

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Father, Why Have You forsaken Me?

The day is Nisan 13, the third day of the week. Yeshua made plans to eat the Passover with his disciples. He sent Peter and John to a wealthy friend for accommodations. They followed his instructions and the Memorial meal was prepared and served in a private room just after sundown, the beginning of a new day, Nisan 14. While they were eating, Yeshua became very somber.

His voice quivered with emotion. "One of you sitting here in this room plans to betray me."

Suddenly the room became unusually quiet. The men looked at each other in utter disbelief. Young John reclined closest to Yeshua. He was touched by the pain in his Master's voice, and impulsively leaned against him in a comforting gesture. The men begin to ask, "Could it be me?"

Peter, curious to know who it might be, tugged at John's robe and whispered, "Ask him who he is talking about."

In reply to John's question, Yeshua answered, "It is the one to whom I will hand this morsel, dipped in sop." John watched dismally as the bread was handed to Judas Iscariot.

Yeshua sat quietly, steadying his turbulent emotions. His quivering voice betrayed enormous depth of emotion. "This evening has great, passionate significance to me. I have long anticipated eating this Passover with you before I suffer." He began breaking from a large flat of unleavened bread, handing each disciple a small piece. "Eat this; it is my body which will be broken for you," he stated. After they finished eating, he poured a portion of wine from a large vessel, and passed it to the disciples. He instructed, "Divide the cup among yourselves.

Drink all of it; this is my blood of the New Testament. It shall be shed for many for the remission of sins. When you eat of this bread, and drink of this wine, do in remembrance of my death until I return.

"This is the last time I will keep the Passover, or drink wine with you, until everything is made new...until we are in my father's kingdom."

At mention of the kingdom, the disciples' interest suddenly surged into excited comments among themselves. Yeshua continued, "The hand of my betrayer serves himself at my table. However, the son of man will proceed as determined. Woe to the man who betrays me."

Their curiosity as to who might betray Yeshua soon changed. They surmised who would fill what position when the kingdom was established. Each hoped he would have the higher office.

After a while, Judas succumbed to Satan's influence. He willed himself to carry out his plan to betray Yeshua; he reasoned he had gone too far to back down now. Yeshua turned to Judas, and spoke

softly, “Do what you intend to do, and do it soon.” No one suspected what was taking place. They thought since Judas was the treasurer, he left to take care of some financial chore. After Judas left the room, Yeshua sighed deeply and said, “Now the son of man, and Yahweh, shall be glorified; each shall glorify the other.” No one understood how far into the future he was projecting himself.

He knew they misconstrued his words. They were mostly interested in their own ideas about the kingdom and their personal gain. Though they were all adult men—a few were older than himself—through his superior, spiritually mature eyes they were but infants. Overwhelmed with love for them he spoke tenderly, “My little children,” he began. “I’m only going to be with you for a short time. Where I am going, as I have said, you cannot come. Listen...I will give you a new commandment; love one another as I have loved you. Demonstrating true love will prove to everyone you are my disciples.”

Yeshua rose from his recliner, removed his robe, and wrapped a large towel around his waist. As he poured water and began washing their feet, he taught, “You still do not understand. You know how the Gentile ruling class demeans the poor and profit off them. This is not how it will be among you. Which is greater the one being served or the one serving? Usually it’s the one being served. I, as your Master, am here to serve. Just as my father has appointed me a kingdom, so I appoint it unto you. You will be given to eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Then he poured water, and began washing each disciple’s feet, drying them with the towel.

When he attempted to wash Peter’s feet, Peter, embarrassed, drew his feet back. “Why do you feel you should wash my feet? That is a job for servants.” he insisted.

“Simon, I know you don’t understand this now, but you will later,” came the answer.

Yeshua reached for Peter’s feet. Peter swung his legs to the other side of his recliner. “No, Master. I am unworthy. You must never wash my feet,” he insisted.

Yeshua stood patiently. “Simon,” he stated firmly. “If you continue to refuse, you will no longer be my disciple.”

Peter hesitated, then gradually he realized how serious Yeshua was. With widened eyes, Peter eagerly lowered his feet into the water and apologized. “If that be the case, Master, wash not only my feet, but my hands and head, also.”

After Yeshua had washed all their feet and sat back down he asked, “Do you know why I have washed your feet? You call me Master and Lord. That’s fine, because I am. Now, since I, your Master and Lord, have washed your feet, you should do likewise for each other. For I have set the example for you. If you realize you are not greater than your Lord, neither am I greater than my father. If you understand and do these things you will be happy. I don’t include all of you, for I know one has turned against me. This was predicted in the scriptures. Even though you don’t always understand, I tell you anyway, so that when it happens you will look back and know that I told you beforehand.

You will know then I am the one sent by The Father. Just as you have received me, so when others receive you, they receive me. If they receive me, they receive The Father who sent me.”

The disciples sat quietly. Each man sensed the seriousness of the moment. An air of soberness settled over their restless spirits. Yeshua continued, "Tonight you will be tempted to turn against me because of things that will happen. The scriptures foretell, 'I will smite the shepherd, and his sheep shall scatter'. After I am risen, I will go to Galilee and meet you there."

There was a stir among the men as they whispered to each other, "What is he talking about? What do you make of 'I will only be here for a while'?"

Yeshua knew what was on their minds. "Why do you inquire among yourselves about what I have said? Listen to what I tell you...very soon you shall weep in sorrow. The world will rejoice. Then your sorrow will turn into joy. Just as a woman experiences the pain of childbirth, then when the child is born, she rejoices, forgetting the pain; so shall it be with you. You will have joy that cannot be taken away. In that day, nothing you ask, in my name, will be denied you. Let me ask you this:

When I sent you by twos, without money, clothing, or food, did you have need of anything?"

"No, nothing," they answered.

"Now, he that has a purse, or lunch bag, take it and if you have no sword, sell your garment and buy one. There is something written of me that must be accomplished, 'He was reckoned among the transgressors'. These things will shortly be fulfilled."

Peter and John each produced short swords, "Here are two swords."

"That is enough," Yeshua said.

Peter's curiosity exploded, "Where are you going, Master?" he demanded.

"Where I go, you cannot come. But you may join me later."

Yeshua answered.

Peter's passionate loyalty overwhelmed him; his massive chest heaved rapidly. He suspected they were in for a fight. For added courage, he fingered his stubby sword. He glanced around at the others; his eyes squinted in suspicious accusation. He turned to Yeshua. "Why can't I come with you now? If all of these...and everyone else turn against you...I will never turn against you! I will go to prison with you; I will die first!" he asserted hotly.

Yeshua slowly shook his head. "Your intentions are good, Simon, but our enemy, Satan, is determined to destroy you. He wishes to sift you as one sifts wheat. You...lay down your life for me, Simon? This very day, near dawn, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times. I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail. When you are converted, remember your experiences and strengthen the others," he said.

The men all joined in agreement with Peter, "We will never turn against you, not even if our lives be endangered," they vowed.

Seeing their distressed expressions, Yeshua comforted the men. "Don't allow yourselves to be so troubled. If you believe in Yahweh, trust me. My father has many residences, many positions, to be filled. I go to prepare your places. When the time is right I will receive you into my kingdom. We shall be together.

You will then understand the way where I go," he promised.

Thomas rubbed his prominent nose, his dark eyes shifting about. "Lord, we don't even know where you are going. How can we possibly know the way?" he asked bluntly.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man can come to The Father except through me. If you have known me, you also know The Father. In the future you will know Him and see Him," was the answer. Philip spoke up,

"Lord show us The Father and we will be satisfied."

Yeshua patiently explained, "I have been with you all this time, and you still do not know me, Philip? If you have seen me, you have seen The Father. Why must you continue to ask, 'show us The Father'? The Father and I are one. The works that I do are the result of The Father that dwells in me. If you can't understand this, accept it for the works you see; he does the works. If you can believe me, you can also do the same works, even greater. Because I go unto The Father, whatsoever you shall ask in my name, I will grant, so The Father will be glorified in the son. If you love me, keep my commandments. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. Yet a little while and the world will be unable to see me. You will know then that I am in The Father, you in me, and I in you. And because I live, you shall live also. I will not leave you comfortless. I will ask The Father to send you a comforter, the spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive. Only those who keep my commandments will recognize the comforter, for I will abide in them, and manifest myself to them."

The other Judas asked, "Lord, why will you make yourself known only to us, and not to the rest of the world?"

Yeshua sighed deeply and thought, "So many questions stir in their minds of flesh...unable to understand the spiritual world and the plan...no need to explain now that I will deal only with those who answer The Father's call through obedience. Few will understand that conversion of the whole world will continue on past this age into future ages."

He avoided the question and continued, "I have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. It is necessary that I go away, otherwise the comforter will not be sent. To show your love for me, you must keep my words, and my father will love you. We will come and abide with you. The Holy Spirit will teach you spiritual things, give you spiritual comprehension, bringing to memory these things I have taught you. I will give you peace far superior to anything the world offers.

"I have told you these things that my joy might remain with you, making your joy full. Man has no greater love than to die for his friends. If you obey my commands, you are my friend.

You have not chosen me, but I chose you, that you should bring forth fruits. As long as you abide in me, my words will stay with you. Remember what I told you about the servant not being greater than his lord. If the world hates me, it will also hate you. If you were of the world, it would not hate you.

“I have called you out of the world. If they persecute me, they will also persecute you. If they refuse to keep my sayings, they will refuse to keep yours. Their ill treatment will be because they reject both me and The Father. Had I not brought the word of truth to them, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse. He that hates me hates The Father. The Father sent me into the world. I will leave the world and go back to The Father.”

“Now you speak plainly, not in proverb,” they said. “We are convinced you know all things. There is no question in our minds that you came directly from Yahweh.”

“Are you sure?” Yeshua questioned them. “Because very soon each of you will scatter, leaving me alone. Yet I will not be alone; The Father will be with me. I tell you this so you will be at peace. As long as you are in the world you will have tribulation, but don’t be discouraged, I have overcome the world.”

Yeshua stood up, signifying it was near time to go. He turned his face toward heaven and spoke aloud. “Father, the time for you to glorify me, and I you, is near. You have given me power over all flesh, that I may give eternal life to as many as you have given me. I have finished the work you gave me to do.

Now, return to me the glory which I had before the world began.

I have revealed you to the men you have given me.

“They have accepted me as your representative, believing you sent me.

I am not praying for the world, but only these which are yours and mine. Soon I will no longer be in the world, but they will be left in the world. Keep them through your own name, that they may be one as we are one. I kept all that you gave me except for the son of perdition; that was prophesied to happen.

Now I am ready to return to you. I speak, while in the world, these things so that they might be filled with joy. I have given them your word; the world will hate them, just as they hate me.

“Like myself, they are no longer of the world. I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but that you keep them from being destroyed by evil. Set them apart with your word, the truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I’m sending them. I am not praying for these few only, but include all future believers who will accept the word through them, that they may all be one through us. In this way they will come to perfection. I also request that when I come into my glory, they will be permitted to be with me, to see my glory. You loved me before the foundation of the world. Oh, Righteous Father, the world has never known you, only myself. Now, these know you sent me. I have introduced you to them, and will continue to do so, so they will grow in the same love we have for each other.”

After the prayer Yeshua led them in a hymn. Then he strapped on his sandals and proceeded to the gardens of Mt. Olivet. When they reached their campsite in the gardens of Gethsemane, it was almost

midnight. After they deposited their personal items, the disciples prepared to settle in for the night. "I am going out farther to pray. You stay here and wait," Yeshua told them.

"Peter, James, John...come with me," he added. He led the three men toward a familiar place of prayer.

As they walked his mind drifted ahead to the next few hours. Already the horrors of mankind's sin bore heavily upon him, suffocating, threatening his life. The power of death, and the shame he knew he must experience, inflamed him with excruciating pain. Intense fear and dread weakened him. The three men rushed to steady him as he staggered under the unseen burden.

"Agonizing sorry is sapping my life," he explained. "Wait here and watch; pray that you will not be overcome by temptation." He left them sitting against a large tree trunk, huddled together against the chill of the night.

He went into the shadows, fell to the ground, and prayed passionately.

"My Father, My Father...It is within your power to take away this agony." His body shook uncontrollably. "This is so much more difficult than I ever anticipated," he groaned. "My flesh cries out in rebellion against my spirit. My mind is filled with visions of the shame ahead. My body is racked with agony; my enemies gloat over my death...horror descends upon me in great waves threatening to overpower me." He waited, but received no response.

He felt a strong urge to draw comfort from his earthly friends. He found them slumped to the ground, dozing. Yeshua looked at each sleeping man, disappointment written across his dejected face. He reprimanded, "Simon, do you consider my agony such a light thing that you could sleep? Can you not stay awake for just a short time, praying with me?"

Peter slowly opened one eye, shook his head to bring himself out of his slumber. He managed to sit upright, trying hard to look alert. He nudged James and John; they responded with muted grunts.

Yeshua returned to the shadows. After several minutes of intense prayer, he again returned to find the men almost asleep. "How can you sleep?" his voice shook. "In spite of such good intentions, the flesh is so very weak. Pray for strength and courage, for soon we will all be tested." The sleepy-eyed men lifted themselves heavily, their faces heavy with guilt.

Again he returned to pray. "Father...Father, truly all flesh is weak; I, too, am flesh. Everything within my body rebels powerfully against this plan." And again he pleaded, "All things are possible for you, Father...I pray for another way...nevertheless...I yield to your will."

His prayer became even more intense as frightening visions of demons and inhuman torture paraded before his eyes. His stomach knotted with fear; nausea threatened to rob him of his evening meal. Great drops of sweat fell from his brow, his clothing becoming saturated. Unbearable pain wrenched his trembling body; he cried out in his helplessness. "Hear me...my Father. Your son needs your strength; I can do nothing of myself." His voice failed; he slumped into a heap. He was hearing painfully loud, ringing sounds; unconsciousness claimed his mind. Suddenly he felt the comforting hands of a heavenly being. He opened his eyes to the brightness of an angel, a familiar, trusted servant.

“Your prayers have been heard,” a gentle voice comforted. “I have come to strengthen you. Your task will not be eased, but with increased strength you will endure victoriously. When your suffering is completed the door will open for all men to unify with The Father, as you are. Remember the plan. You are that door...the only door that leads to eternal life for all begotten sons of Elohim.” With a touch of his hand, the brilliant light transferred strength and comfort to Yeshua.

Yeshua’s mind cleared; confidence and quiet resolution replaced his previous inner turmoil. He rose up, returning to the sleeping disciples. They responded slowly when he approached. “You may as well sleep,” he said. “It is too late for changes now. It is already determined; my betrayer is on his way. Come, let us rejoin the other men...we go to meet my enemies.”

Flickering, dancing lights and excited voices approached in the distant darkness. Yeshua calmly reassured the three men. “The Father is with me. Soon the prophecies concerning me will be fulfilled. Remember...when you are shaken by fright, I have told you in advance what to expect. For a short time, I must go away, but I will appear to you again.” They walked back toward camp, where the other disciples were sleeping.

Judas Iscariot, caught up in self-delusion walked bravely in front of a band of officers. Following closely behind were several important Pharisees and other religious leaders. Behind them were men of ill repute and curiosity seekers. Many carried lighted torches, lanterns, swords and several types of heavy, crude-looking, wooden clubs. “I know the place well,” Judas was speaking. “He goes there often. He and his followers pitch camp there, spending nights in the pleasantness of the gardens around Cedron brook. He uses the place for a refuge from the many crowds who seek after him. No doubt we will find him retired for the night. When he appears I will identify him with a greeting kiss. In this way there will be less chance of violence.”

He slowed his pace, and spoke to the captain. “I trust you will honor the high priest’s promise not to harm the man, but take him safely before the counsel?” Now that they were getting closer, Judas was fast losing his courage. He reassured himself by thinking, “The Master will understand, once he has asserted himself, and taken his rightful position as king of Israel.

Surely he will see I am doing this for his own good. He has made all these wonderful predictions, using the scriptures to back up his claims, showing he is destined to be the ruler of our people.

He has incredible, supernatural power; he has the support of the people.

And the time is right. I am merely forcing his hand to make his move now.

And what harm is done for me to fatten my purse at the same time?”

Yeshua, knowing what was taking place, patiently waited for the approaching band. When they arrived, he walked toward them. Judas came toward him first, his arms extended. “Hail Master,” he greeted, then kissed Yeshua’s bearded cheek.

Yeshua, deeply pained, looked into the evading eyes of Judas. "Judas, are you betraying me with a kiss?" he asked. Judas, overcome with guilt, moved back, positioning himself behind the soldiers. Yeshua turned to the threatening mob. "Who are you looking for?" he asked.

A gruff voice answered, "Yeshua, from Nazareth."

"I am Yeshua, the man you seek," Yeshua confessed.

Several anxious, hate-filled men rushed toward Yeshua with their heavy clubs raised, threatening to attack. Suddenly they staggered backwards, unable to control their steps, then fell flat on their backs. Twisting and turning, they struggled to free themselves from the unseen force that held them firm.

Surprised, the crowd halted, speechless by the unusual spectacle before them. Just as suddenly, the power released them. The embarrassed men hurriedly scrambled to their feet, gathered up their weapons, and attempted to hide among the crowd.

Peter, encouraged by the event, impulsively drew his sword. Startled, James, uncertain, questioned, "Master, shall we defend ourselves by the sword?" Peter, not waiting for an answer, swung his blade wildly, making contact with a man's right ear, cutting it off. The severed ear fell, hanging precariously by a thread of skin still attached to the man's bleeding head.

Yeshua restrained Peter with a touch of his hand. "Simon, put your sword away. I have allowed these incidents so far, but I must drink from the cup my father has given me. You must not interfere anymore." Then he approached the man, and placed the dangling ear back in place. Soldiers, witnessing the act, closed in to bind the rash offender only to discover the bloody ear reattached to the man's head, with no show of injury.

Again Yeshua asked, "Tell me again, who are you looking for?"

"Yeshua, the man from Nazareth," a voice answered.

The drowsy disciples, awakened by the noise, slowly mixed into the menacing crowd. Sudden fear seized them as they watched. Soldiers moved in, surrounding Yeshua, Peter, James and John. "Why have you come out in the middle of the night, with swords, and clubs, treating me as though I were a thief? I was with you every day in the Temple...why didn't you take me then?"

There was no answer. His voice was mellow, resigned. "Nevertheless, the scriptures must be fulfilled. This is your hour, the power of darkness," Yeshua stated flatly. "I have told you who I am. Take me, but let these others go."

A command was given by the captain, and Yeshua found himself grasped by strong, cruel hands. His arms were jerked and twisted behind him. He could feel sturdy cords tightening painfully round his wrists. With Yeshua bound the soldiers preceded on to arrest the disciples. When the disciples saw this, they panicked and ran. As Luke bolted through the darkness a man in the crowd caught him by his clothing and yelled, "Here's one of them...I have him!" Young Luke was too quick for the man. He flailed and twisted furiously, pulling his body out of his loose garment. He fled naked into the darkness, leaving his clothing with his would-be captor.

The crowd followed jeering as soldiers half led, half dragged Yeshua back into Jerusalem. He found himself before a powerful group of religious leaders. Among them were Annas, Caiaphas' father-in-law, and Caiaphas, the current practicing high priest.

They all took turns questioning Yeshua, trying to find something for which they could condemn him. They brought in paid witnesses who swore lies against him; none of their stories agreed. Yeshua stood silently, not trying to defend himself. They urged him.

"If you are the Christ, why not admit it?"

Finally he did answer, "You do not believe anything that I tell you. After this I shall be seated at the right hand of my father."

Caiaphas became so infuriated he ripped his own clothing in a rage of temper. "This man claims to be The Son of Yahweh! Do we need further witness that he is profaning the name of Yahweh? He condemns himself!" Finally, the Jewish religious council all agreed Yeshua deserved the death penalty.

Yeshua closed his eyes as witnesses, servants, and soldiers spit in his face, slapping him repeatedly. Then they amused themselves by blindfolding him, insisting, "Prophecy to us. Who slapped you...you are a man of miracles...tell us, who pulls your beard?" The question was posed each time another person joined the humiliating game. "You claim to be the Christ...The Son of Yahweh. You talk of 'coming in the clouds...of being on the right hand of power'. You claim that you could rebuild the Temple in three days. Yet, you can't even tell us who is slapping you!" they jeered.

Peter, angry and fearful, cautiously moved quietly through the taunting mob. He desperately wished he could do something. He felt confused, totally helpless. "Why does The Master allow himself to be humiliated this way. Why does he forbid us to fight...where are James and John...and the rest of our group?" he wondered. "The Master could call down a legion of angels to wipe these dogs off the earth if he so desired." His thoughts were jumbled. "He must just be waiting for the right time to make his move...surely he won't tolerate this much longer. I am a fool to be here, taking a chance like this...when he won't even defend himself. I can't take this anymore...I have to get away!" He lowered his head, hunched his shoulders and moved to a lower level. He joined a group of servants hovering around a brazier filled with hot coals.

It was still dark, but nearing daylight. Temple servants were exchanging work shifts, bustling about attending their chores. A suspicious woman watched Peter closely for several minutes. Then she questioned him, "Pardon me, but were you not one of this Yeshua of Galilee's followers? Haven't I seen you with the man who has been arrested?"

Peter's heart began pounding, fear overwhelmed him. "I'm sorry, lady. I don't know what you are talking about," he denied. He moved away quickly, going onto the palace porch.

From there he heard a familiar sound of a nearby rooster's crowing, announcing dawn's arrival. He pushed aside a twinge of guilt. Again he was recognized and questioned; again he denied knowing

Yeshua. For fear of people questioning him, he went back into the hall where Yeshua still endured his tormentors. He stayed near the back, hoping no one would notice him. To his dismay he was approached again. "You are one of his followers, aren't you?" they accused. When he denied being a follower of Yeshua, they said, "Your accent is Galilean; it gives you away."

An accusing crowd gathered, questioning him further. "You are the one who cut off my cousin's ear. I saw you in the garden earlier."

Exasperated, "I swear by Yahweh," Peter exploded, "I am just here out of curiosity. What difference does my speech make? There are lots of people here from all over Judea this time of year. Galilean or no...I have nothing to do with this man...I don't even know him," he insisted. Suddenly he heard a rooster crow a second time. Something drew his eyes to the saddened gaze of Yeshua; he remembered. A sudden sting of bitter remorse gripped him. He bolted from the hall, down through the court and outside the Temple. When he stopped running, deep sobs shook his muscular frame. "Just as he said, I denied The Christ three times before the rooster crowed twice. He knew...he knew. He knows everything about us...about the future, everything...he said he was going to die...that surely is going to happen. Now I know. Why didn't we believe it? There is nothing anyone can do to stop it; Yahweh has ordained it."

Peter slowed his pace, deeply meditating on the past few hours. Then he thought, "I must find the others. There is no real danger to us if we are discrete."

Back in the palace, Pilate turned Yeshua over to his soldiers for scourging. He hoped that after the Jews saw Yeshua's bleeding, mangled body, they might be moved to compassion and agree to release him. The soldiers took him to the common room, stripped him, and tied him to a post. They selected Roman style whips made of knotted, leather cord fastened to short, wooden handles. At the end of each cord were small, sharp, metal tips.

The merciless Roman soldiers accustomed to cruelty, death and suffering, considered this infrequent activity a pleasurable sport. Each soldier eagerly anticipated his turn with the whip.

With each vicious lash, Yeshua silently winched in agony. Edged metal caught and ripped large chunks of flesh from his body, leaving parts of bone clearly visible.

When the beating finally stopped, Yeshua was no longer recognizable.

His face and body dripped profusely with blood. He could only see dimly from bruised, swollen eyes. His ripped, enlarged lips exposed gums and teeth. There was a loud buzzing in his ears as he drifted in and out of consciousness. He felt a firm tug at his bonds; rough hands shoved him forward. He struggled to stand, staggered weakly, then crumpled to the floor.

A churlish voice growled, "We can't present him to the people like this...dash him down with water." He felt the sting of water in fresh wounds. He was forced upright; a dark purple robe was placed around his naked, bleeding body. Someone weaved a wreath of thorns and shoved it onto his head; the thorns penetrated his scalp. Placing a heavy reed in his hand, they knelt before him mocking, "Hail, King of the Jews! Worship and honor the new king! Long live the King of the Jews!" When they became bored they

took the reed, and beat him about the head with it, making the thorns sink deeper into his scalp. Taking turns, they slapped, punched, and spit on him, until they tired of the sadistic sport.

They led him back to Pilate. Pilate addressed the crowd for the fourth time, "For the last time...I am bringing this man out to you. I want you to know I find no fault with him!" he yelled.

Yeshua appeared before the mob, assisted by a burly soldier on each side. His swollen, disfigured face was caked with dried and fresh blood, the purple robe soaked with bright red stains.

"Behold...this is the man you want to have crucified. Look at him," Pilate commanded. "Does this not appease you? He is near death already!"

The determined Jews demanded repeatedly, "Crucify him."

Pilate replied, "You crucify him; I find no fault in him."

"We have a law," they said, "and by our law, he ought to die, because he makes himself to be The Son of Yahweh."

They accused him even more, saying, "We found this fellow perverting the nation. He encouraged the masses not to give tribute to Caesar. He insists that he himself is Christ, a king and Messiah."

Pilate asked him, "King of the Jews; Your people have delivered you to me. What are you guilty of? Are you the king of the Jews?"

Yeshua answered, "You say that I am. Were you told this by someone, or is it your own words? I was born to this end. My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight for me. I came into this world to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Pilate felt uneasy about this situation. He kept remembering the night his wife had related to him a disturbing dream she had had concerning this man. He questioned Yeshua. "Who are you, really? Where are you from?" Yeshua remained silent. In fear and frustration Pilate screamed at him, "You stand there refusing to answer me. Don't you know I have the power to have you crucified? I also have the power to release you."

"You have no power to do anything with me, unless it is given to you from above. However, the one who has delivered me to you has the greater sin."

The persistent Jews continued to accuse him more fiercely, saying, "He is constantly stirring up the people. He teaches throughout all Jewry. He started in Galilee; now he has brought his teachings here."

When Pilate heard he came from Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean. Herod was also at Jerusalem at this time. As soon as Pilate knew that Yeshua belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he was very pleased. He grasped at the opportunity to send Yeshua to Herod. "Let Herod use his cunning to settle this messy situation," he thought.

Herod was elated to see Yeshua. He had wanted to entertain himself at Yeshua's expense for a long time. He had heard lots of things about this miracle man. He hoped The Healer would perform for him. Much to his disappointment, the mangled remains of the swollen faced man answered not a word.

The chief priests and scribes stood and emphatically accused him repeatedly. Disgusted, Herod turned him over to his soldiers for their entertainment. They mocked him by dressing him in a gorgeous robe. They taunted and shamed him unmercifully, trying to force him to speak.

After a while they became bored; they sent him back to Pilate.

Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people. He addressed them, "You have brought this man to me, as one that perverts the people. He is accused as though he were a criminal. After having thoroughly examined him, I find no fault in him. I sent him to Herod; he found no reason to condemn him. I will therefore punish him, and release him. For, as you know, I am obligated by custom to release a prisoner of your choice, in celebration of your Feast."

They all cried out together, "Away with this man; release Barabbas instead. They kept yelling, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Barabbas, imprisoned on charges of murder, was well known as an insurrectionist and robber. The people kept calling for the release of this criminal, rather than Yeshua.

Pilate hoped to change their mind. He really preferred to release Yeshua. He pleaded with them for the third time, "Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no reason to condemn this man to death. Be satisfied that I will chastise him, and let him go."

Again, for the last time, Pilate attempted to release Yeshua.

The Jews insisted, "If you let this man go, you are not the friend of Caesar. Anyone making himself a king speaks against Caesar." They refused to listen. They kept insisting that he sentence Yeshua to be crucified. Finally he gave in to their demands. He freed Barabbas, and turned Yeshua over to them.

"Very well," Pilate gave in. "I have many important duties to attend. He is yours to do with as you wish." After a brief display of renewed mockery, the soldiers removed the blood soaked robe from Yeshua and replaced his own cloak just before they led him out to be crucified.

Behind the procession followed a cheering, blood thirsty mob, chanting, "Crucify him...Crucify him!"

Two criminals were also included in the march to death. They carried their heavy instruments of execution with little effort. When they placed the wooden crossbar on Yeshua's back, his weakened body buckled under the weight. An African man, named Simon, was forced to carry it for him. Groups of women, young and old, followed closely behind Yeshua weeping bitterly. He was touched by their mourning. "Daughters of Jerusalem, please...do not weep for me. If you must weep, weep for yourselves, for your children. I foresee a time when you will be called blessed if you are unable to bear children. During these times people will pray for the mountains to fall on them, the hills to hide them. If they do these things in a green tree, early times, know what cruelty will increase in the dry, latter days."

They reached a small hill called Calvary, just outside Jerusalem. The three condemned men, stripped of their clothing, lay nearly naked on their backs, their arms outstretched, impaled to a crossbar fastened to a crude stake. Large spikes were pounded through their open hands. Their feet, also spiked, could barely reach a small platform. Then soldiers pulled each staked man upright and dropped his stake into previously dug holes. The force of the heavy drop pulled and tore body tendons and tissue. Yeshua clinched his teeth as waves of unconsciousness clouded his mind. Blood from the thorny crown flowed anew, dripping onto his face. In spite of bitter objection from the religious leaders, Pilate had a title written in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, 'Yeshua of Nazareth - THE KING OF THE JEWS' positioned above Yeshua's head.

As the three staked men hung on their stakes, the soldiers noticed the exceptional quality of Yeshua's clothing. As was prophesied, in the scriptures, to happen, they stripped him, divided the smaller pieces and gambled for his quality, seamless coat. The noon's hot sun rays burned against his exposed mutilated body. His swollen mouth ached; his dry, thick tongue tasted fresh blood. Yet, in spite of his pain, he looked down at the people and felt pity for them. "My pain is greater for them, for they have lost their way. Satan is fast destroying them," he thought. Then with a painful gasp he breathed, "Father, forgive them. They really do not understand the significance of what they are doing."

Back in Jerusalem the markets swelled with Jews buying provisions for the evening Jewish Passover celebration meal. The first holy day of the year would begin at sundown, an annual Sabbath, the first day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Priests, officiating at the Temple, were butchering the ceremonial lambs.

Most were unmindful of the great historical event taking place on the hill outside the city.

Those who had followed the illegal occurrence stood viewing the gruesome spectacle with little or no sympathy. Some drifted off; others lingered. Some approached the suffering men for one last look, shaking their heads, expressing disgust and disappointment. "Oh, you poor fellow...you who claimed to have power to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. You saved others, yet you cannot rescue yourself from the cross.

Come, show us your power...come down from there," they urged.

Jewish rulers derided, "If he is the king of Israel, let him come down now and we will believe him. He trusted in Yahweh...why doesn't Yahweh deliver him now? He said he was the Son of Yahweh...If that is true why doesn't Yahweh care that he suffers? Would a true father desert his son to suffer such a death?"

The two criminals beside Yeshua mumbled painfully. One was trying to speak. "Man...if you are...why do you not save us, and yourself? If you have any power...any compassion...now is the time to use it. We are going to die...you also. Can you hear me, prophet?" Receiving no reply, he persisted. "I have heard about you...you who claim to be so great. Show us if you are better than the king's magicians. At least they make no grand claims of being gods. Are you better than we...are we not all Abraham's children? Come on man...show us what you can do. If you are the Christ, prove it...he would not tolerate this shame," he insisted in desperation.

Yeshua remained quiet. The other man, his head drooping, spoke sternly, "What right do you have to talk to this man so harshly? Do you not fear Yahweh, seeing we are deserving of our punishment? We are here

because of the heinous crimes we have committed. This man is innocent. Do you not know of his many good deeds? Were he not The Son of Yahweh he could not have healed so many...even to raising the dead, I have heard," he rebuked. He heaved a deep, painful sigh, twisted his head toward Yeshua. "Master, I am a sinful man. I pray you will remember me when you come into your kingdom, and be merciful."

Yeshua nodded slowly, and spoke confidently, "Of a truth, I can tell you this very day...you shall be with me, in the Garden of Eden (paradise)."

Looking around at the people still lingering, Yeshua saw large bands of women huddled together, weeping softly. Rich, respectable ladies and one-time prostitutes, women who loved him passionately, openly grieved together unashamed. Some of the disciples, cautiously scattered among small groups, watched.

They tried, unsuccessfully, to hide the shame and fear written on their tearful faces. Many faces he had not seen for a long time, relatives, and family friends stood at a distance. Familiar voices came through waves of jumbled sounds. Young John, red-eyed, his face wet with tears, stood close by supporting the crumpled body of a travailing woman. The desire to comfort this lady who had once been so close to him drove all other thoughts from his mind. He attempted to moisten his dry, cracked, bleeding lips with his swollen tongue. "John!" His voice sounded strange in his ears.

John heard the faint call. "Aunt Maria, listen...he is calling." He gently straightened her bent form. "Let us move closer, but slowly. We must not appear conspicuous," he warned.

As they moved closer, Mary, Martha, Peter, and several others advanced with them. "Listen, he speaks," John said.

"John, take the lady...with you...to your home. Let her be unto you as your mother." Yeshua rested; his breath came in painful gasps. "Mother, go with John...let him take the place of a son...his home...be your home." He closed his eyes against her grief and thought, "Now she remembers, knows, and believes...but her maternal pain is powerful. She needs the comfort of believers around her; else she will die from grief. Until her sons believe they will be no comfort to her. Young, loving John...will treat her with patience and kindness. He will nourish and encourage her for as long as she needs him."

The hot, midday sun grew dimmer as dark clouds billowed above. Loud, rumbling sounds echoed across the darkening sky. Within minutes blackness enveloped the land. The ground beneath quivered and convulsed. Flashing streaks of crackling lightening revealed frightened people scurrying off in all directions. Those who stayed moved in closer, clinging to each other for comfort.

Loneliness and shame overpowered Yeshua. All about him, the air was filled with gleeful screams, demons delighting in his pain. A foreboding spirit threatened to smother and steal his labored breath.

Drifting in and out of consciousness, nightmarish visions invaded his troubled mind. Distant voices from people beneath and around him mingled with the roaring in his head. Demon voices echoed through the darkness repeating deafening taunts, "You are no Yahweh...only human. You will die...he will not rescue you. You will be left without hope, just as all men. You have failed...the plan is lost. You fool...you fool. Where is he now...has he not deserted you...deserted you...deserted you?" The words echoed over and over, pulsating throughout eternity.

Horror of death overpowered his human spirit; doubts invaded his tortured mind. He heard masculine voices beneath him, felt the pressure of something moist against his mouth, and tasted the bitterness of vinegar as it stung his open wounds. He willed his mind to pray. "Where are you...why are you so far away? I continually cried out to you, in the light, and now from the darkness. In your perfect holiness, you wait and long for the praises of Israel. When our fathers called, you were faithful to respond. When they trusted you, you delivered them! I am as a crushed worm, losing its life fluid, hated, despised by my own. I have become a thing of shame, scorned and ridiculed by men. You brought me out of the womb, made me hope as an infant. I have been dependent upon you from my earliest conception. Please, do not desert me now. I am in my deepest time of trouble, with no one else to help.

"I will expound to my brothers your greatness. I will be a witness to the congregation, and praise you. You have never despised or deserted the suffering of the afflicted one. You have not hid your face, but have listened to his cry. I will fulfill my vows before those who fear you. All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Eternal. They will bow down and worship. Future generations will hear and proclaim your righteousness to a people yet unborn.

"I am compassed about with strong bull-like enemies. They gape upon me, determined to devour me as ravening, roaring lions. My life is pouring out like water. My flesh is torn away, exposing all of my bones. My heart's blood is draining into my bowels like melting wax. My strength is dried up like sun baked, broken clay. You have brought me into the dust of death. I am surrounded by ferocious enemies. They have pierced my hands, my feet, and I can count all my bones. They divided my garments among them and gambled for my coat. Please, Father, don't go far away from me. Oh my Lord...my strength...don't leave me in the grave. Haste to my rescue! Restore my precious life as it was in the beginning.

Rescue me from the powers of darkness," he prayed.

Weakness claimed Yeshua; he could no longer speak. His mind cleared. He began to meditate on the prophecies concerning himself. "You have heard me from the darkness. Never have you hid your face from the afflicted, nor despised them. But when they call you hear. I shall live to praise you before the great congregation. I trust in your promise, 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord. The meek shall no longer hunger; they shall praise the Lord and seek him. All nations shall worship before you. You shall be their governor', for the kingdom is yours. Then they shall all be satisfied. And when one dies, he shall live again. You will restore him, for no one can keep his own soul alive. They shall all bow before you.

My seed shall be a generation of servants to declare your righteousness unto a people of the future.”

After three hours of darkness Yeshua accepted the inevitable. He could hang on no longer. The cruel, heavy burden of man’s sins crushed him mentally and emotionally. Reaching limitless depths of darkest despair, he struggled against the pain. The Father could no longer bear to look upon his agony. He had to leave the body so that Yeshua, the man, could die.

Yeshua heard himself moaning. By sheer willpower he forced out words of desperation. “My Yahweh...my Yahweh...why have you forsaken me? Eli...Eli...lamentasabachthani?” Suddenly he felt unbearably thirsty. “I thirst,” he moaned. This time he accepted the vinegar. As blackness engulfed his mind, he panicked and cried out again, “My Lord, don’t forsake me.” His last words were calmer, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. It is finished!” His head dropped, his body slumped, and Yahweh’s spirit left the human soul.

The remaining few were startled anew by a deafening clap of thunder, and a shaking of the earth beneath their feet. The sky instantly convulsed with billowing clouds of darkness, erupting with pulsating lights. A gigantic flash of light made its way to the Temple, into the most sacred, holy sanctuary. It split the heavy, elaborate veil from top to bottom. Unnerved priests toiled persistently to perform their sacrificial duties where large portions of freshly slain paschal lambs were in process of being offered on the altar. Men had been waiting patiently for their remaining pieces of butchered carcasses. Alarmed, terrified people ran from the Temple, into the open courts.

Panic changed into hysteria. The courts were filled with screaming people, stumbling and falling over disoriented bodies and dislodged stones.

Trembling with fear, kneeling at the foot of the dead body of Yeshua, “Truly, this man was The Son of Yahweh,” a Roman centurion declared.

end of ch. 15 edited 2013