

In My Own Words

[A QUICK NOTE TO MY READERS: Please understand that this is an UNFINISHED manuscript. While I apologize that the spelling errors & such have not been corrected, I wanted to post it immediately.]

Like clockwork, the rains came again this morning. They come every morning for two hours just before daybreak. Myself, I wake at sunrise and get a jump on the day. I love my morning walks. This morning was no different. Walking up the path to the auditorium, I could see the sunshine reflecting off the water droplets on the luscious, soft green grass. The number of deer that gather to eat the grass suggests to me that it must taste as good as it looks. I doubt that I'll ever have a taste, but the sight of the roaming herds enjoying their breakfast as the early morning sunshine dance across their backs is truly picturesque.

From my home to the lecture hall it can't be further than about a mile, but because I always stop to pet the deer and literally smell the roses along path, it commonly takes me at least twenty minutes to make the trip. And to be honest, I'm in no hurry to get to the auditorium. I'll get to there when I get there.

From a distance I suppose the auditorium looks like any other building ever built on Earth. However, coming close to its outer structure one begins to gain an appreciation for the amount of work that has gone into creating this masterpiece. This building is not coated in gold or decorated with sapphires. It is composed of only simple materials: oak, cedar, cherry, mud, clay, granite, et cetera. But it is the workmanship not the materials that is so striking to the onlooker. Every angle is a perfect ninety degrees. Every wall is perfectly vertical and flat. Every window crystal clear and clean.

I never enter the auditorium through the front doors because there is always a line out front. I don't wait in lines. Consequently, I enter from the side door. I always have and I always will. Monday through Friday, I arrive at precisely 9 o'clock in the morning and walk down the short corridor leading to the stage.

Entering the main hall, one can see that the inside of the building is just like any other modern structure. What goes virtually unnoticed is the fact that the seats, the carpets, the stage are all made from 100% biodegradable, natural materials. Seating 5000 people, the entire amphitheater conducts sound naturally without the need for microphones or speaker systems. I am sad to say that I rarely have the opportunity to savor the inner beauty of the amphitheater because it is pretty well packed to capacity by about a half hour before I arrive. Luckily, my place is always reserved since I am the keynote speaker at this venue.

My lecture is the same every day. I have been doing this for so long that I have the entire six-hour seminar memorized word for word. While my introduction sometimes varies, I rarely veer from my standard structure except when answering questions. But even then, my responses are pretty well patented. I have heard all the same questions over and over and over again. And though it is not always possible, I do my best to answer the large majority of questions before they are even asked. Today was no different.

This morning when I stepped onto the center of the stage, there was no clapping or cheering. As per usual, my audience was informed that I prefer silence so that we can right down to business. Putting my bag on the floor next to the podium, I promptly opened my mouth and began to speak in a rather monotone voice.

"Good morning to all of you newcomers, and welcome. This is lecture number four in your syllabus. You should only be in this class if you have already taken *Einstein's Revised Principles of the Universe* and *Modern Socratic Principles 101* and *102*." As is the common trend, at this point a few hands in the crowd shot up into the air. But I already knew the jist of what they were going to ask so I continued unfazed. "I understand that most of you are not here by choice, but that is neither here nor there as far as I am concerned. This is just the way our system is set up here: I will impart certain knowledge to you word by word. I wish that I could magically impart to you all that I know. I wish that I could simply wave a magic wand and you would suddenly know everything that I know. However, as you have probably alright figured out, that is not the way that this works." And with that, the raised hands went down.

My voice began to pick up a bit of pace, but somehow remained monotone, "Learning here at this institution is no different than any other place. We learn through interaction with those who have experienced these things before us. And that is exactly why I teach this class. I began teaching this class a long time ago because everyone always has the same questions about me and for me. As luck

would have it, I know many things about my own life that you have previously had no way of knowing. When attempting to understand the significance of my life, it is crucial that you understand what was factual and what was fictional. What I say is likely to shock and annoy many of you. However, my words are fact so you really have no choice but to accept them." I paused to have a brief but refreshing sip of water.

Clearing my throat, I said, "Of course I don't expect you to blindly believe what I am saying to you. You have free will and free minds. I expect you will naturally question everything that I am about to tell you. You are not sheep and neither should you be. You are welcome to investigate the validity of what I say. At one point or another in the future you will most likely come in contact with many of the people of whom I will be speaking. Both they and I encourage your questions. Knowing that the bulk of today's lecture material is challenging to the newcomer, I have done my very best to support my explanation by including and listing references throughout the material I will be discussing today. For this reason, class notes including hundreds of footnotes have been provided and as you can see are currently being passed out by my teaching assistants. I encourage you to carefully analyze each footnote in detail."

As I do at the beginning of every lecture, I asked, "Where would you like me to begin?"

No one is ever willing to put his or her hand up initially. It always takes a little prodding.

"Come on now people," I said. "Where shall I begin?"

Typically, this will inspire ten or twenty hands to go up in the crowd. Today was different. Only one person in the entire crowd raised his hand. He was a tall, slender man of about forty-five. I called on him and he stood up. To my surprise he asked, "Teacher ... or uh, Professor, what was your childhood like?"

I chuckled. "Now that is a question that I have not heard in many, many years," I responded. "You can be seated." Gripping the podium firmly with each hand, I leaned forward over it a bit, using it to take my weight and began to tell the story of my life. And here is what I relayed to them ...

I guess you could say that my father and I never had a particularly good relationship. It's not that he was a bad guy or anything. He was just, well, he was an older parent. I was born about 3 weeks before his thirty-eighth birthday. And by the standards of our day that was not the norm.

My mother on the other hand was only fourteen years old when I was born. I know that this probably seems very strange to all of you, but things were quite different in the day and age in which I was raised. Back then people were of the opinion that when a woman began to menstruate, according to the laws of nature, she was of childbearing age. I am not condoning such acts for modern society. Over the course of human existence on Earth, social changes have led to altered view about what is considered right and wrong. Morality is shaped in such ways.

My mother, Mary, was the second wife of my father. His first wife was a Samaritan woman named Judith. She and my father had been married for 22 years, ever since they were both thirteen years old. My father never talked about her much, only to say that he had been madly in love with her since the day they first met. And though she had been unable to conceive a child in her belly for over two decades, my father loved her and her alone. For this, his family and the community at large criticized my father heavily. You must understand, my father was a direct descendent of a royal lineage. Actually, my father was the last direct Jewish descendent of King David. By choosing to love a non-Jewish woman who was incapable of providing him a child, my father had effectively chosen to let the line of David die out.

However, by some miracle, after many years of being barren Judith's womb was finally opened. It was at the ripe old age of thirty-six that she finally fell pregnant. But the Lord our God had other plans for my father's line. Sadly, Judith and the son she was to bear both died during childbirth, thus leaving my father without an heir.

Roughly eighteen months after this tragic event, my father met my mother. She became pregnant and soon thereafter I was born. My birth was of great significance to my father, to his lineage, and to our community at large. Just as my father before me and his father before him, I was born into a royal family.

As kings are, I was provided with an education. At the age of eight, I was sent away to Jerusalem for one six-month semester to study with some of the great Rabbis of our day, including Hillel and Shammai. These men were friends of my father and unlike most of their peers, both men were progressive in their views. Along with general religious studies, the Rabbis taught me to read and write. Such things were extremely uncommon in the first century AD, even for men. The single most profound thing that I learned

in my studies under Hillel is that we overcomplicate our praise of God.

I once said to Hillel, "Rabbi, I feel that I am learning very well, but the Torah contains 613 tedious laws that I find quite difficult to remember. Do you have a system for memorizing all of them?"

Hillel replied, "There is always a system. But wouldn't you prefer that I summarize Mosaic Law into one simple rule?"

I was a bit shocked at the suggestion that such a thing was possible. "Can you do that? How does one summarize a whole book into one thought?"

He smiled and said, "That which is hateful or harmful to yourself, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn."

After my short stint in Jerusalem, I returned home feeling like I had received an education fit for a king. However, I was quickly faced with the realization that I would never become the King of Jews, for my father had no kingdom. My father had never claimed his rightful throne as the Earthly king of God's Chosen people. Instead, he owned a small construction business, as he was a stonemason by trade. Being that he was a small business owner, we were quite well off ...

"Wait, wait, wait!" a woman shouted from the back of the auditorium, "Jesus, the Bible says that you were a carpenter. The Bible says that both you and Joseph were carpenters."

Leaving the podium and walking up to the front of the stage, I addressed her concern. "As I said before, many of the things I will tell you are going to shock you. However, I assure you that I was a stonemason, not a carpenter. Anyone who has ever visited Israel knows that it has plenty of rocks, but not so many trees. The idea that I was a carpenter is due to a mistranslation in the text. From a young age, my father taught me the art of stonemasonry."

"Your father?" she blurted out. "Why do you keep calling Joseph your father? Jesus, aren't you the Son of God Almighty?"

"Woman, I understand your discontent," I told her. Turning then to my entire audience, I said, "I know that many of you are also distressed. We see this with almost every group of newcomers who arrives here. Some four days ago each one of you died and left your Earthly lives only to find that Heaven is not what you expected it would be, and that I am not who you expected me to be. On Earth, many of you were told that I am God. Upon arriving in this place, you came to understand that things are not exactly as you were taught. And as you have already learned during your first three lectures, while we can now say with certainty that God does exist, He was not here to greet you when you arrived. I know it is troubling that instead of skipping through the daisies and floating from place to place, you arrive here to find that your introduction to Heaven is more like attending university than you ever could have imagined. I cannot apologize for the way things are. This just is the way it is. We are all captives in this place, even me. But take heart, while we cannot know all that there is to know, each of you now has the luxury of 100% memory and 100% recall of everything that you will learn here. With this luxury at hand, I promise you that you will quickly be able to make sense of your life on Earth, your existence here, and the true essence of our Creator."

The woman threw herself back down into her chair and folded her arms across her chest. She was silent though obviously not impressed with my diatribe. With that behind us, I continued my lecture:

"Now as I was saying, I was a stonemason as was my father before me. However, from a young age I had felt that I was destined for something more. I mean for goodness sake, I was born into the line of King David! My father had been born into that same line and yet he threw away ..." Having become a bit overly excited, I stopped speaking, calmed myself and return to my podium, standing behind it once again.

"Sorry about that," I said apologetically, "I would never dishonor the memory of my father Joseph, but in retrospect, I must make an admission: When I was growing up, quietly I had always considered my father weak for not standing up to the Roman infidels. They were living in our land, feeding on our crops, raping our women, and we had done virtually nothing to eradicate them from our midst. As the rightful leader of the Jews, it was supposed to be my father's duty before our God, Yahweh, to drive out all foreign invaders."

When I was twelve and a half years old, I remember confronting my father on these issues.

"Father," I inquired, "as our king, why have you not yet rallied the people and crushed the Romans? Why do you choose the toil of cutting stones over the glory of kingship?"

He replied, "My son, you are young and brave, but we live in a place and time when it is illegal for any man to claim kingship. The Romans insist that there was only one king, Caesar. And Caesar does not tolerate competition. Anyone claiming to be a king is viewed as a direct threat to Caesar's supremacy

and quickly executed."

"But father," I insisted, "Is it not written that we Jews, being God's Chosen people, are supposed to be the rulers of all the nations of the world?"

He replied, "Yes, it is written. And someday God's people will indeed rule, but I fear that that time is not soon coming. In this day, the Roman Empire cannot be challenged by our tiny nation."

"Tiny nation?" I inquired. "Every man and woman among us knows that when Yahweh stands with our soldiers, no pagan army can defeat us."

He laughed at my innocence. "Son, you have to understand that the number of trained soldiers in the standing Roman army is greater than the entire Jewish population of Israel," he informed me. "If Jewish women and children and stonemasons were to attempt to wage war against the Roman empire, not even by the grace of Yahweh would we stand a chance ..." My father stopped for a moment while he contemplated what appeared to be a mind-numbing thought. He smiled broadly, saying, "Jesus, in these times it is better that we suffer in silence. Yahweh is indeed with us, but He asks of us that we be patient until our time comes."

"You talk like one of the Pharisees!" I exclaimed. The Pharisees were the Jewish priestly class.

Reprimanding me, my father said, "Your tone is unacceptable, boy. I allow you to speak freely because you are nearly a man ... nearly."

"Forgive me, father," I replied. "But what you are saying is very similar to what the Pharisees say."

"And is that a bad thing?" he asked.

"I think so," I said. "The Pharisees ask us to keep our heads down and let ourselves be ruled by dogs. It is disgraceful to ask the people of God to do such a thing."

My father answered, "Some people may say that it is disgraceful. I say that it is smart to avoid harm. For the last 600 years, with every empire that has conquered this region, Judaism has continued to survive. And do you know why? I'll tell you why: Our people and our way of life have survived because we have stayed true to what works. And what works, you may ask? What works is to stay obedient just as the Pharisees have instructed us to do."

"Father, while I do respect many of the Pharisees, I cannot understand why in the world we should follow Mosaic Law," I expressed.

"Do you not see that following the Laws of Moses make our lives good?" inquired my father.

"Of course I can see that following Mosaic Law makes our lives on Earth better. But what no one has been able to explain is *exactly how* following Mosaic Law pleases God and put us in His good graces? By what means does this occur?"

My father replied, "How does laying with a woman bring forth a child? No one knows. It is a mystery. This is why we call it a miracle. And yet, we do know that it works." Continuing, he said, "Exactly how does following the Law please God? No one knows. It is a mystery and a miracle to all of us, but we do know that it works."

"I love you father and I love God, but am not sure that I can following blindly without knowing why I follow," I answered. "It seems to me that we have all become listless sheep who blindly follow the 613 Mosaic Laws of the Torah without having the sense to question their validity, or lack thereof."

"Like I said before, you are nearly a man and you are entitled to think freely, but know this: The system set forth by the Pharisees works," stated my father. "It has stood the test of time. It kept our faith from being diluted by or absorbed by the pagan mythology of the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Macedonians, and now the Romans. I tell you truly, it is Pharisaic Judaism alone that has maintained the existence of our people."

Depressed with what I was hearing, I asked, "Can we not hope for something greater than merely subsisting as a vassal to larger empires?"

"At this time in our history, I don't believe that we can," was his sobering answer.

This dialog stuck in my mind for many years afterward. I remember, for the first time in my life, saying to myself, "This situation is not good enough for me. I will not accept this fate for myself or for my people". And though I disagreed with my father's opinion on this matter, it was such conversations that stirred useful discontent in my soul. Discontent is a wonderful thing to gain inspiration from. Unfortunately, this was one of the very few significant conversations that I shared with my father before his death. He was laid to rest shortly before I reach manhood at age thirteen. It was at this point that, in a state of mourning and confusion, I disappeared from the pages of biblical history for the next 17 years.

Following my father's passing, I left home. I was looking for answers. Consequently, I decided to join my cousin John at a place called Qumran. The compound at Qumran was located about 12 miles

east of Jerusalem. Qumran was a settlement run by the Essenes, who are well known for having recorded the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Essenes were one of the three main religious factions of Judaism, the other two being the Pharisees and the Sadducees. However, the Essenes were known for expressing a rigid belief system which opposed many of the views set forth by the other primary religious factions. This is exactly why I went to Qumran.

I joined the ranks of the Essenes in hopes of learning something radically different than could be learned anywhere else in Israel. I wanted to learn these things so that I might share them with others. During my two-year stay in Qumran, I excelled at mastering all that the Essenes had to teach and became heavily involved in their way of life. But I quickly disappointed with the realization that the Essenes weren't all that different from the Pharisees. While the Pharisees preached that men should follow Mosaic Law so that God would stand with us while we suffer in silence, the Essenes taught that men should follow Mosaic Law so that God would stand with us while prepare for the end of the world. I could not see the logic of either view point.

"How is it," I asked many of the Essenes, "that following these Mosaic Laws will impress the Lord? How is it exactly that following these Laws is supposed to prepare our land and the minds of the Jewish people for the end of times?" No one could provide me with an semblence of a sensible answer.

So when my patience for their ways had grown thin, I left there one morning with their book of God tucked underneath my arm. The sun was bright and the breeze was cool. I went off into the desert to seek God and ask Him some questions that I needed answers to. On the third day that I was alone in the desert, I yelled out, "Is the thinking man not above Laws made for fools? Why is it written that man should not wear clothing made from a mixture of cotton and wool? And why should I praise You any less on a Tuesday than on the Sabbath? Is there not a better way to please You, King of kings?" And then I waited.

In time, I heard a reply though I could not say where it had come from. A voice spoke to me saying, "Jesus, the Scriptures have been written by the lying hands of men. The Scriptures are dead words, written by dead prophets, and given to a dying people. No man can draw close to his God by following a list of regulations sketched on papyrus. Trust only the writing on your own heart. Be merciful to your neighbor and to yourself ... always to yourself. Be conscious of your God wherever and whenever you see Him. Do this not to please Me, but to make your world a better place. For you are right, I am not the kind who *needs* your praise each Sabbath day, or any day for that matter."

So I went back and told the head Essene Rabbi and to anyone who'd hear, "I have to leave. Please keep me in your prayers. I regret that I don't believe you. You've got the whole damn thing all wrong. God's not the kind you have to bow down to each Sabbath day. Well, you can look down on me in disgust and call me a great fool, but I attest now that your dogma is all wrong: Somehow you dare to tell me that we Jew are better than other nations because of what we believe. And now you will say that I am lesser than you because I do not believe what you do. Well, in your pomp and all your glory, you're a poorer man than me. Your love of God is borne out of fear. That's not love. And it's something that I will not embrace. I will not believe you. You've got the whole damn thing all wrong. He's not the kind who needs our sacrifices each Sabbath day."

With that I was off, and I think that they were glad to see me go. Needless to say, the entire Essene community including my cousin John was convinced that I had been possessed by a demon while out in the desert. They assumed that I had gone mad. And yes, I had become a *mad* man, but not crazy, just angry. Angry about being fed garbage and kept in the dark.

After two years of being in Qumran, I departed for greener pastures. In search of Truth, I traveled abroad. I essentially became a nomad. My home was wherever I lay my head at night. I followed the Silk Route as far it would take me and traveled extensively throughout the Far East, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, and India. Such travels are not free of monetary expenses. Consequently, from place to place I found employment cutting stones and assisting in the construction of buildings. I was no longer a king, but merely a migrant worker in many distant lands. The fact that I spent many years in the Far East is well documented and the archeological proof concerning this has been the subject of many of your modern books on Earth. Having been to the corners of the known world, I gathered much wisdom. The most important lessons that I learned, I learned while living in India. There I studied under a guru named Adi Shankaracharya. During the eighteen months that I studied under Guru Shankaracharya, many times we discussed Mosaic Law, the Pharisees, the Essenes, and even the Roman occupation of my homeland. To Guru Shankaracharya I had expressed a willingness to overthrow Roman rule in Israel through violent means and mayhem. Being a man of peace and great

wisdom, the guru was able to enlighten me. He taught me that the thoughts and ideals cherished by men could be mightier than the sword.

"If you want to be a hero in your homeland, you will never be able to challenge Rome by way of physical force," he told me. "The only way that you will be able to usurp the power that Rome has over your people is by providing your people with something worth living for and believing in. The man who can mobilize public opinion is the one who holds all the power in his hand. You must start a revolution, but not a violent revolution, rather an ideological revolution."

"But what ideas can I give my people to believe in that are more powerful than the Roman armies?" I inquired expecting to hear a definitive answer.

"My son, that is not a question for me to answer," he replied. "This is your quest. And your destiny."

"When will I be ready for this journey?" I inquired.

He responded, "Jesus, a man can only avoid his lot in life for so long. Time is off the essence. You must leave as the sun rises tomorrow."

I had always known that at some point, I would return to the land that I loved and to my people. For above all else, I was born to be the King of the Jews. I just didn't know if I had what it would take to fulfill my destiny.

The Prodigal Son

When I was a man of thirty years, I returned to Roman-occupied Israel. After having visited my mother and siblings, the next person I looked to find was my cousin, John. I was desperate to tell him of everything that I had learned. He and I had shared many philosophical and theological opinions both before and during our time with the Essenes. He was the one person I was sure that would be open-minded and willing to listen to what I had to say. John was a easy person to trust because he was, well, a bit of what you might call a hippie.

John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. One could say that we were both kind of extremists in our day, but I would suggest that John was far more eccentric than I.

When I first located him, he was wondering around the desert in which he lived. As I approached from a distance, I saw him, but he did not see me. Thinking quickly, I hid behind a large pile of rocks. I removed my shoes, stripped the clothes off of my upper body, leaving my lower body covered. Then I rolled around in the sand and messed up my hair. Emerging from my hiding spot, I ran towards John yelling out, "Messiah, Messiah, heal me for my body and mind are plagued." I said and did these things not to be funny, but to determine what kind of a healer and what kind of a man John had become in my absence.

John spun around in shock. Not recognizing me due to my fifteen-year absence and now full beard, he exclaimed, "What are you doing man? Calm yourself for a moment." Incidentally noticing my partial nakedness he asked, "Dear God man, where are your clothes and shoes?"

I answered, "They stole them and now I stand here, my feet burning in the hot sand."

"Who stole your things?" he questioned.

"The Nephilim, the sky walkers from another world," I replied.

"Really?" he said sarcastically.

"Yes," I assured him. "It was the people that Moses spoke of, the people who travel on the stars."

Abruptly changing the course of the conversation, John asked, "What is your name?"

"I am Rachel, a humble woman from Canaan," I told him.

"A what? A woman?" he asked dumbfounded. "But you have a full beard. And the little clothing that you have on suggests to me that you are a Jew, not a Canaanite."

"Messiah, can you heal me?" I inquired. "I have demons," I said as I began to twitch mildly at the neck and right shoulder.

John answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

"Then you will not heal me just because I am Gentile?" I asked.

Avoiding the implications of that question John replied, "I can heal no one. Only Yahweh's spirit can heal a man ... or woman. The spirit of the Lord resides within each and every man. If you have faith that you can be healed, then it will be so."

"Faith in who?" I asked.

"What?" John replied.

"Faith in who?" I asked again. "Who do I need to have faith in order to be healed? Do I have to have faith in you or in God?"

"Faith in me? No. And neither is it necessary to have faith in God?" John retorted. "Why would you ask such things? No man need have faith in things that obviously exist before our very eyes! Don't you know that the Lord God exists whether or not a man believes it so? Look around you man, can you not see His majesty in the mountains, His wisdom in the plants, His likeness in the water, His love in your own heart?"

I began to speak, "I ..." but John put up his hand to stop me.

"When I say have faith, I mean merely that," John said. "Have faith that amazing things are possible. Have faith that healing is possible. It is by believing that you empower the God within you to accomplish things that are otherwise inconceivable."

"You are so wise, Teacher," I said in apparent admiration. "I am but a simple woman who can hardly resist your charm. May I kiss you deeply with my tongue?" I asked as I moved in closer to John.

John outstretched both of his arms to stave me away, "No. What ... ? No!" he said quickly and with a look of confusion upon his face.

I couldn't take it anymore. I absolutely bust out laughing. "You should have seen the look on your face ..." I said before John interjected.

"Is this a joke?" John exclaimed angrily. "Do you think that my work here is ..."

I then interrupted him, "What kind of a friend are you that you do not even recognize your own cousin?"

"My cousin?" he asked as his jaw dropped a bit with the realization of who I might be. "Jesus?"

"That I am, John," I replied.

"I can't believe this!" John said joyfully and threw his arms around me not remembering that I was half naked. "I didn't even recognize you. You've been gone so long, I thought you ... well, we all thought you were ..." he said without finishing his sentence.

"You all thought *what*?" I asked.

"Well, we all thought that you were dead or something," he informed me. "Are you really still possessed by the demon that found you in the desert near Qumran?"

"I'm not dead and I'm not possessed. However, I have much to tell you," I said to him. "But first let me grab my clothes."

After quickly getting dressed, I returned to John. We sat for hours speaking of old times and of what the future might become.

As we conversed, I inquired, "In the short time that I have been back, I've have heard that you are greatly loved by the people and yet greatly despised by the chief priests and Pharisees. Why are they so displeased by you?"

"I have been preaching all over Galilee and even into other parts of Roman-occupied Israel," John began. "As you know, the Pharisees and priests wish to maintain the status quo, both theologically and politically. They honestly believe that by doing so, it will maintain peace in our land. But they fail to recognize that the end of the world is at hand!"

"Ah, the end of the world. I am quite aware that this is what we learned from the Essenes, but do you honestly think the end of times is near?" I asked skeptically.

John informed me, "Just as the prophets of the past said, 'When the end of times are near, you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Nations will rise against nations. There will be starvation and natural disasters all around you.' You see Jesus, we are living in that time! But while the pagans will perish, the world of the Jews will not come to an end. For Yahweh will make a kingdom on Earth for His Chosen people, if we are willing to receive Him. It is our duty to prevent the end from coming upon our people. We must make amens with Yahweh so that He will have mercy on our souls. It is a time for change!"

"Is this what you've been telling our people?" I asked. "And this is why the Pharisees hate you?"

"No. Not exactly," John replied.

"Honestly, I am so confused right now," I admitted. "Precisely what have you been telling the people?" I asked.

He replied, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!"

"Repent, you say?" I asked. "That is interesting, I suppose. But will asking God for forgiveness prepare our people for the God's kingdom on Earth?"

John noted, "I am not talking about asking for forgiveness. I am talking about repentance. There is a major difference. Repentance is more than words. It is a radical shift in one's actions and the way that one serves God."

"So then, you are implying that our current way of serving and worshipping God is insufficient," I said knowing that it would get John all riled up.

"Completely insufficient," he piped up. "We must teach the people to repent for falling away from God and repent for choosing not to pursue our destiny as God's Chosen people," he explained.

I asked, "That is exactly what the Pharisees themselves teach, isn't it?"

"No!" he exclaimed. "The Pharisees are not inspiring men to seek Yahweh or fulfill our destiny. They are teaching men to be the willing slaves of the Romans! Judaism has degenerated into nothing more than a mindless cult that placates the masses."

I laughed, "Now you're really starting to sound like me."

"Now I mean no disrespect, but my approach is a little different to yours," he criticized kindly. With a little smile he said, "Instead of running off into the desert like a crazy person, I have been actively bringing men back to God."

I knew that John was being humorous and it was funny, but still I responded in my own defense, "Come now, John. You know that was a hard time for me. I was searching."

"And did you find what you were searching for after all that time in the Far East?" he asked.

"Yes. I believe that I have," I affirmed.

"So then, what did you learn?" John inquired.

"Ideas are more powerful than a show of arms," I replied confidently.

John's jaw dropped open slightly. "You're serious?" he said.

"Yes, I'm serious," I replied.

"Fifteen years of travelling and studying, and that's all you learned?" John remarked rather derogatorially.

I replied, "What? What's wrong with that? I'd say it's a revolutionary idea."

"Jesus, I love you, but you have grown naive. Maybe it is because you have been gone from this place for so very long," he said. "Ever since we were young, you were always a dreamer, but you must understand, times are tougher now. You cannot reason with the either Pharisees or the infidels. They are both utterly unreasonable. The Pharisees conspire against every man who challenges their dogma and the Romans insist that we Jews bow before them as though they were gods!"

Irritated by John's pessimism, I blurted out, "How can you say ideas are not more powerful than swords and spears? By asking people to repent, aren't you simply asking them to change their ideas and consequently change their actions?"

"Cousin, you have me all wrong. That is not what I am teaching," John retorted. "Our people have sinned by turning away from Yahweh. It is true that many of our people follow Mosaic Law, but they have been unwilling to stand up and say, 'I love Yahweh and I will fight for Him!' I am going to change all that. Everyday, I convince more and more men to repent by preparing to take up their swords for Him."

"Take up their swords for Him?" I gasped. "I don't like where this is going."

John challenged me saying, "We have a duty to inspire those who have become poor in spirit to abandon Pharisic Judaism, return to Yahweh, draw their swords, and fight for Him. We must fight against injustice and tyranny!"

"I agree with you that something must be done," I began, "but you're talking about murdering Pharisees, John," I noted. "This is not right."

"Whose talking about killing Pharisees?" John asked. "Not me."

Relieved, I said, "Oh, thank goodness. I thought you were talking about beheading Pharisees one by one, or something."

"No, Jesus. I'm talking about beheading each and every Roman invader living in our lands," John told me.

I could not believe my ears. I was almost completely at a loss for words. The only words I could muster were, "This is trouble."

"Trouble? I'm don't mind getting into trouble for doing what I know is right in my heart of hearts," John said with conviction.

Gravely concerned, I tried to reason with John, "Don't you realize that by causing discontent among the people, the Roman authorities will see you as a threat to their rule in this land?"

John retorted, "That's exactly what I want. I am a threat! I want the Romans to see that we cannot

be pushed around. Understand this, it is their policies more than their theology that is destroying the world."

"Where is this coming from? Why are you talking about their policies?" I questioned. "We are Jews, man! We are supposed to hate the Romans because they are devil-worshipping, pagan dogs. We aren't supposed to hate them because of their politics."

"I'm serious," John replied, "the Roman empire is a festering disease, a plague. It consumes all the natural resources of the known world and delivers them to Rome alone. This consumption has made the Romans fat and lazy. They are gluttonous. The gluttony of Rome has left the rest of the world in strife. In the world outside of Rome, the rest of us are starving. The rest of us are hurting. Our lives are full of pain, struggle, and hunger. There is an imbalance in the world because of Rome. It is for this reason that the rest of world greatly desires the downfall of this Great Harlot. And we Zealots are the spark that will ignite the fire that will burn the Roman empire to ash!"

For those in the auditorium who are not yet aware, I will tell you that the Zealots were the ancient form of what today you might call a terrorist. They were an Essene faction of extreme radical Jewish nationalists who believed that by proclamation from God, the Jews were created for the purpose of ruling the world.

I was utterly shocked to hear that John was associating himself with such a group. Dumbfounded, I stuttered out, "Wait ... what? When did you become a Zealot?"

"About two years back one of the Essenes that we studied with in our younger days convinced me to consider ..." John answered until I interrupted.

Extending my arm and presenting my palm toward my cousin, I said, "Wait, wait, wait right there. Please tell me that you're not talking about Barabbas."

"Yes, Barabbas," John said in defensive manner. "What's wrong with Barabbas?"

Alarmed, I said, "He's nuts! He was crazy fifteen years ago and I'm sure still the same!"

"He not crazy. He's just eccentric," John said in an effort to defend his association with Barabbas. "Anyhow, he and I have spent endless hours talking about the God's plan for Israel and in the end, I found that we share many ideals in common."

Knowing that John had been spending time around Barabbas, the new found intensity of his frustration with the Roman empire did not surprise me. However, I could not understand how the Zealots intended to defeat the rulers of our world. Skeptical as I was, I asked him, "Do you believe that you are Judas Maccabee? I hope not, because even he would have no power here against Rome!"

"How dare you dishonor Judas' name! And how dare you dishonor God!" John exclaimed. "God blessed Judas Maccabee making him the light of this world. He was the greatest of all men since King David! Single-handedly, he drove Alexander the Great's generals out of Israel. I should be blessed if I were half the man he was."

"John, you living in the past," I remarked. "It has been 180 years since Maccabee fought the Macedonians. We live in a different world. The Roman empire has ten times the size, strength, and organization of Alexander's squabbling generals. Do you honestly think that a tiny, Essene fringe group in this distance corner of the world will destroy Rome?" At that moment, I realized just how much of my father's philosophy and emotionally baggage I had unwittingly taken on. John picked up on this.

"Come on, Jesus. I may as well be talking to your father," he observed.

"I'm not my father!" I exclaimed. "I just think that it is unreasonable to believe that the Roman empire can be so easily destroyed."

"Do you take me for a fool? We Zealots do not intend on destroying Rome ... all at once, or even within our lifetime. Though little by little, I assure you that we will get the job done. Various factions of our organization have already carried out a half-dozen riots in Syria, Phoenicia, and Edom in the last year. With each uprising that has taken place in a Roman territory, the Roman people are growing concerned," John noted. "They are beginning to ask themselves, 'Is it possible that our colonies might all rebel and free themselves?' Additionally, they are asking 'Could these attacks begin to happen in Rome itself?' Jesus, they are living in fear! They have started to wonder if traders and travelers coming into their city might be Zealots in disguise who intend to assassinate Caesar and burn Rome to the ground!"

"And so you believe that fear of the Zealots will somehow topple Rome?" I questioned.

"No ... not exactly," said John. "But because of fear, the people have already begun to demand that the Roman government interrogate every traveler at every check point. Even naturally born Roman citizens are being harassed. And now the Roman people are beginning to demand that Rome expand it's armies to seek out Zealots and other foreign radicals at home and abroad. Roman citizens are even

willing to give up many of their rights in order to suppress our voices. Astonishingly, the Roman people are actually happy to pay extra taxes to cover the cost of fighting what they fear. The Roman people don't seem to realize that the cost of fighting a war against fear takes money out of their pockets and food out of their mouths. I tell you Jesus, the economic stability of Rome will soon falter. And without economic stability, no empire can endure."

Quite skeptical of John's rambling, I said, "What you say seems hopeful, but unlikely."

"It's not *hopeful!*" exclaimed my cousin. "It's already happening! The Roman people are beginning to lose faith in their own government. And that, my friend will be the beginning of the end of those dogs!"

Entertaining this insanity, I commented, "While this is good in theory, how long can the Zealots carry on like this considering that every riot is suppressed and followers of the Zealot-movement are crushed by the hundreds?"

The intensely excited expression that John had been wearing for our entire conversation left his face. He became instantly solemn and filled with philosophical conviction, saying, "We have become accustomed to losing each and every individual battle, but we must keep chipping away at the Great Harlot. And without a doubt, we will endure because Yahweh demands it of us and supports our efforts. We will not stop until every Roman infidel is punished and the rest of the world is saved from their over consumption. Our people are meant to be the saviors of this world."

I told John, "I want to believe that these things are possible. I'm just not so sure that this is the right way."

"And have you got a better plan?" snapped the Baptizer.

"No, but ..." I said before being cut off.

Becoming hostile, John said, "I remember a time when you believed that God's Chosen people must rise up against Rome. Jesus, do you now believe that we should live as slaves? Have you become warped?"

"Warped? No. Look, when I was a child, at a lost for how we might better the lot of our people, I assumed that violence was the only way. When I was a child, I thought like a child. Now that I am a man, I think like a man." I paused. "John, you are thinking like a child."

"A child, am I? At least I have the courage to stand up for what I believe! Unlike some people, I'm no coward!" John exclaimed.

"Why do you call me a coward?" I asked defensively.

John replied, "Jesus, I'm not calling you a coward. I'm saying that any man who is not willing to stand up his principles is a coward." As he turned his back on me, under his breathe I heard him say, "You could hardly be a coward. You have no principles."

I ran around to the front of him. "What in the world is that supposed to mean?" I snapped.

He looked up at me with grimace on his face. "You abandoned us! You were supposed to be our king and yet you fled from your people when they needed you most!" he yelled. "Our people need a warrior-king and you are more like a eunich than a man!"

"What would you have me do?" I questioned pensively. "You are proposing that I commit suicide!"

"Not suicide, but sacrifice," John insisted. "Unlike you, I am willing to do what is right in the eyes of our God. I am willing to speak for Truth. And if I die for Truth, I have died a worthy death. I have well accepted the fact that by my actions I am sacrificing my own life in an attempt to save our people. Each and every one of my disciples are committed to this same end." He paused and looked piercingly into my eyes, saying, "Would you not die to save your people?"

"Well, I, um ..." I started.

"Would you not die to save your people?" John exclaimed. "For you have in your own hands the ability to change the face of things. Would you not engage this ability even at the cost of your own life?"

"Yes, but I think that maybe a man can accomplish such a goal without sacrificing his own life," I replied.

"Jesus, there is no other way," insisted John. "We must inspire those who are poor in spirit to repent and fight for justice."

Filled with anger because I did not know how to diffuse John's enthusiasm for war, I said, "You talking about revolution here! What makes you think that your disciples will be willing to follow you to their deaths?"

"They believe that I am prophet," he said proudly. "Many even believe that I am the reincarnation of Elijah or Horus, the Egyptian god."

"Honestly?" I asked.

"Yeah, honestly," he answered.

"And why do they believe that you are a god?" I asked.

John confided in me, "Because my preaching is validated by the baptisms that I perform. For the ailing come to me to be baptized in accordance with the Essene customary practice. And a significant minority of these people find that their skin diseases and afflictions are cured by what I am promoting." Cleansing with water was especially effective for skin conditions because in first century AD, people were ridiculously unsanitary. We didn't have toilet paper so we used our left hand, we had no indoor plumbing, and rarely if ever did we bathe.

As our discussion on this matter continued, John and I argued back and forth about the ethical and moral impacts of his course of action. In the end, we agreed to disagree. What else could I do? He had said it himself, 'You can reason with unreasonable people.' Disturbed as I was by our conversation, I acknowledged that at some point in the near future, I would have to come along to hear John preach and see how the masses reacted to his message. But for the time being, I returned to my family in Galilee.

Nearly two weeks passed before I took John up on his offer. I decided that not only would I listen to John's teachings, I would test the abilities of his apparent healing touch.

I came from Galilee to the River Jordan to be baptized by John. When I arrive, I found him preaching to a crowd of over 2000 people.

People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers!"

John proceeded to criticize the Pharisees heavily and they were visually upset by this, but did nothing because they could see that the crowd was on his side. While the Pharisees and chief priests were arguing among themselves about what they might or might not do to John, I stepped forward toward John that he might cleanse my body and soul.

But John tried to deter me, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

I replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

Then something unbelievable happened ... or at least that is the way I interpreted it.

As soon as I was baptized, I went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and I saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on me. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

It was incredible. This was the same voice that I had heard in the desert near Qumran, only this time it was ten-fold louder and yet crystal-clear. The voice had been so loud that it echoed throughout the entire sky. "I have been touched by the hand of the Lord!" I exclaimed. "For I am the Son of God."

"What?" asked John.

"I am the Son of God," I repeated.

John grabbed me by the arm and pulled me aside. Turning his back to the crowd, he said, "Quiet man. What is wrong with you?"

"Nothing is wrong. That was incredible," I told him.

"What was so incredible, Jesus?" he asked.

"The voice of the Lord echoing in the sky," I said.

Still holding onto my upper arm, John squeezed it hard saying, "Are you mad? There was no voice in the sky. I submersed you in the water and then brought you up. That was all. Nothing else happened."

I looked over John's shoulder at the crowd. I could see that they were already gossiping and pointing in our direction. Quickly, I realized something was amiss.

John waved his hand in front of my face and snapped his fingers. "Jesus, what is wrong with you? What voice did you hear?"

Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with concern for myself. It was readily obvious that no one other than myself had heard the voice or seen the light from the sky. Had anyone in the crowd heard Yahweh's voice proclaiming my kingship, they surely would have all rejoiced instantaneously and worshipped the ground on which I walked. Instead they stared at me with disgust and puzzlement.

I apologized to John briefly and ran off to be alone in the desert with my demons. Throughout the rest of my Earthly life, I had to live with the regret that this was the last time I ever saw my cousin John.

For a long time, I was greatly distraught by the fact that no one in the crowd, not even John, had heard

the voice from the sky. I knew that I had heard a voice, but I began to wonder whether the voice had been that of God, or a demon, or my own consciousness. Eventually, I came to believe that it must indeed have been the Lord's voice. I felt that God had truly anointed me and consequently, I was inspired to begin my own ministry. And from earlier on in my ministry, I was not shy about professing to be a prophet. I made such claims even in my own homeland, Galilee.

Unfortunately, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. In fact, in my hometown I was vehemently rejected! While I preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth, I said to the people, "I am a prophet, anointed by Yahweh, and charged with the duty of fixing everything that is wrong with Pharisaic Judaism."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. Because they knew me only as a stonemason, a group of six older men were in disbelief that I could know what I did. Consequently, they got up, drove me out of the town, and took me to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw me down the cliff. But I walked right through the crowd and went on my way. I was not about to let a few old cronies throw me to my death. Visiting my hometown really was a bit of a nightmare. Honestly, I was really quite amazed at the lack of faith displayed by the people I once knew. However, my visit to Galilee was not all bad. Twelve men from among my neighbors and friends believed that I was an honest man with an important message. Eight of these men had once been my childhood friends. These men became my inner circle, my twelve closest disciples or apostles.

These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot.

In and of itself, the act of taking on disciples was a way of publically declaring that I considered myself a Rabbi of significance. When my family heard about this, they came to take charge of me, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

My brother Gamaliel, the second son of my parents got me alone and confronted me on the subject saying, "Why in the world are you taking on disciples?"

"I need shepherds to help me gather my sheep," I answered cryptically, but Gamaliel did not understand the metaphor.

Thinking that I had been speaking literally, he shouted, "You don't have sheep! You're a stonemason!"

I answered saying, "Once I was a stonemason. I cut rock and built structures that will one day be destroyed by wind and rain and earthquakes. But no longer shall I engage in the toil of erecting temporary structures. For what I have now begun to build will become indestructible."

"You are not making any sense, brother!" he exclaimed. "Who is it that you are pretending to be? Do you claim to be a prophet or something more?"

"I need not claim that I am anyone," I replied. "One who is the anointed is anointed by God!"

Gamaliel gasped, obviously appalled by my statement. "Anointed? Anointed! Mary our mother is right: You are out of your mind. You're either possessed or delusional from drunkness."

"I am not drunk, but I am indeed possessed. I'm possessed by the spirit of God," I exclaimed.

Gamaliel laughed loudly and sarcastically, for he was not one who believed the God anointed men. He had always held the belief that if God wanted something done on Earth, He could do it Himself without the help of men. Expressing this thought, he said, "While I love you, dear brother, what you say is a mistruth. Since the times of our forefathers, the anointing of human men has been something of myths and tales alone."

"Then you do not think that King David was anointed?" I asked earnestly.

"Come on Jesus, King David's supposed anointing was nothing more than hearsay," he told me.

Promptly, I retaliated, "Hearsay? How can you say that it is hearsay when it is written in the Scriptures! No less than eleven times the Holy Books call David the One. Three times David himself tells us that he was God's Anointed.

While praying to Yahweh, David himself pleads:

'O LORD God, do not reject your **anointed one**. Remember the great love promised to David your servant.'

I continued, "And it is not merely David who refers to himself as having been anointed. Yahweh did the same. In fact, God refers to him 'the one'."

'Then the LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; **he is the one**." So Samuel took the horn of

oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.'

"Yahweh further called David His 'firstborn'," I reminded Gamaliel.

"Yahweh said ...

'I have bestowed strength on a warrior; I have exalted a young man from among the people. I have found David my servant; with my sacred oil I have anointed him. My hand will sustain him; surely my arm will strengthen him. He will call out to me, 'You are my Father, my God, the Rock my Savior.' I will also appoint him **my firstborn**, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.'

Rolling his eyes, Gamaliel said, "I know what the Scriptures say, you fool. But considering that those passages were not written until more than 200 years after King David's death, they can hardly be taken literally! The author of those passages had the luxury of writing them retrospectively. And yet you put your faith in them? It seems to me that you are not a wise man by any stretch of the imagination."

Glaring at Gamaliel, I said, "The people all around me who have heard me preaching know that I am the Anointed One of Yahweh, even without me telling them so. It is the people, not myself, who have announced my coming."

"The people, our people are sheep," retorted Gamaliel. "They are zealously hopeful to find an anointed one. Throughout our history, they have declared that dozens of men are from God, when those men clearly were not."

Caught off guard, I asked, "Of whom are you speaking, specifically?"

"Don't you play dumb with me," Gamaliel spouted. "Some 600 hundred years ago, our people called Nebuchadnezzar their anointed one. And fifty years after that, Isaiah even went so far as to identify Cyrus of Persian as Yahweh's chosen one."

"Isaiah wrote:

'This is what the LORD says to **his anointed**, to **Cyrus**, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.'

"According to our people, Cyrus had replaced Nebuchadnezzar as the newest incarnation of King David's spirit. In their eyes, Cyrus was assigned with a mission to save us Jews from our enemies," noted Gamaliel.

I responded, "Gamaliel, my brother, though men like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus were great and powerful, neither could wholly fulfill the role of the anointed one. For neither man was an ancestor of King David. The prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah both foretold that it was David's line that would produce the ideal Jewish king."

I reminded Gamaliel, "Writing around 600 years ago when Zedekiah was king, Jeremiah wrote: 'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness'."

I further imparted knowledge to Gamaliel, saying, "And about 500 years ago, Isaiah declared:

'A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [David's father]; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD--and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.'

"Gamaliel," I continued, "the one true anointed of Yahweh must come from the line of David ... and I am that man."

"Liar!" screamed my brother. "You are the Deceiver! You are the Satan! You delude yourself and you attempt to deceive your own people!" Gamaliel peered at me with evil intent, picked up a rock, and prepared to throw it, saying, "Give me one reason that I should not put you to death right now."

Looking out into my audience in the auditorium, I realized that many had not comprehended the incredible magnitude of what I was saying, I halted my lecture and stepped to the front of the stage.

Addressing the crowd of 5000 in the Heavenly auditorium, I said, "Everyone, it is very important for you to understand why Gamaliel was so upset with me. In saying that I was the anointed one, I was professing that I was the Christ, the Messiah. You see, the title *anointed one* in Hebrew is literally pronounced *mashiah* or *messiah*. Whereas, in Greek it is literally pronounced *christos*. At various times within Jewish history, King David and Nebuchadnezzar and even Cyrus had each been called the Christ, the Messiah."

This revelation is generally met with great resistance from my audience, so I continued, "You see, the Jewish people had been desperately seeking a Messiah for a thousand years when I arrived on the scene. I was claiming that I was the fulfillment of a dream that my people had been dreaming for just over 1000 years. And so, virtually no one was willing to believe what I was professing unless I was capable of demonstrating to them that I was beyond a doubt, the anointed Messiah. Consequently, Gamaliel's skepticism was not unexpected.

As Gamaliel prepared to hurl the stone at my head, I told him, "Look around us. Our people are in agony. They *need* a reason to believe their lives are worth living. I am charged with the duty of giving our people hope."

"No," he said softly and then his tone rose. "No! It is not your duty! Do you think that just because you come from David's line, you are the Messiah? Have you forgotten that you are not the only Son of David? Our cousin John the Baptizer and myself are no less entitled to kingship than yourself. Should I then go out and claim that I am the Christ?"

"Brother," I said to him calmly, "that we are born into the ancestral line of a king may be incidental or coincidental for all I can tell, but what is no accident is this: I have heard the voice of the Lord in the sky and He Himself has declared that I am to become His mouthpiece here on Earth."

"Are you ..." Gamaliel began to yell and then stopped in frustration and let out a non-verbal scream. "You should be ..." he said and restrained himself again. He paused. I could see that he was thinking deeply. He peered piercingly into my eyes saying, "Did anyone else hear this supposed voice?"

I did not answer because I knew that I alone had heard it. And though I alone had heard God's voice that did not change my conviction. I was sure that my ears had not deceived me.

"Well there you have it," Gamaliel said snidely, clamped his hands together, and took a couple steps backward before spinning around and walking off.

Arguments with one family are never easy to bear. However, the situation at hand was bigger than Gamaliel and I. The future of Judaism hung in the balance. The destiny of an entire people hung in the balance.

About two weeks after my interactions with Gamaliel, I received word that King Herod's men arrested my cousin John the Baptizer for himself claiming to be a Messiah. At the time that this had occurred, I had no idea what was transpiring behind closed doors. It was only once John and I both arrived in Heaven that I was able to ask him what had happened.

Apparently, while John was in jail, two of his closest disciples visited him and said to him, "Teacher, you know that we love you and we have no doubt that your message is in line with Truth. But," they inquired, "how can we be sure that you are the true Christ when you have been captured and will surely be put to death? We do not doubt you, but if you could only show the people a miraculous sign in the sky, then they might believe in your words."

Though he had tried, John had been unable to produce a miraculous sign beyond human power. Based on this insurmountable failure, it was generally accepted that John's messianic claim was invalid. John was no fool, he was aware that his disciples had begun to fall away on this account. John gravely admitted to them, "You disciples may believe that I am the Christ, but I don't know what to believe anymore. Maybe there is someone else who is coming."

One of John's disciples used this opportunity to tactfully inquire who else might be the Messiah. "The people are saying that your cousin Jesus heard the very voice of the Lord when you baptized him at the River Jordan," the disciple informed him. "What do you make of that?"

"I respect my cousin greatly," John told his disciples. "Jesus is a wise soul and has excelled at the art of healing more than any man since Elijah, but I cannot say for sure that he is the anointed one. When I baptized him, he did claim to have heard a voice. However, neither I nor anyone else around us heard God speak."

The disciples asked, "Are you saying that he is mad? Or possessed by demons?"

"I am not saying that at all. However, I am wondering," said John, "whether Jesus claims to be the Messiah or it is merely others claim this about him. Do you know which?" he inquired of them.

"We are not sure," answered the disciples.

Thus, John sent his disciples to find out if I was truly the Anointed Messiah.

At the time when John's disciples came to ask me this question, they found me while I was in the process of healing many people. My most spectacular feat one this day was the healing of servant of a Roman centurion named Clementius.

The centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. This man was more than the centurion's favorite servant. After many years of service, the two men had fallen in love. Such a situation was not all that atypical for the Romans of our time.

The centurion heard of me and sent some elders of the Jews to me, asking me to come and heal his servant. When they came to me, they pleaded earnestly with me, "This man [the centurion] deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." After many years of living among the Jews, Clementius had reportedly converted from Roman paganism to Judaic monotheism, except that he maintained his sexual orientation. Still, I took pity on him.

So I went with the Jewish elders. I was not far from the house when the centurion came out to greet me.

I said to him, "Centurion, I have heard that you are a man who has great faith in our Father Yahweh."

"I have faith and do not doubt in Yahweh," he informed me.

"Do you also believe that I can heal your dying servant?" I questioned.

Clementius affirmed, "I do."

"Then I shall come into your house and heal your servant," I told him.

The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof."

"As you request, I will not enter your home, but instead I will heal your friend from where I stand."

Then I said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." And his servant was healed at that very hour. I healed the servant without touching him or even seeing him.

Not only did I heal the centurion's lover, later in that day I ministered to Clementius directly. Having heard my message, he further converted to my line of thinking. From that moment, he accepted that I was indeed the Jewish Messiah.

Having seen what had occurred, John's disciples asked me, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" Upon hearing this question, I understood that John was still unsure as to whether or not I was God's Anointed.

This question from John confirmed the fact that he indeed had not heard the voice in the sky that I had heard. I was greatly saddened by this confirmation. Even after all that I had done to this point, there were still many who did not believe that I was who I said I was. Such a thing was not really surprising, I suppose. You must understand that there was great confusion concerning this subject.

I replied to John's disciples, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

Not long after I had spoken with John's disciples, Herod the Great had my cousin beheaded. I went into mourning privately. I was both saddened by John's death and fearful of the mission for which God had anointed me.

And so there I stood at the crossroads of history, the direct descendent of King David, anointed by the voice of God. The task of saving my people from themselves and from the Roman way of life fell squarely on my shoulders. I came to accept that I must pick up where John the Baptizer had left off. But it was my intention to do so in a more refined manner. I did not intend to inspire men to assassinate Roman officials or innocent citizens. I sought merely to start a revolution in Jewish ideology.

Man on a Mission

Many of you have been taught that my mission was to bring peace on Earth. This misunderstanding comes from the teachings of Paul the Pharisee, a man whom I was never engaged in a philosophical or theological conversation with while on Earth. I never knew the man and yet he authored fourteen of the twenty-seven books of New Testament. The way in which Paul twisted my message has grossly

affected Christian theology to this very day. It is a disgrace.

As the single greatest theological scholar (Jimmy D. Kuratz) of the current era has adequately demonstrated in his writings, "Christian theology is based more on misguided ramblings of Paul than on anything Jesus ever did or said." Paul did not know me and he surely did not understand my mission. Mine was not a message of peace. I explained this plainly to my followers at my Sermon on the Mount.

I said: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the Earth. **I did not come to bring peace**, but a sword." The *sword* was a metaphorical reference indicated that I sought to create chaos and confusion. I sought to *rock the boat*, if you will.

Furthermore, I explained to my disciples:

"For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law - a man's enemies will be the members of his own household."

I had always believed that it is only from a state of confusion that men are forced to think for themselves and contemplate their current state of living. Nothing can put a man at odds with his own family like variances in political, philosophical, and theological ideologies.

When you look at my words throughout the Gospels, not Paul's writings, it is plain to see that my message was one of ideological and theological revolution. I desired greatly that men might open their minds to the possibilities of knowing Yahweh without enslaving themselves to Him. I desired greatly that men might learn to love the life that the Creator had blessed them with instead of sacrificing their lives to Him.

For many years, I was filled with much anger at the way Paul bent and changed my teachings. But you must understand, my anger was not with Paul specifically. My anger was and is with those who manipulate the Word of the Lord in order to suit their own needs. And in the day that I lived, it were many who bent and twisted the Hebrew Scriptures. Instead, various religious and secular faction used their knowledge of the Scriptures to control men by making them feel guilty and ashamed for their inborn nature. The injustice of this, I could not bare.

My mission was to force men to question the validity of the reality with which they were faced. I did not seek to teach men to think what I thought, but rather, I desired to teach men how to think for themselves. By this, I intended that men might claim their birthrights as God's children.

I was soon faced with the reality of what my cousin John had noted earlier: There are always those who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

I swear to you that it's true when I say that never my intention to physically or verbally attack the Pharisees themselves. Unfortunately, my message was distinctly at odd with that of the Pharisees and the chief priests. I hoped that while I preached to the people, the Pharisees and I would agree to disagree concerning our theo-political difference. I soon learned that the Pharisees were not willing to accept my 'agree-to-disagree' proposal. And thus began a game of cat-and-mouse.

While in the city of Tyre, I addressed a crowd of roughly 500 men, women, and children who listened intently as I spoke and performed healings. That day, the crowd brought many to me to be cured of skin afflictions, paralysis, pain, and the like.

Then they brought me a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and I healed him, so that he could both talk and see. But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." The Pharisees were envious of me because I was a better exorcist than they themselves.

I knew their thoughts and said to them, "If I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out?"

I could see that one of Pharisees, a man named Boaz had become particularly disturbed by my reply. Now Boaz was a Pharisee of great political clout who served on the Sanhedrin council, which is the Jewish high court. Turning to the crowd, he exclaimed, "Do not listen to this man, Jesus. He is a fraud. We know that he neither pays his taxes, nor gives a tithe to temple treasury. He is but a miscreant."

Irritated, I responded to Boaz with authority and tenacity. "How dare you! Why should men pay a one-tenth tithe to you and your temple? If men choose to give away one-tenth of their income, they should just give their money directly to the poor."

"How can you say that men should not give their tithe to the Temple priests?" said Boaz. "This is what God Himself has asked of us."

"Let us be honest," I demanded. "The idea that a man should give a tenth of his spices to the Temple treasure is a money making scheme that comes from an inaccurate interpretation of the Scriptures."

One of the teachers of law spoke up saying, "How dare *you!* You criticize Moses' Law? Don't you

realize the importance of the Mosaic Law? It is what holds the Jewish people, the Jewish nation together!" This enraged me.

Turning to the entire crowd of people, I overly criticized the Pharisees and chief priests for the first time in my ministry: "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

"In the end, you men have forgotten what Yahweh had told the prophet Hosea: For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of Myself rather than burnt offerings."

"And what would you propose, Jesus?" asks Boaz turning to the crowd. "Would you have us abandon the Mosaic teachings that we don't like while obeying the one's that suit us?"

"My message is simple," I replied. "Yahweh is not impressed by the things that men give up, but by the things they do for one another. I greatly desire that our people should learn to please the Father by respecting one another unconditionally, regardless of all other influences. No Law can be greater than this."

Boaz was speechless.

In an effort to trap me by my words, one of the chief priests spoke up saying to the crowd, "This man would have you believe that Rabbi Shammai is a fool?"

Rabbi Shammai was known for teaching that it is acceptable to hate your enemy.

The chief priest's comment angered me greatly, but I remained calm and addressed the crowd with a booming voice:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?"

The chief priests and Pharisees looked on in awe because they knew I held the crowd in the palm of my hand. Seizing the opportunity, I spoke to the crowd yet again.

"Further, I will teach you this: Life is simple. If you want to make the world a marvelous place to live," I told them, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

My people loved me and loved my message because I was offering them an easy relationship with their God that did not require them to bow down before outdated Laws. Unlike the chief priests and the Pharisees, I did not require that men should feel ashamed and guilty before the Lord.

To conclude the afternoon, I raised my arms into the air and screamed out, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

And for saying such things, the Pharisees despised me. So much did they detest me that they sought to destroy me.

The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill me. Aware of this, I withdrew from that place. When I say that that "I withdrew from that place", I mean that I ran away as fast as my legs would carry me. I ran down alleyways, hid behind fruitstands, and under manure carts just to keep from being apprehended.

I am sad to say that my cousin had been correct: I was naive. Criticizing the ruling priestly class and their status quo is a dangerous thing. Throughout the remainder of my ministry, this became an ever-increasing problem. Consequently, many times as I finished speaking to a crowd, I would have to slip away down the back streets in anticipation of what might occur if I stuck around to find out.

Luckily, in ancient Roman-occupied Israel running away was a suitable means of avoiding trouble. In those days, there were no cameras and no news reporters. There were no *FBI's Most-Wanted* photographs by which to identify me. I was virtually anonymous everywhere I went. I looked just the same as every other Jewish man: I had long hair, a long beard, and big nose. We all looked the same to the Romans.

The authorities were looking for a ghost. All they had to go on were mere sketches of a tall, Jewish man who wore a beard and a long robe. If I didn't identify myself to the authorities, then they had no idea where I was.

Even still, as a rational man I knew that the odds of my survival were not favorable. There were just over ten thousand Pharisees looking for me. I understood that if they wanted me dead, I was most likely going to die. Initially, I was very upset by this realization. It was never my intent to get myself killed. It

took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that this had become my lot in life. But I suppose that one's lot is one's lot. What are you going to do, right?

And though I had come to accept the inevitable fact that I was going to die, I looked for a way to do it upon my terms, not theirs. Everyday I prayed that the Father would show me how I might do so and how I might help my people to overcome the grip of religious ignorance. It was at this time that Yahweh blessed me with serendipity: I met the one man who could help make all of my dreams come true. His name was Joseph of Arimathea, one of the few Pharisees who I ever got along with.

The sweltering summer of the Near East had only just drawn to an end ushering in autumn with its cooling breeze. One beautiful Sabbath morning, I found myself in Korazin preaching the living Word of Yahweh. But it was to no avail, in this city my teachings about the Great Spirit in the sky were rejected harshly. And though my message was not well accepted in this place, a few good things did come of my time there.

A man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse me, the Pharisees asked me, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

I said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

I turned to the man with the shriveled hand and looked him over. Then I said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.

From there, the Twelve and I headed to an olive grove to enjoy a midday meal and rest in the shade of the olive trees. The infuriated Pharisees and chief priests stayed in Korazin attempting to repair the so-called damage that I had done. However, as my apostles and I made our way to the olive grove, I noticed that a single Pharisee was following us at a distance.

I called Peter over to my side. "Peter, who is this Pharisee? Have you any idea?"

"No, Jesus," he answered. "I do not recall seeing him this morning while you were preaching, but I would have to say that he doesn't look like a menace."

"Please go to him and inquire of his intentions," I ordered.

Shortly thereafter Peter returned to me and reported, "His name is Joseph and he says that he would like to speak to you privately."

"I will speak to him then," I told Peter.

As I pivoted to walk toward this Pharisee, Peter grabbed me by the shoulder. "He is a Pharisee. Do not trust him."

I replied, "Not to worry, Peter. I will proceed with caution." Then I greeted Joseph.

"Good evening, sir," I said to him. "Let us find some privacy and talk." We distanced ourselves from the Twelve, but remained within an earshot of them. "How can I help you, Joseph?" I asked.

He answered, "I am a member of the Sanhedrin council, but I am a good and upright man even by your standards. I come from the Judean town of Arimathea and am awaiting the kingdom of God."

"A Pharisee awaiting the kingdom of God?" I asked sarcastically. "Now that is a conflict of interests."

Joseph replied, "Rabbi, what you say is correct. And although I myself am essentially a Jewish politician, I pride myself on being an open-minded man. I have spent this whole morning quietly observing you from the back of the crowd and listening to what you are telling the people. I recognize that you are a wise and insightful man. Yet what you teach flies in the face of conventional Judaic teachings. One might be tempted to say that many of your teachings are blasphemous. Some even say that you intend to destroy what is left of Israel's traditions."

I answered, "**Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven**, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."

"Do you believe that the Pharisees speak against the Holy Spirit of God?" the man from Arimathea inquired.

"Even worse," I told him. "Although they are not anointed by God, the Pharisees have tricked the people into believing that they can speak for God, in His place. The Pharisees and chief priests like to make themselves feel needed, but I attest to the fact that each man is capable of meeting God upon his own terms. Each man is capable of listening to the voice of God."

Joseph noted, "But what you say threatens to destroy the fabric of Judaism. Judaic dogma provides a list of rules and methods by which man can keep from offending God."

"Not offending God is not the same as connecting with Him. Worshipping God by following Mosaic Law is like being married to a woman you don't love. One cannot find Truth by living a lie," I explained.

"What you say is logical on one level," began Joseph, "but for me, and probably for many others, your approach creates great inner-conflict and confusion."

I posed this question to Joseph: "How is it that one will ever begin to contemplate the meaning of his life if confusion is not present to make him think?"

"Whole-heartedly I agree," said Joseph. "But in what ways can a man marry the dogmatism of Mosaic Law to the self-determinant approach to Yahweh which you are proposing?" That night Joseph and I stayed awake until 3:30am discussing the pros and cons of Mosaic Law. Since there were no clocks in my day, I had no idea that it was so late into the night. This is only something I came to surmise in the millenia following my death. As a rule, I never stayed up so late, but I wouldn't have traded that night. Joseph was such an invigorating conversationalist. I found him to be an intriguing man, and he was equally intrigued by me. Discussions like we had that night are the kind that stir a man's soul to action and make him want to accomplish something truly magnificent with his life.

For nearly three weeks, Joseph left his home and family to follow me as I preached across northern Judea. We sat together and spoke about the Father and the Scriptures nearly every night during those weeks. In the end, I came understand the nature of mankind just a little bit better than I had previously and Joseph came to understand the Father through my eyes.

Before long, Joseph was a disciple of mine, but secretly. Fearing for his life, he swore to me that he would never tell the other twenty-two members of the Sanhedrin that he had spoken with me. I remember that I adamantly encouraged Joseph not to hide his association with me. To this he queried, "Am I not better to you alive than dead?"

"How do you mean?" I asked in reply.

Joseph explained, "I am an insider. I am a member of the Sanhedrin and yet I now pledge my loyalty to you, from this day forth. I am certain that you are God's mouthpiece here on Earth. Someday Teacher, you will call on me and I will gladly use my political and financial clout to best serve your interests." Joseph was correct. He was one of my few disciples that was well connected and exceedingly wealthy. He was also probably one of the most intelligent men that I had ever had the pleasure of knowing during my Earthly life.

Knowing that Joseph could be trusted and that he was a man of great resources, I asked him, "Joseph, if you were the Messiah attempting to lead a revolution in ideology, what would you do?"

He replied, "Firstly, I would prove that I was more than a mere human Messiah. Your skeptics will never listen to you because you are but a man. If you could do something that other men cannot ... now that would be worth paying attention to."

"Do you say that my miracles of healing do not demonstrate that I am no ordinary man?" I asked.

"Master, I mean no disrespect, but even the Pharisees can heal blindness and shriveled hands," noted Joseph.

"But can they raise the dead as I can?" I spouted.

"They can," he said and stopped. Then a huge smile came across his face and he jumped to his feet, "But they cannot raise themselves from the dead!"

Quite surprised, I asked, "What?"

"They cannot raise themselves from the dead!" he shouted again.

"Well, neither can I," I retorted.

"Why not?" he prodded.

"What in the heavens are you talking about?" I inquired.

So excited by the idea, he yelled out, "If you could raise yourself from the dead, it would prove that you are Yahweh's anointed Messiah!"

I acknowledged that Joseph was onto something special. I was in agreement with Joseph that if I could overcome death, it would indeed validate my superiority in the minds of the people. This was the beginning of something very big. Still the details of such a plan were sketchy at best. Consequently, I put it in the back of my mind and told Joseph that I would think about it over the next few months.

At various times throughout the remained of the autumn and into the winter, I was able to meet secretly with Joseph of Arimathea. Slowly God revealed a plan to us. God's plan for me was crystal clear: I must be crucified and yet live.

Three years into my ministry, as springtime approached, I marched into the lion's den and confronted my destiny.

Into the Lion's Den

It's a funny thing: Until six days before my crucifixion, I hadn't been to Jerusalem for nearly 20 years. This is where most of the people I wanted to save lived, and yet I had been avoiding it like the plague!

I had previously avoided Jerusalem because it is was home to roughly 6000 of the Pharisees, with whom I did not see eye-to-eye on matters regarding the Father, as you know. From all around Israel, the Pharisees in Jerusalem had heard that I was running through the countryside stirring up discontent amongst their flocks before disappearing into the night.

And now, there I was: At the mouth to lion's den.

However, my time in Jerusalem was not as dangerous as one might think. Such situations involve a significant degree of calculated risk. Knowledge of the environment into which I was entering, coupled with proper preparation was the best way to minimize risk.

For instance, I was well aware that while I was within Jerusalem, Roman law was actually on my side. Within the walls of Jerusalem, the Pharisees had no legal right to stone me to death. They could merely report me to the Roman authorities. The downside of course was that if convicted of any serious violation of Roman law, the Roman authorities would publicly punish me by inflicting the agonizing torture of death upon the cross. But this is something that I had already anticipated. In fact, I intended to use this to my advantage. As I said, it was God's plan for me that I should be crucified. In order for this to come to pass, it was necessary that I allow myself to be captured in Jerusalem and nowhere else.

No longer would I run. I intended to validate my teachings and my Heavenly anointment for all to see. And I intended to do so in front of the many pilgrims who had arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. The great crowd that had come for the Feast usually numbered about 100,000 pilgrims.

For those not familiar with Passover, please allow me to explain it.

In the story of the Exodus, your Bibles tell that God inflicted ten plagues upon the Egyptians before Pharaoh would release my people from slavery. The tenth plague killed of all of the firstborn males in the population, from the Pharaoh's son to the firstborn of his cattle. My people were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a spring lamb and, upon seeing this, the spirit of the Lord *passed over* these homes, hence the term "passover". As a result of the slaughter, Pharaoh was distraught and believed that Egypt was cursed by the Jewish presence in his land. Consequently, Pharaoh expelled my people from Egypt. It is said that they left in such a hurry that they could not wait for bread to rise. In commemoration of this, no leavened bread is eaten during the Passover celebration, for which reason Passover is also called "The Feast of the Unleavened Bread".

Every year, the Jewish Passover meal is celebrated on the 15th day of Nisan (early April by your calendar), just after sunset. Nisan is the first month of spring on the Jewish calendar. In the year of my crucifixion, the 15th of Nisan fell on a Thursday evening. Thursday would be the night of my arrest by the authorities.

However, Thursday had not yet arrived. This was not yet my day. After having traveled such a long distance, a man needs rest. And so, I did not burst into Jerusalem the first time I laid eyes upon it after so many years. Instead, I took rest in Bethany to enjoy a meal with my friends and friends of friends. This was the calm before the storm.

Six days before the Passover, I arrived at Bethany. Bethany was a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, about two miles east of Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives is a mile-long ridge rising 200 feet above the altitude of Jerusalem. Bethany, Bethphage, and Gethsemane were all located on the Mount of Olives.

I spent Friday night in Bethany.

The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that I was on my way to Jerusalem. This day was Saturday, the Sabbath. It was five days before the Passover meal.

Early that morning, my disciples and I awoke and headed out for the Holy City.

As we walked along our way, there were two sisters named Gadiela and Pora who came out to greet my followers and me as we passed by their home. I overheard the younger of the sisters as she inquired of my disciples, "Why do the people of this crowd insist on traveling during the Sabbath? Don't they know that according to Mosaic Law, a man isn't supposed to walk so far on the Sabbath or do anything that might be construed as work? You are all sinning!"

Then the older sister, Pora added, "God himself said: 'Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On

it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter'."

"My good women," I said to them, "I am Jesus the Nazarene and these people are my disciples. "

I could see in their faces that they had heard of my name but were unfamiliar with much more than that about me. "The Pharisees call all men 'sinners' who do not abide by Pharisaic Judaism. And by that logic I am a sinner, but I assure you that I am no enemy of Yahweh."

The women stood before me silent. By their body language, I could tell that they were unsure whether I was a deceiver.

Then I said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."

Pora replied, "But the Pharisees tell us that we must abide by the Laws of Moses or else ..."

I interrupted her quickly, but calmly. "Please realize that such Laws are the work of men, not of the Father in Heaven. Those of us who do not subscribe to Mosaic Law and therefore not bound by it. You are sweet and young. The Pharisees teach you what they think. They desire that you should believe what they believe. But when will you first begin to think for yourself? Yahweh has given you a mind that you might use it. If He didn't want you to think independently, He would not have provided you with thought. In the same way, if the Father didn't want us to walk everywhere, then He wouldn't have given us legs."

With that, I continued walking toward Jerusalem on the Sabbath.

As we approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, I sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

Was it a miracle that my apostles found a donkey in Bethphage, near Jerusalem?

No, it wasn't a miracle. What other sort of transportation were they going to find? An automobile? It was ancient Jerusalem. Of course they were bound to find a donkey. And it's not like I hadn't planned this out beforehand.

When I had first arrived in Bethany the night before (that is, Friday), we had dinner, as I said earlier. A number of people dined with us, one of which was a Roman chap named Lucius. After having explained my purposes for being in Jerusalem, Lucius asked if there was anything he could do to assist me. I replied, "As a matter of fact there is: Do you own a donkey and a colt?"

"No," he answered, "but my brother does. He owns the only donkeys in Bethphage. I would be happy to send him word that you need to use one of them tomorrow morning." And so the wheels were set in motion, as they say.

Finding that donkey was no miracle, nor did it require any supernatural knowledge. However, it was very important for me to ensure that I entered Jerusalem upon a donkey. I was acutely aware that my people expected their messianic king to arrive upon the perch of a donkey, just as Zechariah had once written about:

"Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

It was Alexander the Great who had set this precedent. This is whom Zechariah had been writing about. When Alexander conquered Jerusalem in 332 BCE, he came in softly rather than demolishing the entire city. He didn't charge in on his stallion with his sword swinging. His entrance into the city was humble, upon the back of a donkey. He offered himself to the Jews as a righteous king who would allow them to continue to follow Yahweh, while providing salvation from the attacks of their neighbors. Consequently, the donkey was recognized as an animal symbolic of humility, peace, as well as, a princely mount before the horse came into common use in the area.

My entrance into Jerusalem upon a donkey, in royal fashion, was a statement, saying, "I am the rightful religious and political leader of the Jews. I am a Messianic king." All Jews, including the chief priest and Pharisees, recognized what I was saying by my actions.

When Caiaphas, the head of Sanhedrin council heard of what I had done, he sent one of the chief priests to me immediately. This priest's name was Jehoiada. He came to me frantically asking, "What in the world do you think you are doing? Are you a mad man? Why in the world would you proclaim yourself King of the Jews?"

"I am a son of David and rightful heir to the throne," I replied arrogantly so that I might inspire angst in Jehoiada's heart. "And you must acknowledge me as such." And that did upset him as I had intended.

"You fool! You insolent fool," cried out Jehoiada. "Don't you realize what will happen if your followers crown you King?"

"Yes, I do," I replied. "Everyone will rejoice and the Romans will leave Jerusalem." I did not believe this to be true. I merely said it to further enrage Jehoiada.

"What ...? Wha ...? You've lost your mind!" Jehoiada screamed. "You are a mad man. This will surely start a riot."

"No, it won't," I stated bluntly.

"Yes, yes it will," Jehoiada snapped. "You'll start a riot and the Romans will not stand for another riot. They're going massacre all of us!"

Again I replied similarly to before, "No, they won't."

Jehoiada turned to run off. Then he spun around to me and stopped. Then he spun around again to run off, but stopped and then stutter-stepped. Facing me again, he began to yell something incoherent that sounded like, "I you will can wait, ahh ..." I honestly had no idea what he said, but I could tell that he was very clearly upset beyond words. And then he took off sprinting back to Caiaphas.

I knew exactly what he was concerned about and his concern was valid. However, I knew that Caiaphas would sooner have me arrested than allow the people to crown me king. I also knew that his men could not arrest me on this day because it was the Sabbath day and such an act was forbidden on the Sabbath. And so, I had an entire afternoon to do as I pleased. However, I had only one order of business on my mind.

"All of you twelve apostles are to meet me back in Bethany tonight," I whispered to Peter. "Be there just before nightfall." With that, I did what I had come to do.

I entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. I overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

A man from Rome, a very large man, stepped forward to confront me. He was the height of more than one and half Jews and probably twice the weight of any Jew I knew. He asked, "What are doing man? I have come here on vacation and I need to trade my coins for Jewish shekels so that I may buy food for my family. Don't make me ..."

I stepped in closed to him and interrupted quietly, "I apologize, sir. I will be done in just a moment. By the way, just outside of north wall of the temple there are more money changers who actually have better prices." He shook my hand and walked away. Because of this the rumor spread that I could calm even Roman giants with my spellbinding words.

As the Roman departed, I turned to the onlookers. I yelled out at the top of my lungs, "You hypocrites! How is it that you buy and sell here and yet you tell the common man that he is not allowed to pick grain on the Sabbath to feed his children? You are the embodiment of Satan himself!"

As I was finishing my rant, a fist-sized rock came flying just past my head. Immediately, I made a run for it leaving my disciples behind.

I left them and went out of the city to Bethany, where I spent the night. According to my instructions, my twelve apostles met me there just before sunset and we ate together.

After my twelve apostles and I had finished eating supper that evening, Judas came to me showing great concern. "Master, I am greatly distressed by what happened today at the temple."

"Why should that be of concern to you?" I asked.

Judas said, "I know that you have always been eccentric, but lately ..."

"Is it not wrong to buy and sell in God's Temple?" I inquired.

"Of course, it is. But ... you were running around in their like a mad man," he said. "The people were not all impressed. And the rock that was thrown could have killed you."

I replied, "And so what if I die Judas? What is it to you?"

"Master, you are one of my closest friends. It makes me sick to think of such a thing," he replied.

"Judas, I fear that it is too late," I told him. "My cousin John was right. A man cannot speak out against dogma and hypocrisy without sacrificing his own life to do so."

Judas tried to reassure me saying, "Jesus, don't stress yourself so. We will not allow them to kill God's anointed Messiah."

"It's not up to you, Judas," I said. "I have come to embrace my fate."

"And exactly what fate is that?" asked Judas.

I explained to him, "It is inevitable now, Judas. I have started the ball in motion. I will be crucified this Friday. This is the fate that I am embracing."

"You're embracing torturous death?" Judas blurted out angrily. "You can do no such thing! I won't

let you!"

I asked, "And what would you have me do? Run away?"

Judas suggested, "Maybe it is time to do so rather than to die for no reason."

"No reason?" I asked rhetorically. "Are you saying that everything I have done and everything I've said amounts to 'no reason'?"

"You know what I mean," said Judas.

Just to be difficult, I replied, "Maybe I do and maybe I don't."

"Jesus, do you really think that your word will matter more if you die than if you live?" Judas inquired earnestly.

I replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds."

"What is that even supposed to mean?" asked Judas angrily.

"It means that a hero's death inspires his followers. Did you not see what happened to John the Baptist's disciples when he was captured?" I asked. "They fell away as wheat does from a sheath. But when John was beheaded and I then provided his followers deeper soil in which to flourish. I gave them something positive to believe in and they were strengthened in their resolve. They have since joined our ranks and you know that they are by far the most zealous among my disciples."

"Truly, what you are saying is making no sense to me," Judas remarked in a puzzled manner.

Looking back on this now, I can understand Judas' concern. I'm not entirely sure that I was making a whole lot of sense at the time. I was on edge, both invigorated and concerned by the situation with which I was faced.

Judas continued, "I think that the best thing is for you to flee Judah immediately. Go back to India. If you run away, no one will blame you."

I could see that Judas had not thought this out. "If I run away, then this ideological revolution ends. That would save my skin, but would accomplish nothing of note," I told him. "My mission is to turn my people, our people back to God so that He will stand with them and so that they can free themselves from all which oppresses their hearts. If we are going to make a difference in the minds of men, if we are going to free them from the ties that bind them spiritually, then we must see this to the end. Even to death."

"You are asking me to sit idly by while you commit suicide," he said.

"No," I said and paused. "I'm asking you to help me."

Judas was visibly disturbed, asking, "Help you? No, there's no way ..."

"Hear me out, Judas. Of all my disciples, you are the only one strong enough to bare this burden. Think how strong the resolve of my disciples will become if I can overcome death? It is through this act that our people will find their salvation," I told him.

Judas was full of questions. "What make you think that you can overcome death? Do you believe yourself to be a god like Venus that you shall overcome even death?"

I said, "I am no more or less divine than you, but if I can overcome death, my message shall itself become immortal."

With that Judas threw up his arms in disgusted confusion saying, "I am sure that I do not know you anymore. And I have no idea about the things of which you are speaking." Then he stormed off.

The next day, four days before the Passover meal, was a Sunday. A new day, a new endeavor.

Again I set out to bring the sword, metaphorically speaking. This time my approach was not as flamboyant, but it disturbed Jewish authorities to an even greater extent. I began to preach in the one place that the Pharisees considered completely off-limits to people like me: the courts of Herod's Temple.

I entered the temple courts, and, while I was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to me. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

A Pharisee named Ramiel approached me saying, "Only the Pharisees and the chief priests are allowed to instruct about the way of the Lord. You are neither."

In the Temple courts there was a crowd of more than 2000 people listening to various Rabbis preach. I replied to Ramiel loudly enough that everyone's attention was drawn to me, "I tell you truly Ramiel, the way of the Lord cannot be found in the books of man. Nature is the canvas of God's will. That is where He hath painted His masterpiece. The sun, the flowers, the trees, and the wild animals *are* the perfection of God. Even you and I are part of His perfect masterpiece. And yet we are so very different from one

another. I recognize God in all the things I see around me, and I commune with Him through every breath I take. But you Pharisees do not commune with God. You commune with your books of rules and laws. It is the yoke that you are all too happy to wear. But more than that, you are like an ox that loves his yoke. You see the native animals of the forest as stray and vagrant things. You insist that they should wear a yoke like yours when in fact it is not as Yahweh Himself has intended. You attempt to make yourselves the gods of men. You would rather control men than inspire them to follow their hearts."

As one might have expected, there was instantly an uproar among the Pharisees. And yet, they did not arrest me while I was preaching in the temple courtyard.

They looked for a way to arrest me, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that I was a prophet.

The Pharisees and chief priests were rightly afraid of the mob that I was preaching to. I am not and never was a stupid man. Many of the men in that crowd were devout disciples of mine and would gladly have laid down their lives to protect me. But no such fighting would be necessary. For there is safety in numbers. And so, I used this opportunity to stir the crowd into a frenzy.

Until the last week before my crucifixion, I engaged in relatively few public attacks against the Pharisees. Of the attacks I did wage, most of those were ingeniously disguised within parables. In contrast, during the last six days of before the crucifixion, I intensified my overt attacks on the Pharisees. This is obvious even in your own Bibles.

As described throughout all of twenty-first to twenty-third chapters in the Gospel of Matthew, I kept the Pharisees close to me, but the crowd even closer. And in chapter twenty-three of Matthew's Gospel, I did everything I could to irritate the Pharisees. It served my purpose to do so. The entire chapter consists of nothing more than me verbally abusing the Pharisees for thirty-nine verses. For the most part, I would have to say that Matthew's record of my speech that day is fairly accurate.

I said to the crowds and to my disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them."

I continued on abusing them strongly:

"Woe to you, blind guides!"

"You blind fools!"

"You blind men!"

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!"

"You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and self-indulgence."

"Blind Pharisees!"

"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell?"

"Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor lets the cattle eat."

This was, by far, the most overt and open I ever was with my attacks on the Pharisees. Even my own disciples were convinced that I had lost my mind.

Some of the Pharisees and chief priests began to threaten me saying, "Your days are running short, Jesus. It won't be long before we have our way with you. When we find you in the streets tomorrow, you will regret what you have said this day!"

"You shall not lay a hand on me anytime soon," I replied. "For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, **'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'**"

And though Christian theology does not teach that it was so, as I shall explain to you shortly: Every single Pharisee absolutely did say those exact words, four days later!

Following this discourse, the Twelve and I again left Jerusalem late Sunday night, went back to Bethphage, returned the donkeys, and stayed the night with Lucius at this brother's home.

The next day was Monday. It was three days before the Passover meal. This day, I was again hiding out and preparing myself for what was to come.

Late in the day, some of my disciples came to me bringing food and much wine. We ate and drank with much enthusiasm, and talked into the late hours of the night. To be perfectly honest, the wine clouded my memory. I have almost no idea what we talked about that evening and neither do any of men who were with me that night. I can say that with surety because since arriving in Heaven nearly two millenia ago, I have conversed with each one of them about this and found it to be true.

When Tuesday came, my disciples and I woke at sunrise. We departed for Bethany and arrived there by midday. Again, my disciples and I relaxed most of the afternoon. As dusk came, I told them a few parables.

When I had finished saying all these things, I said to my disciples, "As you know, the Passover is two days away--and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified."

Many of my disciples were very upset by the latter portion of this statement. Philip, one of the Twelve apostles, blurted out, "Stop saying that! ... Please, Teacher ... Judas told us what the two of you talked about and we agree that such talk is lunacy."

I turned to Judas asking, "Is this so?"

"Yes, Rabbi," was his reply.

I turned back to Philip.

"Philip, why shall I not speak the truth?" I asked.

He responded, "Because the thought of such a horrible thing is gut-wrenching."

"Why are you so concerned? As I told Judas, I plan to overcome death," I noted rather matter-of-factly.

Philip's tone intensified, "No earthly man can overcome death! Such a thing is impossible! It is beyond human power!"

I said, "Come now Philip, I have raised the dead. In Nazareth, you saw me raise that dead girl. Do you not think that I could raise myself from the dead also?"

Philip responded, "You said yourself that that girl was not even dead, but merely asleep. Waking a sleeping girl is nothing like reanimating your own corpse!"

"You do not trust in me," I said. "Do you think I am a mad man or a wise man?"

"You are wise man, but this is madness!" Philip retorted.

I smiled softly at him and replied, "This is by no means madness. Dangerous yes, but not madness. I expect that you will soon find it is the most ingenious thing any man has ever done."

"I don't understand any of this," Philip commented and bowed his head. Under his breathe, he continued, "How in the world is killing yourself ingenious?"

"Do you think I want to die, Philip?" I asked rhetorically. "Of course, I don't want to die. As I have said many times, I shall not be eliminated so easily. You must have faith that though I will hand myself over to be crucified, I shall overcome crucifixion and death at the hands of the worst kind of Roman torture. I know that this seems like madness to you, but have I ever given you reason to not trust me?"

"No, but ..." Philip began.

Cutting him off, I repeated the question: "Have I ever given you reason to not trust me?"

"No," Philip admitted softly.

"Do you remember the day that I killed the fig tree simply by wishing disaster upon it?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Philip.

"Please allow me to reiterate what I had said back then: 'If you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, "Go, throw yourself into the sea," and it will be done.' I continued, "If a man has faith in himself and is focused, he can move mountains. This is a mountain, but I shall break it to pieces."

I kissed Philip on the forehead and retired for the night.

On my way to the house, Judas ran up behind me. "Master, master," he said. "Please wait for a moment."

Somewhat defensively, I asked, "What is it, Judas?"

Falling to one knee, Judas said, "I need to apologize. Something you said to Philip has made a lot of sense to me."

"Stand up, Judas. Do not kneel before me, only before God," I told him. "Now, what is it that you are apologizing for?"

Judas replied, "You asked Philip if you had ever given him a reason to doubt you. I realize now that you have never given any of us a reason to. And so, I will never again doubt you."

"Your apology is accepted," I said. "Thank you, my friend."

"You have said that you have a plan," noted Judas. "If you are still willing to accept my help, I offer it to you freely."

Consequently, I explained to Judas exactly what I needed him to do and why. He remained sorrowfully resistant but opened himself to trusting me fully.

On Wednesday, I awoke late and did virtually nothing all day. That day we all remained in Bethany

on the Mount of Olives.

When A Plan Comes Together

Thursday, the day of the Passover meal, had finally arrived.

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to me and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

I replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'"

Peter inquired, "Who is this random man that you speak of? How will we know how to find him?"

"Are you so dull?" I asked. "I said nothing about a random man, but a certain one. And by *certain*, I mean that he is trustworthy and convinced of my mission. He is *certain* that my message is in line with Truth."

"Sorry, my lord," Peter apologized. "Does this *certain* man have a name?"

"Yes," I told him. "His name is Joseph of Arimathea."

"Oh, right. Which one of us should go to find him?" Peter inquired.

"Andrew shall go," I answered as I motioned for Andrew to come to me.

"Hurry to find Joseph of Arimathea at once," I instructed Andrew.

"Yes, master," he said and ran off to find Joseph.

Roughly two hours passed before Andrew finally returned to inform us that Joseph had happily agreed.

On our way to his house, I was speaking to my apostles about Joseph and what a good man he was.

I told the Twelve, "The reason that Joseph can be trusted is because in spite of political affiliation with the Sanhedrin, he has freed his mind from the choking grip of dogmatic religion. Joseph of Arimathea is a man who thinks for himself rather than allowing fear and propaganda to guide him."

Thaddaeus (one of the Twelve) inquired, "Do think that many of the Pharisees can be trusted by us?"

"No!" I exclaimed. "Joseph is but one of two Pharisees in this entire land whom can be trusted!"

"Who is the other trustworthy Pharisee?" Thaddaeus asked.

"That is of no concern to you at this time," I answered. "As a rule, I command you that you are not to trust any of the Pharisees or chief priests, other than Joseph of Arimathea. Is this understood?"

Each of the Twelve nodded in agreement with my instruction.

"Be careful," I said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread."

Aware of their discussion, I asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? We fed those people spiritually, not carnally."

After all this time, after three years of preaching out in the desert in the stinking hot sun, my closest disciples still struggled to grasp my meaning on simple things. Disgusted with the situation, I threw up my arms and demeaned them, "How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the *yeast* of the Pharisees and Sadducees." Then they understood that I was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Finally we arrived at the Joseph's home.

Approaching the front door, I suddenly realized that we still didn't have any bread and so I sent Bartholomew to the markets to buy some. When I had finished instructing him to do so, Joseph opened the door and invited us in. Following a brief bit of small talk, Joseph and I found a place to sit and talk privately so that no one could hear us conversing. I explained to Joseph of Arimathea every detail of what must take place over the coming days, how these things must transpire, and by what means he was to help me accomplish these ends. He alone was the one man with whom I trusted all of this knowledge. I had literally placed my life in his hands.

I told him, "I need you to visit two men for me."

"Yes, of course. Just tell me who and I will go to see them," Joseph answered.

"Firstly, I want you to go to the centurion that you know named Clementius. He is at his friend's home on the east side of Jerusalem where they are celebrating the Passover. You must visit him before

the Passover meal begins," I instructed.

"I will do it, Teacher," he responded.

"Secondly, you will go to the home of Nicodemus the Pharisee," I told him. "Visit him at lunch time tomorrow."

"And what shall I say to these men?" inquired Joseph.

"Explain to them what I have explained to you," I began. "Only do not tell them everything that I have told you. Tell them only what they need to know in order to assist you."

"I will do exactly as you have instructed," he assured me.

"Wonderful," I said. "Now, go ... immediately!" As Joseph ran out the door, Bartholomew ran with the bread I had sent him to buy.

When evening came, I was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

We ate the Passover meal within the walls of Jerusalem, right under the noses of the Pharisees. And yet, they had no idea that I was there. However, remaining undetected did nothing to serve my interests. I had returned to Jerusalem that Thursday night for one reason: It was necessary for me to be crucified. Consequently, I did what I had come to do.

While we were eating, I said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me."

When I said, "one of you will betray me", it was not meant as an accusation. It was a command, though only Judas was aware of this.

You can barely imagine the looks I received from a number of my closest friends. I saw both disgust and despair in the eyes of many of them.

They were very sad and began to say to me one after the other, "Surely not I, Lord?"

Not one of the apostles desired to be the instigator of their Teacher's crucifixion. But eleven of my friends had nothing to fear. For the decision had already been made. When I had spoken with Judas two days earlier, it was he alone whom I had commissioned to do the job that must be done in order to ensure that the crucifixion would take place on the Friday after Passover. I felt that none of my other apostles could be trusted to know of my plan.

Again, I informed the Twelve what was about to take place: "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."

Then the disciple whom I loved spoke up.

Leaning back against me, he asked me, "Lord, who is it?"

I answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish."

Then, dipping the piece of bread, I gave it to Judas Iscariot, son of Simon. "What you are about to do, do quickly," I told him, **but no one at the meal understood why I said this to him**. As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out.

Judas had thus been commissioned to carry out the most undesirable task of identifying me to the authorities. But as he was almost to the door, both Peter and John stood up and blocked the exit. "We will not allow this to happen!" John exclaimed. "Tie him up," ordered Peter. "He will not leave these premises."

"My brothers," I said, "sit now. For I have ordered that this must take place to fulfill what the prophets have spoken of. Trust in me now. Judas must do as I have asked him to do."

With that, Peter and John stepped aside and Judas hurried along as I had instructed him.

Once Judas had departed, the meal proceeded as normal.

While we were eating, I took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to my disciples. When the meal ended, the apostles and I sang a hymn of remembrance.

Incidentally, the hymn we sang was no ordinary hymn. It was the traditional Passover hymn that every single Jew in the world sings to conclude the Passover meal. The hymn comes from the second half of the Hallel Psalms (Ps 115-118). Originally sung by King David 1000 years before I had been born, this hymn is sixty-eight verses in all and takes about four minutes to sing.

Singing that hymn was especially meaningful to me on that evening. It strengthened my resolve dramatically. Though I will not recite the entire hymn to you now, I will offer you a few excerpts.

"How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. **I will fulfill my vows** to the LORD in the presence of all his people. O LORD, truly **I am your servant**; I am your servant, the son of your maidservant."

"The LORD is with me; **I will not be afraid**. What can man do to me? **I will not die**

but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death."

"This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. O LORD, grant us success. **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.**"

As I said to the Pharisees four days earlier:

"For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, '**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.**' "

I knew that the Pharisees would sing the Hallel Psalms. I knew this, not according to prophecy, but according to tradition. And when we had sung the hymn, we went out to the Mount of Olives. The apostles and I went out to Mount of Olives, to the garden at Gethsemane because I had told Judas that that is where I would be waiting for him and the Pharisees.

On our way to the garden at Gethsemane, we stopped to rest our legs because my apostles were weary with intoxication. For the wine had been strong that night.

Soon, we came to the place called Gethsemane, and I said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

I prayed alone that night. None of my apostles knew what I was praying about, for they were asleep and none were with me. However, I will tell you now that I prayed a very simple prayer in quiet saying, "Father, I believe that I am one with you, as a man is one with his wife. I feel that I know your mind better than any man alive today. I have seen your workmanship in the stars. I have witnessed your creativity in the plants. I have listened to your voice upon the wind. Now please Master, listen to my voice crying out to you. Daily, I have sacrificed my life in an effort to help my people see Your Truth. What I am about to do, I do not for glory or money or fame. I seek only to glorify Your Name. I must overcome crucifixion. Please Lord, save me from the pain of death and from death itself that I may live to sing your praises."

I then returned to my apostles.

When I came back, I again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. The apostles and I were in a secluded area at the back of the garden. The darkness of night hid us completely from sight. Through the olive trees, I could see a band with torches approaching the main entrance at the north end of Gethsemane. At this time, I woke the apostles.

"Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" I said this loud enough for Judas to hear. In this way, I alerted him that I was ready for him.

The apostle all stood up. "Be not afraid," I said. "For what is about to happen, happens only because I have intended that it would. Be not afraid and trust that God ... "

While I was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and the elders of the people.

This "large crowd" was a group of auxiliary police assigned to the task of maintaining public order beyond the precincts of the temple. Essentially, this crowd was a detachment of soldiers.

One of the soldiers then leaned over to Judas and whispered into his ear. But it wasn't much of a whisper because everyone could hear what he was saying. "Judas, give us the signal now," he said. "Point out to us which man is Jesus."

Judas answered softly, "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him."

Coming at once to me, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed me.

While we were in close proximity, Judas stared blankly at my face. In the torchlight, I could see that tears had begun to well up in his eyes. He whispered to me, "Master, I cannot bare this. Please run from here. I will create a distraction."

For once, I didn't run away into the hills. Instead, for the first time, I was intent on letting myself get arrested. Everything was going according to God's plan.

I replied, "Friend, do what you came for." I called him "friend" because Judas was no enemy of mine. And to this day, I respect him and love him dearly for the sacrifice he made for me.

On Trial

Once Judas had positively identified me to the soldiers, they led me off to trial. I was transported to Caiaphas' house for the initial trial. Caiaphas was High priest in Jerusalem from 18 AD to 36 AD. His son, Ruvel, had been a pupil of Rabbi Shammai at the same time I had. On a number of occasions while I was studying in Jerusalem, I had been to Caiaphas' home for dinner and celebrations. It was so strange to be there under these very different circumstances.

The whole Sanhedrin was present at this midnight meeting, including Joseph of Arimathea. None of the Gospel authors, neither Matthew, Mark, Luke, nor John were present. They all received their information about the trial from second and third-hand accounts. Each of their Gospel records was composed retrospectively. Matthew and Mark wrote in about 60 AD, thirty years after my crucifixion. Luke completed his Gospel in approximately 80 AD, and John finished his around 95 AD. Consequently, they are not a perfect source for information concerning any of the stage of my trial. The perfect source comes from my own mouth alone.

Caiaphas' interrogation of me began straightaway, "I have many questions for you Jesus ... "

"Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said. If I said something wrong," I replied, "testify as to what is wrong."

Caiaphas and his confidants were not impressed with my unwillingness to cooperate. They were intent on intimidating me.

"I know you well, Jesus. Since you were young, as though you think you were Socrates, you attempt to talk men in circles," ranted Caiaphas. "But this time, you are merely delaying the inevitable."

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against me so that they could put me to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.' "

This accusation was based on a misinterpretation of something I had said early on in my ministry. Months earlier the Jews demanded of me, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" I answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." At that time, the people were confused by what I said. They thought that I had been talking about the Herod the Great's Temple, though I was not.

The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple I had spoken of was my body.

I have always viewed the human body as a temple in which God resides. However, members of the Sanhedrin were not aware that I had been speaking metaphorically. And this was not something that I brought to their attention.

It didn't really matter anyway. None if the witnesses could get their story straight.

Soon another two witnesses stood up and gave this false testimony against me: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.' " Yet even then their testimony did not agree. These men had contradicted what the first witnesses said against me.

According to Mosaic Law, a Jew could not be convicted unless two or more parties gave testimonies that agreed. I demonstrated to the Sanhedrin that I was well aware that the Scriptures made this very point. "It is written," I said, "'One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'. Therefore, these lies are not enough to establish my execution."

The members of the Sanhedrin were visibly frustrated by my remark and by their lack of progress with the trial.

One of the Pharisees cried out, "Tell us the truth man! Did you say that you were going to destroy Herod's Temple?"

I stopped listening to their nonsense. I bent down and started to write on the ground with my finger.

Then the high priest stood up before them and asked me, "Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?" But I remained silent and gave no answer.

If I had said, "Yes, this testimony is correct," it would have been a lie. The ninth commandment says that a man should not lie or tell false tales. When presented with the opportunity, I was not willing to lie. Besides, nothing I would have said would have been admissible evidence. It was a well-known fact in my time that Jewish Law forbid legal trials from being held between sunset and sunrise. This nighttime court session was unofficial. Consequently, I knew that at daybreak the Sanhedrin would have to go through the entire trial again to make it official. We had to wait until the sun peeked over the horizon.

During springtime in Israel, sunrise isn't until roughly 6:00am. And so the entire Sanhedrin anxiously waited for the sun to show its light.

As expected at daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and teachers of the law, met together, and I was led before them. "If you are the Christ," they said, "tell us."

I answered, "If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer." My wittiness generated a palpable tension in the room.

The high priest said to me, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." When Caiaphas used this form of questioning, I was legally obliged before God to answer and do so honestly.

"Yes, it is as you say," I replied. My stalling tactics had come to an end.

The high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?"

"He is worthy of death," they answered.

Mosaic Law states: "Anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death." Just before 6:30am, I was found guilty of blasphemy. The acceptable Jewish punishment of blasphemy is death by stoning. However, as I said earlier because Jerusalem was under direct Roman rule, the Jews there were not permitted to put anyone to death within the walls of the Holy City. The highest-ranking local Roman magistrate had to oversee all death sentences. And though the Pharisees and chief priests desperately wanted to see me dead, they knew that if they superceded Roman laws, they themselves could be put to death. However, blasphemy was not considered a violation of Roman law. Therefore, the Romans would not have been willing to get involved in the situation.

Faced with this dilemma, many of the Sanhedrin members stood around Caiaphas' house discussing what to do next. During that time, two younger men detained me in the kitchen. The two of them stood there just dribbling nonsense for thirty minutes. They really were an extremely annoying couple of kids, sons of some of the Pharisees. I wasn't sure how they fit into the whole picture, but I was quite sure that they weren't Rabbis. In any event, they were still both drunk from the night before. I had seen them finish off three bottles of wine between the two of them while the midnight trial had been going on. I think that's why they had been left to detain me while all of the older men in the other room had been discussing matters concerning my execution. Unfortunately, the jibberish of these two young drunkards made it difficult for me to hear exactly what was transpiring in the next room.

Amidst the discussion that was occurring in the main room, an argument broke out between Joseph of Arimathea and Caiaphas. I couldn't make out much of what was being said between the two men. However, I did hear Caiaphas accuse Joseph saying, "If I didn't know better, I would think that you were a sympathizer to this Jesus. Maybe we should execute you with him."

Joseph yelled out, "A sympathizer, huh? I'll show you how much of a sympathizer I am!"

Next thing I knew, Joseph came running into the kitchen and delivered a wild, sweeping punch with his left arm and caught me square in the ribs. He punched me so hard that it knocked the wind out of me and I dropped down to one knee. Pretty good punch for a sixty year old man! Right away, I knew that he had broken a couple of my ribs on my right side.

"Son of God, huh?" he said snidely. "We'll just see about that, now won't we?" Then he spit in my face, turned his back, and walked out the room. Everyone honestly believed that he wanted to see me die, but I could see his hands trembling as he made for the door.

As Joseph was leaving the house, I shouted out, "You punch like a girl!"

The two men who had been detaining me burst into laughter. They began to taunt me and slap me saying, "So you think Pharisees punch like girls, hey?"

Then they spit in my face and struck me with their fists. One slapped me and said, "Prophecy to us, Christ. Who hit you?"

I replied, "You did. You hit me first, and then the little guy did."

In drunken amazement, the shorter of the two men said, "Yeah, that's right. Maybe he is a prophet."

"Well, it's not like I have a blindfold on, now is it?" I said. "I *can* see you."

The two drunks didn't torture me. And they didn't leave my face bloodied or fractured. Not even your Bibles suggest such nonsense.

I find it extremely funny and yet exceedingly disappointing the way that both Christian theology and Hollywood movies portray the events that occurred at Caiaphas' house and throughout the next day, for that matter. They have led many people to believe that *all* of the members of the Sanhedrin participated in beating the stuffing out of me. Hollywood has forgotten that the Sanhedrin consisted of a bunch of frail,

old men. And yet, somehow, in evangelistic cinematography I am the one portrayed as an emaciated shell of a frail man, bloodied, broken, and on the verge of passing out from exhaustion!

Is that what the Gospels portray? No, it isn't.

The Gospels attempt to describe the day of my crucifixion without giving attention to my emotional state or reactions. Additionally, the Gospels do not discuss the state of my health during these events. The problem is that the Church and cinema conjecturally apply emotion to these events. They insist on sensationalizing the possibility that I suffered greatly at the hands of these elderly Jewish politicians. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

You must understand: I was no sissy of a man. Part of the reason that I was such a popular speaker amongst my people was because of my physical presence. Without a doubt, I had a powerful message, but just as importantly, I had a deep, powerful, booming voice. I stood over six-feet tall in a land where the average man was barely five-feet in height. I was thick through the shoulders, chest, and legs. For God sake, don't you realize that I worked as stonemason throughout all of my travels and for most of my adult life! Additionally, during my three-year ministry, I walked everywhere. Seriously, I was in peak physical condition. Humbly I tell you that I had the body of Adonis. One punch from an old man was not enough to slow me down.

In coming to understand the truth about my crucifixion, one must examine the subject matter for himself without applying his own biases to the story. Regardless of what one *believes*, the story is just what it is. For those in my audience who do not believe that what I am saying is accurate, I implore you, go back to your Bibles and compare it with what I am about to tell you now. You will see that I am an honest man and my story is in no way fraudulent.

Look, with the exception of two broken ribs, I was feeling remarkably good that morning while we stood around Caiaphas' home. It's not like Joseph punched me forty times. He hit me once. Obviously when he spit on my face it was rather surprising and demeaning, but it didn't cause me any physical harm and I understood why he did it in the first place. Following this incident in which I was roughed up, the members of the Sanhedrin again looked to devise a way in which they could coax the Romans into executing me.

"We could tell the Roman authorities that we caught Jesus stealing from Herod's Temple," said one of the Pharisees.

"No, no ... that won't work," remarked Caiaphas. "Thievery is not punishable by death. They would merely flog him."

"What if we say that he killed someone?" asked another Pharisee.

"No, that won't work either." replied Caiaphas. "No one will claim to have witnessed that."

Then one of the young men whom had hit me started to speak, "How about we ..."

"Enough of this!" yelled Caiaphas. "Just let me think."

But members of the Sanhedrin didn't give Caiaphas much chance to think. They just kept arguing among themselves.

By now, it was approximately 7:15am from what I've been able to reconstruct. With all of their arguing, they were losing precious time on and that was fine with me. For I tell you truly, I was in no hurry to be crucified before midday. If I had been crucified too early, I would have been hanging up there for the entire day. That would have been far too much for me to bear. But some point, if my crucifixion was going to take place on this day, we needed to get the show on the road. Otherwise, there was the potential that it could be delayed until Monday ... and that would have been bad ... very bad.

Again one of the Pharisees spoke up saying, "I think that we should take him before the Roman authorities and tell them that he is claiming to be a god more powerful than any of the Roman gods."

I laughed loudly at them saying, "You fools! Such a claim is of no concern to the Romans. I can't wait to walk free!"

"He's right," Caiaphas said. "At best, the Romans will think he is crazy, but they will not punish him for something that they consider Jewish nonsense."

"It won't be long now and the people will be declaring me as their king," I shouted. "Then we shall riot and overthrow the Romans!"

Someone had to put the idea into Pharisees' heads. For whatever reason, they weren't coming up with it themselves! I put it down to sleep deprivation.

As though it were his own idea, Caiaphas screamed out, "That's it! For the good of Judaism, I will go before Pontius Pilate and tell him that Jesus has claimed to be the rightful King of the Jews, threatening to riot against Roman rule!"

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from 26-36 AD. Normally, he resided in Caesarea, where his main headquarters were. Caesarea lay on the eastern Mediterranean coast, roughly 100 miles northwest of Jerusalem. However, during Passover time, when such a large number of Jews had gathered in Jerusalem, Pilate was present in Jerusalem to help control any insurrections. He was therefore the highest-ranking Roman magistrate present in Jerusalem at the time.

Just after 7:30am on Friday morning, Caiaphas & some of the chief priests went before Pilate to discuss my fate. When they met together, Caiaphas said to Pilate, "We have apprehended a Jewish troublemaker and we want this man punished to the full extent of Roman law." However, Pilate wanted nothing to do with the situation.

Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.

"Excuse me?" Pilate said. "Did you say 'execute'? What is wrong with you? What makes you think that I am going to execute someone for you?"

"He claims to be the king of the Jews," replied Caiaphas. "He denies that Caesar is king."

"Is that so, Caiaphas?" inquired Pilate sarcastically.

"It is indeed," Caiaphas insisted. "I will grab the man and return with him shortly. Then, you can ask him for yourself."

So Caiaphas returned home and instructed the Pharisees to bring me to Pilate.

Then the whole assembly [of the Sanhedrin] rose and led me off to Pilate.

When we returned, Caiaphas presented me to Pilate who was standing out on his second-story balcony admiring the hustle and bustle of the crowd below. Caiaphas shouted up to Pilate, "Here is the traitor that I informed you about."

Pilate chuckled as he asked, "Who is this that you bring me? He is dressed in the clothing of an Essene pauper. Surely, he is no one of consequence."

Irritated Caiaphas said, "I am serious, Governor. This is the man."

"Fine. Come up here then," directed Pilate.

Many members of the Sanhedrin and I then went upstairs.

So Pilate asked me, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

"You yourself have said it," I answered. It has often been said that I replied, "Yes, it is as you say." However, my answer that appears in English Bibles of the current era is actually a mistranslation from the Aramaic. I can tell you truly that regardless of what your Bibles tell you, I said what I said.

Still standing out on the balcony, Pilate motioned for me to come to him. Caiaphas and I began to walk toward him.

Pilate said, "No not you, Caiaphas. Just this Jesus."

I went out to the place where Pilate was standing.

He said to me, "You are a witty one, aren't you?"

"How do you mean, sir?" I asked.

"Your reply was no reply at all," he accurately noted. "Now I ask you again, are you a king?"

I answered him, "Look at me, Governor. Do I look like a threat to Caesar?"

Distracted as he looked out over the crowd below, Pilate seemed unfazed or uninterested in my answer to his question. "No," he said. "You look like one of them, a laborer."

Leaving the amusement of his balcony behind, Pilate turned around and faced the members of the Sanhedrin. He paused a moment, inhaled deeply, exhaled, closed his eyes, and shook his head a bit.

Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd of Pharisees, "I find no basis for a charge against this man."

Although Pilate quickly dismissed the charges that had been brought against me, the Sanhedrin continued to press the issue because they needed his approval.

They insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here." On hearing this, Pilate asked if I was a Galilean.

"Yes, I was born in Galilee," I answered.

Upon hearing this, Pilate attempted to pass the buck, as they say.

When he learned that I was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent me to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Normally, Herod Antipas (son and successor of Herod the Great) would have been at his residence in Tiberias (modern-day Tabariya), on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. However, he was in Jerusalem for the Passover, as well. Because it was located on the opposite side of the city, the walk to Herod's residence in Jerusalem was by no means a short one.

When we arrived at Herod's around 8:30am, he was bathing and therefore, unavailable. Approximately a half-hour elapsed before I went in front of him.

When Herod saw me, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to meet me. From what he had heard about me, he hoped to see me perform some miracle. He plied me with many questions, but I gave him no answer.

The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing me. This is why I would not speak.

Also the Pharisee kept saying over and over again to Herod, "If you let this man go free, you are no friend of Caesar. Jesus claims to be King of the Jews. If you let him go free, you will yourself be put to death for treason."

Herod wore a look of great distress upon his countenance. Consequently, he sent everyone out of room, including his soldiers.

"Are you willing to talk to me now that we are behind closed doors and the rabble-rousers are no longer present?" he inquired.

"I am willing," I replied.

Herod inquired, "Why do these men want you dead so badly?"

I answered, "They say that I am a threat to the theological and political balance of Roman-occupied Israel."

"Is this true? Are you such a threat?" Herod asked.

"I think that it is what the Pharisees truly believe," I commented. "But I am only a threat to those who embrace ignorance and blindness."

"But aren't we all a little ignorant and blind?" Herod stated. "For there are so many things that we cannot know."

"All who listen to my words, know Truth," I told Herod. "A light will always shine through the darkness."

"So many people in this land are saying that you are anointed by God. Though I am no Jew myself, we Idumeans are also looking for the Messiah. I am a rich man," he said. "I am sure that your travel expenses are steep. If you are indeed the Messiah, not only will I let you go free, but I would be happy to donate money to your ongoing mission. All that I ask is to see some of miracles as a demonstration of your messianic destiny."

This was an interesting gesture. I could not tell if Herod was being genuine or looking for proof that I should be executed. Shrewdly I replied, "While I appreciate your kindness, you know that I do not need your money. I know that you are aware that my expenses have already been taken care of by Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of your household, Susanna, and many others. These women have been helping to support me out of their own means."

"I will ask you one last time: Are you willing to show me a sign from God?" Herod pleaded.

I replied, "I am sorry, but that is something that I cannot do."

"Jesus, you are nothing short of interesting. However, as you may well have expected, since you have not provided me any reason to believe that you are the Anointed One, I cannot risk my life by setting you free," Herod stated. "For if I do, the Pharisees could make the case that I am an enemy of Caesar. Nor can I in good conscience recommend that you be punished because I do not believe that you pose any real threat to Rome. This is quite a little dilemma. As many people know, Pilate and I do not see eye-to-eye on many issues, but on this I agree with him: I find no basis for charges against you. And so, I think that the best course of action is for me to send you back to the Governor."

With that, Herod called his soldiers back into the room. Dressing me in an elegant robe, they sent me back to Pilate. That day Herod and Pilate became friends--before this they had been enemies.

Once again, I was returned to Pilate. Herod's messenger accompanied us.

It took us 30 minutes to walk back to Pilate's residence. We arrived at 9:45am. As we approached Pilate's palace, Caiaphas was notably surprised to find Pilate awaiting us just outside the front gate.

"What is it now?" he asked Caiaphas in a rather exhausted tone. "Why is the Galilean standing before me yet again?"

Herod's messenger stepped forward to speak with Pilate, "Governor, Herod has requested that I deliver a message to you in private." The men stepped inside.

At this time, I had no idea what the messenger had relayed to Pontius Pilate. However, in the years after Pilate and I had arrived in Heaven, I was able to sit down with him and talk over the details of what exactly had occurred.

Apparently, the messenger had told Pilate privately, "Herod Antipas would like to inform you that he finds no fault with Jesus the Galilean and recommends that he be released from custody. However, Herod feels that it is not his place to release Roman prisoners and has thus referred the matter back to you."

Pilate sighed with disappointment knowing that now he would have to deal with the situation himself. He dismissed the messenger and spoke to his royal guards saying, "Stay here and make sure that the politicians remain outside of residence. They are not welcomed guest. In the meantime, I am going to take a walk with the Galilean."

Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned me and asked me, "Are you the king of the Jews?" As he was asking me this, the two of us alone, disappeared from the eyes and ears of any witnesses.

"Is that your own idea?" I asked, "Or did others talk to you about me?"

"Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

"It rather complicated, you see," I told him.

"Still," Pilate began, "I am interested in hearing your explanation of this situation."

I said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate. "Which land are you the king of? For your sake, I hope that it is far outside of the borders of Roman territories." Although the Governor imagined that I was king from a distant land, he quickly uncovered the metaphorical nature the announcement I had made.

I answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. 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."

Pilate dropped his back, closed his eyes, and laughed as he realized what I was carrying on about. "Finally, I understand your meaning. Your goal is not to subdue men, but to subdue the blind ignorance which consumes so many of us," noted Pilate introspectively.

I replied, "You are correct, Governor. I am a teacher of righteousness and Truth."

"Ah, but what is Truth?" Pilate asked. His response was deeply pensive as if to say, "Ah, truth ... how can we know Truth in this crazy, mixed up world?"

"Understanding Truth is very easy, sir," I started to explain.

"Even for the Jews?" Pilate asked with sarcasm in his voice.

"Yes," I said. "My message has been well received even by many of my people."

"I'm not so sure that I agree," he said. "If your message has been so well received, then why do your own politicians seek to have you killed?"

"As I said before, it's complicated," I responded.

The Governor was a man of upper-class Roman status, refined by the influences of Hellenization. He was not new to deep, introspective contemplation. Folding his arms across his chest, Pilate bowed his head and spoke solemnly. "Do you know how long I have been here ... in this land, I mean?" Before I could answer, he said, "Too long, too damn long. I have observed your people for enough years to know that given the opportunity, your people would choose dogma over Truth. They would choose religion over God. They would choose turmoil over peace. I mean no disrespect, but your people are a stiff-necked, backward people. And for the life of me, I cannot understand them. And sadly, I am convinced that they will never change. They would gladly choose to die rather than adapt to the progress of the changing world around them."

"What you say it true . . ." I began to reply when suddenly Pilate interjected.

"Why?" he asked. "Why are your people so resistant to progress?"

"Do you really want to know, Governor?" I asked. "If so, I will explain it to you in detail."

"Yes," he replied. "I do really want to know."

I explained, "Some 600 years ago, our land was conquering by the Babylonian, Nebuchadnezzar. The Temple was destroyed and all of our most prominent citizens and priest were sent into exile in Babylon. Consequently, my people could no longer satisfy our God through animal sacrifice at the Temple. This had been the chief means by which we remained in God's good graces. My people felt that Judaism was therefore threatened with extinction. And were it not for the Pharisees, our way of life would have disappeared into the pages of history. However, amongst the tides of change, the Pharisees remained focused on preserving the culture and religion of their forefathers. They did so by formalizing the religious books of Judaism and putting them into practice during decades in Babylonia exile."

I could see from the look on Pilate's face that he was losing interest in my explanation so I said, "I know this is a bit much, but just hear me out."

"I'm listening," he said. "Just get to the point."

I continued, "The Pharisees determined that since there was no central temple to offer animal sacrifices to Yahweh, instead He could be best pleased via adherence to the 613 laws set forth by Moses in the Torah, that is, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Pharisees have pledged themselves to obey all facets of the traditions to the minutest detail and advised others to do the same. To their credit, it was the Pharisees who single-handedly saved Judaism from being enveloped by Babylonian paganism. The only way that Judaism has been able to survive the last 600 years is by following the teachings of Pharisaic Judaism. Almost everyone among my people is deathly worried that by altering our approach we will fall out of favor with our God."

Pilate asked, "So then, am I to understand that you would not agree with that perception?"

As I am sure the Governor anticipated, I responded, "Essentially what has the Pharisees and chief priests so upset with me is that I have been saying that their approach to religion and to our God is completely outdated and needs to be refashioned. I am in favor of abolishing religion and replacing it with one simple rule: Treat others as you want to be treated."

"And you expect me to believe that for this, the Pharisees would kill you?" Pilate asked sarcastically. "I'm not sure that I believe you, Jesus."

"It is true," I said emphatically. "The Pharisees believe that if we take away the Scriptures, then mankind will no longer have a moral compass. And without that moral compass Judaic society will degenerate into a cesspool of moral depravity. And in a state of such depravity, the Pharisees fear that the Jewish people will become so riotous as to incur the wrath of the Roman war machine. And if angered enough, Caesar might seek to eradicate the world of all Jewish influences."

"So what do you think? Do you not see their point?" Pilate inquired.

I answered, "Yes, I see their point. I understand that if my people too greatly irritate Rome, then we might force ourselves into extinction. However, I do not believe that men who abide by the Scriptures are morally superior to those who follow their hearts. No man needs a book to know what is right and what is wrong. For each man is born with an innate moral compass regardless of the time and place in which he lives. If my people could simply learn to treat the Romans as we would like to be treated, we would find great favor with the Romans. However, I believe it is the 'holier-than-thou' attitude of my people which has already intensified Rome's distaste for us."

Pilate was dead silent. He just stood there looking me over, as if staring into my soul and examining me with his mind's eye. "And you are a Jew?" he asked rhetorically as a grin came across his countenance. "Yet from the lips of this Jew comes much wisdom. I must admit that I am captivated by the poise and integrity of the man standing before me."

Pilate seemed to me to be a good man, a fair man. Though he was a politician himself, it appeared that he had not lost his appreciation for Justice and Truth. I was pleased to see that he was rather taken with my message and my charm.

"Jesus," Pilate said, "I do not believe that you a threat to Roman rule in Judea ... a threat to Judaism, yes, but no threat to Roman rule. From what I have observed, you deserve all of the same rights and respect as any well-mannered resident of the Roman Empire. And so, I shall express this sentiment to your politicians from the Sanhedrin."

With that our conversation ended and we walked back to the front gate of his palace.

Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, "You brought me this man 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 sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death." Having himself previously been the object of three attempted assassinations, Pilate saw through the spiteful plot of the Sanhedrin. For Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had handed me over to him.

I once heard *envy* defined as "the desire for some advantage or quality that another has." The Pharisees envied my charisma and my ability to inspire others to accept my message. Unable to take these things from me, they sought to destroy me. This was strictly a political maneuver on the part of the Pharisees. Their spite for me was political, not personal. I always understood that. I don't blame them for plotting against me. Had the shoe been on the other foot, I would have done the same. To them, I was a theo-political terrorist. I sought to disrupt the control that they wielded over the masses. I sought to destroy a dogma that had taken them over 600 years to build. I never expected them to appreciate

me for doing so.

With one voice they cried out, "Away with this man!" Yet, Pontius Pilate continued in his attempts to stifle the efforts of the Sanhedrin.

Wanting to release me, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

At this juncture, Pilate pulled me aside once again and asked me, "Are you willing to appease the Sanhedrin by taking back your claims that you are the King of the Jews?"

"Unfortunately, such a thing is not going to happen," I replied.

"Are you so stubborn that you would not attempt to save your own life?" he inquired in a frustrated tone. "What kind of a man finds no value for his life?"

"I value my life as much as any man, but some principles are more important than the comfort of one man," I told him.

"Do you realize," he continued, "that this situation puts me in a very precarious position?"

I answered, "I do understand your position well, Governor." In fact, everyone in Roman-Israel was well aware of Pilate's position.

Not six months earlier, there had been a harmless food riot in Samaria. Pilate ordered it suppressed at all costs. It seems that he may have misjudged his response to the riot. Much to his dismay, thirty-six people were killed, many of them women and children. Consequently, the Samaritans complained to Vitellius, legate of Syria, who in turn complained to the Emperor. It is because the Emperor was Pilate's personal friend that he was given leniency in the matter and had not been replaced.

Pilate said to me, "The Pharisees say that you seek to crown yourself king and start a riot which the Roman guard will have to suppress. But it is not you I fear. Look at them, at the members of your Sanhedrin. They are the one's who themselves are pressuring the people into riotous behavior. I despise them, but by not giving in to their demands I would jeopardize the stability of this entire Roman territory."

Although Pilate had expressed concern over the stability of the province, I could see in his eyes that he was more concerned about his own hide. Another failure on his part might just have given Rome the impression that Pilate's services were no longer of use. His own life was quite literally at stake.

"Well then Governor, let them crucify me," I suggested.

"Do you dare to tell me how I should dispense justice?" he questioned in an authoritative tone. "If the Sanhedrin honestly believes that they can manipulate me, they are in for a surprise!"

"It is true Governor that I am as stubborn and difficult as any Jew. I would rather be crucified than back down to the Sanhedrin." I said. "However, I cannot understand why you, a reasonable Roman aristocrat, would consider putting yourself in harm's way over this matter."

"You are a mad man!" he said to me. "You say that you value your life and yet you are willing to die at the hands of these envious, despicable men?"

There was a pause as Pilate stood there staring at me again, waiting for me to say something.

"I never said that I was willing to *die*," I clarified. "I said that I was willing to be crucified."

My reply didn't seem to register with Pilate at that time.

"Okay. Enough of this!" he exclaimed as he marched off toward the members of the Sanhedrin.

For the third time he spoke to them shouting, "This man Jesus is crazy, not dangerous ..."

But Pilate's plea was drowned out by the drone of the politicians chanting: "Crucify! Crucify! Crucify!"

Distraught Pilate exclaimed, "Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him."

Pilate took me and had me flogged. My flogging was not a public spectacle, but rather, it occurred within the privacy of Pilate's private residence, called the Praetorium. The Governor's soldiers took me into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around me.

It was standard that a man guilty of crimes against the Roman government would be flogged. This was usually considered punishment enough and the man would be subsequently released. Flogging was generally not meant to kill, but to set an example. Degrees of flogging varied. They could be mild or unintentionally lethal, but tended to be somewhere in between. The principle Roman authority, in this case Pilate, determined what type of whip would be used, how many lashes would be received, and how severe the scourging would be. Commonly, the leather tails of the whip had chips of bone and rock glued to them. However, this was not always the case. A whip could be nothing more than a three-tailed leather strap.

Although your Bibles give no indication of my constitution either before or after my flogging, I will tell

you now that my flogging was exceedingly mild. This was because, as he had stated on multiple occasions, Pilate desired that no harm come to me.

Pilate and four of his soldiers led me down a long corridor toward the place where I was to receive my scourging.

"Do you have any idea who this man is?" Pilate asked his soldiers.

The men looked at one another in bewilderment.

"This is the King of Jews," Pilate stated authoritatively. "And you will treat him as such. You will treat him with the respect that a king deserves. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Governor," the men replied.

One of the men spoke up, "Sir, are we not to flog him then?"

Pilate addressed his soldiers, "Gentlemen, I know all too well that you enjoy your jobs. However, today you will go easy on this man. Give him a beating, yes, but you shall not break any of his bones. You will not use heavy whips. You will not deeply pierce his flesh. You are to rough him up, but he will be returned to me in remarkably good health. For if he is not, you yourselves will be flogged ... and harshly. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, sir," they replied.

"But won't the Sanhedrin be concerned that this man has not been flogged in typical tradition?" asked one of the soldiers.

"You shall place a royal robe on his back so that the crowd cannot determine the degree to which he has been punished," replied Pilate.

With that, the Governor walked off. As he was leaving, I expressed gratitude saying, "Thank you Governor. You are a fair man." I know that he heard me, but he didn't respond and didn't break stride.

Consequently, I was taken and flogged accordingly. I received nine mild lashes. Afterward, one of the soldiers inquired which land I was the king of. I chose not to reply. At this, two of the soldiers began to make jokes about my people, the Jewish people. I neither laughed nor smiled which inspired him to say, "Come on, it's a joke. Toughen up a bit."

The soldier in charge said, "Enough Leonardo." Then he turned to me saying, "Well, if Pilate says you are a king, then we shall dress you as a king, I suppose."

The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on my head.

Contrary to popular misconception, the soldiers did not *grind* the crown of thorns into my head. They set it upon my head. I did not bleed and it did not cause me physical pain. I just looked like a complete fool.

They clothed me in a purple robe and came up to me again and again, saying, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They weren't mocking me exactly. They were just having a laugh. And laugh they did.

The soldier in charge said, "Okay boys, now we have to make him look the part."

Then the soldiers spit on me and roughed me up, as they had been ordered to do. One of them smacked me in the face repeatedly with an open hand. Another hit me in the back of the head four times with a thin staff. It smarted. The fourth time he hit me, the staff snapped in half. I could feel a small trickle of blood running down the right side of neck.

The soldier in charge yelled out, "Leonardo, you idiot! Pilate said 'no blood!'" Speaking to all of the men, he said, "Okay, that's enough. Party's over, gentlemen." Following this, I was led ...

Interrupting me in the middle of my story, a woman yelled out from the back of the Heavenly auditorium, "Jesus, that can't be right! The Christian Bible says the soldiers viciously attacked you! Why would you say otherwise?"

"I am here to tell you that your Bibles are wrong on this matter," I rebutted. "I should know because I was there. Not a single one of the Gospel authors were in the Praetorium with me. My word supercedes theirs. Now, please allow me to get back to telling my story."

As I was saying: I was then led back down the long corridor. Pilate was waiting outside.

"Look at me," Pilate said to me.

I looked at him while he looked me over. "That should do it," he said. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see the soldier named Leonardo breathe a sigh of relief.

Pilate asked me, "How do you feel?"

"I feel fine," I remarked.

"Do everyone a favor and try to act like your in pain, would you?" Pilate commanded.

"I will, sir," I confirmed. Pilate then dismissed the soldiers and walked me back to where the Pharisees and priests were awaiting my arrival.

Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him." When I came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"

The sight of me in royal attire enraged the Sanhedrin. I suspected this would happen because I was familiar with Jewish sensitivities on such matters. However, Pilate was caught quite by surprise.

As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw me, they shouted, "Crucify! Crucify!"

Knowing that they had no right to crucify me, Pilate answered the Sanhedrin sarcastically, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him."

Of course, Pilate's antics didn't satisfy or impress the members of the Sanhedrin.

They insisted, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid.

Afraid? Pilate was afraid? How in the world could the author of John's Gospel know such a thing? He didn't. Writing his Gospel approximately sixty years after my crucifixion, John retrospectively included this note because it fit well with the tale he was spinning. However, I can personally assure you that Pilate was not afraid. He was merely angry. He was fed up with the entire circus-like trial.

Pilate went back inside the palace taking me with him. Three of the chief priests followed us, but Pilate did not turn them away.

"Where do you come from?" he asked me, but I gave him no answer.

"Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

I answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above."

"What in the world are you talking about?" Pilate exclaimed. "Do you honestly believe that you are Pollux, Son of Zeus? If this is your claim, then I should let the chief priests stone you right now!"

The politicians picked up stones in preparation. One screamed at me, "You shall not blaspheme and yet live!"

I confronted them saying, "Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?"

"Yes, that is why you must be put to death," they said. "What right do you have to claim that you are God's son?"

I answered them, "Is it not written within the Scriptures, 'Every man is a god'?" Continuing, I noted, "Yahweh Himself said, 'You are gods; you are all sons of the Most High'."

Turning directly to Pilate, I said, "Governor, we are all the sons of God, including you. That is a message that I repeated to many people on many occasions instructing them, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God'."

Pilate was silent. His tongue ran back and forth across his upper lip a good number of times as he stared off into the sky while the chief priests jabbered in his ear. The observer could see that he was mulling over what I had said.

"We are all the sons of gods then?" he asked rhetorically and paused. "I like it. You are a strange one, Jesus. You're a strange, and yet fascinating man." Motioning to me as he began to stroll away he said, "Walk with me." Again, we left the chief priests behind.

As we walked, he remained two paces ahead of me. His hands were behind his back and his eye set their gazing into the trees. He spoke as though I was not with him, "Minerva, goddess of wisdom, what can I do? Were the circumstances different, this man might be my friend. Instead, I am forced to put him to death. My god please find it in your heart to forgive me."

Still looking up into a nearby olive tree, Pilate acknowledged my presence. Pointing up into the tree, he asked, "Jesus, do you see the bird?"

"Yes," I answered.

Solemnly he said, "We Romans believe that good men are commonly reincarnated as birds or bees, majestic creatures that circle above mankind without a care in the world." Dropping his chin a bit he said, "A man like you deserves at least that."

Fifteen minutes after 11:00am, Pilate returned to address the Sanhedrin.

"This man," he began, "is by no means a criminal ..." However, his voice was drowned out by the shouting of the Sanhedrin.

Again he said, "This man is a ..." And yet again his voice disappeared under a wave of protest.

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. Having little other choice, he offered me up for crucifixion.

"I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate had me flogged. And so, I was flogged for a second time. This time the flogging itself was firm. I was whipped seventeen times with a single-tailed whip. Luckily, the whip itself was not imbedded with any type of abrasive or chards. I was not beaten, or mocked, or punched, or struck. This flogging occurred about the sixth hour. The 'sixth hour' means *the sixth hour after sunrise*, that is, 12pm. In actuality, my flogging occurred a little while before the sixth hour.

"Here is your king," Pilate said to the Jews.

I was flattered by the fact that Pilate did not say, "Here is the man who *claims to be* your king."

Whether it was a show of respect for me or merely an effort to irritate the Pharisees, Pilate referred to me as the undisputed Jewish king. As expected the Pharisees and chief priests were not impressed.

They shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

"Shall I crucify your king?" Pilate asked.

"We have no king but Caesar," the chief priests answered.

Pilate was shocked. "Respect for Caesar? Well this is new! Everyday the members of your Sanhedrin complain that the Romans and Caesar are not nothing more than dogs that occupy your land. And yet today, suddenly you love Caesar?"

"Not true," they shouted. "We have always loved Caesar. He is merciful and ..."

Interrupting their lies, Pilate said, "You know what? You're all crazy. I can't deal with it anymore. Just take him!"

Finally Pilate handed me over to them to be crucified.

To Die or Not to Die ...

Not long after Pilate announced that I was to be crucified, word of this reached my apostles. As one would expect, they were devastated. As I would later come to find out, no one took it harder than Judas.

Once I had been sentenced to death, Judas felt as though he had betrayed me unnecessarily.

When Judas, who had betrayed me, saw that I was condemned, he was seized with remorse. "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." Then he went away and hanged himself.

If I had just gotten a whipping, Judas may have been able to live with the role that he had to play, but once he realized that his Master was going to be crucified, he lost the plot. Are such feelings of remorse consistent with a truly evil person? Of course, not.

Christian theology says that Judas will never be forgiven for his betrayal. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is nothing to forgive. Judas was a hero! For if he had not turned me over to the authorities, I would never have completed my mission.

I for one was greatly saddened to hear of his untimely death, a death that I alone take responsible for. I misjudged his resolve. I thought that Judas would be able to bare the burden of the role I asked him to play. I am ashamed to say that I was mistaken.

At the same moment that Judas was committing suicide, I was on my way to the crucifixion site.

Carrying my own cross, I went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

The Greek word *stauros*, translated "cross" in your Bibles, also meant "stake". Undoubtedly, the word *stauros* could be used to describe parts of the cross as well as the whole. Most often, those to be crucified did not carry the entire cross, just the crossbeam. It was standard procedure that a criminal set for crucifixion would carry the crossbeam to the site of execution.

And so it was in my situation.

Catholic tradition says I was so wearied from the beatings I had received earlier in the day that I stumbled and dropped my cross on three separate occasions. This was not the case. In fact, your Bibles themselves don't even report such a story. Truth be told, I didn't struggle at all carrying the crossbeam. I had spent half of my life carrying stone blocks around building sites. This little piece of wood was pretty light to be honest. And yet for some reason, the Romans didn't even make me carry it very far at all.

While was making my way up to Golgotha a man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country. Cyrene was a city in Libya, North Africa. Simon

was a dark-skinned field hand of some description.

As I was walking along, Simon approached me offering to carry my crossbeam. With very few exceptions, no one was allowed to assist a condemned man. As he approached me, I was a bit shocked to see him walking toward me from out of the crowd.

"Give it to me," he said.

"Excuse me?" I queried in a confused voice. "What are you doing? Sir, I am afraid that the soldiers are going to pummel you if you should attempt to interfere."

"Whatever," he remarked snidely. "I'm pretty sure they won't."

Looking over at the Roman soldiers, I expected nothing but trouble. Surprisingly, they gave me a nod of approval. It was very peculiar indeed. I kept asking myself why this man would offer to bare my burden.

As we walked together, I could see the discontent in his eyes and in the way that held his jaw clenched. Simon cursed and swore the entire way up the hill. I felt horrible about the situation. I said to him, "I'm really sorry about this ... but thank you very much for your assistance."

He replied, "Look, it's not that this is a lot of work, I just have things to do. If I don't get back soon with the supplies I've been sent for, my master is going to end up crucifying *me!* Ya know," he continued, "I've just finished six hours of labor in the fields and was on my way into town to fetch the supplies when the soldiers strong-armed me into doing this garbage. This is not convenient timing at all!"

I asked why in the world he had offered to help me if he really didn't want to. As it turns out, he didn't actually *offer*. The Roman soldiers put him up to it.

They **forced** him to carry the cross.

As we reached Golgotha, Simon threw the beam down and mumbled something incoherent that sounded rather derogatory towards Jews in general. I was at a loss for words. Not knowing what else to say, as Simon stormed off, I just shouted, "Um, thanks again."

In any event, just after the sixth hour, I was crucified. I was not the first Jew to be crucified at Golgotha, neither would I be the last.

You must understand that I lived in Roman territory where crucifixion was all too familiar. When I was young I remember hearing that after Herod the Great was assassinated in 4 BC, the governor of Syria marched his legions through Galilee to Jerusalem and ordered 2,000 rebels to the cross. Such a sight would have been gruesome, to say the least.

Crucifixion was a Roman means of execution in which the victim was nailed to a cross. Heavy, wrought-iron nails were driven through the wrists and the heel bones, as was the case with my own experience. The severity of this sentence was designed as a harsh lesson to rebels. Crucifixion was the primary means by which Rome repeatedly attempted to subjugate my Jewish countrymen.

The worst part about crucifixion was that it was a long, agonizing death that dragged on and on. With the physical suffering of crucifixion came mental and emotional anguish. It was meant not simply to produce death in its victims, but to provide a torturous example for all to see. And so that all passersby would know the crime of the crucified, a plaque was fixed to the top of the main beam.

Above my head they placed the written charge against me: **THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS.**

Not everyone was satisfied with the plaque.

The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews." Pilate answered, "What I have written, I have written."

This was consistent with what Pilate had said to the Pharisees and chief priests earlier in the day, saying that I was the King of Jews, not merely that I claimed to be. I am sure that Pilate had the plaque designed accordingly because he knew that it would grievously upset the members of the Sanhedrin. It would have been a small victory for Pilate. However, the chief priests seemingly got the last laugh because regardless of what the plaque said, I was still hanging up on a cross.

As I hung there, the soldiers took my clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

In total, my clothing consisted of an under and an outer garment, a belt, sandals and a head covering. This was the standard clothing of every Jew. The undergarment that Jews wore was a type of shirt, reaching from the neck to the knees or ankles. Such an undergarment was seamless and therefore too valuable to be cut up or torn. My clothes were removed with great care. The soldiers dare not tear them off of me.

"Let's not tear it," the soldiers said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it."

Casting lots was somewhat similar to rolling dice or rolling bones like a witch doctor. The casting of lots to decide who would get to keep the criminal's clothes was common occurrence. After all, dead guys don't generally need their clothes. The soldier who won my undergarment, being Roman, was never going to wear my clothing. Instead, he would have immediately taken it to the markets and sold it for a profit.

By now, my time on the cross was nearing its end and the mood of the Sanhedrin was intensifying. Those who passed by **hurled insults at me, shaking their heads.**

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders **mocked me.** "**He trusts in God. Let God rescue him** now if He wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' "

About the ninth hour [that is, 3pm] I cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"--which means, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?**"

One might ask why I would have believed that Yahweh had forsaken me?

I once heard an evangelistic pastor give a very compelling explanation about how at that moment, God disconnected from me so that I could feel the full pain of what it meant to suffer as a human and would therefore have a better understand of why humans sin. This is a very interesting thought, but completely and utterly unsubstantiated by the Scriptures.

When I said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me," I was actually quoting from the book of Psalms. I tell you truly, this was by no means accidentally, coincidentally, or a haphazard fulfillment of prophesy. I had memorized this Scripture and quoted it purposefully. In doing so, I was making a point that all the Jews within hearing distance would understand. Since I realize that not everyone is familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, please allow me to quote directly from chapter twenty-two of Psalms:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. **All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him.** Let him deliver him, since he delights in him." Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Psalm 22 was originally spoken by King David. It was the anguished prayer of a godly sufferer victimized by the vicious and prolonged attacks of enemies whom he has not provoked and from whom the Lord has not (yet) delivered him. However, all hope was not lost. King David knew in his heart of hearts that Yahweh would rescue him from the clutches of death itself.

King David acknowledged God's mercy saying:

"But you, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you. You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor Him! Revere Him, all you descendants of Israel! For He has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from him but has listened to his cry for help."

These are not the words of a man who felt that God has abandoned him, but the words of a man whose resolve had been strengthened and who was singing the praises of his God.

In quoting Psalm 22, the point that I was making was this: "All is not lost; there is yet hope." In quoting Psalm 22, I was letting my followers know that God had *not* forsaken me!

In the moments after I praised God through Psalm 22, I requested a special drink that had been prepared for me by my followers.

I said, "I am thirsty." A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to my lips. When I had received the drink, I said, "It is finished." And when I had cried out again in a loud voice, I gave up my spirit.

At this point, I was not dead. I had not actually given up my spirit, just my animation. I can say with

great certainty that I was merely unconscious. My body was now unresponsive to the world around it.

The wine vinegar that I was given was not actually wine vinegar at all. In truth, it was a concoction created by Talasheus, the sister of Lazarus. This concoction contained a heavy narcotic substance capable of causing a man to become incapacitated.

Following just over three hours of hanging on the cross, my tribulation had come to an abrupt end.

Then something amazing seemingly occurred: A Roman officer was greatly moved by the circumstances of my crucifixion.

The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"

The centurion, a Roman official was praising Yahweh and calling me the Son of God. A bit suspicious, isn't? Did it never occur to you that this centurion and I had met long before I was hung on the cross? Make no mistake about it, this centurion had pledged his life to me after I had saved the life of his gay lover. As you may remember, his name was Clementius. And on the day of my crucifixion, it was no mistake that he was the man in charge of the events at hand.

Clementius was a centurion who had overseen thousands of crucifixions in his day. He was a professional soldier, not a fool. He knew the stench of death. And when he heard me cry out and saw how I instantaneously went limp on the cross, he knew that I had not yet expired. He knew that I had not been upon the cross long enough to have died.

I tell you truly, I never died upon the cross.

"Liar!" yelled out one of my pupils in the Heavenly auditorium. With this, many of the 5000 people began to grumble and shout out questions, too many questions to answer at once.

"I know that this is a very emotional topic for many of you," I responded, "but what I tell you is no lie: I did not die on the cross."

"How can you say such things?" shouted out another. "My Earthly life was based on the premises that you died on the cross to save me from sin!"

"And yet you are still capable of sin. Are you not?" I questioned. "I wish that I could tell you otherwise, but the foundation of Christianity is faulty. I wish that it weren't so, but this is the truth. That is why I teach this class: So that I may set the record straight for you. The purpose of Heaven is not to bring you eternal happiness, but to bring you into intimate contact with Truth. Truth is rarely easy to accept or understand."

Many more hands were raised up into the air, about one hundred or so.

"I see that many of you have important questions," I acknowledged. "However, because we are running behind schedule, I will ask you to hold your questions to the end. We must now continue with the rest of the lecture. I know that much of this is so very hard to swallow, but please allow me to explain what I have learned about crucifixion since arriving here in Heaven." Then I continued:

It is a commonly accepted notion that crucifixion kills by way of suffocation. *Suffocation* is defined as "death by cutting off the supply of oxygen to the lungs." However, it is incorrect to say that crucifixion kills via suffocation. In my case specifically, there is absolute proof that I did not suffocate: Before losing consciousness, I let out a loud yell. Have you ever been winded by a punch to the gut? Can a man yell out when he is not able to breathe? No, he cannot. A suffocating person can't even speak.

It is also a common misperception that crucifixion kills by way of asphyxiation. *Asphyxiation* is "loss of consciousness as a result of too little oxygen and too much carbon dioxide in the blood."

The theory that crucifixion causes asphyxiation via suffocation is attributed to Pierre Barbet, a doctor of pharmacy writing around 1950 AD. As the outstretched arms of a crucified victim support most of the body weight, Dr Barbet hypothesized that this would cause a tractioning across the chest cavity. In turn, this would limit expansion of the thoracic cage and lungs. The more the body sagged, the more traction there was across the thoracic cage. This in turn, so it was said, exhausted the man thus causing his body to sag further. At maximum sag and traction, the condemned would have severe difficulty inhaling. Thus, oxygen content of the blood would decrease while carbon dioxide content would increase. It was theorized that when oxygen levels got low enough and carbon dioxide level got high enough, then the condemned would pass out. As the process continued, he would die.

As clear-cut and straightforward as this is, it is not accurate.

In 2004 AD, experiments by Frederick Zugibe, MD, PhD, revealed that crucifixion is not capable of causing asphyxiation. In his experiments, he replicated the aspects of crucifixion by strapping test

subjects to actual crosses. Instead of using nails, he used rope. The subjects were secured at the wrists and ankles and crucified for twelve hours at a time. In one trial, the men were not fed, but were given plenty of water, and the room temperature was kept 72-degree Fahrenheit. In another trial, the men were again not fed, but were also not given water. The room temperature was raised to 87-degrees Fahrenheit for the second trial.

Though the tractioning process produced rapidly-increasing pain (especially at the joints), the subjects in test group #1 reportedly experienced neither difficulty breathing nor significant change in breathing volume. However, the subjects in test group #2 sweated profusely, showed earlier signs of dehydration. Those these subjects maintained normal breathing volumes, the perfusion (absorption) of oxygen into their tissues was becoming moderately diminished.

Dr Zugibe's *Experimental Studies in Crucifixion* demonstrated that hypovolemic shock, not asphyxiation, would be the harbinger of death.

Hypovolemic shock refers to a medical or surgical condition in which "rapid fluid loss results in multiple organ failure due to inadequate circulating blood volume and subsequent inadequate perfusion of oxygen into the body tissues." This means that if a person dehydrates enough, the water content of the blood is greatly diminished and thus becomes thick and sludgy. Consequently, it cannot circulate efficiently through the vessels. Though the oxygen content of the blood may be high, the blood cannot quickly deliver that oxygen to body tissues, and thus, the oxygen-starved organs shutdown. This includes the heart muscles and the brain. Unconsciousness ensues. **If rehydration does not occur in time**, death ensues.

Unfortunately for those men condemned to crucifixion, a human being can go up to seventy-two hours without any water. Thus, the agony of crucifixion drags on for up to three days. However, as Dr Zugibe demonstrated, the dehydration process can be quickened somewhat if the victim experiences severe heat exhaustion from hanging around in the blazing sun all day. Additionally, a man's body weight can create enough traction of the body joints that they could potentially dislocate, and if nothing else, become excruciatingly painful. Severe pain can result in *traumatic shock* that causes further ineffective circulation of the blood, disturbance of heart function, rapid pulse, marked decrease in blood pressure, and decreased kidney function, amongst other things.

Even with all of these factors combined, on average it takes thirty-six hours for crucified men to die. Crucifixion really is the most prolonged, agonizing, and humiliating type of death.

Luckily, I wasn't on the cross quite that long.

I was crucified on a Friday just after the sixth hour. There were two men, insurrectionists, crucified alongside of me who had been hanging there only slightly longer than myself. But we were in luck. According to the Jewish calendar, Friday officially ended at sunset, at which time the Saturday Sabbath officially began. As Jerusalem is in the northern hemisphere and it was springtime, astronomers can prove that the sunset occurred at precisely 5:48pm that day.

It is ever so important to understand this: Jewish Mosaic Law dictates that no Jew is to be left hanging on a wooden cross during the Sabbath. The Law says this:

'If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. You must not desecrate the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.'

My friends, I assure you that I had previously been aware of this Law! This is precisely why I ensured that I would be crucified on a Friday. After stirring up trouble with the Pharisees, I had purposely avoided Jerusalem for four days, not returning to the Holy City until the Thursday night Passover feast. I plotted to be captured just after finishing the Passover meal. I knew that a Friday crucifixion ensured that I would be up on the cross no longer than nine hours. Having observed many crucifixions during my lifetime, I knew that crucifixion cannot kill a man in less than one day. Unfortunately, so did the Jewish Pharisees.

Because the Jews did not want the bodies left on the crosses during the Sabbath, they asked Pilate to have the legs broken and the bodies taken down.

To hasten death, the Roman centurion would use a club to shatter, not just fracture, the shinbones of crucified men. As sunset was approaching, neither of the men crucified beside me at Golgotha were nearing death. The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first man who had been crucified with me, and then those of the other. This ensured that the men would be dead **and buried** before the

6pm sunset.

In years past, it was suggested that shattering the shin bones reduced a man's ability support himself, thus increasing strain across his chest and arms while reducing lung capacity. It was proposed that this in turn rapidly sped his suffocation. However, if crucifixion does not kill by suffocation, then such an explanation is invalid.

In his research, Frederick Zugibe, MD, explains that the shattering of the crucified man's legs to hasten death was administered as a coup de grâce, hastening death by causing severe traumatic shock and the formation of fat embolisms. Breaking the lower legs was not enough. They had to be fully shattered into many pieces in order to obtain the desired effect. Though this was the normal procedure when they came to me and found that I was already dead, they did not break my legs.

In ancient times, the living were often mistakenly assumed dead.

My followers once brought me a boy whom they hoped I could resurrect. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But I took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

He was never dead. He was merely unconscious. In the same way, I was never dead. I was merely unconscious but no one could tell the difference.

But the misdiagnosis of my death was no accident. The entire situation was rather well orchestrated. As the centurion in charge of my crucifixion, it was Clementius whom had pronounced me dead. And the head centurion's decision was not open to interpretation. You see, no one could really question whether or not his diagnosis was truly accurate. In my day there were no fancy machines for determining whether someone was alive or dead. We did not have ECGs or MRIs. We didn't even have blood-pressure cuffs.

And so, just as Jonah had stayed alive after being swallowed by a whale, I also survived certain death! By the grace of God, I had overcome crucifixion! I was the first man in recorded history to have accomplished this incredible feat! Having said this, I should tell you that I am not the only person in recorded history to have survived crucifixion. I know of many other men who have without a doubt done the same. I will give you three examples from recorded history.

Example #1:

In 1980, in Stockton, California, a local development company had chosen a plot of land to build condominiums. Unbeknownst to them, the land had once been an ancient American Indian burial site. While digging out the foundation for the structure, bone and such were unearthed. They continued on with development and planned to simply dispose of the remains.

In an act of protest against the company and for the right to rebury his Native American ancestors, a man by the name of Jonathan LeDeux (also known by his Native American name *Swift Turtle*) crucified himself at the building site from sunrise to sunset. He was nailed to a wooden cross and a crown of thorns was placed on top of his head. For twelve hours, from sunrise to sunset Swift Turtle remained on the cross.

At the end of the ordeal, the police removed him from the cross and took him back to his home to recuperate. He did not die from suffocation or hypovolemia. He is still alive and well to this day.

Example #2:

The second example of a man surviving crucifixion comes to us from the writings of Flavius Josephus. In his book *Life*, Josephus notes that a series of insurrections that took place in and around Jerusalem between 41 AD and 43 AD. The Romans crushed this particular rebellion and put 2000 Jews to death by crucifixion in Thecoa, six miles south of Bethlehem. While observing the crosses of captured fellow-countrymen one evening just before sunset, Flavius was shocked to see that three of his own friends were hanging in agony. Emotionally overcome, he pleaded for their lives with the commanding general, Titus and offered to pay a ransom. Titus ordered them taken down and given the best care possible. Nevertheless, two of the three died while being cared for by physicians. However, even after having been scourged and then crucified for approximately thirty-one hours, **one man was resuscitated!**

Example #3:

During the first half of the twentieth century, a man named Mortado also survived crucifixion. Mortado was a native of Berlin, Germany. At the age of about eighteen, like most youths of that age, he became possessed of the desire to travel, and see the world. He had already joined the Navy, but had seen no active service, until the first year had passed, on a training ship, and then, at the beginning of the World War (WWI) in 1914 AD, his actual service commenced and there began a series of adventures and incidents that lead up to the terrible crisis that shortened his naval career, and made him into *the Human Fountain*.

As the war started, Mortado was assigned to special duty in Northern Africa. While in the Northern part of the Sahara Desert, he became separated from his party and got lost. Using his compass he went to the nearest Oasis to await some of his comrades. A band of Riffs, who were a wild tribe of Muslims, came riding up to where he was sitting. They robbed Mortado, disrobed him, and carried him to a large wooden water wheel, which was used for drawing water.

The bandits gave him what the Americans called the *spread eagle*, driving large wire nails through his hands and feet through the soft or fleshy parts, and crucifying him, so to say, to the wheel, and abandoned him to his fate. Mortado remained unconscious there baking in the sun for eight hours until he was fortunately discovered by some white men who released him, carried him to civilization, and notified his commanding officer of the situation. In a few hours an ambulance came and conveyed him to a base hospital, and for many days he suffered intense agony. However, he did recover.

Unable to perform any manual labor because of the damage to his hands, and at a loss what to do, Mortado tried out for the circus and presented himself as the *Human Fountain*.

He first presented the exhibition in Berlin, in January, 1929, and it met with instant favor from both press and public. A New York Booking Agent, learning of his success in Germany and soon signed him to a contract with the Dreamland Circus Side Show, Coney Island, New York, for the summer season of 1930.

Many people the world over accept that I did not die from crucifixion itself. Still a percentage of these people are under the impression that I did indeed die while upon the cross. I have heard them say that I was killed by a spear thrust that penetrated deeply into my thoracic cavity. This event is well misunderstood and quite exaggerated.

As the story goes, just after Clementius determined that my legs should not be broken one of the soldiers pierced my side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

None of the Gospels describe which side I was pierced. Additionally, they are not clear about the depth of this piercing. However, I will confirm that the prodding of a crucified man with a dagger or spear was a common occurrence. This did not occur randomly, but as part of the process of crucifixion. In an era before medical technology, this was the most effective means of determining whether the man was truly dead or merely faking it. Poking the side with a sharp point was expected to cause a muscle twitch in a conscious person, but not in a dead one. The prodding of a crucified man's side was not designed to kill, especially if it was believed that he was already dead.

Even the Gospel of John reports that I was *pierced*, not *stabbed*. I will tell you truly that I was pierced upon the right side of my lower ribcage. Because I was hanging so high above the ground, the tip of the spear pierced me and about a 45-degree angle. And because I was unconscious, I didn't feel a thing. However, I am told that what John's Gospel reports was correct: A flow of blood and water came forth from my body.

You must ask yourself what this flow of blood and water demonstrates. Does it prove that I was dead or that I was still alive?

Christian theology of course states that the flow of blood and water is proof that I was dead. In years past, the claim was made that the flow of blood and water was actually blood cells and serum. The serum is the liquid in which the red blood cells float. You see, it is a physiologically accepted fact that when a man dies, his red blood cells separate from the clear serum. Thus, we get the appearance of blood and water. However, such a separation requires a time lapse of at least thirty-six hours. I had not even been on the cross for four hours, let alone dead for such an amount of time. Therefore, such an

explanation cannot be accepted as plausible.

More recently, Christian theology has claimed that the presence of blood and water was due to my pericardial sac being pierced. The *pericardial sac* (or *pericardium*) is "the thin, closed, membranous sac surrounding the heart and the roots of the great blood vessels; it contains a clear serous liquid." Pericardial fluid is present in both living and recently deceased people. As I was pierced from the side, not the front, the spear would have needed to travel completely through my right lung in order to reach the pericardium.

The thin, fluid-containing space between the heart and the pericardial sac (heart sac) is called the *pericardial space*. An average pericardial space contains 15-50 mL of fluid, which is the equivalent of 1-3 tablespoons of fluid. The fluid serves to lubricate the outer layers of the heart as it glides against the lungs and inner chest muscles. Freshly produced fluid is cycled through the pericardial space on an ongoing basis.

As a blade, such as the tip of a spear, is withdrawn from a wound, the flesh quickly approximates, thus clogging an exit point. This makes it difficult for any fluid to escape. Consequently, most fluid from a punctured pericardial sac drains into the lungs and surrounding body cavities. Only a minuscule amount of the 15-50 mL of pericardial fluid will sometimes exit the wound. Any clear fluid draining from the sac is instantly mixed with blood from the lungs and thus takes on an appearance indecipherable from blood. All a witness would see is blood. However, when there is a much greater volume of pericardial fluid in the pericardial space, a small visible amount of clear fluid can conceivably pass through the lung and be emitted from the exterior wound upon the withdrawal of the spear. Such a thing is possible, though highly improbable. In order to see any amount of serous fluid expelled, one would need to have developed a massive amount of pericardial effusion.

Pericardial effusion is the accumulation of a larger than normal volume of pericardial fluid. Pericardial effusion can result from one of two possible scenarios. Fluid accumulation results when there is either increased fluid production or a decrease in the rate of drainage. Pericardial effusions can be either chronic or acute. Usually, chronic pericardial effusion is the result of ongoing irritation to the pericardium, whereas, acute pericardial effusion occurs secondary to injury to the pericardium.

Chronic pericardial effusion can result from chronic inflammatory diseases, infection (i.e. tuberculosis, parasitic, fungal), malignancies, and/or autoimmune processes within the pericardium. Slowly progressing effusions can grow to two liters (or about eight cups) without symptoms. To my knowledge, I did not have a pre-existing condition that would have predisposed me to pericardial effusion over the months or years leading up to my crucifixion.

In contrast, some scholars have suggested that they thought it was more likely that I would have been suffering from the acute variety of pericardial effusion.

Acute pericardial effusion can result from uremia (with associated kidney failure), primary tumors of the heart, myxedema (that is, thyroid failure), aortic dissection, sarcoidosis, Whipple disease (bacteria infection of small intestine), collagen vascular disease (i.e. lupus, scleroderma), and a number of other disease processes.

To my knowledge, I was not suffering from any of the acute causes of pericardial effusion listed above. Look, a person must accept that the odds I had Whipple disease, scleroderma, or myxedema were infinitesimally small.

However, there is one other common cause of acute pericardial effusion: Acute myocardial infarct (that is, a heart attack). It is a known fact that any crucified man can suffer a myocardial infarction, whether major or mild. This could cause an immense amount of fluid to build up around the heart.

As I have discussed previously, dehydration can lead to decreased blood volume, which induces hypovolemic shock, which then causes organ failure, including partial failure of the heart muscles, that is, acute myocardial infarct.

Massive heart attacks cause death in short order. When this happens there is hardly enough time to produce a significant volume of pericardial effusion. Whereas, a mild to moderate, non-lethal heart attack would irritate the pericardial lining over the next 6-24 hours thus producing a significant and measurable volume of pericardial effusion. It may even be possible that such an irritation to the pericardial lining could produce two liters of pericardial effusion within, say, twenty minutes after being stabbed in the heart. However, this would not be possible in a man dying from dehydration (hypovolemia) on the cross. It is not at all probable that pericardial effusion can occur in a man who has almost no water in his body.

Therefore, if you accept the word of the Gospel of John at face value ("blood and water came forth"),

and continue to claim that I did have effusion, then I could not have been dehydrated on the cross. John's report would therefore be testifying that I was *alive*, not dead. One must be willing to admit that this overwhelming makes sense since I was only on the cross for about three and half hours. No one dehydrates in three and half hours in the springtime sun; it was April in the northern hemisphere and the temperature was quite moderate that day. As I was not dehydrated on the cross, then it would not make sense that I could have suffered a dehydration-induced heart attack. And for the record, I did not experience a heart attack that day.

We need to face the facts. I did not suffocate on the cross. My blood cells and serum did not have time to separate. I did not dehydrate on the cross. I did not, therefore, have a heart attack induced by hypovolemia.

As my heart muscle was not irritated from a myocardial infarct, I did not have a buildup of fluid around my heart. And yet, the Gospel of John clearly states that blood and water came forth after I had been pierced with the spear. As I attest that the Gospel of John is correct about the blood and water, you have to ask yourself, "If the fluid did not come from around the heart, then where did it come from? What is our differential (alterative) diagnosis?"

I will tell you the answer now: *Pleural effusion*.

Pleural effusion is "an excess accumulation of fluid in the pleural space around the lungs." Common causes of pleural effusion include: congestive heart failure (takes years to progress), nephritic syndrome (kidney failure), pneumonia, liver cirrhosis, hypothyroidism, tuberculosis and lung cancer. Crucifixion and hypovolemia do not cause pleural effusions.

However, there is another common source of pleural effusion: Blunt trauma.

A good strong punch to the thoracic cage in and off itself will not really cause irritation to the pleural lining. I mean, boxers don't suffer pleural effusion after every fight, and they take quite a beating. Although, if a few ribs were broken, a jagged edge of bone could rub against the pleural lining and cause a significant level of effusion, so long as the man was **not** hypovolemic/dehydrated.

As I related earlier, although most of the lead-up to my crucifixion was rather mild, when Joseph of Arimathea punched me in my right side, I felt a couple of my ribs snap. This was the cause of my pleural effusion. And because I was not dehydrated, I could feel the fluid accumulation around the base of my right lung growing and growing. By early evening, it was beginning to affect my breathing mildly because my right lung could only expand to about $\frac{3}{4}$ -capacity.

When pleural effusions accumulate, the greatest build up of fluid is at the lower end of the ribcage where the lung meets the diaphragm. That is exactly where I could feel all of the pressure increasing. And this is the exact area where my body was pierced by the tip of the Roman soldier's spear. In the current Earthly era, this is almost exactly the medical treatment for pleural effusion: A one-inch wide incision is made one-inch deep on the antero-lateral chest wall between the ninth and tenth ribs. Then a chest tube is installed for drainage purposes.

The soldier did not pierce my side with intent to kill. He pierced my side shallowly in order to check for responsiveness. Because I was six feet above him, his spear caught me in my right side between my ninth and tenth ribs, creating a wound measuring about two inches deep and one inch wide. Consequently, the spear punctured my outer pleural lining and along with a bit of blood, a ton of clear fluid came pouring out.

Such a puncturing of the pleural sac is not commonly lethal. As you may be aware in this new millennium, every patient undergoing invasive lung surgery has his pleural sac cut open to access the lung. It heals and the man generally lives. However, in my day, we did not possess the medical technology currently available on Earth. Unfortunately for me, if I didn't get some sort of medical attention, my open wounds would almost certainly have become infected, and that could have killed me. But none of that mattered to me at that point. As I hung there unconscious at dusk, I was no longer in control of my fate. However, I had not left my fate to chance. Instead, I had left it in the hands of an old friend, Joseph of Arimathea. And he did exactly as I had instructed him to do.

Joseph of Arimathea went boldly to Pilate.

Being that both Pilate and Joseph were men of political involvement, they had previously conversed on hundreds of occasions. Over the years, they had gotten to know each other rather well. But on this night, Joseph did not approach Pilate to speak of political matters or the state of the economy. This time, he went to Pilate for one reason, and one reason alone: Going to Pilate, Joseph asked for my body.

When Joseph paid Pilate this visit, they were alone. No one else was in the room. It is impossible to know every detail of what the men talked about, but I will relate the conversation to you, just as Joseph

late related to me.

Entering Pilate's offices, Joseph greeted him kindly, "Nice to see you again, Pontius. How is your wife these days? Healthy, I pray."

"Healthy, yes, but very upset with me, as usual," Pilate noted.

"I am sorry to hear that?" said Joseph.

"Me, too," retorted Pontius. "As you know, I sentenced an innocent man to crucifixion. She warned me not to do so, and she was correct. Many times I tried to free this man, but as you know, the Sanhedrin in which you are involved would not let the matter rest."

"I am glad that we both agree that Jesus was innocent," remarked Joseph. "Though I am a member of the Sanhedrin myself, I feel that the Council has made a decision out of envy. I attempted to speak out on behalf of this man, Jesus, but the chief priests ridiculed me greatly."

"This is politics gone mad," said Pilate emphatically. "This man was no threat to Rome or to his fellow man. He deserves better than this. I regret his suffering. It is with ..."

Joseph interjected, "Sir, if what you say comes from your heart, then please allow me to take his body and give it a proper burial in my own family's tomb."

Pilate thought for a moment and answered, "Yes, I would be pleased by this. I will have him released into your custody once he is dead."

"Pontius, has no one told you?" asked Joseph. "Jesus is already dead."

Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. Taking a step backward, Pilate let out a small gasping type of a laugh. "Dead?" he inquired rhetorically. "Impossible. He's been out there for less than four hours. And I saw to it myself that he was neither scourged severely nor forced to carry his own crossbeam."

"I know, but the centurion already pronounced him dead," Joseph stammered.

"Not possible." Opening the door to the corridor, Pilate called out, "Someone get Garzarius the centurion in here right now!"

"Yes, Governor. Right away," answered one of the soldiers who was standing guard. "However, Garzarius is on leave. Clementius is the centurion overseeing crucifixions today, sir."

"What? Why is Clementius on duty?" inquired Pilate.

"They swapped shifts, Governor," the soldier answered.

"Fine. Then run along and fetch Clementius for me," insisted Pilate. With that the soldier hustled out the door.

Joseph later told me that though he and Pilate sat waiting in the room for only about ten minutes, but it felt like a lifetime. Finally, there was a knock at the door.

"Enter," yelled Pontius.

The door opened and Clementius walked in. "Sir, you wanted to see me?"

"Yes. What is this nonsense about Jesus being dead already?" probed Pilate.

"Sir?" said Clementius.

"Is Jesus already dead?" asked Pilate in agitated fashion.

"Um, yes. He's dead, Governor," stated the centurion.

Pilate asked, "Are you sure of this, Clementius?"

"Yes, sir," replied Clementius. "I mean, I didn't decapitate him or anything, but he looked dead to me."

"I assume you broke his legs," said Pilate. The centurion gave no immediate answer, so Pilate continued, "You did break his legs, didn't you?"

"Well, no sir," answered the centurion. "Like I said, he looked dead to me. We even jabbed him in the side with a spear to make sure that he wasn't faking. And at that time, he didn't twitch or anything."

"The quick death of a crucified man whose legs have not been broken is unheard of," said Pilate.

"This is extremely surprising and suspicious." Pontius covered his mouth with his left palm and then began to stroke the stubble of his beard. He sort of laughed. It was almost an accusative laugh. Staring at Clementius, he asked, "Do you think me a fool?"

Clementius puffed out his chest, dropped his shoulders back, and stood erect. "No, Governor," he stated boldly. "You are no fool."

"You are my centurion," said Pilate. "This is your job. You know when a man is dead. What do I know about crucifying men?"

Both men stood there silent waiting for the other to speak.

Taking full advantage of this opportunity, Joseph queried Pilate. "Your Highness, this day has been riddled with misfortune and despair. Please allow me to do what is right in the eyes of our God, Yahweh

by burying Jesus before the sun sets.”

“Quiet!” Pilate said raising his right hands as though to shoosh Joseph. “What is truth?” he asked rhetorically. “And what do I care of a Jew? He is dead you say? Well then, he is dead as far as I am concerned.” Pilate paused, again stroking his face. He appeared to look Clementius and Joseph over with care, but truly, he was looking through them. Pilate turned his back on the men and walk toward the open window.

Looking into the sunset he instructed the men, “Take Jesus down and do with his body as you see fit and according to Jewish custom. Dead or not, it is of no concern to me. But mark my words, if this man is ever again seen alive in my province, it shall be the two of you who are crucified unto death. Now, get out of my sight.”

With that Clementius and Joseph of Arimathea quietly, but quickly left Pilate’s presence.

With Pilate's permission, Joseph came and took my body away.

Such special treatment was unheard of. The release of the body of man condemned for high treason, and especially to one who was not an immediate relative, was quite unusual. The remains of an executed criminal often were left unburied or, at best, put in a dishonored place in a pauper's field.

But Joseph was smart enough not to ask questions. He simply got on with the task at hand.

At the place where I was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. This was the tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea. It was less than 100 yards from the crucifixion site.

Joseph took my body down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. And though the tomb was very near to the crucifixion site, a limp body (whether alive or dead) isn't easy to carry. Such a task frequently requires the strength of two men. Not coincidentally, Joseph didn't have to carry my body all by himself. He had had help.

He was accompanied by Nicodemus. Nicodemus was yet another Pharisee who believed that I had come from God. He was the second trustworthy Pharisee of whom I had spoken about to the Twelve.

Initially, only Joseph and Nicodemus were present at the tomb. None of the Twelve or Gospel authors was involved in these events. And though the two men came alone, they did not come unprepared. According to my instruction, they brought along a number of supplies.

Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking my body, the two men wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. The Gospel of John goes on to say that this was **in accordance with Jewish burial customs**.

Have you ever wondered to yourself: "What are the Jewish burial customs?"

Well, this absolutely a question that everyone in this audience should be asking!

Almost no one takes the time to ask this question, let alone research it.

I have heard Christians claim that Jewish burial customs involve the use of aloes and myrrh as part of special blessing while simultaneously covering the smell of decomposing corpses.

Well, I can tell you right now that the use of aloes and myrrh in during burial certainly does not come from Jewish tradition and it is not supported by any Scriptural references. This talk of using aloes and myrrh actually comes from Greek tradition. Nicodemus was a Greek and well versed in such traditions.

In contrast to Greek burial customs, the Jewish custom (going back nearly 5000 years) is to thoroughly wash the body of the deceased, cover it with a simple linen shroud and bury it in the ground or tomb--with no use of embalming or spices. Using spices is forbidden because they slow and disguise the decay. The Jewish idea is to not retard the decay of the body (as for instance the ancient Egyptians did), but rather to help it speedily return to the soil without hindrance. Hence the saying, "ashes to ashes and dust to dust."

In addition, Jewish laws exist regarding the handling of the dead. These laws require *mikveh*: a bath of ritual immersion that must be performed by each person who has come in contact with a dead body. Specifically, something called the *Tamasha baptism* must be performed after handling the body of a deceased person. It is characterized by a triple immersion in water and is performed in an effort to remove sin, disease, and/or Earthly defilement from those handling the corpse.

Note that such purity rituals are only necessary when dealing with a corpse, but not in dealing with someone who is merely "asleep" or injured. Because I was not dead, I never received any sort of Jewish burial rites following my crucifixion. And I tell you truly, it was because I was still alive that Nicodemus brought seventy-five pounds of aloes and myrrh.

I think that most people are vaguely familiar with aloes, but a relative few people have any idea what myrrh is. Both aloes and myrrh have a virtually unlimited number of possible uses, however, the

medicinal properties of both are also well documented.

Aloe is a plant that comes from the lily family. Native to Africa, it possesses fleshy leaves that are spiny along the edge. Breaking open the leaves reveals a slimy gel which can be applied topically or mixed into a drinkable liquid. It can be used to aid in numerous conditions. These conditions include, but are not limited to: indigestion, stomach ulcers, constipation, skin burns, rashes, wounds, arthritis, and joint pain, just to name a few. Additionally, aloe is known to ease the pain and reduce the inflammation associated with open wounds. The usefulness of aloe a medicinal plant is not based on wishful thinking, but on scientific research and clinical trials.

Scientists have found that aloe possesses a combination of antibiotics, astringents, coagulating agents, pain inhibitors, cell growth stimulators, and scar inhibitors. Its beneficial properties can be attributed to mucopolysaccharides present in the inner gel of the leaf, especially acemannan (acetylated mannans). And while aloe is quite an impressive healing aid, myrrh is no less so.

Myrrh is the aromatic, bitter-tasting gum resin exuded by certain trees and shrubs growing in eastern Africa and Arabia. Chinese medicine commonly employs it as a liniment for bruises, aches, sprains, and arthritis. It increases circulation and heart rate. Most importantly, it possesses analgesic, antifungal, astringent, and antiseptic properties. Suitable as a wash for sores, fungal infections, traumatic injuries, and wounds, myrrh is one of the most effective of all known disinfectants on the planet Earth.

Though it is not spoken of in your Bibles, my friend Nicodemus was a doctor of medicine by profession. He was a healer in his own right, well versed in the use of herbal remedies. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were intent on helping my wounds to heal while minimizing the risk of infection from such wounds.

Around 8pm that evening, while Joseph and Nicodemus were packing me in medicinal poultices, two more men arrived at the tomb. These were men whom I had converted to my line of thinking almost two years earlier. While they were both priests from the Essene sect, they believed that I was the Anointed Messiah, or as they referred to me, the Teacher of Righteousness. As with the rest of my disciples, these Essenes believed that everyday is a gift from God. Because my well-being was a sufficient reason to do so, they were willing to work on the Sabbath. God's work knows no restrictions. And these Essene men felt that they were doing God's work.

The men were dressed in brilliant pure white robes, as was customary of Essene priests. They came bearing food, water, candles, as well as other supplies. Joseph had employed them for this purpose, as well as to assist Nicodemus in his duties that were not yet completed.

Soon Joseph gathered his things and prepared to return home, while the other men remained at the tomb.

Joseph rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. Having rolled the stone into place, he headed home.

In this case, the *big stone* was disc-shaped and fit into a groove on the ground that acted as a track. Such stones were commonly used to seal the entrance to a tomb as a method for keep animals from scavenging the remains of the dead. They were not necessarily intended to keep humans out. Just as Joseph had done, a tomb stone could quite easily be rolled back and forth by a grown man who might need to gain entrance to the tomb. Generally, a tomb was left sealed for approximately six months providing ample time for a corpse to completely decay. Follow full decay of the corpse, the tomb stone was rolled away and a member of the deceased's family would go inside to collect the bones. The bones were then taken, cleaned, and stored in a sealed ossuary.

Of course, in my situation this never happened. My body was not left alone to decay and return to the earth. Instead, Nicodemus and the Essenes never left my side. For nearly eight hours straight, these disciples of mine sat by my side administering a form of focused meditative energy healing. This is what men of the current age refer to as *reiki*.

I taught this art to all of my disciples. Peter was my most promising pupil in the art of healing. On many occasions, he even raised people from the dead. Unfortunately, Peter was a bit dense and never fully understood my message. Consequently, I was forced to look elsewhere for assistance in this matter.

The Essene priests were marvelous healers in their own right, but it was Nicodemus whom I entrusted my well being to. Having been trained as a healer by John the Baptizer, Nicodemus was the most adept faith healer in Roman-occupied Israel, second only to me. Additionally, he fully grasped the significance of what I was on a mission to accomplish. Nicodemus was truly a great master of what the Baptizer had

taught him. Consequently, I insisted that Joseph of Arimathea employ Nicodemus' assistance rather than that of Peter.

As I was confident would be the case, by early morning on the Sabbath, I had regained consciousness thanks in large part to Nicodemus. Make no mistake about it: I was not resurrected. I was *resuscitated*.

It was at this point that the three men thoroughly bathed me and carefully cleaned out each one of my wounds. In an effort to wash the minor wounds upon my face and scalp, they shaved my head and shaved off my beard. They cleansed me according to what is recommended in the Hebrew Scriptures:

"The person to be cleansed must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean."

Consequently, I felt like a new man though I had by no means fully recovered. I was not yet strong, but I was strong enough that I could walk unassisted. Thus, before sunrise on the Sabbath, Nicodemus and I prepared to depart. We did however leave the Essene priests behind to clean and purify the tomb.

Upon our departure, Nicodemus and I did not need to remove the giant stone that sealed the entrance to the tomb. Remember, this was not the tomb of a pauper. It was the personal burial sepulcher of a very rich man from Arimathea. Not wanting to be seen by any Romans who might be out for a Saturday morning stroll, Nicodemus and I left out the rear passageway which Joseph of Arimathea had had constructed for that exact purpose.

We spent the night at the home of a disciple who lived relatively close to the Joseph's tomb.

A Wave of Aftershock

A concern rose amongst the Pharisees that my disciples might tamper with the tomb and my body. Caiaphas and his minions brought this to the attention of Pilate.

As was later related to me, on the day after the Friday Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. "Sir," they said, "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."

Caiaphas and the Pharisees did not make this request until midday on Saturday.

Pilate asked them, "Why must I send my men? Why don't you send Jews to secure the body of a Jew?"

"We cannot," Caiaphas replied. "Mosaic Law forbids it. A Jew is not allowed to travel more than 2,000 cubits (3000 feet) on the Sabbath. This agreed upon distance comes from rabbinic interpretation of Numbers chapter 35, verse 5 and Joshua chapter 3, verse 4."

"And why exactly should I care about what some old, outdated Jewish manuscripts say?" queried Pilate.

"Because Rome expects you to keep peace in Jerusalem by remaining sensitive to the traditions of the Jewish population," remarked Caiaphas snidely. "Obviously, you would not want Caesar to hear that you creating riotous angst in this province."

"Are you threatening me?" glared the Governor.

"Not at all," replied the chief priest confidently. "My lord, I am humbly pointing out that offending the entire Jewish populous could very well upset the delicate social balance which you strive so very hard to maintain here in our land."

Agitated by Caiaphas, Pilate exclaimed, "*Our land?* You mean *Caesar's land!* I should not have to remind you that this is no longer Israel. This place now has only one identity: It is Roman territory!"

"Be that as it may," Caiaphas said calmly, "I am quite sure that by attending to the needs of your subjects, their minds will be eased greatly."

Pilate laughed through his nose and gave a brief sarcastic smile. Just wanting to make the conversation end, he said, "Fine. I'll send two soldiers out immediately."

And though he decided that he would grant Caiaphas' request, Pilate did not send his soldiers out expeditiously. Instead, he called for Clementius the centurion and met with him privately.

Clementius came before Pilate with apprehension, not knowing why the Governor had requested his presence. He asked, "What would you request of me Your Highness?"

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how."

"As I know how?" repeated Clementius. "What do you mean, Governor?"

Pilate answered, "Secure Jesus' tomb in the same manner that you have attended to everything concerning this man so far. In addition, please inform Joseph of Arimathea that our soldiers will be on duty at the tomb for the remainder of the Jewish Sabbath."

Understanding the Governor's intentions, Clementius went and did exactly what was requested of him.

Consequently, Clementius requested a brief meeting with Joseph. Coming to place where Joseph lived, Clementius and his soldiers were met at the front door by Joseph's brother, Samuel. "Sir, how may help you? Is there some kind of trouble in the area?" asked Samuel.

"No trouble," replied the centurion. "I just need a quick word with your brother, Joseph."

Joseph soon came to the front entrance of the house. "How can I help you, centurion?" Joseph asked in a manner that implied that he had never before met Clementius.

"I am here merely as a courtesy," said the centurion. "I have been sent to inform you that the Governor is dispatching myself and these two Roman guards to protect Jesus' tomb from tomb raiders. Is there *anything* that you might need to gather from the tomb before we go to do what we must?"

"No," answered Joseph. "Everything that needed to be done has been completed. Thank you, centurion." With that Clementius and the soldiers went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Very early on the first day of the week [Sunday], just after sunrise, Mary Magdalene and another woman named Mary were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away. Unbeknownst to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, it was the Essenes whom had rolled the stone away.

When the two Marys entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

At this realization, Mary Magdalene panicked, yelling out, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" While they were wondering about this, suddenly **two men** in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. These were the Essene men.

In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" Then both Marys remembered my words.

Truth be told, I really should admit that I made a mistake. I had once said: "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." But technically, I was incorrect. I enter the tomb at about 6:00pm on Friday night, just before Saturday began. By 6:00am Sunday morning, only thirty-six hours later, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary arrived at the tomb only to find that I was long gone. They, of course, had no idea where Nicodemus and I had spent the night in hiding.

When I awoke late Sunday morning, I found that I had regained much of my strength. Granted, I felt like one of your modern day rugby players the day after a big game, but I was by no means disabled. Anxious to see which and how many of my disciples had gathered at my burial place, I once again departed for the tomb owned by Joseph.

Upon my arrival, I was somewhat disappointed to find that only one person remained. It was Mary Magdalene. She was sitting on a large carved block of stone. I approached from behind her, stopping about ten feet short. I coughed to alert her of my presence.

At this, she turned around and saw me standing there, but she did not realize that it was I. Without my full bushy beard and long hair, I now looked unrecognizable. I looked like a pagan Gentile.

"Woman," I said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" Thinking I was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." Mary again dropped her head and began to weep.

I said to her, "Mary." Suddenly, she recognized my voice.

She turned toward me and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). "But Master," she continued, "you look so different, so unfamiliar."

"Yes, I know," I replied. "A little later, I'll explain everything to you, but for now I must go. I am off to Galilee where I told my apostles that I would appear to them today."

So off I went.

Now that same day two of my disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles

from Jerusalem. As they talked and discussed the events of the day with each other, I myself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing me. One of them, named Cleopas, asked me, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

I couldn't help myself: I chuckled. They stared at me a bit surprised and disgusted by my reaction. "Yeah, I've heard about this Jesus-character," I said. "But am I a Jew that this man's tribulations should concern me?"

They replied, "Sir, if you knew of Jesus' teachings and his revolutionary message, then you would be greatly concerned by what has happened."

"If I had the time to hear of this man's story, I might be interested. However, I have a long trip home and no time to waste," I informed them.

But they urged me strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So I went in to stay with them. When I was at the table with them, I took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized me.

Cleopas exclaimed, "By Zeus! It is you, Jesus! You look so different without a beard and long hair. I mean, literally, you look like a different person. You look like one of the damn Romans!"

"I know," I responded. "Even Mary Magdalene didn't recognize me! She thought I was a Gentile gardener."

"But what possessed you to shave your beard and hair?" asked Cleopas.

I replied, "Actually, I didn't even think of it myself. Joseph of Arimathea suggested that it would be a great way to disguise myself in lieu of the situation. It was such a brilliant idea that I couldn't resist. Apparently, Joseph's brother Samuel had done the same thing many years ago in order to rid himself of a skin affliction. Joseph said that one day Samuel came home after having shaved his head and beard, and his own wife didn't even recognize him! She mistook him for a thief and began screaming uncontrollably for help. Her neighbors came running over and attempted to subdue Samuel. However, when given the chance he was quickly able to verify that he was indeed who he claimed to be." I continued, "I figured that if Samuel's own wife didn't recognize him, then no man will recognize me. And now that I look like a Greek, it appears that I can now move throughout the land incognito. From this point forward, I plan to call myself, *Apollonius*."

Overwhelmed with joy and confusion, Cleopas and the other disciple wished me good luck. Leaving Cleopas' home, I continued on to Galilee. When I arrived at Peter's house, I found my apostles weeping over the tragedy they had witnessed when I was on the cross.

While they were still talking about this, I myself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." Again, because of the distinct sound of my voice and the way I spoke, my disciples supposed it was I standing before them, but could not recognize me.

They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.

"How can this be?" asked Thomas. "Surely, you cannot be alive. You cannot be in human form. You do not look like the Jesus I knew. You are a ghost!" he shouted at me and then shouted to my other apostles, "He is a ghost!"

I corrected him immediately by demonstrating my humanness.

"Look at my 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." And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, I asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" They gave me a piece of broiled fish, and I took it and ate it in their presence.

Then I said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

I had palpable holes in my hands and feet! I was not in a different body and I was by no means a ghost! Upon the realization that I was indeed myself, my apostles rejoiced with much gladness. For nearly two weeks I stayed with them, teaching and engaging in merriment. As far as they were concerned, I had been crucified, died, and came back to life. I did nothing to correct their misunderstanding of the situation. I saw fit that they should find hope, albeit through misguided faith.

By myself overcoming crucifixion and avoiding death, I succeeded at turning the myth of Horus into reality. This is why my followers considered me a god. I succeeded in doing what only a god was capable of doing! I did what people had once considered impossible. And in doing so, I demonstrated to my people that even the greatest of Roman oppressions could be overcome. I gave them hope.

This was an incredible legacy to leave behind ... and that's just what I did: In the face of much

protest, I left it all behind. I had validated my teachings by demonstrating the most miraculous sign the world had ever witnessed. There was nothing further that I could do.

As I readied for my departure, Thomas came to me asking, "Master, what are we to do now?"

I said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."

Thomas replied, "We will. But for how long?"

"Until I return," I said.

"And when should we expect your return, Rabbi?" asked Thomas.

I told him, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. You will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes." And literally, that is what I meant. I planned to return within the time span of about thirty years, at most.

And then, I simply walked into the desert abyss. My disciples were left eagerly awaiting my return.

Having said my peace, I departed from the pages of biblical history. Leaving the land of my people, I once again returned to northern India. My intention was to do so only temporarily in order to build a small army of 200 intensely-devoted, well-trained apostles. I spent thirty years training the Two-Hundred on how to evangelize my message. Though I loved India and wished that I could bring her my message, that was not my fate. As I had said many times, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." I bred my Indian apostles to assist me in this important mission. With their help, we had specific, detailed plans on how we would mobilize the masses by delivering public sermons, infiltrate the political arena, and radically improve the way in which Jews viewed their God. And though this took thirty years to plan, I knew that I had to take that amount of time to get it right. The Roman empire would not be easy to repel from Israel. However, it was absolutely necessary that such an must be accomplished. For I was destined to be the King of Israel and to restore my homeland to its rightful glory as the leader of the free world.

Consequently, in 69 AD, after many years of preparation, I began the long arduous journey back to Jerusalem in order that I may restore hope to Israel. By this time, I was a man of many years, however, I retained the health of a much younger man. Still, the journey was slow. It took my party over one year to make the full trip.

In the summer of 70 AD, my traveling companions and I came over the peak of Mount Nebo on the east shore of the Dead Sea. Mount Nebo is over 2500 feet high. In the distance, we could see Jerusalem. It was a sight like I could never have expected: Much to my shock, the entire city was on fire. I came to find out that only days before our arrival, the Roman army under the command of Titus had razed Jerusalem to the ground. Apparently, this occurred in response to a number of serious Jewish riots that had begun in 66 AD. I was informed that the Romans had grown so sick of dealing with the unruly nature of my people that they massacred over 600,000 of them, men, woman, and children. This was the first Holocaust, one that very few people in the modern era know about. At that time, the Romans destroyed every building in the city, including Herod's Temple. Eventually, they even went so far as to dig up the foundations of almost every building in Jerusalem so that the city could not be rebuilt. Israel essentially ceased to exist.

As I had promised my Jewish apostles, I had returned. However, there was nothing to return to. I was too late. There was no one to save. My people were gone, either dead or dispersed across the nations. Consequently, my traveling companions and I quickly retreated to the East. I returned to Kashmir where I lived out my remaining years. In 78 AD, I died a natural death and was buried. My gravesite can still be found there today. I wish for your sake that there was a more climatic end to my story, but there's not. The truth is not always exciting. It's just the truth.

There are many people who are disturbed by the admissions that I have made in this lecture. It seems to me that they are not happy to hear that I was a fallible human being and a 'sinner', according to Mosaic Law. Many people are upset to find out that my crucifixion was merely pre-planned, not pre-destined. I am sad when I hear people call my actions "fraudulent." I did what I did for the good of Judaism and for the spirits of my people. I have no regrets about that, and I will not apologize for my actions. I do not believe that I should be held accountable for the way my message has been twisted over the centuries. I never dreamed that men would base the value of their own lives on this idea that I actually was God. I was a king, not God. And upon hearing the truth that I faked my own death, somehow men suddenly feel as though their own lives have no meaning. One of your own religious leaders, John Henry Newman, once wrote:

"We are in a world of mystery, with one bright Light before us, Jesus. Take away this Light and we are utterly wretched--we know not where we are."

Such statements seem ludicrous to me. For I tell you truly as I told the Jews of my time, you don't need religion to make your lives meaningful. That was my entire message. Just as it had been in my time, it is your religious institutions that more than any other single force retard progress of the human soul and therefore the progress of humanity as a whole.

Further I tell you, you don't need me and you don't need to praise me. I was just a man; flesh and blood the same as each of you. I was not a god. Or at least, I was no more of god than you yourselves are. If you want to know Yahweh, to truly know Him, look inside yourselves. For the kingdom of God is within you!

And still, some of you here in this auditorium are left asking, "If I don't worship Jesus and read our Bibles, then how can I know right from wrong? How will I maintain a moral compass here in Heaven?"

For I tell you truly my friends, you are born with this knowledge. Innately you each have knowledge of what is right, and what is wrong, and what is a necessary compromise. You don't need some outdated book or some religious hypocrite to tell you these things. For Yahweh has already written them in your heart.

Don't let religion rob you of your innocence. Be like the little children: Follow your heart and trust in it.

My friends, life really is as simple as that.

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HERE I WILL INCLUDE A CONCLUSION PAGE IN WHICH JESUS THANKS THE STUDENTS FOR COMING TO HIS LECTURE AND REMINDS THEM THAT THEIR CLASS ON "UFO'S 101" BEGINS AT 8:30AM ON MONDAY. THEN I WILL DESCRIBE JESUS WALK OUT OF THE AUDITORIUM AND BACK HOME.