything Jewish from its history and practice some seventeen centuries ago (we will discuss this a little later), it did not take long for people to become ignorant as to Jewish customs and practice. The basic information at hand was that the Jewish Sabbath was on Saturday, and the day before the Sabbath was called the day of preparation. Almost nothing was known about the Feast days, annual Sabbaths, High Sabbaths, etc. Therefore, when the New Testament states that late on the day of the crucifixion, "*...the Jews, because it was the (day of) preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day...besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away*" (John 19:31, see also Mark 15:42 and Luke 23:54), the only understanding they had was that it must be Friday! And so the tradition was begun, and as we stated early on, once a tradition is in place, it is very difficult to change.

The Friday crucifixion, therefore, is a tradition based on faulty information. There may be no outwardly harmful effects in celebrating "Good Friday" along with the rest of Christendom. Still, once the truth is known, should we continue to practice error? That is a question each person must settle for himself, yet please remember this one thing...as Believers we are to seek truth. Jesus said: *You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free* (John 8:32). This writer prays regularly for the Lord to show him truth in His Word. If the truth He reveals would ever be decided to be too "troublesome" to accept or practice, what right would he have to expect Him to reveal more truth? Each person must walk in the light they have in order to receive more light.

This study, to this point, has been primarily academic. Now comes the practical. Have you ever questioned why we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord with rabbits and colored eggs? You guessed it...tradition! However, unlike the previous tradition that might have started due to faulty information, the traditions of "Easter" are the result of a more serious problem, replacing the commands of God with the traditions of men. Anti-Semitism has existed ever since God called Abraham and began to form a people for Himself some 2000 years before Christ. While the Church was born out of the nation of Israel, it did not take long for the Church, like all others, to turn against the Jewish people. By 300 AD the separation of the Church from its Jewish heritage was fully underway. Constantine, the emperor of Rome from 306 to 337 AD, was the first emperor to make Christianity the "state religion." He, himself, was very anti-Semitic, and in 315 issued his first decree against the Jewish people, which was followed by other, ever increasing, anti-Semitic rulings. By the year 325, at the Council of Nicea convened by Constantine, the Roman Church made specific decrees separating Christianity from everything "Jewish."

Up until this time, Passover was still practiced by most of the Gentile Church. This decree put a stop to this practice, and separated the Church's celebration from that of Passover. Christians were not allowed to eat "Jewish foods" such as unleavened bread, and could have no social ties to the Jew. Intermarriage between Christian and Jew was punishable by excommunication from the church, and in later years, even by death. A Jew who converted to Christianity had to denounce everything Jewish, including his/her family. The Roman church had by creed eliminated the Jewish roots of Christianity. The Feast of Passover, which God commanded to be an ordinance forever, was no longer observed due to the tradition of men.

As always, when the truth of God's Word is rejected, the lies of the enemy soon come to replace it. Most, if not all, pagan religions had a celebration tied to the Spring (Vernal) Equinox, the time of the year when there are equal amounts of daylight and darkness. Most of these celebrations were fertility festivals, honoring the various goddesses from each respective culture: Astarte from Phoenicia, Ostara from the Celts, Ishtar from Assyria, and Eostre of the Saxons. The spring festivals were celebrated in the pagan temples, usually accompanied by orgies. Symbols of fertility were hung from the trees and bushes...

colored eggs. Rabbits were honored for their renowned ability to reproduce, and were the symbols of some of these goddesses.

In time, the Christian celebration of the resurrection of Christ came to be called "Easter." Many historians admit this name is most likely a variation of Ishtar or Eostre. No longer was the most significant event in human history celebrated with the Feasts that God had commanded; it had been replaced by a tradition tied to the names and symbols of pagan fertility goddesses! Indeed, God must be a God of love, and patience, and longsuffering. How long will our traditions replace the commands of God?

This writer understands that modern day Christians are not knowingly celebrating pagan festivals. Most Christians who celebrate Easter do so with the intent to honor God. Giving Easter eggs and chocolate rabbits to our children is not an attempt to teach them of pagan fertility rituals. But still, have we not replaced the commands of God with the traditions of men? Each reader must make his or her own decision as to how they will receive and respond to this information. This writer has decided to proclaim that which is true. Jesus was resurrected on the Feast of First Fruits, during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which immediately followed the Feast of Passover, on which day He was sacrificed as our Passover Lamb...just as God planned from the foundation of the world!

Someone is sure to ask, "Isn't Easter found in the New Testament?" The answer is yes, but only if you read from the original King James Version. The word "Easter" is used in Acts 12:4, "***And when he (Herod) had apprehended him (Peter), he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.***" The Greek word in Acts 12: 4 is "pascha" (pas'-khah). Strong's Greek and Hebrew dictionary defines pascha as follows: "of Aramaic origin; the Passover (the meal, the day, the festival or the special sacrifices connected with it)." It is translated correctly as Passover some thirty times in the New Testament by the same King James translators that chose to translate it in this verse as Easter. But remember that the King James Version of the Bible was translated in 1611, close to thirteen hundred years after the Council of Nicea. It is no surprise, therefore, that the translators incorrectly translated pascha; the surprise is they did it only once!

## Conclusion

So what now? Assuming that everything presented here is true, what is the average Christian to do with this information? Is there any real relevance to this information and how we live our daily lives? In answer to these questions, I would like to make the following observations:

- All truth is relevant. When our beliefs and actions are based on that which is untrue, it becomes increasingly difficult to discover and apply real truth. This is especially true of God's Word! Have you ever considered why some of the most educated people believe some of the most ridiculous things? For example, how much sense does it take to conclude that everything in the universe did not get its start by some accidental "Big Bang?" Is it really that hard to believe that God created man in His own image, and that easy to believe that over millions of years, man evolved from monkeys? And when the truth of God's Word is applied, is there really any doubt as to when life begins? Once we start accepting as truth that which is not true, how can it lead to further truth?
- Today, more than any other time in history, the Word of God is under attack. The prophetic passages of Scripture are twisted and manipulated to make them say anything desired by man, with little regard to truth. It is a confirmation to the sovereignty of God and His plan of redemption for mankind that he has perfectly planned every piece to fit precisely with every other piece. There are many today who teach that the prophecies concerning Jesus' Second Coming are not literal. I don't know about you, but I would bet they are literal... and exact to the day, just as were the prophecies about His first coming! As Jesus said in Matthew 5:18, *"till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled."*
- There is a big move today among Christian teachers and preachers to proclaim a doctrine known as "Replacement Theology." This simply means that the Church has replaced Israel and now has claim to all the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In other words, God is through with the nation of Israel. The fact that there is currently, after 1900 years, a nation called Israel, that it is located in the exact land God gave to Abraham, and that Jews from around the world are even now gathering in this land, is regarded as a

coincidence at best. The prophetic Scriptures foretelling this event are ignored, because it does not fit into their "system of truth." The reason the Church lost the truth of God's Word concerning the Passover Lamb, the Feasts of the Lord, and other important Jewish roots of the Church, is the same reason today that the importance of modern Israel on God's timeline is rejected. At best, it is a subtle rejection of the Jewish people, and at worst, a deliberate anti-Semitic philosophy. The Church needs to recognize the importance of its Jewish roots, and a good place to start is with the correct understanding of the events of the Passion Week of Christ.

As I have stated earlier, what you do with this information is up to you as an individual. Without doubt, you will need to consider this for a time, reading and rereading the Scriptures referenced here, and perhaps even reading through this study again. Ask God to reveal His truth to your heart and show you what He desires from you. I would dare to say that anyone who has read to this point is a seeker of God's truth (otherwise, you would have given up after about four pages), therefore, it is not likely you will choose to simply ignore this information and to go on your way as usual. But, by all means, do not allow this to become something to separate and divide you from other believers. As we are admonished in Ephesians 4:15, we need to "***speak the truth in love.***" May God bless you with all truth as you walk daily with Him!

# **ADDENDUM FOUR**

**Light of Life Ministry and  
Southern Methodist College**

**PRESENT**

## **The Wesley Institute of Bible and Ministry Training**

### **Level One:**

**Christian Foundation Certificate -  
30 CEUs.**

**Both laity and clergy to complete the ten  
Foundational courses in this level.**

### **Level Two:**

**Laity - Leadership Certificate -  
54 CEUs.**

**SMC Clergy - Ordination as Deacon  
eligible with 57 CEUs  
(54 units plus Homiletics course)**

**Other Clergy - This program can be adapted to fit the  
requirements of other groups for clergy ordination.**

### **Level Three:**

**Laity - Advanced Leadership -  
63 CEUs**

**(choose any 3 courses from this level)**

**SMC Clergy - Additional 15 units needed (72 total)  
to be eligible for**

**Ordination as Elder in the SMC.**

**(\*three required and two elective  
courses from Level 3)**

## Wesley Institute General Chart Below

<b>The Wesley Institute Of Bible and Ministry Training General Program Structure</b>			
<b><u>Level One</u></b>  Foundation Courses  All Laity & Clergy	101	Laying the Foundation - God's Answer To Your Questions	3 CEUs
	102	Building on the Foundation - Understanding God's Revelation	3 CEUs
	103	Becoming an Effective Witness - How Do I Tell Them?	3 CEUs
	104	A Study of the Christ - Jesus from Creation to Consummation	3 CEUs
	105	The Holy Spirit - His Work, His Gifts, His Fruit	3 CEUs
	106	Understanding the Bible - Survey of Old and New Testaments	3 CEUs
	107	Ministering to the Hurting - Ministry in Action	3 CEUs
	108	Holiness - The Two Great Commandments and Their Application	3 CEUs
	109	Genesis - The History of Our Beginning	3 CEUs
	110	Romans - Justification by Grace through Faith	3 CEUs
<b><u>Level Two</u></b>  Leadership Courses  Advanced Laity & Clergy	201	Major World Religions and Christian Cults - A Basic Overview	3 CEUs
	202	Acts - The Holy Spirit, the Apostles, and the Church	3 CEUs
	203	Concepts of Church Growth - Home Missions & Church Planting	3 CEUs
	204	John Wesley - His Life, His Doctrines, His Influence	3 CEUs
	205	Hebrews - The Supremacy of Christ	3 CEUs
	206	Survey of Christian Education - Growing in Grace and Knowledge	3 CEUs
	207	Apologetics - Learning to Defend the Faith	3 CEUs
	208	Hermeneutics - A Structured Approach to the Study of God's Word	3 CEUs
	209	Homiletics - Preparing and Delivering a Message from the Word	3 CEUs
	200	Electives From Denominational Programs, Seminars, Conferences, etc.	Various
<b><u>Level Three</u></b>  Pastoral Preparation Courses  Complete a Minimum of five courses *3 required plus 2 electives	301	* Theological Trends and Methodism in the 21st Century	3 CEUs
	302	* An Introduction to Conservative Arminian Systematic Theology	3 CEUs
	303	* A Theology of the International Mission of the Church	3 CEUs
	304	A Review of Church History - Early Church through 20th Century	3 CEUs
	305	Biblical Counseling - Applying Scriptural Truth to Personal Life	3 CEUs
	306	The Minister and His Ministry - Personal Life and Public Work	3 CEUs
	307	Biblical Ethics - Doing What Is Right (In Every Situation)	3 CEUs
	308	Character Studies in Leadership - How to Lead God's People	3 CEUs
	309	Pastoral Epistles - Called to Serve / Called to Lead	3 CEUs
	300	Electives From Denominational Programs, Seminars, Conferences, etc.	Various

## **About Light of Life Ministry**

Light of Life Ministry was organized in the Spring of 2006, legalized in May as a State of Tennessee Non-profit Corporation, and officially approved in June 2006 as an IRC 501(c)3 Religious Non-profit Organization by the Internal Revenue Service. The goal of this ministry is to establish teaching, training, and discipleship centers in as many places as possible for the purpose of:

- Helping Christians become more effective witnesses to the lost through training and example.
- Teaching sound biblical doctrine in a classroom environment through the Wesley Institute program. (see Addendum Four)
- Helping others to become home-cell Bible teachers, Sunday school teachers, Small Group Leaders etc.
- Discipling those won to Christ in all the above, so the whole process can be repeated.

Light of Life Ministry is designed to work with a church when it so desires or to work independently when necessary. Either way, the focus is to witness, to teach, to train and to disciple. If you would like more information, or if you desire to be added to the Ministry mailing list, please contact us at the address or phone number below.

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**And please visit our Web-site at:**

**[www.lolministry.org](http://www.lolministry.org)**

## Scriptural References

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:32-34

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:69-75

<sup>3</sup> John 12:1

<sup>4</sup> Luke 10:38-42

<sup>5</sup> John 12:1-2

<sup>6</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>7</sup> John 12:2-8

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah 53:8

<sup>9</sup> John 11:1-44

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 12:40

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 21:1-5

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 21:6-71

<sup>13</sup> Matthew 21:8-9

<sup>14</sup> Exodus 12:3, 6

<sup>15</sup> John 1:29

<sup>16</sup> Zechariah 9:9

<sup>17</sup> Matthew 21:12-14

<sup>18</sup> Matthew 24:1-2

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 26:6-9

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 26:12

<sup>21</sup> John 13:21-30

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 26:29

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- <sup>23</sup> John 13:1-17
- <sup>24</sup> Luke 9:46
- <sup>25</sup> John 13:21-30
- <sup>26</sup> Luke 22:17-20
- <sup>27</sup> Luke 7:1-10
- <sup>28</sup> Psalm 109:4
- <sup>29</sup> John 19:23-24
- <sup>30</sup> Psalm 22:18
- <sup>31</sup> Matthew 26:53
- <sup>32</sup> Luke 1:26-35
- <sup>33</sup> Genesis 1-2; John 1:1-3
- <sup>34</sup> Genesis 3
- <sup>35</sup> Genesis 6-8
- <sup>36</sup> Luke 2:21-39
- <sup>37</sup> Matthew 27:40
- <sup>38</sup> Luke 23:35-37
- <sup>39</sup> Isaiah 52:14
- <sup>40</sup> Psalm 22:3
- <sup>41</sup> Psalm 22:16
- <sup>42</sup> Matthew 14:14-21
- <sup>43</sup> John 10:18
- <sup>44</sup> John 1:29
- <sup>45</sup> Matthew 27:44

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- <sup>46</sup> John 19:19
- <sup>47</sup> Deuteronomy 16:2
- <sup>48</sup> Matthew 20:28
- <sup>49</sup> Luke 23:39
- <sup>50</sup> Matthew 8:28-34
- <sup>51</sup> Mark 2:1-12
- <sup>52</sup> Luke 23:40-43
- <sup>53</sup> Luke 16:19-31
- <sup>54</sup> Matthew 6:16
- <sup>55</sup> Matthew 26:33
- <sup>56</sup> Luke 18:10-11
- <sup>57</sup> Matthew 26:34
- <sup>58</sup> Matt 26:69-75
- <sup>59</sup> Matthew 26:14-16
- <sup>60</sup> Matthew 27:3-5
- <sup>61</sup> John 3:1-9
- <sup>62</sup> John 3:16
- <sup>63</sup> John 3:18
- <sup>64</sup> Matthew 27:15-18, 20-21
- <sup>65</sup> John 1:46
- <sup>66</sup> John 19:25-27
- <sup>67</sup> Luke 1:26-38
- <sup>68</sup> Matthew 1:18-25

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- <sup>69</sup> Luke 2:8-20
- <sup>70</sup> Matthew 26:36-46
- <sup>71</sup> John 19:37
- <sup>72</sup> Luke 23:44
- <sup>73</sup> Psalm 8:3-8
- <sup>74</sup> John 8:12
- <sup>75</sup> Matthew 27:46-47
- <sup>76</sup> Matthew 27:19
- <sup>77</sup> Luke 23:4, 14
- <sup>78</sup> Genesis 3:15
- <sup>79</sup> Genesis 22:18
- <sup>80</sup> Psalm 2:6-7
- <sup>81</sup> Isaiah 53:5
- <sup>82</sup> Jeremiah 23:5-6
- <sup>83</sup> Joel 2:32
- <sup>84</sup> Zechariah 9:9
- <sup>85</sup> Malachi 3:1
- <sup>86</sup> John 19:28-29
- <sup>87</sup> John 18:36
- <sup>88</sup> John 19:30
- <sup>89</sup> Matthew 27:51
- <sup>90</sup> Matthew 27:54
- <sup>91</sup> Matthew 27:51

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- <sup>92</sup> John 19:31-37
- <sup>93</sup> Psalm 22
- <sup>94</sup> Isaiah 52:14
- <sup>95</sup> Isaiah 53:2
- <sup>96</sup> Isaiah 53:3-4
- <sup>97</sup> Isaiah 53:5
- <sup>98</sup> Isaiah 53:7
- <sup>99</sup> Matthew 12:40
- <sup>100</sup> Matthew 27:57-58
- <sup>101</sup> Mark 15:44-45
- <sup>102</sup> John 19:39
- <sup>103</sup> Mark 16:9
- <sup>104</sup> Luke 23:55
- <sup>105</sup> Matthew 27:62-66
- <sup>106</sup> Genesis 12:3
- <sup>107</sup> Genesis 49:10
- <sup>108</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15
- <sup>109</sup> 2 Samuel 7:12-13
- <sup>110</sup> Isaiah 2:4
- <sup>111</sup> Isaiah 9:2
- <sup>112</sup> Isaiah 9:6
- <sup>113</sup> Isaiah 11:10
- <sup>114</sup> Isaiah 28:16

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<sup>115</sup> Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

<sup>116</sup> Jeremiah 23:5

<sup>117</sup> Daniel 7:13

<sup>118</sup> Daniel 9:25-26

<sup>119</sup> Micah 5:2

<sup>120</sup> Zechariah 3:8

<sup>121</sup> John 1:29

<sup>122</sup> Isaiah 61:1-3

<sup>123</sup> Mark 16:1-3

<sup>124</sup> Matthew 28:2-4

The story develops around the characters and events surrounding the cross of Jesus on the day of His crucifixion. The Bible tells us that Jesus was placed on the cross at 9:00 am on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the Jewish religious calendar, Aviv, and that he died on that same day at 3:00 pm. Thus is derived the name of this story, *Six Hours of Eternity*.

While the story is classified as Christian historical fiction, as there are thoughts and conversations of some of the characters that are fictional, the story, itself, is true and taken directly from the Bible. There are some one hundred twenty Scripture references cited by number in the text of the story and matched with the End Note references in the very back of this book. We invite you to read this book with a Bible by your side in order to verify these references.

We believe you will find this story enjoyable, educational, and inspirational. It will likely answer many questions, solve a few mysteries, and reveal the eternal purpose of God for the event called the '*atonement*' of Christ.

### About the Authors



Lanny Carpenter joined *Light of Life Ministry* as a writer and teacher in August 2007. While this has been a part-time and volunteer position, as he is also a pastor in the Southern Methodist Church and a Christian high school Bible teacher, he has already undertaken several writing assignments. Rev. Carpenter is a 1981 graduate of the Southern Methodist College in Orangeburg, SC. He has served nineteen years as a pastor and thirteen years as a Bible teacher for Dillon Christian School, Dillon SC. He and his wife, Sandy, have been married 31 years (as of May 2012) and have six children.

James (Jim) Jones is the Founder and Director of *Light of Life Ministry*. He is a 1981 graduate of Free Will Baptist Bible College in Nashville, TN and served as a pastor for fifteen years primarily in the Southern Methodist Church with some time spent in non-denominational work. His greatest ministry love is that of teaching, and he has devoted most of his adult life to the study of God's Word and teaching the truths found there. He is married to Barbara, his wife of 30 years (as of April 2012), and an elementary school teacher with 32 years experience. Together they have three children, and at this writing, six grandchildren.



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