

## DEATH OF THE MESSIAH IN JERUSALEM

### Monday

Early in the morning, before the crowds began to gather, Jesus left Bethany with his Twelve Apostles and usual followers to go to Jerusalem. They were silent as they entered the city, so different from the joyous expectation and high Messianic promise of the previous day. The streets were just as crowded, every bit of available space in courtyards, gardens, parks and mountainside was occupied by families, relatives, pilgrims and visitors preparing for the coming Passover. Some of the excitement arose from yesterdays' events, but mostly people were occupied with their usual pre-Passover tasks. Pontius Pilate and his wife, with Roman legions and pomp, had arrived from the Roman military headquarters in Caesarea on the coast. Herod Antipas had arrived from Galilee, with the notorious Herodias and Salome in his retinue. Roman soldiers and Jewish Temple Guards were prominent everywhere, watching the jostling crowds with suspicious eyes for trouble-makers.

On this Monday morning Jesus and his Apostles passed through

the noisy celebrating crowds virtually unrecognized. When they reached the Temple, it was also different. The previous day most of the services had ended when they arrived, while today not only were the services in session but the money-changing hucksters had returned with their avaricious practices. As Jesus and his companions pushed their way through the packed Courts to the teaching forum they could see the chief priests and doctors of the *Law* waiting for them in groups—not to listen, or even debate, but to encompass the arrest of Jesus if possible.

Jesus ignored their antagonistic presence and turning to the people crowding around him he denounced the recurrent defamation of his Father's House by the money-changers in the outer Court. The assembled religionists challenged him, "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said, "and who gave you authority to do this?"

"I will ask you one question," Jesus said to them curtly. "If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. Tell me, John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

It was not just a clever debating point devised by Jesus, and the professional religionists knew it. The issue of official authority for interpreting the practices of Judaism had been appropriated by themselves for their own reasons and ambitions in the past four hundred years, from the time of Ezra. Previous to that it had been in the hands of the *Prophets*, and God's anointed leaders of Israel. However, it had been agreed by their own self-appointed leaders that the authority to interpret the *Law* of Moses could only be exercised by them "*until a faithful prophet should arise*"—one who would hold authority direct from God. This, they knew, was what Jesus was challenging them to face and answer with regard to John the Baptist—and, by inference, to himself.

They gathered into a tight group to find an appropriate answer, for they knew if they said, "From heaven," Jesus would ask, "Why didn't you believe him, then?" But if they said, "From men," all the people would rise up and stone them because to the public John was a true prophet. So they answered reluctantly and

sullenly, "We don't know where it was from."

Jesus regarded their blatant casuistry and hypocrisy with open contempt. "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things." Then Jesus launched into one of his parables: "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later changed his mind and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," someone replied.

"Let me tell you", Jesus said, "the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you posturing religionists. John came to show you the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and prostitutes did. Even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

There was a murmur of apprehension in the crowd as Jesus acclaimed the tax-collectors and prostitutes who believed above the professional religionists who rejected him. Jesus ignored the rising apprehension and anger, and continued: "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey for a long time. When the harvest-time approached, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; but that one also was attacked shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent a third, and they stoned and seriously wounded him, and threw him out. He sent many other servants to them and the tenants treated them the same way; some wounded and some killed. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw the son, they talked the matter over, saying, 'This is

the heir. Let's kill him, and his inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes what will he do to those tenants?

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," someone replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

Jesus affirmed slowly and categorically, "He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

"No! This will never happen!" the crowd shouted in protest.

They knew that Jesus was speaking of Israel as "*God's vineyard*". The Prophet Isaiah had stated clearly, "*The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel*", and many others had also used the analogy. There was no doubt in their minds, therefore, that Jesus was accusing the current religious leaders of the Jewish people of betrayal of their divinely bestowed responsibility, and of culpability in the murdering of God's true servants in pursuit of their own rebellious ways. Israel was still truly the vineyard of God, Jesus was telling them, and he was God's last servant, the heir himself, the Messiah Anointed of God@, come to right the wrongs of the past and to render to God the true fruits of His vineyard. It was a clear call to follow him, and to reject the false Judaism religionists.

In the shocked silence Jesus spoke again: "What is the meaning of that which is written? Have you never read this Scripture?

*'The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone;  
the Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes?'*

"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

Jesus looked around the variety of expressions on the faces of the people in front of him. It had been so ingrained in them by tradition, culture and religion that they were the chosen people of God—

despite the appalling historical record of unbelief, disloyalty, disobedience, and idolatry—that they could not comprehend God had forsaken them, rejected them, and in punishment had brought them to their present distress as He had warned them. They were still refusing their need for God’s mercy in their fearsome predicament, and for their repentance and forgiveness.

In the silence Jesus told another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner. My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet’. But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you can find.’ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing the customary wedding clothes. ‘Friend,’ he asked, ‘how did you get in here without wedding clothes?’ The man remained silent with guilt. Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Many are invited into the kingdom of God, but few are chosen.”

The group of professional religionists in the crowd were livid with rage, and they looked for Temple rulers or guards to have Jesus arrested immediately for his denunciatory application of the Scriptures in relation to themselves, but it was obvious that the people around them favoured the teachings of Jesus so once again they had to leave and plan a more effective approach. They increased the number of spies following Jesus and the disciples to report on

his every move, his every word—and also who among those closest to him might be tempted into some betrayal. What they needed was something so incriminatory that they could hand Jesus over to the Roman Procurator for punishment by death. Normally, the Pharisees among them hated the Sadducees, and both hated the Herodians; but now all were in agreement to get rid of the one man threatening all their interests.

The Herodians agreed to go back to the Temple, accompanied by some Pharisees as a religious cover, to entrap Jesus with a cleverly constructed political question. They used a polite and flattering approach: “Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth, teaching what is right. You aren’t swayed by men, and you do not show partiality. Tell us then: Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar nor not?”

The people gathered around Jesus murmured with excitement, for it was a common topic of discussion, a hated imposition, and a rallying point for rebellion against the Roman authorities by the Jewish revolutionaries. To agree to pay taxes to Caesar would antagonize the people; to refuse to pay the taxes would call down punishment from Rome.

“You hypocrites,” said Jesus, “why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax. Bring me a *denarius* and let me look at it.” The only coins permitted by Rome to be minted in Palestine were made of copper and of low denomination; the silver and gold coins came from Rome, and had the head of the reigning Caesar on them, at that time the head of Caesar Tiberius. Jesus held up the coin handed to him. “Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?”

“Caesar’s,” they replied.

Jesus said to them, “Then give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

The Herodians were obviously chagrined at the reply. It could be taken to mean the philosophical and political delineation of the responsibilities of the temporal and eternal, the material and the spiritual; or it could emphasize the comprehensive primacy of God

over all human authorities. When the defeated and chastened Herodians and Pharisees had left, the Sadducees saw their opportunity. Aristocratic, arrogant and supercilious, they rarely condescended to enter into public debate with Jesus, choosing to dismiss him contemptuously as a religious fanatic beneath their notice. They considered themselves the true heirs of the Levitical *Law* from Moses from Moses, through the rabbinical variations of the post-Ezra Judaism, and therefore the true guardians of Israel's national heritage.

They now approached Jesus in the Temple. "Teacher," they said with mock respect and seriousness, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. There were seven brothers among us. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died, too. Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since all seven were married to her?"

Jesus knew that the question was designed to make him look ridiculous. It was a common rabbinical theological exercise for all aspiring rabbis. One popular absurd discussion was of a supposed man who had lost twelve brothers and, required to observe this Mosaic injunction, had sexual relations with each widow monthly, and at the end of three years had thirty-six children.

He looked at them pityingly. What satisfaction did they get out of their supercilious religious posturing? "You are in error," he told them, "because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. The people of this present dispensation marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy of taking part in the future dispensation, following the resurrection from the dead, will neither marry nor be given in marriage for they can no longer die, and are like the angels in heaven. But, regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, '*I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?*' He is not the God of the dead, but

of the living, for to God all continue to be alive. You are totally misinformed.”

This was not only superior Judaism theology, grounded in traditional Mosaic *Law*, it was also a brilliantly perceptive interpretation of a difficult temporal and eternal doctrine based on a grammatical construction, the present tense of: “*I AM—the living God of Abraham, etc*”, used over a thousand years after their deaths. To God they were as alive as Elijah and Moses had been on the Mount of Transfiguration talking to Jesus. The common people listening to Jesus were not aware of these nuances, but the expert doctors of the *Law* among them recognized it and, despite their antagonism, they were impressed by the argument and said to Jesus approvingly, “Well said, Teacher!”

But, while many were marveling at the spiritual authority with which Jesus taught, others feared the powerful hold which Jesus exercised over the minds of his listeners. A leading Pharisee asked him, “Teacher, of all the commandments, which is the most important?” This, too, was a common loaded question, usually addressed to individuals to determine which particular theological school they represented. But Jesus detected a greater reason than this in the questioner.

“The most important one is this,” Jesus answered him: “‘*Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength!*’ This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it: ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’ There is no commandment greater than these. All the *Law* and the *Prophets* depend on these two commandments.”

It was an impeccable answer - according to all theological schools —and, for those among the listeners who had heard the earlier teachings of Jesus, it was a fundamental part of all that he taught. The Pharisee who had asked the question was smiling in approval: “Well said, Teacher,” he agreed. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more

important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Jesus gazed at him approvingly: “You are not far from the kingdom of God,” he told him. The man’s next essential step was to act on his stated beliefs.

As Jesus waited for a reply, and none was forthcoming from the professional religionists, the crowd responded with shouts of delight and acclamation. Jesus held up his hand for silence, and then raised his voice so that all could hear:

“The teachers of the *Law* and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat, so you should obey them and do everything they tell you. *But do not do what they do*, for they do not practice what they preach. They create heavy burdens and put them on men’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is for men to see: They make their phylacteries on their foreheads wide, and the tassels on their garments long. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted in the market-places and to have men call them ‘*Rabbi*.’ They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues. These men will be punished most severely. You must not be called ‘*rabbi*’, because you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘*father*’, because you have one Father, and He is in heaven. Nor are you to be called ‘*teacher*’, because you have one Teacher, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

“Woe to you, teachers of the *Law* and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are seeking to do so. Woe to you, teachers of the *Law* and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the Temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the Temple, he is bound by his oath.’ You blind fools!

Jesus’ voice sharpened in emphatic condemnation: “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?”

I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. So upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of the righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the Temple and the altar. I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation."

The Apostles were unusually silent as they left the Temple. It was now early evening, and it had been a demanding day of unremitting tension: the challenging confrontations between Jesus and the professional religionists stretching their intellectual capacities and Scriptural knowledge to the limits. They had been awed by the sweep and passion of Jesus' commitment to his vision of God's will, and by the demanding implications of his prophetic statements for both the present and the future. Their spirits had soared as he unfolded new vistas, then spiraled downwards at the naked hatred and intentions of the religious leaders. And through it all was the litany of the early death—by criminal crucifixion, he had implied!—expected by Jesus.

The sun was setting, striking the white marble and golden spires with glittering shafts of light against the yellow and saffron and purple of the evening sky, and one of them said, "Look, Teacher! What massive stones! What magnificent buildings!"

Jesus gazed at the towering splendor of the structure, and shook his head. "Do you see all these great buildings?" he said somberly. "Not one stone will be left on another; every one will be completely destroyed." His Apostles did not yet know or understand it, but on the inevitable Roman destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple he would build a new Temple for worship, a Spiritual Church of those *Acalled out* from the mass of unbelievers, composed of believers in the kingdom of God and himself as their Redeemer and Head of that Spiritual Church.

He turned his back on the Temple, and the city, and made his way to Bethany, that oasis of love and peace. They crossed the black River Kidron outside the gates of the city, the rippling waters silvered by the light from the moon, and slowly climbed

the slopes of the darkening Mount of Olives.

### Tuesday

The early morning sunlight was just touching the top of the Temple, and Jesus sat on a boulder high up on the slopes of the Mount of Olives watching the city below come to life, with James and John, Peter and Andrew beside him.

After a time of silence one of them said to Jesus, obviously referring to the words of Jesus the day before regarding his return, “Teacher, tell us, when will these disasters happen? What will be the sign that they are about to take place, and what will be the sign of your later return and the end of this age?”

Jesus gazed at their intent faces. At long last the reality of his death was dawning on them, the reality of a doomed Roman world and a doomed Israel nation. He was the only fixed point in their spinning universe—and he was shortly to be removed from them and from the world. They were no longer the simple fishermen and obscure acolytes of three years ago; under his tuition they had developed qualities they had never known they possessed, a certainty and authority that was impressive to all who heard them. But they still had some way to go—and only days to accomplish it. The whole divine vision was still too great for them to comprehend, and its scale would only serve to intimidate instead of inspire them. Time and revelation—and resurrection!—with the power of the post-resurrection Holy Spirit, would be needed before they could fully understand.

“Take care that no one deceives you,” Jesus answered. “For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he, I am the Messiah, the time is near’, and will deceive many. Do not follow them. You will hear of wars and revolutions and rumors of wars here and in other places, but see to it that you are not alarmed. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in many places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. All these are the beginning of birth pains preceding my final manifestation.

“You must be on your guard. Before all this happens they will abuse you and persecute you. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. They will deliver you to prisons. Because of your link with my name you will be brought before governors and kings. This will result in your being witnesses to them. Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. Just say whatever is given to you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit through you.

“At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. All men will hate you because of me. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved; not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm even to death you will gain eternal life. This gospel of the kingdom will first be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end of the world will come.

“For the present, when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, when you see ‘the abomination that causes desolation’, spoken of through the prophet Daniel, in the holy place of the Temple, you will know that its destruction is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. They will fall by the sword and will be scattered as prisoners to all nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. At that time of overwhelming catastrophe, as the Prophet Isaiah says:

*‘The sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken’.*

“Everyone will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. He will send his angels and gather his elect from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. Now learn this lesson from the fig-tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these calamities happening you know that the end is near. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on your guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”

Jesus could see by the expressions on the faces of the Apostles that, while they were engrossed with what he was saying, they did not comprehend the meaning. He sympathized with them, for they were being asked to enter a spiritual world where no one had gone before and they had no means of understanding its current importance let alone its future significance. Only time, circumstances and their experiences would unfold the mysteries for them. Then they would remember his present words to them and the Spirit-Counselor, who would replace himself when he was gone from them, would guide them into all divine truth. For the present, the forms to help them understand heavenly things would have to be couched in earthly terms. He had shown them the place of individual responsibility in the kingdom of God, with allocation and application of differing abilities; he would now instruct them in the kingdom’s rewards and punishments for work done or work neglected.

To help them understand Jesus gave them another parable: “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom for his wedding banquet. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was delayed in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The

foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us; go to those who sell oil and buy some.'

"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The five wise virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. Then the door was shut. Later the five foolish virgins arrived. 'Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' "But the bridegroom replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you'. Then they will go away to eternal regret, but the righteous to eternal joy. Therefore keep watch, because you do not know that day or hour. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'.

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and go to visit you?'

The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these afflicted followers of mine, you did for me.'

As they left the Mount of Olives in late afternoon the Apostles questioned Jesus regarding what he had been saying to him. The outlines of the spiritual truths of the kingdom Jesus had come to announce were taking shape in their minds, but its spiritual form and administration that were being implied in what Jesus was saying continued to baffle them. Who were the king and the nations, the Bridegroom and the Bride at the wedding feast? Who were the

celebrating friends such as the five wise virgins? Who were the five foolish virgins who were shut out of the marriage celebrations and “*the door shut*”? Who were those on thrones ruling with him, and those who were servants in less rewarding circumstances, such as the five foolish virgins? Who were *Athose counted worthy to escape tribulation?*”

The return of a conquering Messiah with angels and companions to rule the nations opened vistas in their minds that bewildered even as they excited the Apostles. Then Jesus informed them clearly and distinctly, clearing their minds of everything else. “As you know, the Passover is two days away — and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified.” The categorical statement of his imminent death put a stop to all their questions regarding the future. They were aware of the imminent Passover’s significance of the sacrificial death of the lamb.

That evening a special supper was prepared for Jesus, at which the whole of Bethany gathered to do him honor. It was held in the house of Simon, a former leper, whose guest-chamber was the largest in the town. The guests of honor were Jesus, Lazarus, Mary and Martha. While they were reclining at the table Mary brought out an alabaster jar of pure spikenard, a rare and fragrant perfume obtained from distant India. On a previous occasion in Magdala, a notorious courtesan who was a friend of Mary, had anointed Jesus’ feet with her harlot’s perfume in repentance and supplication. Now Mary, herself forgiven for the sins in her past and full of gratitude for all that Jesus meant to her, repeated the gesture as a gift of her love in anticipation of his imminent death.

The alabaster jar of rare perfume, which weighed about a half-liter, was valued at about two thousand dollars. The wealthy women who could afford such perfume used it for both hygiene and fashion purposes, but Mary had brought it with her for a very private reason. She alone among the closest followers of Jesus had accepted the inevitability of his death, and it was her intention on this occasion to anoint him with it in anticipation of this, as an expression of her belief and her love. She had not used it for the burial of her beloved brother Lazarus at his death, and it would

serve no purpose to use it on Jesus after his death.

When every guest was present and reclining at the tables Simon asked Jesus to give thanks for the food and occasion, and Jesus responded, "The hour is now come for the Son of Man to receive great glory", and closed his eyes in prayer: "Father, shall I say do not let this hour come upon me? But that is why I came —so that I might pass through this very hour of suffering. Father, I pray, bring glory to your name."

In the silence a loud voice suddenly reverberated in response: "*I have brought glory to it, and I will do so again.*"

There was no doubt from the stunned looks on faces and the attitudes from all those present, including the immobile servants and spectators in the courtyard, that it was the voice of God from heaven. It was confirmed when Jesus spoke again: "The voice did not just speak on my behalf, but for you. *Now* is the time for this world to be judged. *Now* is the time for the ruler of this world, Satan, to be overthrown. When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone, everywhere, to me."

At that moment Mary rose from her seat and walked to where Jesus was reclining, knelt before him and anointed his feet with her rare perfume then, loosening her hair, she used it to wipe away the excess. The perfume's intense fragrance filled the room, like the sacred incense in the Temple rising to the Presence of God. The guests were still in a state of shock from the sequence of statements from Jesus and the voice of God, and they watched silently as Mary returned to her place at the table.

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the Twelve Apostles present, broke the silence suddenly and harshly, saying, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth at least a year's wages". The rudeness and crudeness of his words shattered the awed silence which had gripped everyone. Whatever the social impropriety of her action, it was accepted by most of those present as an expression of her sorrow, faith and devotion.

Jesus looked towards where Judas was reclining. Of all his Apostles Judas cared least for those who were poor, except as a social concept. As a former member of the dreaded terrorist *sicarri*

Judas had used the conditions of the poor as an excuse for advancing his personal political advantage. He was still the most fanatical of all the Apostles, voluble when talking about helping the poor and sick and oppressed, but significantly silent when discussing the spiritual values of the kingdom of God. His interjected complaint, Jesus knew, arose out of his disappointment that the money had not gone into the common purse which Judas held, and out of which he was taking money for himself and his own interests.

Jesus rebuked Judas: "Why are you insulting the woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my death. You will always have the poor among you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it because of her love for me in anticipation of my burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."

When the feast ended Jesus went out to the Mount of Olives, to spend the night alone with his Father as his "hour" of destiny on earth was now imminent.

### Wednesday

When Jesus returned from the Mount of Olives to the house of Mary and Martha and Lazarus in Bethany he found a crowd of people gathered there with his Apostles, all of them obviously disturbed. Someone had arrived from Jerusalem early in the morning to inform them that some of the religious leaders had met with Caiaphas the high priest the night before to discuss the details of Jesus' death. While no final plan had been agreed, it was accepted that it must be done before the Passover began, because the plotters accepted that any action taken during the Feast would create a religious uproar among the millions of Diaspora pilgrims in Jerusalem.

Already the political atmosphere in the city was tense as news and rumors circulated from the latest pilgrims arriving from distant countries. The Roman empire, so long an apparently unshakeable

monolith, was becoming unstable from its rapid expansion and multiplying enemies. The warring families of the dissolute Caesars, the cynical licentiousness of the Senators, the self-serving ambitions of the Generals, were creating internal unrest and tensions throughout the Roman empire. Rebellion had broken out in distant Gaul, led by two Romanized Gaul nobles, caused partly by the economic conditions and partly by the excesses of occultic Druidism. Reinforcing legions had been drawn from Germany, but then their commander, Silius, had been deposed and exiled by Caesar Tiberius for extortion. In Africa, a series of uprisings had forced Tiberius to send the uncle of his favorite, Sejanus, to counter the advances of the Numidian revolutionary, Tacfarinas. Tiberius fuelled the mounting dissatisfactions by his suspicious purges of supposed enemies, encouraged by the unscrupulous Sejanus. It was already being whispered that, after the expected death of Tiberius, he would be succeeded by the fool Claudius or the decadent Gaius Caligula.

Closer to Israel, Persia and Syria were simmering with discontent and outbreaks of local rebellion. Inside Israel, unrest and revolts had become endemic as various political and religious groups intensively contended for recognition of their various ambitions. Josephus, the contemporary Jewish historian, had recorded that there were reports of earthquakes and heavenly phenomena, in addition to the political disturbances tearing the land of Palestine apart.

In Judea and Jerusalem there was a pervasive premonition of some looming disaster. One mystic from Egypt gathered a crowd of people on the Mount of Olives in expectation that, at his command, the walls of the city would fall down. An illiterate peasant—strangely, also called Jesus—paraded the streets of Jerusalem declaring prophetically, “The voice of the Four Winds is calling Jerusalem, calling all the people.” And the most reckless of the fanatical groups—such as the Zealots and the Sicarri—carved out districts within Jerusalem as their respective fiefs, one dominating the Tower of David, another the precincts of the Temple, others occupying Ophel and Bezetha. In seeking to extend their terrorist influence they resorted to blatant intimidation, including murders and rapes.

Jesus noted that Judas was not among the Apostles gathered with the others from Jerusalem to discuss the reports of the meeting of the religious leaders plotting Jesus' arrest. On making enquiries he learned that Judas had been there when the news was first brought from the city, and must just have left. Jesus knew it was no coincidence. He had watched the spiritual deterioration of Judas—reflected in his recent outburst against Mary's action. He had known for some time that Judas helped himself from the common purse to support his own political causes. Judas was the most fanatical of all the Apostles and, as Jesus had intensified the spiritual emphases of the kingdom of God, Judas had become progressively less verbally supportive.

He knew what Judas wanted was a Messiah like David, one who would organize a guerrilla band and attack tribal and national enemies; he wanted a Messiah who would assert the dominance of Israel in the world; he wanted a Messiah who would make his close followers commanders and administrators and public heroes, just as David had done in establishing the nation of Israel in his day. Judas had become finally disillusioned with these hoped-for prospects following Jesus' implacable confrontation with and rejection of the professional religionists in the Temple Court, and his recent teachings to his Apostles on Mount Olivet regarding the priorities and future developments of the kingdom of God.

Judas had still not decided what he would do as he made his way into Jerusalem. He had made a sudden decision to go to Jerusalem when he heard of the crisis meeting of Caiaphas and the religious leaders to determine the fate of Jesus. His initial confused rationale to himself had been that he might be able to explain about Jesus to the Jewish leaders, that he was a good but misguided individual, but it was not long before he admitted to himself that his real motive was to place himself in the most advantageous position to benefit from the two opposing groups.

Jesus was doomed. Everyone—except the other Apostles!—could see that. Jesus himself had affirmed his own immediate death. The religious leaders already were planning the best way to bring this about before Friday—two days' away. With Jesus removed from the

leadership of the group by death it would fall to Peter, James and John, to hold things together — with little hope of success, in Judas's opinion. So, if he could work out some arrangement whereby the religious authorities would support him he could bring the vast following of Jesus into some form of cooperation with them. In his view, Jesus had taken a wrong turning when he had left John in prison to be beheaded by Herod. This had been compounded by Jesus' strategy of going into the villages and towns of Galilee instead of building up his following in the centres of power. By the time he had reached the Temple Judas had convinced himself that he would be doing Jesus a favour by reorganizing the Apostles after the arrest of Jesus.

After some cautious questioning Judas found out that there was an informal meeting being held right then in the high priest's palace. A formal meeting of the Sanhedrin could not be held, because it would be considered illegal. According to strict Jewish law, any criminal case must be conducted by an approved quorum of the Grand Sanhedrin, and the inner circle of plotters did not have that with any certainty.

Judas found a scribe with whom he was slightly acquainted and, after giving him a carefully edited version of what he proposed, he was conducted into the high priest's palace. He noted on the way with mounting interest and excitement that the captain of the Temple guards and his officers were in attendance in an ante-chamber, which indicated that they were awaiting official instructions. The scribe accompanying Judas spoke to the captain of the Temple guards regarding Judas' request to see Caiaphas personally and the importance of his proposal.

The captain looked at Judas noncommittally. Every day he was approached with scores of important requests to meet with the high priest, most of which he dismissed. But the present crisis meeting was about Jesus, and this was a close disciple of the Galilean — although apparently this Judas was not a Galilean but a Judean. He nodded his head in agreement, and directed an officer to accompany Judas into an inner chamber. The officer told him to wait there while he went into the meeting to inform the high priest.

Shortly afterwards the officer returned and escorted Judas into the room where the few selected members of the Sanhedrin were gathered. In addition to Caiaphas, there was Annas his father, a former high priest, and a few he vaguely recognized as Sanhedrin representatives as well as Temple officials. The officer withdrew and Judas was left alone. It was obvious to Judas that the high priest wanted no witnesses other than the chosen few, and Judas felt a surge of excitement as well as fear. What he had to tell these people about his close association with Jesus would place him in their hands; it was a situation fraught with danger as well as opportunity.

Judas hesitantly described his increasing disagreements with Jesus over the years, then went on to name the many important people who had become supporters and followers of Jesus to bolster his own personal connections and influence. In the ongoing silence, heavily weighted by implied menace, he sweated profusely as he described Jesus' recent explanations of the administrative aspects of the kingdom of God, and the promises to the Twelve Apostles of influential ruling positions over the nations of the world in the future. He had expected to be greeted eagerly, with promises of reward, but there was only a chilling response from the gathered officials.

When he had finally unburdened himself of all that he wanted to say—much more than he had anticipated when he first arrived, because of his mounting fears—Caiaphas and the others closely questioned him. From their questions he gathered they were interested in possible charges of blasphemy, or political involvement against Rome. Squirming internally at his unintended widening betrayal of Jesus, he gave them slanted answers to their questions which would confirm their suspicions. Finally, they questioned him regarding the present whereabouts of Jesus, and his anticipated movements over the next few days. They were particularly interested in where he was likely to be found at night. It was apparent that they did not want to do anything when there was any likelihood of people being around who might support Jesus and inflame the public against the religious leaders.

When Caiaphas signaled dismissively to Judas that they were

finished with their questioning, Judas was stunned. There had been no indication of further interest, or continuing involvement, in return for what he had just given to them. He panicked as he thought of having to return to Bethany after all that he had done, and he blurted out to the silent officials, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?"

Caiaphas whispered to one of the members next to him and, approaching Judas, he took some coins from a bag at his waist and counted out thirty silver Temple shekels. Judas looked disbelievingly at the money being counted into his hand. Thirty pieces of silver! The legal price of a slave! The Scriptures leaped into his mind, the Prophet *Zechariah* saying, "*And now, said I, pay me my wages, if pay you will; if not, say no more. So they paid me for my wages thirty pieces of silver.*" He had been paid a slave's wages for the betrayal of Jesus! And only a few hours ago he had been a possible heir to rule with Jesus in the promised kingdom of God!

Judas pushed the thought away as he walked in a daze from the high priest's palace, sick with despair. Where did he go now? He had come to the high priest's palace with such high hopes—of influence, status, wealth—and they had paid him off contemptuously with a meager bribe. As the shock eased he was filled with a growing hate for everything and everybody—and a feeling of utter desolation. If that was all the reward he was going to receive for his betrayal of Jesus, where could he go to hide from the contempt of all those who must hear of his perfidy as "the man who betrayed the Messiah of Israel"?

As he wandered the streets of Jerusalem he concluded that he had no alternative but to return to Jesus and the disciples in Bethany. He was committed to the rulers of the nation to lead Jesus to them at an opportune time. Perhaps when he had given them what they wanted they would offer him the position of authority he craved. He turned towards the road that led to the Mount of Olives and Bethany.

Meanwhile, Jesus had chosen to spend some time with his mother. It would be the last time she would be able to spend with him. She was staying with her usual relatives in the city during the Passover, Philip the Gaulanite and Mary, his wife, and their

fifteen-year-old son, John Mark. They had no explicit details of his anticipated imminent death, but they must have heard the reports that were circulating. Jesus knew that his mother had lived with the conviction of his early death, because of the prophecies concerning him at his birth.

As he made his way through the crowds of pilgrims on his way from Bethany to Jerusalem, and into the city, his thoughts turned again and again to the looming tragedy of Judas. Although the betrayal had been foretold by the prophets in the Scriptures he had sought to help Judas in every way to avert it. David had declared prophetically: *“Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.”* And again: *“If an enemy were insulting me I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship, as we walked with the throng to the house of God.”*

#### Thursday

It was the Day of Unleavened Bread. The divinely provided time for this pre-Passover celebration was the fourteenth day of the month, Nisan; from the appearance of the first three stars on the previous evening to the appearance of the first three stars at the end of this day. From then on the Feast of the Passover ran its course through the remaining eight days to the twenty-first Nisan. There were several variations of this format among the different Jewish groups—Sadducees were a day after the Pharisees, Galileans reckoned a day to be from sunrise to sunrise while Judeans reckoned it from sunset to sunset. Others followed a solar calendar against a lunar calendar—but the traditional practice was observed by millions of the Diaspora pilgrims in Jerusalem. This was the Day of Unleavened Bread, and the Passover Feast would begin at sunset the next day.

After the morning meal the preparations for “the Paschal Feast” began. Both Jesus and Judas had been away from Bethany the previous day, and Judas, as group treasurer, had brought back some necessary supplies from his visit to the city. In their absence the

others had concluded the traditional “search for leaven” in the household of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, looking for anything not approved in the *Law* that might have been overlooked by careless servants, destroying this so that no contamination remained. No other work was done on this first day of preparation for devotion to God.

Jesus called for Peter and John to step aside from the others—especially out of the hearing of Judas—and gave them explicit instructions to prepare the Paschal Supper in Jerusalem: He wished to be alone, with his own immediate followers at the end. The chosen house was located near the Gate of the Essenes in the south-eastern district of Jerusalem, and belonged to Mary of Jerusalem. She, with her husband Philip, and her young son John Mark, knew of his requirements from his recent visit with his mother, and would be watching for his messengers.

When Jesus and his Apostles arrived there in the late afternoon they found the guest room ready for them, with divans, rugs and cushions for the customary reclining around three tables forming a horseshoe shape, the open end facing the kitchen for the women to have easy access in bringing the food to the table. The room was already lit by an ornate square metal lantern hanging from the ceiling. It was a place well known to them, for they had often met there, but Jesus had wished to keep the present arrangements as secret as possible from Judas. With the setting of the sun the Paschal Feast began, with John, Jesus and Judas in the first three seats of the open end at the left, the others arranged around the top and far side of the table, and Peter at the other open end on the right, opposite John.

It was the first, last, and only Passover hosted by Jesus. It was customary for the host to pass “*the first cup*” of wine prior to “*hand-washing*” before the actual Paschal Supper began. On this occasion Jesus surprised the others by rising from the table and going to a side table to pick up a basin of water and towel. Returning with them to the reclining Apostles he knelt at the feet of John, the nearest to him, and to the group’s obvious consternation Jesus began washing John’s feet. They were silent as he

went from one to the other doing the same.

When he came to Peter as the last, he said to Jesus hesitantly, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

Jesus replied, "You don't understand now what I am doing, but later you will."

Peter shook his head forcefully, "No, you shall never wash my feet." He thought this was a demeaning action for the Messiah.

With even greater firmness Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." The strong-minded Peter more than the others needed to learn the lesson of humility.

Peter held Jesus' gaze for some time, then smiled suddenly and said: "Then, Lord, not just my feet but my hands and head as well!"

To make the symbolism clearer for Peter Jesus explained the significant nature of his action: "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; because his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. The truth of this action is that no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the One who sent me, and as the Father has sent me so I send you into all the world."

The Paschal celebration began with thanks to God for the day, the occasion, and was followed by the reading of *Psalms* 113, which praised God for Israel's great deliverance from Egypt. It was celebrated according to a prescribed sequence of courses, prayers and hymn-singing—sometimes even with dancing. The meal was structured around the drinking of four cups of red wine mixed with two parts of water. The Passover lamb was only eaten between the drinking of the second and third cup—"the cup of blessing". At the end, the fourth cup—or "cup of benediction"—was drunk, and the *Great Hallel* "*Songs of Thanksgiving*"<sup>9</sup> were sung.

The opening words of Jesus emphasized the uniqueness of this

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<sup>9</sup>Psalms 113-116

occasion: "I have eagerly looked forward to eat this Passover with you before I suffer," he said slowly, looking round at each face, from John next to him on his right with his head on his shoulder, to Judas on his left round the table to where Peter was sitting opposite. "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. I tell you truly, one of you here will betray me—one who is eating with me, whose hand is sharing the same dish on the table." He knew that not only Judas, but all his Apostles, would fall away and forsake him in the next few critical days, including the protesting Peter.

There was a murmur of protest from the Apostles at Jesus' devastating accusation, and each of them protested strenuously, "Surely, not I?"

Jesus stilled the questioning with an upraised hand: "It is one of you Twelve, one who has dipped the bread in his hand into this bowl with me. The Son of Man will go to his death just as it has been written about him, but woe to that man who betrays him. It would be better for him had he not been born."

Judas, sitting to the left of Jesus, said in a low voice like the others, "Surely not I, Rabbi?"

Jesus, equally softly, replied, "Yes, it is you."

Peter, from the other side of the table, asked John sitting to the right of Jesus to find out from him who was the traitor among them. To John's query Jesus replied in a normal tone, "It is the one to whom I will give this bread when I have dipped it in the dish." The unleavened bread was usually dipped in a red sauce called *harosteh*, followed by a sip of salt water, in memory of the bitter tears shed in the bondage of Egypt. Jesus dipped the bread in the dish, and, as he ate it, he quoted the customary "*This is the bread of misery which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt*" before passing it on.

The earlier terse reply of Jesus' regarding the betrayer had left the disciples uncertain, for it was customary to pass the dish from the host to his left,—where Judas was sitting—and on around the table. But Judas—who had had the whole of the evening before, and the present day, in which to confess to Jesus and seek forgiveness for his betrayal—knew that Jesus was aware of his act of betrayal the previous day.

Watching the expression on Judas' face, Jesus saw his resolve hardening and said to him quietly, "Judas, what you are about to do, do quickly." When Judas got up from the table and left the room the others thought that Jesus had given him some instruction regarding the Feast, and gave it no significance. He was silent as he contemplated the departure of Judas, conscious that all was now in place for the final stage of his divinely ordained earthly purpose. All power in heaven and earth had been given to him by his Father, but the secret of that power was still hidden from his Apostles, who were hoping for some final last-minute miracle to deliver him from his imminent crucifixion.

With Judas gone Jesus broke a piece of the unleavened loaf and laid aside the remaining piece for later. A piece of the unleavened bread would be eaten with the lamb by each of them, together with the fragrant wild herbs. But, first, Jesus picked up the second cup of wine and, departing from tradition, he gave thanks with the words, "I will not drink wine again until that day when I drink it with you in my Father's kingdom."

It was now time for eating the lamb and before doing so Jesus picked up the remaining piece of unleavened loaf and, breaking it, he divided the pieces out among the Apostles, again departing from tradition by saying, "Take and eat; this is a type of my body, given on your behalf. Do this in remembrance of me."

After the supper was completed, Jesus took the third cup—*"the cup of blessing"*—and, after giving thanks, added, "Drink this, all of you. It is *the new covenant in my blood*, which is shed for you and others for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

Conscious now that they were taking part in a symbolic celebration far beyond anything that had been known in Israel's history—beyond the Passover itself and *Moses' Law!*—the Apostles took particular note of Jesus' departures from the traditional Passover Feast: the identifying *"body"* significance of the broken bread, and the new covenant *"blood"* significance of the poured wine, both linked to his impending sacrificial death. The original Passover had been celebrated with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and an annual covenant in blood of a lamb in celebration of God's

deliverance of His people from the bondage of Egypt. This celebrated “feast of remembrance” with its bread-and-wine symbolism would be their covenanted visual link on earth with him in heaven, until he returned in glory to claim his kingdom at his second coming.

From the moment of the departure of Judas, Jesus knew that his remaining time would now be measured in hours. He would only have a few more lessons to deliver to those beloved disciples before he was forcibly removed from them, with all the shattering impact of that event on them. So he told them: “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: where I am going you cannot come. Here is a new command: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Peter, detecting a new urgency in Jesus’ words, looked at him closely, and said to him, “Lord, where are you going?”

There was no way Jesus could adequately explain to them the inevitable events of the next few days and weeks; nor his later ascension into heaven. There was no framework of understanding at this stage whereby they could comprehend the cosmic significance of the events, but they would grow into it in time. “Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later,” he assured Peter.

“Lord, why can’t I follow you now?” Peter said doggedly. “I will lay down my life for you.”

Jesus shook his head sadly. “This very night,” he said slowly with a sigh, “you will all renege on me, for it is written: *‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’* But, after I have risen, I will go ahead and meet you again in Galilee.”

The Apostles were concentrating so much on the importance of the imminent death of Jesus that they missed the significance of his words regarding being in Galilee after his resurrection.

“Even if all others renege on you,” Peter asserted stubbornly, “I never will.”

“Simon, Simon,” Jesus used his former name affectionately; “Satan wants to sift you like threshed wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have repented, strengthen your brothers.”

Peter persisted: “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and death.”

Jesus looked at Peter for some time, choosing his words carefully, and said, “Will you really lay down your life for me, Peter? Today — yes, this very night — before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.”

Peter would not let it go. “Even if I have to die with you” he declared stubbornly, “I will never disown you.”

This time, the others joined with him in their declarations of loyalty and support. Jesus did not reply. There was little to gain at this time in laboring the point. They would remember his words when the situation arose. The implications of his imminent removal from them were what was important. He picked up the fourth cup of wine — the “*cup of benediction*” — and called on the disciples to join him in the singing of the traditional antiphonal *Psalm* 136, followed by the second part of *the Great Hallel*.<sup>10</sup>

“Don’t be worried,” he said to them gently at the close of the hymns. “Trust in God; and trust in me. In my Father’s home are many places; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you and, if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You now know the way to where I am going.”

“Lord,” Thomas interrupted, “we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

“I am the Way,” Jesus answered him, “and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip pleaded, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus shook his head in exasperation. “Philip, don’t you know me, even after I have been among you such a long time? *Anyone who*

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<sup>10</sup> Psalm 115-118

*has seen me has seen the Father.* How can you say ‘Show us the Father?’ Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words that I say to you are not just my own; it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe the evidence of the miracles themselves. Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me you will obey what I have commanded. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you for ever—the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him, but you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you will also live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.

“Lord,” the Apostle Jude objected, “why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

Jesus’ heart ached for them. They were trying so hard to understand, but they were still bound by the workings of their natural minds, and not yet perceiving by their spiritual minds. The kingdom of God was a realm of the spirit. God was spirit. When he, Jesus, was gone it would be the Holy Spirit who would be their intermediary with the Father. The Holy Spirit would guide them into the truth of all he had taught them.

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching”, Jesus reiterated in reply. “My Father will love him, *and we will come to him and make our home with him.* He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. I will not speak with you much longer, for Satan the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. Come now, let us leave.”

In the city Judas was with the religious leaders, informing them of Jesus' whereabouts and making plans for his arrest. Because it was the eve of the Passover and, as such, hedged around with the strictest regulations regarding what might and what might not be done, their timing would have to be exact if they were to succeed in having Jesus arrested, tried and put to death without some popular eruption. Their greatest problem was the unpredictable and antagonistic Roman Procurator, Pilate.

In order to increase their own powers the Jewish religious leaders had intensified their denunciations of the practices of the Roman occupation forces. They had emphasized that it was an infraction of their *Law* to have any contact whatever with the Romans or any Gentile. It defiled a Jew to sit with them at table, or even to enter their house. They had taught that the Gentiles had lost the nature of men and retained only the instincts of beasts. All knowledge of God was denied them; they were God's enemies, to be denounced with a curse. These teachings had inflamed the anger of the Roman authorities against the Jews throughout the empire. The leading philosophers and orators denounced them. Cicero had said of them that "they are a nation born for servitude", and their religion "a barbarous superstition". Seneca was said to despise them as a wretched and criminal people. Tacitus said they had made themselves notorious by their hatred of the human race. Juvenal said that they would give directions to no one but their fellow-believers. So the arrogant Pilate, still smarting from the humiliations heaped on him by the Jews, would be unlikely to cooperate with the religious leaders. If anything, he would be sympathetic to the Galilean prophet who had healed Gentiles as well as Jews, and whose message of love was to all Gentiles as well as Jews. The issue facing the religious leaders, therefore, had to be political and not just religious.

The current high priest was Caiaphas, but the real power behind the religious leaders was his father-in-law, the former high priest Annas, crafty, unscrupulous, and head of the powerful Sadducee party. When the Grand Sanhedrin sat in session, Caiaphas sat at the head of the Council, with the brooding, menacing presence of Annas

on his right. An official emergency meeting had been called in the high priest's palace when Judas reported the whereabouts of Jesus and his Apostles were in the city and not Bethany. The captain of the Temple guards stood by with a troop of men, awaiting orders; but it had been decided that they would require a military unit from Pilate to serve as a support for the Temple guards in order to give them the cover of a political issue when Jesus was sent to Pilate. That was the easiest part of their deliberations.

The difficult part was in arranging a select group of supporters to have the charge against Jesus brought before being ratified in the Grand Sanhedrin before daybreak—now less than eight hours away. With a quick verdict of guilty to whatever appropriate charge could be obtained, Jesus could then be rushed to Pilate in the early morning before he finished his official duties which concluded about noon, with the charge that Jesus incited the people with false claims to be a king of the Jews. If all went according to plan, Jesus could be executed before the mid-day of the Passover Friday. They would be free of any violation—well, *serious* violation—of the *Law*, and the Passover celebrations would keep the people quiet until it was all over.

It was unfortunate but unavoidable that the *Law* would have to be broken at several points, or evaded, at least. It was laid down that in capital cases *“the trial must be held during the daytime, and the verdict must also be reached during daytime.”* It further stated that the trial may not be held on the eve of a Sabbath, or on the eve of a Feast day, and that a conviction could not be given until after the trial. This so-called Galilean prophet must not only be removed by death, he must also be discredited by both Jews and Romans. The Jewish people must be made to see him as a false Messiah; the Romans must be made to see him as a political revolutionary. He must be neither hero nor martyr if they were to retain their positions of power in the region and guardians of the Jewish religion.

Judas listened to the casuistical arguments with a mounting sense of disaster. This was not how he expected events to develop. He had simply wanted to have the support of the influential Sanhedrin to remove Jesus from the leadership of the promising movement he

had begun, and to be appointed in his place. Now, no one wanted to know about alternative leadership or possibilities. All the talk was of how to encompass the death of Jesus. Plans were even made, in order to ensure a death conviction, for Pilate's courtyard and judgment hall to be packed with their sympathizers demanding the death penalty.

As they left the upper room of the courtyard of Mary and Philip's house Jesus stopped at the gate, where a vine wound luxuriantly over the gateway and spread its branches along the roof. Placing his hand on the vine he said: "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

"Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master'. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father as well. If I had not done amongst them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. They have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their *Law*: '*They hated me without a cause.*'

"All this I have told you so that you will not misunderstand. They will put you out of the synagogues; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God. They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me. I have told you this so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you."

One of the Apostles said emphatically, "Now you are speaking

clearly and without figure of speech. We can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you come from God."

"You believe at last!" Jesus exclaimed. "But a time is coming, and has now come, when you will be scattered, each to his home and you will desert me. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have persecution. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Lifting his hands to signal that he had finished speaking, Jesus turned his face heavenwards and prayed in final benediction: "Father, the time has come. Now, glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. *This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and me, the Messiah whom you have sent.* I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ***Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*** As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified by obedience. My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one."

At the close of his prayer Jesus went round and embraced each Apostle. They were awed into silence at the passion, intimacy and sheer glory of Jesus' words to his Father on their behalf at such a time. Standing in the shadow of the vine on the night-quiet street of Jerusalem they were conscious as never before that they were in the presence of God, and had been allowed to look not only into the heart of Jesus and his Father, but also into eternity. Others in the past had stood in the presence of a theophany of God, or an archangel, but here and now they were standing in the presence of the approved and anointed Messiah Son of God, and he had united them with himself and God in the same unity.

Jesus signaled for the Apostles to follow him and they moved down the moonlit street towards the lower part of the city, passing the Lower Pool and the great wall of the Temple as he led them over

the bridge on the Tyropeon and out of the city by the Golden Gate. They crossed over the stone bridge spanning the tumbling moon-lit waters of the Brook Kidron and on to the Mount of Olives where it sloped down into a narrow culvert where there was an olive-press. It was known locally as "*the Garden of Gethsemane*", and they had often met there in the past for prayer and teaching.

Jesus told the others to wait while he, Peter, James and John went further into the trees for prayer. "Pray," he told them soberly to their mystification, "that you might not enter into temptation." Alone with his three closest companions, Jesus broke down and wept with sorrowful anticipation at having to leave them leaderless, at the sufferings they would have to face in the years ahead, at the willful evil of Israel, and at the unhappiness of the world. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death and separation from my Father. Stay here, but keep watch with me."

He left them and went a short distance into a nearby opening in the trees. He needed to be alone with his Father as his personal confrontation with Satan was now imminent. But even more than this cosmic encounter, he was in agony over his greatest commission from God: to be made sin on the cursed cross as a vicarious atonement for the sin of all men and women in the world. What he was about to do would estrange him from his holy Father as he took upon himself the guilt of the world's sins, and be made like the expiatory goat led into the wilderness alone bearing Israel's sins. Throwing himself face down on the ground he prayed agonizingly: "Abba, my dear Father, everything is possible for you. If possible remove the necessity of this act from me. Yet not what I will, but your will be done."

In his agony of spirit an angel from heaven appeared and comforted him. He returned to where he had left the three Apostles, and found they had fallen asleep. He wakened them and asked, "Could you men not support me for one short hour? Watch and pray so that you don't fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

He left them, embarrassed and silent at his rebuke, and went back to the spot where he had been praying alone. His hour, and his

Father's, was now upon him. Satan was throwing all his demonic powers into the struggle for the dominance of the world. Until now he, Jesus, had been daily, hourly, constantly, conscious of his Father's presence and power; but now he was approaching the moment when his Father would forsake him as he chose to bear the sins of the world. The words of the Prophet *Isaiah* poured across his mind:

*"Surely he took up our infirmities  
and carried our sorrows,  
yet we considered him stricken by God,  
smitten by him, and afflicted.  
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 . . .  
Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him  
and cause him to suffer . . . "*

The dark night of the soul pressed upon him, and the awed disciples could see the sweat on his forehead darkening into blood drops as the agonizing suffering caused the blood vessels to burst. As his agony peaked, Jesus prayed again in resignation: "My Father, if it is not possible for this task to be removed unless I do it, let your will be done."

When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep again. This time he did not awaken them, but with a sigh he returned to his lonely vigil and prayed again to his Father, hungry for these last hours of divine companionship. The time with the Apostles he loved was ending. He thought of Judas with pity, and the particular lonely hell of that doomed man who had chosen to follow Satan at the end.

Judas, at that moment was on the way to the Mount of Olives, with the Temple guards and Roman escort. He had taken them to the house of Mary and Philip, and found that Jesus and the Apostles had gone. Then his mind cleared and he guessed that Jesus and the others would either be on their way to Bethany, or to the Garden of Gethsemane. He instructed the military escort to follow him to the Mount of Olives. He did not see the hidden and listening John Mark

slip away from the house in the darkness and run ahead of them to warn Jesus.

In Gethsemane Jesus rose to his feet, mind and spirit flooded with a great peace. The conclusion of Isaiah's great prophecy rang in his ears:

*“. . . After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.  
Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.”*

He awoke the three guilty Apostles and said to them. “The time has come when the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Here comes my betrayer.”

They were suddenly aware of sounds in the stillness of the night, shouts and flickering of torches coming through the olive groves. While they were still trying to clear their minds from the confusion of sleep and the urgent words of Jesus a troop of soldiers, led by Judas, burst into the olive-press.

Jesus walked towards them, serene as always, and was met by the advancing Judas, who kissed him on the cheek and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!”

“Judas,” Jesus said sorrowfully, “are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss? Friend, do what you came for.” Turning to the military escort he demanded of the captain, “Who is it you want?”

“Jesus of Nazareth,” he replied promptly.

“I am he,” Jesus stated—and at these words the troop of soldiers stumbled backwards and fell to the ground, overwhelmed by some unknown force. In the confusion Jesus waited for them to recover, then asked them again: “Who is it you want?”

Again the captain replied, more cautiously, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

“I told you that I am he,” Jesus reiterated. “If you are looking for me, then let these men go.” He indicated the Apostles, surrounded by the soldiers.

As the soldiers stepped away from the Apostles, Peter, ready to keep his earlier boast of never failing Jesus, grabbed a sword out of a soldier’s hand and, with an upward swing, sliced off the ear of the high priest’s official, known as Malchus. Before he could do more damage, Jesus rebuked Peter: “Put away your sword ! Shall I not drink the cup my Father gives me? All who take the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?”

He turned to the massed soldiers and officials, and said challengingly, “Am I leading a rebellion that you have come armed with swords and clubs to capture me? Every day I sat in the Temple Courts teaching and you did not arrest me. But this has all taken place that the writings of the *Prophets* might be fulfilled.”

He walked towards the wounded man and, replacing the sliced ear, healed him. Then he signaled that he was ready to go with the military escort, leaving the Apostles to scatter in confusion and despair.

### Early Friday

It was now just after midnight and Judas, with the military escort, had been told by the religious leaders to bring Jesus as quickly as possible to the house of the former high priest, Annas, to see if he could entrap Jesus by his devious questioning. When Annas made no headway with the silent Jesus, he was hustled quickly to the palace of Caiaphas. It was the first time Jesus had been in the residence of the high priest, and as he looked around at the ostentatious grandeur of the furnishings he wondered anew at the scale of the hypocrisy which maintained such material splendor in defiance of Moses’ injunctions to the Levitical priesthood. Here, as president of the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas took the lead in the group of selected conspirators questioning Jesus.

Jesus was aware of both the intentions and the tactics to be so easily trapped and, to the increasing frustration and fury of the conspirators, he remained conspicuously silent. Conscious that this unauthorized interrogation of an arrested person without a witness was illegal, and that the clever Rabbi from Nazareth would know this, and also aware that time was running out on them, they were led into making foolish mistakes in their hectoring and provocative questions regarding his teaching.

Finally, Jesus held up his hand in a signal that he wished to speak. "I have spoken openly to the world," he declared firmly. "I always taught in synagogues or at the Temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said."

Infuriated at the implied rebuke by Jesus for not producing appropriate witnesses according to the *Law* of Moses, an official standing near Jesus struck him on the face, saying "Is that any way to answer the high priest?"

The other Sanhedrin officials watched in silence, and Jesus, blood running from his bruised lip, looked from the silent members to the bullying official. "If I said something wrong," he rebuked the official coldly, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?"

There was a low-voiced discussion among the Sanhedrin members, and then, at the suggestion of Annas, Jesus was led into a side-chamber for a private meeting with Caiaphas. But Jesus had nothing to say to the duplicitous high priest in private which could be twisted and used against him in public.

Meanwhile, after their first blind panic at Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane the Apostles fled back into the city. Young John Mark had arrived among them at the time of the arrest of Jesus and had been roughly handled by the soldiers. With no other definite refuge in mind they accepted his suggestion that they return to his parents' home. There, after a quick discussion, they decided to make for the palace of the high priest where they guessed Jesus would be taken by the Temple guards. The Apostle John's family was known to the high priest, and John thought he could get

into the precincts of the palace without too much difficulty to find out what was happening.

It was decided that Peter would go with John, and with his help they did get into the courtyard, where there were many people passing into and out of the palace. They were standing in the courtyard, warming themselves at one of the several braziers lit for warmth on the cool spring night, when one of the passing maidservants stopped and, looking doubtfully at him, said to Peter, "You are one of this man's disciples, aren't you?"

Without stopping to think, Peter denied it strenuously: "I am not."

The woman looked more closely at him in the flickering light, and stated emphatically to the curious crowd gathered around the fire, "This man was with him. You were with the Nazarene, Jesus of Galilee."

"Woman, I don't know him. I don't know what you're talking about", he snarled, and walked away from the fire on to the dark terrace circling the courtyard. John stayed where he was, silently appalled but unidentified.

After waiting for some time in the darkness of the pillared walkway Peter went looking for John among those gathered in the courtyard. He had stopped to ask a stranger if he had seen John, describing him, when the man said to those standing nearby, "This fellow was with the prophet, for he is a Galilean." The others, after looking closely at Peter, agreed, and one of them said suddenly, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" Unfortunately for Peter this man was a relative of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off.

As the crowd gathered around him, murmuring angrily, Peter panicked at the confrontation. and swore with a string of Galilean curses, concluding with "I don't know what you're talking about! I don't know this man!"

In the silence following on his emphatic denial, there was the clear sound of a rooster crowing for the second or third time, as they usually did between midnight and dawn. As Peter stood transfixed with guilt at the words of Jesus being so literally fulfilled, Jesus

himself was led into the courtyard from the inner chamber, where he had been with Caiaphas, and he looked straight at Peter. Peter walked away from the fire and the courtyard, seared in conscience and blinded with tears, into the enfolding darkness of the night.

The meeting between Caiaphas and Jesus was fruitless and the high priest had been forced to call for a full meeting of the Sanhedrin before daybreak, or at least as many as would form a quorum. He hoped to pack the quorum with as many of those who would support him as possible, before others could arrive. While the members were gathering Caiaphas planned his strategy; they would spend some time on charges of blasphemy to give some substance to their claims that it was a serious religious matter, but then they would switch to the more important political aspect of Messiahship and its treasonable association with kingship. This would justify bringing in Pilate and Rome, and would settle the fate of the Nazarene.

When the Sanhedrin was convened Caiaphas called for the prepared witnesses against Jesus. The charge was “blasphemy” for “speaking against the Temple”, an offence against both Jewish and Roman law. But the recollections of the witnesses were so vague and contradictory that the proceedings looked like ending in a fiasco.

Caiaphas intervened quickly. “Are you not going to answer?” he demanded of Jesus. “What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?”

Jesus remained silent. He knew, and the gathered members all knew, that it was incumbent on the Sanhedrin to provide witnesses with confirming stories and, where these accounts did not coincide, both the witnesses and the accused were to be dismissed. Above all, it was illegal to attempt to convict a person out of his own mouth.

“If you are the Messiah, tell us,” one of the members demanded.

Jesus surprised them by answering: “If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

There was a gasp of shock—genuine as well as simulated—at the use of the name of God by Jesus, a practice forbidden by the

rabbinical *Traditions*. The carefully phrased reply by Jesus involved no direct claim to be the Messiah of their expectation, but it also left no doubt in their minds that it was a claim to be the Messiah of the Scriptures. But another member saw a chance to trap Jesus. “Are you then the Son of God?” he asked.

Caiaphas also saw the opportunity. “I charge you under oath by the living God,” he said solemnly: “Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One.”

Jesus could have refused to reply to the outrageous violation of the *Law* implicit in Caiaphas’ demand, but instead he chose to answer: “You are right in saying I am. But again I repeat to all of you: in the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

It was enough for the duplicitous high priest. He made a show of protest by formally tearing a strip off his robe. “He has spoken blasphemy!” he cried out in pretended outrage. “Why do we need any more witnesses? You have all heard the blasphemy. What do you think?” He was attempting to force the issue, because in a formal charge of blasphemy all members also had to tear their robes in agreement, and he needed a visible majority in support.

“We have heard it from his own lips,” they affirmed sycophantically. “He is worthy of death.”

It was obvious that all did not agree—he could see that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea refused to comply with the decision—but the others were enthusiastic in their response, choosing to spit in the face of the bound Jesus. Some of them even struck him on the face and, in mockery of his claim to be the Messiah, said to him, “Prophecy to us who smote you, Messiah! Who hit you?”

Then they led Jesus to a nearby room while they deliberated the form of the charges to be made to Pilate. There, the guards repeated the mockery and attacks on Jesus by brutally manhandling him.

### Friday Morning

As Jesus was led away from the main chamber Judas, who had been waiting outside to hear the verdict, knew that he had made a

monumental mistake. This man he had betrayed was not just a potential Jewish political leader as he had imagined, but was in fact the true Messiah, the Son of God—and he had betrayed him! As despair and terror overwhelmed him he approached some of the members of the Sanhedrin who had given him the thirty pieces of silver for his betrayal of Jesus. “I have sinned,” he said to them, “for I have betrayed an innocent man.”

They looked at him contemptuously. “What is that to us?” they said to him dismissively. “That’s your problem.”

As they turned away the now distraught Judas looked wildly around the empty and silent courtyard in mindless confusion and despair. Then his whirling thoughts centered and he took the bag holding the thirty silver coins from his girdle and scattered the money across the ground in front of the departing Sanhedrin members. They simply shrugged off the futile gesture and, picking up the coins, walked away, discussing what to do with the money. “It is against the *Law* to put it into the Temple treasury,” one of them said, “since it is blood money.”

“Then use it to buy a burial place,” another said, laughing.

Judas walked the streets of the city in a nightmare of guilt and isolation. He was conscious of people talking of the events of the night as the streets began to fill up, and he knew that soon they would be talking about his traitorous part in those events. He would be remembered for ever as the cheap tool of the professional religionists and the fool of Satan. His pace quickened as his feet carried him out of the gate of the city into the Valley of Hinnom—the endlessly burning refuse pit “Gehenna” of ghastly reports—and up to the “Potter’s Field” of nameless dead on the steep slopes of the Valley. He had not planned to go there, but it seemed to the tortured Judas that he was being carried forward to a place and act that had been determined for him.

Among the night-shadowed shapes of jagged rocks stood a bent and stunted tree jutting out over the drop into the black depths of the Valley far below. Slowly and deliberately, Judas unwound the girdle that had held the thirty pieces of silver, and threw it over the extended branch. He caught the ends, made a loop, and passed it

over his head, tying one end tight to the branch. His final thoughts as he jumped off into the darkness were of the last words of Jesus—*“Friend, what you are about to do, do quickly.”*

The night had given way to dawn, “the first hour of the day”, or about six o’clock. The silver trumpets from the Temple had sounded the three blasts announcing the start of a new day of prayers and services. The gate-keepers of the Temple threw open the gates and the first of the great crowds of Passover pilgrim devotees pushed forward into the Courts for the first of the morning prayers. The chosen priests went about their preparations for the sacrifice of the Passover lamb for the nation.

Down in the streets of the city the Sanhedrin’s military escort took the bound, bruised and disheveled Jesus from Caiaphas’ palace to the Antonia Fortress next to the Temple—the former grand palace of Herod the Great gifted to the Romans—where Pilate was quartered with his troops. Here the Sanhedrin conspirators handed Jesus over to the Roman guards, because, they said, “we must not be defiled before eating the Passover”.

This was a typical example of duplicity—from either Annas or Caiaphas—for, while it was true that entering into the Roman Fortress would have rendered them unclean for the rest of that day, it would not have disqualified them from eating the household Paschal lamb since that would be eaten after sunset—when a new day had begun. But entering into the Fortress in the early morning of Friday would certainly have disqualified the religious leaders from participating in the *chagigah*, or feast-offering on the morning of the first full Paschal day.

When the Roman guards reported to Pilate the presence of the Sanhedrin members and Jesus at the Fortress gates he was not surprised. He had been forewarned by the request of the high priest the previous evening for a military escort to assist in the arrest of a Jewish rebel. The suspicious Pilate had not sent a centurion with the escort in response lest he was being trapped into some devious Jewish plot, and he had sent a lower-rank *chiliarch*, or tribune, sufficient for support and observation only. It was the same tribune had informed him of the arrest of the prophet of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth.

The solitary arrest of the controversial rabbi did not seem to be of any great significance to Pilate in the rapidly spreading rebellions of the time, but he happened to tell his wife Claudia Procula, about the event and was surprised by her vehement reaction. He had known that she had become a proselyte convert to Judaism, but he had not known that she was informed about Jesus and his activities for some time and had been deeply impressed by his teachings. Now, she warned Pilate not to be swayed by the demands of the duplicitous religious leaders.

The disturbed Pilate made his way through the courtyard to the gate of the Fortress so that he could talk to the religious leaders without them being defiled by coming inside. He looked with interest at the bound and bruised Jesus, the bloodied head and marks of spittle on his face rendering him even more unimpressive. Pilate demanded curtly what accusation they brought against this man: where was the *postulatio*, or formal accusation required by Roman procedure? Strictly speaking this also required a supporting *delatio nominis* to follow, in which the accuser swore that he was not activated by prejudice, and had to be validated by a court official; finally, the accused had a right to have witnesses present. None of these were evident.

The Sanhedrin leaders had known all this, but their determination to have Jesus put to death that day had forced them to ignore it. Now, as they saw Pilate robbing them of their victim, they shouted in their frustrated fury, "If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you."

Pilate knew he was on solid ground in Roman law, and he was glad of the opportunity to frustrate their religious plot. "Take him yourself and judge him by your own *Law*," he said, turning away.

"But we have no right to execute anyone," one of the leaders objected, and Pilate stopped, the uneasy premonition begun by his wife's words now increasing at the use of the word, "execute". What was going on here? Why the pre-determination for death—and that without proper Jewish or Roman legal procedures?

"We have found this man subverting the nation," the chief priest who had spoken continued. "He opposes payment of taxes to

Caesar, and claims to be the Messiah, a king". This was a malicious perversion of what Jesus had said about taxes, but they were committed to his death by any means.

Pilate looked again at the disreputable and bloodied figure, seeking to find some indication of his powerful influence over so many people—and his own wife. Only the eyes were impressive, in their steady and serene acceptance of the humiliations being heaped on him. Pilate signaled to his soldiers to take the man from among the Sanhedrin members and bring him into the courtyard. Here there was the *lithostrotos*, or in Hebrew *gabbatha*, a paved and raised platform on which was installed the single procurator's chair for judging legal cases. When he sat down, and Jesus stood before him, Pilate asked him, partly as a formality arising out of the Jews' charge but also out of personal interest, "Are you the king of the Jews?" It would be informative to see how the man responded.

"Is that your own idea," Jesus asked him, "or did others talk to you about me?"

For a moment Pilate had a flashing thought that the man must have been in touch with his wife, but dismissed it. The man was just cleverer than he looked. He was implying that if Pilate had witnesses they should have been brought there to make their charge.

Pilate resorted to bluster. "Am I a Jew?" he demanded sarcastically. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?" His question was a mixture of disdainful cynicism and curiosity. He had little time for the endless religious squabbling of these Jewish people, but this Galilean prophet had been able to draw their implacable hatred in just over three years.

Jesus gazed at Pilate thoughtfully, and Pilate found himself being impressed by the man's detachment. He was not afraid, nor tense, nor angered, nor antagonistic. He was looking at Pilate as if evaluating him. "My kingdom is not of this world as you understand it," he answered Pilate finally. "If it were, my followers would be fighting to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But my kingdom is from a different place."

"You are a king, then!" exclaimed Pilate, selecting the opening

words of “my kingdom” and ignoring the opportunity to discuss Jesus’ version of a kingdom.

“You are right in saying that I am a king,” Jesus surprised Pilate with the admission. “In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

It was not what Pilate wanted to hear, a religious discussion. He waved his hand dismissively. “What is truth?” he sneered. If he had wanted to know, this was the last place in the world he would look for it—and this pathetic individual of a despicable race the last man to ask about it. He rose abruptly from his judicial *bema* seat and, signaling to his Roman guards to bring Jesus, he walked towards the gate excluding the gathering crowd of spectators behind the chief priests. It had grown considerably as the news of the arrest of Jesus spread throughout the streets of the city. But the selected followers of the conspirators were grouped together at the gate, shouting angrily at the sight of Jesus.

Pilate looked at them with distaste. Who would want to be a king over such a people? Their religion had made them all mad! “I find no basis for a charge against this man,” he informed the leaders curtly and formally. He was about to issue orders to the guards to release Jesus when there was a roar of rage from the crowds at the gate, seeing themselves about to be cheated of their prey. Every conceivable and inconceivable charge was hurled at the silent figure.

“Aren’t you going to answer?” Pilate asked Jesus, hoping for an excuse to support his determination to let the man go. He hated the feeling of inferiority he had in this man’s presence, and the impression of weakness in the face of public and priestly pressure. “See how many things they are accusing you of. Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?”

Jesus looked from the face of the procurator to the distorted faces at the gate, but said nothing. Pilate looked at him in amazement. All the man had to do was say he was innocent, or that there were no witnesses, or that he was being charged illegally—all of it true—and legally he would have released him under the existing provisions of Roman law.

“He has created unrest all over Judea by his teaching,” a voice shouted. “He started in Galilee and now has come here.”

It was a stupid remark, thought Pilate: what had it to do with anything? But the mention of “Galilee” gave him an idea. This man was from Galilee, and Herod was from Galilee, and Herod was already in trouble because of the other prophet, John, whom he had killed. Let Herod deal with the problem. He ordered the military escort to take Jesus to Herod’s palace. The chief priests sent their own messengers ahead to inform Herod of what to expect.

Herod and his retinue were in residence in the family’s Hasmonean palace close to the forum in the square near the Temple. When Herod knew that it was Jesus who was being brought to him he experienced again the mixture of interest and fear that John the Baptist had evoked in him. John had never done any miracles, but this man had done many, including raising people from the dead. And he had a much larger following than the Baptist. Herod had even believed for a time that John had been reincarnated in the body of this Jesus of Nazareth, who had so contemptuously dismissed him as a “fox”. And wasn’t he said to be a cousin of John the Baptist?

When Jesus was brought before Herod he refused to answer a single question put to him by the hedonistic tetrarch tyrant. This Hasmonean puppet had no status in law or morality, he was the public murderer of the innocent John the Baptist, and his posturing before family and friends, and the religious leaders, was solely for personal amusement. Herod wanted to see if Jesus would do a miracle as was reported, but in the face of Jesus’ continuing silence he soon tired of the empty exercise. As a sop to his hurt pride, he called for a *toga* to be brought and placed on Jesus before returning him to Pilate. This *toga* was a garment worn by competing tribunes or political candidates, and it was his own private joke against both the religious leaders and the Roman procurator in their contest over the kingdom of God claims of Jesus.

Pilate was infuriated when the provocatively-garbed Jesus was brought back to the Praetorium for his judgment, suspecting that this was building up into another serious political issue to be used

by the Jews against him here and in Rome, and he said angrily to the religious leaders at the gates, "You brought this man to me as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he has returned him; as you can see, because he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him."

Pilate knew that it was a weak decision, being neither just nor moral, and his tone was whining—but he could not afford to take chances with such a volatile people who had already jeopardized his reputation in Rome. As Pilate turned to go back to his judicial seat to pass judgment someone suggested he offer as an alternative a prisoner to be released at the Passover as was the custom. Pilate had not yet decided, but the suggestion gave him an idea, and he snatched at it to get him out his present dilemma over Jesus.

"Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" he asked them. It was unfortunate for Pilate that he could not forego the pleasure of taunting the religious leaders by using the title which enraged them most. They retaliated by inciting the people around them to demand the release of a notorious revolutionary, Barabbas, who had just led an abortive revolt in Jerusalem, and who had been arrested for this and for murder. "Away with this man!" the people yelled in response. "Give us Barabbas! Release Barabbas to us!"

As Pilate took his seat a note was handed to him from his wife. Pilate was surprised, for only the most urgent circumstance was permitted to interrupt the judicial proceedings. He was even more surprised, and disturbed, when he read the contents: "*Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal in a dream because of him.*"

Stalling for time, and hoping for a change of attitude from the people as he sat in the judgment seat, Pilate asked them again: "Which of the two do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

"Barabbas," they roared back.

Pilate moved restlessly on the stone seat. He wanted to get this over quickly, for there was a malevolent momentum to the situation

which was causing him to perspire more than the heat of the late morning warranted. He could not take his eyes away from the Galilean, who stood quietly amid the uproar, a symbol of sanity in the middle of an insane rabble. His bearing was so calm in all the turmoil that Pilate felt that it was he and the crowd who were under judgment and not the solitary Galilean.

“What shall I do then with Jesus who is called the Messiah,” he asked the Jewish leaders again wearily, guessing what their answer would be, but wishing to taunt them further and to place on record their primary culpability; “the one *you* call the king of the Jews?”

“Crucify him!” they answered. The call was taken up by the crowds in the street: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate shook his head incredulously. These were the people who were shouting “Hosannas” only a few days before, acclaiming the same man as their Messiah. He thought again of what his wife had just said in her message to him, and decided to try once more to save the man. He would have him scourged, and that should satisfy even the most vindictive priest—if the Nazarene survived the experience.

“What crime has this man committed?” he demanded. “I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

It was useless against the mass hysteria of the crowds. The shouts became a sustained chant: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Pilate stood up to indicate the matter was closed. With a sense of shock he discerned that the look Jesus gave him was one of understanding, and even sympathy; as if he knew what Pilate had decided, what the motive—and the consequences. Pilate shrugged off the guilt and gave orders to the soldiers to take Jesus and flog him. He hoped for the Galilean’s sake he would die during the flogging, which was often the result of the experience.

The soldiers marched Jesus to an inner courtyard where there was a short squat post about two feet high, with attached rings for ropes or chains. There Jesus was stripped of all his clothing and, naked, forced into a bent, forward position, like an animal awaiting the knife. The whole Roman scourging procedure was calculated to humiliate and intimidate the victim. It was known as “*the halfway*

*death*", because few survived the experience. The whip used was a piece of wood with several lengths of leather, to which were attached sharp pieces of bone and metal, known as a *flagella*. There was no set number of stripes, and it was left to the *lictors* who wielded the *flagella* to stop only when they were tired, or the victim unconscious or dead. The blows administered to the shoulders and loins peeled back strips of skin, often broke bones, and left the victim maimed for life if he survived. Only the supervising centurion could stop the *lictors* from administering the beating to death.

The centurion, or *exactor mortis* as he was known in this capacity, after more than the basic fifty strokes of the brutal, flesh-stripping *flagella*, told the soldiers to stop the bloody flogging of Jesus before he died, and to take him to the soldiers' quarters and put a robe of some kind on him. When Jesus was brought back the soldiers in mockery had put a purple robe on him, put a plaited crown of long sharp thorns on his head in mocking imitation of the garlands worn by emperors, and a rod in his right hand as a mock scepter. They gathered around him shouting, "Hail king of the Jews!" spitting and striking him on the face in cruel parody.

When the stumbling, bloody Jesus was brought before him again at the judgment seat, Pilate gave no indication of sympathy. He had seen many scourged felons before, and this was the best he could do in the circumstances. It was now about the sixth hour, noon, and there were crowds gathered around the gate of the Fortress, with the black-robed and bearded religious leaders still prominent. Pilate walked with the military escort and Jesus to the gate, and said to the yelling crowd, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." Turning to Jesus he said noncommittally, "*Ecce homo!* Here is the man!"

But the religious leaders were not appeased by the ghastly sight of the shredded and bloodied Jesus, and they reiterated their demand: "Crucify! Crucify!"

"You take him and crucify him," Pilate said harshly. He was tired of this vengeful rabble. "As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

"We have a *Law*," the priests said unctuously, "and according to

that *Law* he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”

It was the first time Pilate had heard of this claim to divinity, and again he recalled with fear his wife’s strange message. He signaled to Jesus to follow him into the judgment seat again. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus curiously. He waited in trepidation for whatever answer Jesus chose to give, but Jesus remained silent.

“Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate demanded testily. “Don’t you know I have the power either to free you or to crucify you?”

Jesus replied with biting contempt, his words increasing Pilate’s fears. “You would have no power over me if it were not given you from your superiors. No man takes my life from me; I lay it down by myself. The one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin than you.”

Pilate was now in a quandary. He was increasingly convinced, despite his cynicism, that this man before him was special in some undetermined way. He was unimposing at first glance, but impressive and even remarkable on closer acquaintance. Pilate wished for more time to find out just who and what he was, but the Jewish leaders wanted a decision immediately. Ominously, they were now threatening him overtly as they saw his hesitation, shouting: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar.”

Pilate knew that the Jewish leaders were actively seeking an excuse to send a delegation to Rome to complain about his “excesses.” They had drawn up a list of these—misgovernment, extortion, unjust decrees, religious oppression—and this latest situation with Jesus as a supposed king of the Jews would give them the final excuse they needed to send a delegation to Rome. He would need to give them Jesus.

He walked back to his judgment seat. He pointed to Jesus standing before him: “Here is your king,” he said to them, leading them into his trap. He knew that when it suited them later they would deny all responsibility in the man’s death and blame him and Rome and everyone else. As he expected, they responded, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!”

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate provoked them into unthinking response and public guilt.

“We have no king but Caesar,” they roared back, heedless in their rage against Jesus of the political implications of their public affirmation of Rome’s rule over them.

With one last look at Jesus, who still gazed at him serenely from beneath the crude circlet of vicious thorns dripping blood on to his bruised and lacerated cheeks, Pilate devised his last gesture. He would refuse to pronounce the sentence of death which these bigoted professional religionists wanted. Also, he had learned something from his Jewish advisers regarding a significant custom of their own. He called for a bowl of fresh water and, as the shouts of the crowd died into silence, he deliberately washed his hands in front of them. To make sure that they understood the full meaning of his action he used the very words taken from their own *Law*: “I am innocent of this man’s blood,” he said. “*It is your responsibility.*”

He had a perverse satisfaction when they responded, “Let his blood be on us and on our children.” That, he thought, would satisfy his wife in Jerusalem, Caesar in Rome—and history, if it ever recorded the present events. He had a sudden thought, and called for the centurion. He gave orders that the sign on the cross above the head of Jesus, listing the official charge for death, should have the words, “*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews*”—in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.

When the furious religious leaders objected, demanding that the wording be changed to “He claimed to be—”, Pilate waved away their protests: “What I have written, I have written,” he said curtly, dismissing them and returning to Fortress quarters.

### Friday Afternoon

The place for the crucifixion of Jesus was only a short distance from the Fortress, reached by a narrow, stepped street leading past the rear walls of the Temple and exiting at the Damascus Gate. It was a Roman law that the criminal condemned to death by crucifixion must carry his cross to the place of execution. This was usually only the cross-beam, the upright part already being installed by soldiers

sent ahead to the site on Golgotha known locally as “*Golgotha*”, or “the place of a skull”. Two other condemned men, robbers, were also in the crucifixion procession with Jesus.

The cross-beam weighed some thirty pounds and this, combined with the sleepless night, the hellish scourging which left his bones exposed and his skin in bloody shreds, the oppressive noonday heat, and the pressure from the gawking crowds in the narrow street, drove Jesus to the brink of unconsciousness and he stumbled. Some of the crowd jeered, and asked him to perform a miracle now on himself. The Roman escort picked out a burly Cyrenian, known as Simon, from the watching crowd and ordered him to help carry the Nazarene’s cross.

During the delay a group of women forced themselves to the front where Jesus had collapsed on the road. They wept as they helped him to his feet, mourning as if at a funeral. The Sanhedrin representative, who was present at every sentence of death to observe that the Roman decision was being fulfilled, waved them away. He had been instructed to see that there were no public protests in Jesus’ favor.

Jesus stopped to recover his breath, and then gasped: “Don’t . . . weep for me . . . weep for yourselves . . . and for your children . . . The time is coming soon . . . you will run and hide . . . If men do this . . . in a time of law . . . what will they do . . . when there is no law?” He was giving them a final warning of the coming national holocaust that would sweep them all away into despair and oblivion.

When the procession reached Calvary the transverse beam of the cross, which Simon of Cyrene had helped to carry, was placed on the ground and Jesus led forward. He was offered the usual drink by the soldiers,—a bitter mixture of wine and myrrh, which had a numbing effect on the senses—but Jesus refused this. His clothing was removed and his bloody, shredded body was laid naked, with his hands outstretched on the transverse beam, facing forwards to the watching public. Only women were permitted to be crucified facing the cross and with backs to the public. The whole exercise of crucifixion was to utterly humiliate as well as cruelly intimidate the criminal being crucified in order to deter all others.

The soldiers first nailed his hands to the beam, and tied his arms with ropes around the wrists. The rope was passed over his shoulders and under his arms and the transverse beam lifted to fit against the upright beam, then was nailed and roped together. A small wooden seat-rest, with a jutting horn-like projection devised to pierce the rectum, had been nailed to the upright beam, and Jesus' legs were straddled ignominiously on either side of this. Nails were driven through his feet on the foot-rest under the feet to support the body in a knees bent position when the excruciating agony of its weight on the nailed hands and feet causing the body to slump. The foot-rest and horned seat-rest were not there to comfort the criminal, but so that death through strangulation from a collapsed rib cage would not occur too quickly, and so that the torturous agony would be intensified and prolonged for up to three days or more as a warning to the watching public. The body, suspended by the nails on the cross, contracted in spasms into agonizing rigidity; wounds swelled and festered in the fly-ridden heat; heart, lungs and head became congested, and breathing was agonizing and often impossible. In order to breathe the individual had to push downwards on the horned seat-rest—but this only served to brutally intensify the agony.

When the soldiers had finished the work of crucifying the three men—the two robbers on the right and left, and Jesus in the centre—they stood back to admire their work. Jesus, watching them out of pain-filled eyes, gasped, “Father . . . forgive them . . . they don't . . . know what . . . they are doing.” The soldiers ignored the words, and picked up the scattered bloody clothing to divide among themselves. Seeing that Jesus' garment was seamless they decided to gamble for it whole, instead of cutting it, while they waited for Jesus to die.

The crowds who had followed the procession began to disperse. Once the nailing of the individual on the cross was completed there was little left to hold their attention. They had to prepare for the imminent Passover celebrations, ignoring the historical irony that they were already killing the Scripturally true *A Passover Lamb*—at the exact time—“*between the sixth and ninth hours*”—ordained by God through Moses about two thousand years before.

Those who had hoped for some sort of a miracle from Jesus were disappointed, and they jeered: "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, the Chosen One."

"If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself."

"You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!"

"Messiah, king of Israel, come down now from the cross so that we may see and believe!"

"He trusts in God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

Even one of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus hurled abuse at him: "Aren't you . . . the Messiah?" he sneered with labored breath. "Save yourself . . . and us!"

At these words the criminal on the other side gasped a rebuke: "Don't you . . . fear God . . . We are . . . punished justly . . . This man has done . . . nothing wrong." Turning his pain-contorted face towards Jesus, he added, "Jesus . . . remember me . . . when you come . . . into your kingdom."

The shadow of a smile flickered on the torn and bloodied face of Jesus, and he said, "I tell you the truth . . . today you will be . . . with me in Paradise." The repentant criminal was only barely conscious through his own pain that the promise of Jesus was not just physical release for that day, but present with Jesus through death and resurrection to the endless Paradise beyond.

The Roman centurion in charge, who had seen thousands of these incidents, gazed inscrutably from the jeering Jewish religious leaders responsible for this man's death to the face of Jesus: "Surely this was a righteous man", he said wonderingly. He thought for a moment that Jesus had heard him, for he was gazing in his direction, but it was the small group next to the centurion that had drawn the attention of Jesus, three women and a man.

Unknown to the centurion this was Jesus' mother, Mary, and the former courtesan Mary "*the Magdalene*" of Bethany, and another sister of Jesus' mother, also called Mary, the wife of Cleopas. John, "*the beloved disciple*" of Jesus was with them. At Pilate's final words he had hurried to Mary of Jerusalem's home, to give the news of

Jesus' crucifixion to the others. Tears streamed down Mary's face as she gazed on the tortured form of her beloved son, and she remembered again, the words of the prophecy that had haunted her life: "*A sword shall pierce through your heart also.*" She had thought that meant the agony of separation from the one who was primarily God's Son as he did his heavenly Father's will, but she knew now that this was the sword—the nation of Israel's brutalized and ravaged rejection of one whose only crime was that he loved too much. The women clung together, weeping and occasionally covering their faces at the spasms of agony wracking the body of Jesus.

Jesus looked from them to John. Addressing his mother he said in pain-rasped tones, "Dear woman . . . here is your son." To John he gasped, "Here is . . . your mother." John nodded his acceptance of the responsibility.

Although it was only past noon the sky began to darken inexplicably. There were none of the usual signs of a storm, and it was not an eclipse, for it was the time of the full moon. The spectators began to move away uneasily, less voluble in their jeering as they cast worried glances at the darkening sky. Was God going to intervene on behalf of Jesus after all? The religious leaders were less suspicious, but they had their own problems with the darkness, for it meant that someone might try to remove the still living body of Jesus. Also, according to the *Law*, they had to make certain that the body should not be left hanging overnight, and the Passover Sabbath would be due at sunset only two or three hours away. They hurried from the scene to see Pilate, to request that the Galilean's legs might be broken to make certain that he died before the start of their Sabbath. Pilate agreed with their request, and sent a messenger to the soldiers at the cross with the order.

Pilate did not inform the high priest's messengers that he had already received an earlier delegation—also distinguished members of the Sanhedrin—with a request. This was the influential Nicodemus, captain of the Temple, and Joseph of Arimathea. They said they were friends of Jesus, and asked Pilate courteously if he would give them permission to remove the dead body of Jesus for

private burial, and he had agreed. He suspected the high priest's men arriving too late would not like his decision, which pleased him immensely.

On the cross Jesus, released from his last ties with earth in attending to his mother, entered his dark night of the soul—his God-prophesied “hour” and the “hour of Satan” when the “heel of Jesus” would be “bruised” but the “head of Satan” would be fatally wounded in a contest that would result in destroying Satan’s power for ever. The physical agonies he was experiencing were as nothing compared to the spiritual anguish of his unseen cosmic confrontation with Satan as he battled for God’s redemption of the creation corrupted by Satan. As he struggled alone in the raging nightmare of Satan’s onslaught a hoarse cry was torn from his lips: “My God . . . my God . . . why have you . . . forsaken me?”

Some of those standing near him, hearing the Galilean dialect “Eli, Eli” for “God”, mistakenly thought that he was calling for Elijah the prophet. One of them ran and got a sponge and dipped it in the mixture of wine and vinegar kept for the purpose, and offered it to Jesus. But the religious leaders pushed them aside, and said roughly, “Leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah will come and save him.”

As the day darkened still more it became difficult to see the features of the men on the crosses. When Jesus whispered hoarsely, “I thirst”, the man with the cup of wine and vinegar ignored the protests of the others and gave it to Jesus.

There was now an oppressive and ominous silence over the whole hellish scene. The usual noises of the city had disappeared as the unaccountable darkness drove people off the streets and stopped all normal daylight activities. There were only a few people around the crosses to hear Jesus shout triumphantly, “*It is finished* . . . Father . . . into your hands . . . I commit . . . my spirit.” Then, unexpectedly and inexplicably in the appalling circumstances, his suspended body slumped and he died. So sudden and unusual was it that the experienced Roman centurion who had earlier observed that Jesus was “certainly a righteous man”, exclaimed reverently, “This man was certainly the Son of God!”

At that point the messenger from Pilate, accompanied by the high priest's representatives, arrived with the new orders to hasten the death of Jesus by breaking his legs. The Roman centurion who had noted the manner of Jesus' death waved them away and, taking up his spear, he drove it through the side and lung of Jesus into his heart to mark the end of the heart-sickening events. He knew from the sudden spurt of blood and clear fluid that the heart had already stopped.

The religious leaders were giving orders to take the body of Jesus for burial when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea stepped forward to claim the body for themselves. They were stunned, then outraged, at being out-manuevered by the two influential Sanhedrin representatives, but could do nothing when the Roman centurion confronted them with Pilate's messenger confirming the Procurator's earlier decision.

Suddenly there was an ear-shattering thunderclap overhead and the skies poured torrential rain. The religious leaders ran to report to the high priest, and Nicodemus and Joseph, with John and the women, took the dead body of Jesus to Joseph of Arimathea's prepared burial place. There they embalmed the beloved body simply, wrapping it in a linen cloth with myrrh and aloes, and placed it in Joseph's own newly constructed tomb. The men rolled the large stone back over the entrance, watched by the grieving figures of the women.

There was no time for more. The time of Passover Sabbath had arrived, and they had to be off the streets. The final celebration of the Paschal Lamb and God's act of cosmic and eternal redemption was ended as it had begun - with the sacrifice of a lamb.



## THE RISEN MESSIAH AND THE WORLDWIDE COMMISSION

Saturday

Very early the next morning, even although it was the hallowed Sabbath—and the Passover Sabbath at that—the Jewish religious leaders once again went to see Pilate with a request. They were disturbed at their oversight in not obtaining the dead body of Jesus for burial, and for being outmaneuvered by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. So, in order to frustrate any possibility of future fictions regarding Jesus they sought to recover the initiative.

“Sir,” they said unctuously to the frowning Roman procurator, “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.”

Pilate was tired of the whole affair. He and his wife had quarrelled over his judgement the previous day, he had been

awakened throughout the night with reports of the earthquake which had followed the day's unique darkness, and then more far-fetched reports of many opened tombs and bodies supposedly rising from the dead. Finally, there was the mysterious incident of the sacred Veil in the Sanctuary of the Temple being torn— from top to bottom, it was said fearfully—and the possibility that this was done by hated Samaritans, or some revolutionary group, or fanatical religious sect, with unpredictable possibilities. When the religious leaders had requested an audience with him he had supposed it was about the torn Veil. It was said to be the subject of greatest importance next to Jesus' death raging amongst the Passover pilgrims in Jerusalem, and all of these events would be carried across the world in the coming weeks and months as they returned to their own countries—including Rome.

So far his spies had established the most mysterious part of the evidence, that the event of the torn Veil being rent from top to bottom was said to have occurred the previous afternoon, at the ninth hour—"just as Jesus died", the Roman centurion reported noncommittally. The huge Veil of Babylonian fine flax tapestry, shimmering in its intricate and colorful cherubim embroidery, had always hidden the Temple's Holy of Holies in awesome darkness from all except the high priest and those duty priests attending the altar of incense. Behind this Veil was said to dwell the brooding, jealous Presence of the God of Israel. Yesterday's strange intervention had exposed the sacred Sanctuary to the eyes of all, and the Place of the Presence was seen to be empty. The cynical Pilate thought it amusing if the consequences were not so serious. Yet here were these posturing and pusillanimous priests seriously asking him to put a guard on a tomb to stop a dead man from rising from it! In a sense he was relieved that this was all they wanted.

"Take a guard," he told the centurion. "Go, and make the tomb as secure as possible." The centurion left with the religious leaders, and they went to the tomb and put the official Roman seal on the stone, leaving two Roman guards with two Temple guards on watch. It would be death for anybody attempting to interfere with it.

Ironically, the professional religionists believed more in the

possibilities arising from the resurrection of Jesus than did the Apostles. From the time that the lifeless body of Jesus was taken from the cross, the bloody and torn flesh bathed, the spices and grave-clothes put on, all, without exception, accepted the finality of his death. Even the thought of removing his body, so feared by the religionists, never crossed their minds as they contemplated the inevitable corruption over the next few days of the Passover. If they expected anything, it was a vague memory of what he said about his Second Coming in the distant future. They had scattered in panic to different meeting places in Jerusalem and Bethany, meeting fearfully behind closed doors for the inevitable arrests they anticipated following Jesus' death. To the dazed and bemused Apostles the startling news of the torn Veil, at the time of the darkness and earthquake and opened tombs and raised bodies, only created further confusion.

The women—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus, her sisters Mary and Salome, Mary the wife of Cleopas, Joanna the wife of Chuza, and the wealthy and patrician Susanna—busied themselves with preparing the burial spices donated by Nicodemus and Joseph for a less hurried application to Jesus when the Passover was ended. Then Joanna and Susanna returned to the Herodian palace, and two of the Marys went with Peter and Mary the mother of Jesus and the Apostles to Mary of Jerusalem's home in the city, one of their most used meeting-places in Jerusalem.

### Sunday Morning

Early on the Sunday morning, at the first light of dawn, the women left their houses to meet at the tomb in Joseph's garden as they had arranged the day before. Cleopas, the brother of Joseph, Mary's husband, and some others left Bethany with the two Marys, but in the city they separated to search out the whereabouts of the Apostles. There was some discussion as to who would help the women move the heavy tombstone, and it was suggested that Joseph of Arimathea would have a watchman or gardener at the scene to help them. But others pointed out that the grave-stone was traditionally made so that several men would be required to move it.

In the city, while they were on their way to the tomb, the women were terrified by the shudders of another earthquake, but it passed quickly and they hurried on. They did not know it, but the earthquake had preceded the arrival of an angelic messenger in Joseph's burial garden, before whom the Roman and Temple guards reeled away, blinded and unconscious, and the heavy tomb-stone moved backwards at their command to open the way into the tomb.

When the guards recovered from the shock they saw a resplendent heavenly messenger sitting quietly on the rolled-back tomb-stone and, after a terrified glance at the obviously empty tomb, they ran from the garden to report to their superiors.

The open and empty tomb in an unoccupied garden faced the women as they approached. Mary Magdalene was the first to recover from the shock and, without entering the tomb, she told the others she was going to call the Apostles and left the garden running. She did not know where to find them but knew that Peter was most likely to be with John nearest to the tomb, through the Gennath Gate.

When she arrived there, breathless, to her relief she found both Peter and John there and she blurted out her incredible news: "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" she stammered incoherently. Recovering quickly, she told the stunned disbelieving Apostles of the open tomb in Joseph's garden. Peter and John left her precipitately, ignoring both caution and decorum as they ran through the streets beginning to fill with early morning crowds of people hurrying to the Temple.

Meanwhile, in Joseph's garden, after Mary's sudden departure, as the other women gazed around in confusion, overwhelmed and dumbfounded at the open and empty tomb, a dazzling angel appeared and addressed them reassuringly: "*Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. He is not here; for he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his Apostles, 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee.'* There you will see him. Now I have told you."

Like most tombs of wealthy Jews, Joseph's tomb had a low

entrance, opening into a deeper inner chamber, with shelves along each side for the bodies of the family. Because this was a new tomb prepared by Joseph, there were no other bodies on the shelves. After an initial hesitation the women approached the open tomb—and saw another angel sitting where they had placed the body of Jesus, but no Jesus. The women noticed that both angels took up positions where the head and feet of Jesus had been. The women backed out of the tomb, filled with a diminishing fear and a rising tide of joy and excitement. Jesus had risen from the dead! There was no body! There was an empty tomb! There were angel witnesses with a clear and commanding message! As they left Joseph's garden they went through the Ephraim Gate before separating to go to different houses to inform the various Apostles.

Peter and John, returning to the tomb by the route taken by Mary—through the Gennath Gate—missed the women. John ran faster than Peter and he arrived at the tomb first to find nobody there—no soldiers, no angels—and the only evidence of Jesus' presence the strips of linen burial cloths lying on the shelf where Jesus' body had been. John stayed outside the tomb, reluctant to enter, while he thought over the possibilities. When the slower Peter arrived he was less diffident than John, and went straight into the tomb. He also noted the strips of linen, as well as the burial cloth that had been wrapped about Jesus' head, both folded neatly and in their respective places.

Eventually, John joined Peter inside the tomb, and both of them stood silent, wondering who could have removed the body of Jesus and left the folded burial clothes behind. They did not believe he had risen from the dead; it was easier to accept that the furious religious leaders had stolen the body. The violated Roman official seal—with death as the punishment for removal—was still in evidence on the rolled back tombstone, which indicated some powerful individual or group had ignored it. Then Mary arrived and, after a quick look inside the empty tomb, she stood outside weeping quietly. Peter and John left Mary at the tomb while they went back into the city to talk with the other Apostles.

After some time Mary stopped weeping and went into the tomb

—and found two angels, dressed in white clothing, sitting where Jesus' body had been. One of them addressed her: "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she replied, her mind distracted as she tried to comprehend speaking angels in an empty tomb, "and I don't know where they have put him."

She heard a sudden sound of someone behind her and, turning to see who had approached, she saw only a figure outlined in shadow against the outside sunlight. She thought it was Joseph's gardener, and that he might know what had happened to the body of Jesus. But before she could say anything he said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

"Sir," she said desperately, "if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." She stepped forward in the urgency of her plea.

"Mary," the man said to her quietly—and her world stood still. There could be only one voice that spoke her name like that, Jesus her Lord.

"Teacher!" she called out joyfully and incredulously, stepping forward to grasp him in her delight.

"Don't touch me," Jesus said to her warningly, "for I have not yet returned to the Father. Instead, go to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

Mary had a thousand questions to ask of her beloved Lord, but with his command she left him immediately to run to the Apostles with the joyful news of the resurrected Messiah. She found them gathered in Mary of Jerusalem's house, all excitedly comparing notes of the morning's events. Other followers had been arriving all morning as the news spread. When Mary was telling the stunned but delighted group of her meeting with Jesus, some of the other women arrived with the news that, while they were on the way to Bethany—on the narrow path winding across the Mount of Olives above the city—they were suddenly confronted by Jesus. He had said to them smilingly, "Greetings", and when they fell on their faces in fear, he had continued, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me." When they looked up, he was gone.

### Sunday Afternoon

If the followers of Jesus were confused it was nothing compared with the consternation among the Jewish religious leaders when they received the Temple guards' report of what had happened in Joseph's garden. At first the religious leaders refused to believe the story of an earthquake, opened tomb and heavenly beings, maintaining that the guards had been asleep, or drunk, or both, and that they had concocted the story between them. But, eventually, the guards attitude of obvious bewilderment and fear, their very incoherence, confirmed by the Roman soldiers as well, persuaded the professional religionists to accept their account of the empty tomb and angels.

They determined that that account must not be allowed to become official, and they quickly and unscrupulously produced their own version. Giving the soldiers a large amount of money they told them to say, if they were questioned about the incident, "His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep." They assured the anxious soldiers, "If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." This assurance was necessary because, under Roman law, the soldiers could be punished by death. In the meantime, it was decided that a campaign of harassment and intimidation should be waged against the followers of the Nazarene, to keep them from seeking to perpetuate the work begun by Jesus. Any attempt to preach about a resurrected Jesus would be severely punished.

The joy of the Apostles on hearing of Jesus' appearances was tempered by their cautious unbelief. It was argued that it was mostly women who had seen the angels. Why had he not appeared to John or Peter, who had been at the tomb just after Mary? Finally, it was decided to keep quiet until they had left Jerusalem for Galilee—after the close of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, in six day's time—as both the angels and Jesus had said he would appear to them there.

They had gone over the earlier statements of Jesus carefully regarding what they were to expect and do. They were to carry on the work he had begun, preaching and teaching the gospel, with miracles and signs where necessary. Peter was to play a leading

shepherding role; the Twelve Apostles—or, rather, the Eleven now that Judas was dead—were his official representatives. As the Apostles with special authority they had an assignment with Jesus in Galilee before he left them for heaven. Then they had to wait in Jerusalem until they received some demonstrable sign of the Counselor-Spirit, whom Jesus was going to send to empower them; and from Jerusalem they were to go out to the whole world.

It was late afternoon by the time the discussions ended, and the group broke up to go their separate ways. Peter left the others to go alone to the Mount of Olives, where he had spent so much time with Jesus. He wanted to visit the Garden of Gethsemane where he had slept when Jesus was in spiritual agony. He could hear again the words of Jesus: “Simon, Satan has desired to have you to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you.” As he stood in the garden of memories, his face wet with tears, Jesus appeared to Peter and comforted him. What was said between them Peter never revealed to anybody.

Among the others Cleopas, the brother of Joseph and uncle of Jesus, married to “the other Mary” present at the crucifixion, had to make a journey to his home in Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem on the road to Joppa. Cleopas had been with the Apostles since arriving in Jerusalem, and he had listened with the same incredulity when the various stories were being recounted. When Cleopas said he had to return to Emmaus, Luke offered to go with him so that they could talk more about the days’ events. Passing through the busy suburbs, and the crowded booths and tents of the visiting pilgrims, they left the wide Roman road for the narrow path leading through the lovely valley to Emmaus. A sparkling stream bubbled along the rift of the valley, and each side was thick with luxuriant foliage.

A few furlongs from Emmaus, at a point where two roads converged, the two friends were approached by a stranger, his face partly obscured by his headscarf against the evening chill and dressed like the thousands of other pilgrims on the roads, who greeted them courteously. They were not too pleased have company, as they were deeply engrossed with the happenings of the past several days, but the stranger continued to walk with them towards

Emmaus. His face shadowed by the encompassing headscarf as he listened to their conversation, he seemed to know little of what had been happening in Jerusalem.

“Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these past few days?” Cleopas asked him incredulously.

“What things?” the stranger enquired interestedly.

“Concerning Jesus of Nazareth,” Cleopas replied, while Luke gazed thoughtfully at the stranger. There was something about this stranger that intrigued him—his shadowed appearance, his enigmatic attitude, his apparent ignorance made him suspect a spy or even one of the religious leaders hiding his identity.

“He was a prophet,” Cleopas continued, “with remarkable spiritual power in words and actions. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. Then some of the women had a remarkable experience. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn’t find his body. They came and told us they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive, and some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, with no sign of the prophet.”

The stranger shocked both of them by saying suddenly, “What fools you are! How can you not believe all that the prophets have spoken! Didn’t they say the Messiah had to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”

With unexpected eloquence he began expounding to them the many Scriptures, from Moses= *Pentateuch*, the *Psalms* and the *Prophets* where the coming of the Messiah was foretold in his many aspects, especially the Prophet Isaiah’s account of him as the Suffering Servant and Vicarious Sacrifice. Cleopas and Luke were so engrossed with what he was saying that, when they reached the village of Emmaus and he looked as if he would leave them, they urged him to come with them to eat. “Remain with us,” they urged him, “for it’s getting dark and the day is almost over.”

The stranger accepted the invitation but, when the meal was served, he shocked them again. Instead of behaving with the

diffident politeness of a stranger, he acted almost like the host of the household. At the table he reached for the bread and, speaking the words of blessing, he broke it and handed it to them. As they took the bread from his hands they saw the wounds in the palms—made by nails!

A great light broke on Luke and Cleopas—as if until then their eyes had been blinded from perceiving the true identity of the stranger—and simultaneously they recognized Jesus. As they exclaimed their surprise, he suddenly disappeared from their sight and presence. They finished their meal quickly and hurried back to Jerusalem to reach there before the gates of the city closed for the night. On the way they recalled how they had been strangely warmed by the stranger’s exposition of the Scriptures, and how inspired they had become. When they arrived in Jerusalem they found that all the inner circle of Apostles, the Eleven—or Ten, except for the absent Thomas the Doubter—had gathered at the house of Mary of Jerusalem for the evening meal. When they had finished recounting their experience they were told that earlier that afternoon Peter had also had a visit from Jesus. However, none of them mentioned a fact that was troubling all their thoughts: in all of his appearances Jesus had suddenly appeared from nowhere, and also had disappeared just as mysteriously. Could it just have been a spirit, they wondered, and not the resurrected real body of Jesus?

This was the thought uppermost in their minds when they were preparing to eat their evening meal, and once again Jesus appeared in their midst. They had carefully locked all doors against any surprising visit from the antagonistic religious leaders, and the sudden appearance of Jesus among them convinced them that he was indeed a ghost. Seeing their doubts and fears Jesus said to them consolingly, “Peace be with you! Why are you so worried and doubting the evidence of your eyes? Look at my scarred hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” He spread his obviously scarred hands and feet for them to examine, but they were transfixed in their incredulity—although an anticipatory wonder and joy was struggling to surface.

“Do you have anything here to eat?” Jesus demanded, looking at the prepared table. He was given a helping of broiled fish and honeycomb, and he ate it calmly, while they watched him in awed silence. If anything they were more confused than ever. While it was accepted belief that a ghost could not eat food, they were puzzled what to expect from a body that had died, that had emptied itself of a great deal of its blood in scourging and stabbing, and the spirit returned to God at death,—and now was able to appear and disappear at will, and even pass through locked doors. They struggled to make sense of the multiplying events with stunned minds. Then, another mystery: Mary had reported Jesus as saying, “Do not touch me because I am not yet ascended to my Father,” yet here Jesus was saying to them, “Touch me and see. “Had he ascended to his Father in the interval? If so, how, and for what purpose? What divinely required sacerdotal commitment from the *Law* or *Prophets* had taken place since then?

Jesus could understand their confusion. “This is what I told you while I was still with you,” he said to them calmly. “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the *Law* of Moses, the *Prophets* and the *Psalms*. This is what is written: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high. Receive the Holy Spirit,” he said to them, breathing symbolically on all of them. “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” With these words once again he disappeared from their sight.

They were still discussing Jesus’ visit and words when Thomas arrived. When they told him of how Jesus had appeared among them, and what he had said, Thomas refused to believe it. In his inimitable stubborn way that had given him the sobriquet of “the Doubter” he said, “Unless I see the nail marks in his hands, put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.”

A week later, when the Feast of Unleavened Bread celebrations

had ended, the Apostles were about to leave for Galilee, and all were gathered in the same place at the same time, Thomas among them on this occasion, Jesus appeared to them once more.

“Peace be with you!” he greeted them again. Then, turning to Thomas, he held out his hands and, pointing to the nail-prints, said, “Put your finger here.” He pulled his robe aside and showed the wound in his side where the centurion’s spear had entered. “Reach your hand and put it into my side,” he said to the stunned Thomas.

Thomas shook his head, dumbly, tears in his eyes. Finally, dropping to his knees, he said, “My Lord and my God!” He did not understand it, but it was clear to him that the Jesus he had known was indeed divine.

Jesus put his hands on Thomas’s head. “Because you have seen me, you have believed,” he said gently. “Happy are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

#### Ten days later

The many Galilean disciples of Jesus left Jerusalem in small groups following the end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Jesus’ appearance to Thomas, so as not to draw the attention of the remorselessly persecuting religious leaders. The Apostles had an appointment with Jesus in Galilee, for reasons known only to him, and they had to wait later in Jerusalem for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, before they obeyed his great commission to evangelize the world with his message of the kingdom.

It took them several days to travel by circuitous byways the usual seventy-mile journey from Jerusalem to Galilee in order to evade the implacable Sanhedrin search parties. In Galilee their families and friends were waiting with many questions as to what had happened in Jerusalem. In addition to the few and scarce true reports from friends, there had been many false rumors spread by the professional religionists. When the Eleven Apostles said that they were waiting in Galilee for an appearance of Jesus, there was great excitement and anticipation. There were numerous reports of Jesus having been seen in different places and many others

who claimed to have spoken with him.

The difficulty for the Apostles was that Jesus had not specified time or place for his promised appearance to them. As the days passed the excitement diminished and the anticipation was difficult to sustain, especially as the many people who gathered around the homes of the Eleven Apostles waiting for a sight of Jesus badgered them for information. Also, there were rumors from Jerusalem that the body of Jesus had been found, then reports denying this, then further rumors that Jesus' body had been taken away by the Apostles and the authorities were searching for them.

"I'm going out to fish," Peter said one day to some of the Apostles. James and John were there, with Thomas, Nathaniel, Matthew and Andrew. "We'll go with you," they said. It was the first time they would go out fishing since the day Jesus called them to leave all and follow him to be "fishers of men." Each of them was uneasily aware of this, and of the danger of slipping back from a vision, but the continuing uncertainty and pressure from the endless questioning was unbearable.

It was not a satisfactory experience. They fished all night and caught nothing. The Lake of Galilee, usually so full of fish—bream, perch, carp and eels—produced nothing at all. They used the seine nets, and the drag nets; they beat pieces of wood together; they used lights and different baits; every trick they had learned from their long experience of fishing was unsuccessful. They remembered guiltily the words of Jesus: "Without me, you can do nothing."

They returned, just as dawn was breaking, without fish and dispirited. As they approached the shore they saw a shadowy figure watching them. "Friends," he shouted, "have you any fish?"

Thinking he was someone wanting to buy from them, they replied discouragingly, "No."

"Throw your net on the right side of the boat," the man called out to them, "and you will find some."

The Apostles looked at the figure silhouetted on the shore, and then gazed at each other. Was this some expert fisherman who had emerged since they had left the Lake to work with Jesus? Did he know something they didn't know? Was it some mocker or an

enemy trap? They shrugged apathetically. what alternative had they? They cast their nets on the right side of the boat—and, suddenly, the Lake was alive with fish of all kinds. They cast and hauled, cast and hauled, until the boat could hold no more.

“It must be the Lord,” John gasped to Peter, as the heavily laden boat swung into the shore to unload.

Peter, impulsive as usual and with his mind filled with a confused mixture of fear, guilt and joyous anticipation, without a word gathered up his robe and plunged into the water to go to meet the stranger. When the others arrived they found that it was indeed Jesus and that he had kindled a fire in preparation for a meal with them.

“Bring some of the fish you have just caught,” he told them quietly, “and come and eat.”

As the day lightened Jesus talked with them, and the Apostles found their earlier doubts regarding the resurrected person of Jesus disappearing in the normality of eating and talking together. In Jerusalem he had also eaten roast fish and honeycomb with them, but the setting and circumstances there had been unreal with his sudden appearing among them through a locked door. Here, on their own Lake-shore, with their boat and fish and environment all familiar, having Jesus sitting beside them talking and eating with them as he had done in the past, they believed that he was definitely their Lord, their Messiah.

“Simon,” Jesus said eventually, looking thoughtfully at Peter, “son of John, do you truly love me more than these?”

Peter knew from the gentle formality that he was being faced with a personal crisis—just as he had been when Jesus had first called him “Peter” —a boundary that he was to cross, never to return. He swallowed miserably as he remembered how, in his arrogant self-confidence he had boasted that though everyone else betrayed Jesus he never would. Had he learned his lesson? Jesus was asking. He was not just asking about his love being greater than fishing, or the greater than the other Apostles.

Without any of his former self-confidence, and avoiding all comparison with others, Peter chose deliberately a different word for “love” than the word used by Jesus. “Yes, Lord,” he replied

humbly, "you know that I am your friend." He would not use the word which Jesus had used with reference to the pure love of God.

"Then feed my lambs," said Jesus, encouraging him with a personal commission. No more fishing, Jesus was saying to him: "No more thoughtless gestures. Pick up your cross, remember my words and your commission, and feed the many immature and unprotected who will depend on you!"

Jesus was not finished with him, addressing him again. "Simon," he said, "do you truly love me?" This time there were no comparisons, Peter noted, but a repeated emphasis on love once again. "Yes, Lord," he replied doggedly, "you know that I am your friend." He would not use the word used by Jesus, because such love as Jesus had shown in his sacrificial life and death was beyond him.

"Then take care of my sheep," said Jesus. Again Peter noted the shift of word and emphasis. The commission from Jesus was being extended beyond simply feeding the young and immature to the providing for the ones that Jesus said he himself had come to care for as "*the Good Shepherd of the sheep*." He, Peter, was to provide for those who hungered for the presence and words of Jesus in his absence. A third time Jesus addressed Peter directly. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

Peter felt aggrieved that he had to be asked a third time, but then, suddenly, his mind flooded with a great light as words and sayings and parables of Jesus poured across his mind, informing him of their responsibilities when Jesus was gone. Above all he remembered Jesus' words: "*If you love me, keep my commandments*", and also the responsibility to use "*the keys of the kingdom*" when Jesus had gone. "Lord," Peter said feelingly, "you know all things; you know and understand the kind of friend I am." If the kind of love that Jesus had was beyond him, at least he could promise a new loyalty born out of his recent experience of betrayal.

Jesus smiled approvingly. "Then feed my sheep. When you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go". Peter understood this to mean that he would be called on to die for his

faith, like his master, and he was content. "Follow *me*," Jesus concluded, and Peter inwardly made a vow to himself that from now on he would do that until the day he, too, died. Peter understood that he had just been given the greatest commission of all: to supply the needs of the followers of Jesus the Messiah everywhere. The responsibility of opening up the kingdom of God was now his.

Jesus stood up, and the others stood with him. Peter, conscious of the great responsibility he had been given, and that Jesus was about to leave them, asked him tentatively about John, his friend and Jesus' constant companion. "Lord, what about him?" John was the nearest relative of Jesus and the Apostle closes to him.

But Jesus had given them their last command. Now all he said to Peter brusquely was, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? *You must follow me.*"

Before Jesus left them he told them of another meeting he would hold with them shortly. They were to get the Eleven Apostles together, and proceed to the place in the foothills of Mount Hermon where he had gone with them for prayer occasionally in the past. He told them to invite as many of the other known disciples as were interested, and he would address them.

At the appointed time there were five hundred people gathered together on the slopes of the mountain to meet with Jesus. There he gave them their great commission to fulfill God's eternal purpose for His chosen people so often betrayed in the past - "*to enlighten all nations of the world.*" He was leaving them shortly, and they would see him no more, but the gospel he had given to them they were to communicate to all men everywhere. He concluded: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And be assured that I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."

When he had said farewell to the gathering he drew the Eleven Apostles to one side and told them to return to Jerusalem immediately, so that they would be there for the Feast of "Weeks", or "Pentecost", occurring fifty days after the Feast of Passover, to

celebrate the dedication of the first-fruits of the corn harvest, the last crop to ripen. It was also known as the "Feast of Harvest" to celebrate God's blessings of seed-time and harvest, of sun and rain. He would meet with them there. And there they would receive the promised empowerment of the Holy Spirit for their great worldwide task of "bringing in the sheaves", beginning at Jerusalem, then spreading into Judea and Samaria, and on into the furthest parts of the earth.

In Jerusalem, before meeting with the Eleven Apostles, Jesus appeared to his step-brother, James. James had never agreed with the Messianic ministry of Jesus, being a strict Mosaic traditionalist, a devout Jew, observing every detail of the *Law*, who was held in great esteem by all Jews in Jerusalem. It was because of the sincerity of his life that Jesus chose to appear to him after his resurrection, alone of all his earthly family.

Then Jesus met with the Eleven Apostles and followers for the last time. They were gathered as usual in Mary of Jerusalem's upper room, but, unlike the previous occasion, when they were petrified with fear, now they were discussing excitedly their plans for the future. He joined them in their meal, and then addressed them regarding the message they were to preach: "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the *Law* of Moses, the *Prophets* and the *Psalms*. This is what they say: the Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses that these things have happened as written. I am now going to send you the Holy Spirit my Father has promised; but you must stay in the city until you have been clothed with this power from on high. John has baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

When he had finished talking with them Jesus did not disappear as he had on the previous occasion. Instead he signaled for them to come with him, and he led them and some other followers through the streets of Jerusalem on the familiar way to Bethany. They walked openly, returning the startled greetings of those who knew them and

Jesus, but never stopping to talk with anyone. They crossed over the Kidron Valley, past the fateful Garden of Gethsemane, to the spot where they had so often stopped for a last look over the city of Jerusalem, on the ridge where the path dropped down to Bethany. Here Jesus stopped once more, and looked at the city he loved. Then, turning, he embraced each Apostle and follower.

They knew this was the last they would see him. "Lord," one of them said, "Are you in the immediate future going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

Jesus shook his head. "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

With those words Jesus lifted his hands and blessed them, and as they watched, he disappeared from their sight into a cloud drifting above them. As they were still gazing skyward speculatively two angels appeared and announced to them:

*"Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven".*

They returned to Jerusalem, rejoicing, making for the Temple to begin their task of bringing the Messiah's message of eternal salvation to the world.

**ends**

## EPILOGUE

*“The relationship in which he (Jesus) stood to the new Israel was defined in the early church by assigning to him the traditional titles, ‘Messiah’, the ‘Anointed’. For Greek-speaking people this was literally translated as ‘Christos’, Christ; but even so it was not generally understood, and it was soon taken to be simply a proper name. But in the gospels generally the term is fully alive in something like its original sense, and we shall do well to retain the word as a reminder that ‘Christ’, or ‘Messiah’, is here neither a personal name nor a theological term, but an index to an historical role. John, in bringing his gospel to a close, says it is written to support the belief that ‘Jesus is the Messiah’ . . .*

*“As we have seen, the office of Messiah was conceived in various ways, but always it was bound up in the special calling and destiny of Israel as the people of God. From the gospels we gather that Jesus set himself to constitute the new Israel under his own leadership . . . That was his mission . . .”*

*The Founder of Christianity, by Dr C.H.Dodd*

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*An exciting new book from George Patterson will be available on this site  
from the 1st of June 2010*