

SIMON'S RESCUE

Written by:

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Biblical, historial, drama

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BLACK SCREEN:

SUPER:

"Certainty is the mark of common sense; gracious uncertainty is the mark of the spiritual life. Oswald Chambers"

FADE IN:

SUPER: "Jerusalem. Sabbath. 38 A.D."

EXT. LOWER CITY - VILLAGE - NIGHT

In the b.g., torches reflect light off a tower, decorated with a golden eagle, on the Western wall of Herod's palace.

A war-hardened centurion, MAGNUS ARCENIO (40's) of Equestrian rank with leather shoulder pauldrons, rides a stallion. He leads a SIX-MEN SQUAD of ROMAN SOLDIERS on foot through a narrow, unpaved street. The street is empty and quiet.

One and two-story, limestone houses, colored yellow-brown from years of sun and wind, form a maze of alleyways sloped in every direction.

Magnus raises his arm, halts in front of a synagogue, dismounts, motions to his men.

MAGNUS

He's somewhere in this maze. Two days furlough for the team who snatches him from his den.

In groups of TWO, the soldiers, carrying torches and wearing battle armor and swords, disperse through the dusty concourse, like packs of bloodhounds hunting for a fox.

EXT. LOWER CITY, TWO-STORY HOUSE - ROOFTOP - NIGHT

Alarming sounds from a shofar of NINE STACCATO BLASTS are heard in the distance.

With a full beard and wearing a medium length robe, JAMES, son of Zebedee, the fiery Apostle, (mid 30's) gently shakes a booth made of tree branches which leans on the balcony wall.

JAMES

I'm surprised the wind hasn't blown this rickety booth from the roof.

The booth's trimmed in palm leaves, dried figs, and grape clusters wilted into raisins; its center is open to the sky.

MARY SALOME (60's), James's petite and protective mother, with a golden scarf covering her white hair, strolls into view.

She places a communal goblet of wine on a table near the booth. Roasted lamb, flatbread, and boiled eggs are plated.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I've been meaning to tear this
tabernacle down.

Salome reclines on a pillow, props up a pillow for her son.

SALOME

Sit. We have things to discuss.

James sits, stretches out.

JAMES

I thought we were having a
communion meal?

SALOME

(scowls)

As the elder son, how can you
abandon your father in his old age?
You've been gone over a year.

JAMES

And what of my true calling?

Salome gazes at stars above them.

SALOME

Our Master has departed to his
kingdom in the heavens. We know not
the day or time of his return.

JAMES

It's why we follow his command to
occupy until he comes.

Salome nibbles on a boiled egg.

SALOME

Become a light to the fisherman on
the Sea of Galilee. They never
abandoned their nets like you and
John.

James breaks off two pieces of the loaf, hands one to Salome.

JAMES

Yeshua wept over this city.
Jerusalem is the center of power
and still must be reached.

Mary and James dip their portion of bread into the cup.

SALOME

Religious power which corrupts and deceives. Come home. Leave the priests, scribes, and Pharisees to Peter and your brother.

JAMES

(laughs)

Someone has to keep Simon Peter in check.

SALOME

I miss you. Your laugh.

James lifts up his piece of bread soaked in wine. Salome bows her head, closes her eyes, puts her bread to her lips.

JAMES

Visit us, bread of heaven, the Christ, as we partake of your body and blood. Amen.

James and Salome reverently eat their bread together.

BALCONY - MOMENTS LATER

The door to the balcony is kicked open by TWO ROMAN SOLDIERS both MUNIFEX - military privates - (mid 20's), fully armed.

James leaps to his feet, faces the soldiers in defiance.

JAMES

What right do you...

One brash soldier draws his sword, smashes James on his forehead with the handle. James falls backward, a gash appears across his temple. He's dazed.

SOLDIER 1

You pitiful dog... know this, lest you die where you are... I bear the authority of King Herod of Agrippa.

The second soldier, a giant of a man, brazenly grabs Salome by her hair, yanks her in front of him, puts a dagger across her throat.

James rises, his fists raised, to defend his mother. He's kicked in the ribs by Soldier #1. He crashes into the table, MOANS; the booth collapses around him.

SOLDIER 2

Woman. What's his name?

SALOME

(gasp)

Leave him alone.

The second soldier returns the dagger to its sheath, forces Salome to her knees. He wraps his massive hands around Salmone's neck, chokes her.

SOLDIER 2

Try again.

Salome GAGS. The soldier releases his pressure hold slightly.

SALOME

James.

Soldier #2 applies more pressure. Salome's face turns red. Seconds pass. She holds up her hands in surrender. He releases her. She crumbles to the floor, CRIES.

SALOME (CONT'D)

James, son of Zebedee.

The two soldiers lift James to his feet, bind his hands behind his back with rope. Soldier #2 spits in Salome's face as they pass, shoves James toward the steps.

SOLDIER 2

You speak of this... to anyone, and you'll be next.

James and the soldiers exit through the doorway, out of view. Salome WEEPS.

EXT. HEROD'S PALACE, JERUSALEM - UPPER CITY - ESTABLISHING

Groves of trees, canals, and ponds - studded with bronze fountains - surround two white marble buildings set upon an 850 meter platform with four towers, seven stories high.

Within the fortified walls, are two bathhouses, a Roman theater, courtyards, and a large walkway with enough space to accommodate hundreds of guests.

INT. HEROD'S PALACE, PRAETORIUM - NIGHT

Three marble steps lead to a platform and a lavish throne.

Facing the platform, Magnus holds James upright. James's feet and hands are in chains; his face is bruised, one eye's partly closed, his hair matted in blood.

Wearing a wreath, HEROD AGRIPPA (40's) in a toga with a reddish-purple band on the lower edge, slouches on his throne.

Agrippa is well-educated, selfish, and a conniving scoundrel.
A banner declares him as King of the province of Judea.

AGRIPPA

Magnus... did you cut out his
tongue?

MAGNUS

He refuses to speak, my lord.
Mumbled something about following
the way of his master.

Agrippa stands, POUNDS his golden scepter several times
against the white marble platform. The sound ECHOES
throughout the opulent courtyard. He stands, sneers at James.

AGRIPPPA

I... am... your... master!
(to Magnus)
How long will these rebels continue
to boast of their fantasies.

Agrippa strolls down the steps, strides back and forth in
front of James and Magnus.

AGRIPPA

My grandfather heard your master's
claims in this very room. He
admitted openly to being the son of
God. Look what it cost him.

Agrippa stops, an inch from James's face.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

You, your Jewish prophets, and yes,
even I... unfortunate as it may
be... have no master but Rome.

James stands erect, juts out his chin out. Agrippa SLAPS
James; blood oozes from a cut on his lip.

AGRIPPPA

I know exactly who you are. A
leader of the way. Riots and unrest
spread in every city you enter.

Agrippa turns abruptly, meanders across the courtyard.

AGRIPPA

More names, Centurion, and their
locations.

MAGNUS

The whipping post?

Agrippa stops, turns back.

AGRIPPA
Privately. Keep no record of his
lashes. Try not to beat him to
death.

MAGNUS
Yes, my Lord.

AGRIPPA
I'd prefer he face a legitimate
sentence to stand trial before
Caiaphas.

MAGNUS
(nods)
Let the Jews judge their own.

AGRIPPA
I hope to speak with him further
when his tongue is loosed.

Magnus nods, clicks his boots together.

MAGNUS
As you wish.

Magnus escorts James down a hallway.

INT. ROMAN PRISON, LOWER CHAMBER - DUNGEON - DAY

Light from dual torches filters into the darkened cell, hewn
from stone. A low, vaulted roof connects stone arches.

James lies on his stomach on the dirt floor. Hi shirt, in
shreds, sticks to his back, saturated in blood.

James's neck, arms, and thighs are covered in welts and
bruises. He struggles to lift his manacled arms attached to
an iron ring on the wall.

The RATTLE of the chains sends a rat racing for a dark
corner.

JAMES
Have mercy upon me, for I have
sinned. If it be your will, release
me from this body of death.

James turns his head upon hearing sounds of keys CLICKING
open the lock to his cell. His one good eye's nearly swollen
shut.

Wearing a toga over a tunic, with a dagger at his belt, a
haggard Roman guard, FELIX HARREL (early 20's) short of
stature, steps inside, stretches, yawns. He kicks James's
sandals.

FELIX

Get up.

James doesn't stir.

Felix kicks James in his side, exits the cell out of view.
The door remains partially open.

FELIX (O.S.) (CONT'D)

(yells)

Clavius. Get down here.

James hears Felix's POUNDING FOOTSTEPS as he ascends stairs.

James sits up with new strength and resolve; a soft glowing light shines onto his face. His chain CLANGS against the rock floor as James reaches out his hand.

JAMES

Is that you, Lord?

FLASHBACK - EXT. MOUNTAIN, RIDGE - DAY

SUPER: "Five Years Earlier"

The wind WHISTLES as it whips across a plateau.

In sandals and cloaks, James and his younger brother JOHN THE BELOVED (late 20's), and an outspoken disciple, PETER, son of Jonah (late 30's), known as SIMON, stand beside JESUS (32).

Jesus wears a robe and a keffiyeh head-dress. They view Jerusalem below them.

JAMES

What a gorgeous view.

Suddenly, Jesus's countenance changes. His face glows brightly, shines like the sun; his garments become as pure, white light. The disciples are astonished.

PROPHETS ELIJAH and MOSES appear. Moses wears a long-sleeved, garment made of a thin fabric. He has a long, gray beard.

Elijah wears a garment made of leather. Both prophets shine with the same glorious light.

SIMON

Lord, it is good for us to be here.
We will build a tabernacle for you,
Moses, and Elijah.

James, John, and Simon fall to their knees, astounded by the glory. A cloud of bright light hovers over them.

CLOUD
 (booming voice)
 This is my beloved Son. He is my
 delight. I am so very pleased with
 him. Listen to what he says.

They tremble in fear. The cloud of light surrounds the
 disciples; they are gently lifted and placed prostrate onto
 the ground.

Jesus touches each of their shoulders.

JESUS
 James, John, Simon. Don't be
 fearful. I'm here with you.

The disciples look from side to side. The glory cloud and the
 two prophets are gone. Jesus's face no longer glows.

BACK TO PRESENT

James fixes his eyes on a SPIRIT in the shape of a MAN,
 dressed in light, who kneels beside him.

JAMES
 I'm no longer afraid.

GUARD STATION - LATER

A small roughly hewn, stone enclave with a table, stool, a
 bucket on a shelf, and an open closet.

Dragging his feet, FELIX scoots inside.

GAIUS (50's), an overweight guard with a lazy eye turned
 outward, leans over, throws a dice against a stone wall. He
 wears a toga and tunic, with a ferula, a leather strap at his
 waist.

FELIX
 Where's Clavius?

GAIUS
 I've about got it to spin out any
 number I need.

Gaius notches a slit in the corner of a die with a knife.

FELIX
 Did you not hear me yellin'?

GAIUS
 (nods)
 For Clavius... six.

Gaius rolls the die from his fingertips. It spins out.

ON DIE: A six.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Whad' I tell you.

FELIX
Need help dragging some doomed Jew
upstairs. Get him cleaned up before
his trial with our pompous king.

GAIUS
The man Clavius threw in the
dungeon last night? Late?

Felix nods.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Don't bother. I've received word
from Clavius.

Gaius grabs a bucket of dirty water from a shelf in a corner.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Felix, grab that sword.

Several swords and spears are in the closet. Felix hesitates.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
(grins)
Your first?

Gaius shoves a bloodied sword in Felix's hand. He loosens the
whip for his belt.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Nothing to it.

Gaius sweeps his finger across Felix's neck. They exit the
guard station, out of view.

GAIUS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
In his shape, he won't feel a
thing.

HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Gaius and Felix step into a cramped hallway. Bright, glorious
light emanates from the completely open door of James's cell.

FELIX
What the...

The guards glance briefly at one another, dash toward the
cell.

Within a few meters of the cell, they're knocked backward onto the ground, as if stunned by an invisible hand.

The sword is swept from Felix's grip.

Water spills from the bucket onto the stone wall. With eyes closed, neither guard moves.

The light fades slowly, then is gone.

GUARD STATION - LATER

Felix and Gaius ascend, carry James's corpse on a stretcher.

James's torso is covered by a cloth, his face ghostly white in appearance. An irregular, bloody laceration is across James's neck.

FELIX

He was dead before I slit his throat.

They reach the guard station, out of breathe.

GAIUS

I've heard rumors of this happening a few years back... an olive grove outside the gates at Gethsemane.

Felix and Gaius set the stretcher on level ground, breath deeply.

FELIX

Whatever caused that light, it didn't happen.

Gaius grabs a metal cup from a stool, places a copper coin inside it, RATTLES the cup. Using a stiff scabbard as a cane, he contorts his features, moves and CACKLES like a chicken.

GAIUS

Alms... alms to the possessed.

FELIX

With that crazy eye of yours, you look the part.

(chuckles)

Begging on the streets as one gone mad... no, we can't have that, now can we?

EXT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - DAYBREAK

Strolling down the dirt road is Simon, with a graying beard and a loosely-fit robe over his toga.

Simon purchase a pear from a WOMAN at the corner, who sets up her fruit market.

A synagogue, surrounded by flat-roofed, single-story houses, is nearby, in the b.g.

JOSEPH ARIMATHEA (late 50's), a Rabbi in a white linen robe with tassels on the sleeves and bottom, dashes toward Simon. He's a wise man and a member of the Jewish High Council. He's secretly a follower of the way, and is trusted by all.

JOSEPH
Simon. Come quickly. It's urgent.

The two men hug. They hear a rooster CROW in the distance.

SIMON
What is it, Rabbi?

Joseph glances suspiciously down the road, sees no one.

JOSEPH
James has been killed.

Simon's startled, confused.

SIMON
How can that be? I was with him a few days ago.

JOSEPH
A Temple Guard of Caiaphas, whom I trust, informed me last night.

SIMON
Does Salome and John know?

JOSEPH
(nods sadly)
Nicodemus and I will request his body.

Joseph grabs Simon's sleeve, leads him toward the synagogue.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
I've learned you and John are their next targets... insurrectionists according to the guard.
(urgent tone)
John pressed me to have you join him in the north country. He said you'd know the location.

Simon nods. They stride quickly through an alley between a house and the synagogue.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
A horse is saddled for you in the
back, loaded with supplies.

Simon and Joseph turn the corner. Joseph loosens the horse's
leather rein.

SIMON
Thank you, Rabbi.

Simon mounts the horse.

JOSEPH
Leave now. Don't look back.

EXT. HEROD'S TEMPLE, COURT OF THE GENTILES - DAY

King Herod Agrippa, in an exquisitely detailed robe, with
Magnus at his side, pass a colonnade, reach a third tier of
steps, stride onto the portico.

AGRIPPA
Where, among these so foolish, is
the one in whom we seek?

Agrippa and Magnus look out at the huge plaza below them.

VENDORS sell souvenirs, food, sheep, and pigeons to the
JEWISH PILGRIMS in the courtyard.

The longest lines cluster around tables of the CURRENCY
CHANGERS, exchanging Roman coins for Tyrian money.

PRIESTS, in white linen robes and tubular hats, mix with
FAMILIES, advise them concerning their sacrifices.

MAGNUS
Our men have yet to locate him,
your majesty.

FOUR ROMAN SOLDIERS come into view, spread out, canvas the
area.

AGRIPPA
Is the temple square so vast that a
simple fisherman eludes your net?

MAGNUS
No, my Lord. Perhaps James knew not
where this outlaw frequents?

AGRIPPA
Or he lied to save him.

Agrippa whisk his robe, stomps toward an entrance door over an
arched dome.

The entrance is guarded by TWO TEMPLE POLICE, who wear bronze-colored helmets, carry swords, and hold spears.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
Come. The high priest awaits.

INT. HEROD'S TEMPLE, COUNCIL CHAMBER - DAY - LATER

Sunlight shines onto the patterned, circular floor created from differing hues of white marble. The room is surrounded by banners depicting names of twelve Jewish tribes, written in Hebrew.

The High Priest, JOSEPH CAIAPHAS (mid 60's), sits on a pillow on a single step. His white beard flows over a white, linen robe, with golden bells attached to the bottom.

A breastplate of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet covers his chest. He wears a white turban, with a blue central ribbon, on his head.

Agrippa paces, his hands on his hips. He's fuming mad.

AGRIPPA
I know he has circumcised Gentiles
in a synagogue near my temple.

Caiaphas, a shrewd operative at the apex of religious power, is interested in maintaining the political, status-quo with Rome. He's accustomed to the perks of his position.

CAIAPHAS
Your temple, my King?

Agrippa meets eye-to-eye with each one of the FOUR TEMPLE POLICE, who hold spears, stand at attention.

AGRIPPA
With knowledge of where he is...
(sarcastic)
... why haven't these brave men,
your temple police, seized this
unarmed sage by now?

CAIAPHAS
Everything has a price.

Agrippa turns, faces the High Priest.

AGRIPPA
How dare you bribe me!

Caiaphas calmly leans over, folds his arms across his lap.

CAIAPHAS

Peter stirs up the city of Antioch with his boasting of miracles. He's been there, possibly over a year, with his trusted friend, Barnabas.

Herod throws up his arms.

AGRIPPA

What else have you kept from me?

CAIAPHAS

For James untimely death, we... the council of the Sandhedrin... are most grateful. We rely upon Rome to carry out such sentences.

Caiaphas stands, runs his fingers through his beard. The bells on his robe RING.

CAIAPHAS (CONT'D)

Salome grieves, as a mother should, over the loss of her eldest son. Her husband and sons are fisherman.

Agrippa rubs his chin; a light has come on.

AGRIPPA

Galilee. In my travels, I have avoided that poverty stricken province, although...

(chuckles)

... their seafood is a delight for my palace guests.

Caiaphas nods, gives a mock kiss on Herod's cheeks.

CAIAPHAS

We, too, consider Peter to be the biggest threat to Roman security. My sources tell me that he's hiding in Nazareth.

AGRIPPA

I will see that justice is served.

Caiaphas strolls from the chamber, out of view with bells RINGING. The four temple police march alongside.

CAIAPHAS (O.S.)

Perhaps a public trial this time, to appease the people while considering our cultural and religious heritage. I'm sure you understand.

EXT. GALILEE, NAZARETH - VILLAGE - DAY

A relatively poor Jewish enclave with small, one-story houses and shops along a single road. It's nestled in a basin, surrounded by hills of limestone in the b.g.

TWO MEN repair fishing nets outside a small shop, which also serves as their dwelling. A TEEN BOY POUNDS a board in place on a flat-bottom boat he builds in an alleyway.

An ELDERLY WOMAN, carries baskets of green olives on a shoulder pole. She scurries inside her home upon seeing Magnus and his SQUAD of SIX SOLDIERS ride into the village on horseback, come into view.

Magnus stops in front of a synagogue elevated on a platform in the center of the village. He dismounts, faces his MEN.

MAGNUS

(sarcastic)

Why do such rabble begin their
conquest of the world in a dreary
village as this?

The soldiers LAUGH, remain on horseback.

INT. NAZARETH, SYNAGOGUE - MOMENTS LATER

A large open room.

EIGHT BOYS (7 to 12) sit on flat stone benches around the room's outside edge.

RABBI BENJAMIN (50's), in a simple, blue-linen garment, stands before the boys, teaches from a Torah scroll. Magnus quietly slips inside, waits unseen by the door in the shadows.

A small Menorah is behind Benjamin with candles burning.

BENJAMIN

What did Moses speak unto the
children of Israel in the Torah
concerning how offerings are given?

BOYS

(recitation)

They must be given with a willing
heart.

BENJAMIN

Good. Besides gold, silver, and
brass, what are other acceptable
sacrifices unto Yahweh?

The boy's reply in the order of their seating.

BOY 1
Oil for the light and spices for
anointing.

BOY 2
Fine linen in blue, and purple, and
scarlet

BOY 3
Onyx stones for the breastplate.

BOY 4
Ram's skin dyed red, badger's skin,
and...

Magnus STOMPS into view, blows out the candles.

MAGNUS
School's dismissed.

SILENCE. The CHILDREN look to Benjamin for clues.

BENJAMIN
(waves)
Go. We will continue tomorrow.

The boys scramble through the door, out of view.

MAGNUS
(sarcastic)
Caiaphas sends his greetings.

Benjamin makes no eye contact, rolls up the scroll, turns his
back, places the scroll inside a cubicle on a shelf.

BENJAMIN
What do you want?

MAGNUS
Cooperation.

Benjamin fearlessly faces Magnus.

BENJAMIN
Or what? Whip me until I'm
unconscious?

Magnus pounces; he grabs Benjamin, throws him against the
shelf. Scrolls scatter everywhere. Magnus raises his fist,
about to strike, but releases him.

MAGNUS
Where is the willing heart of which
you speak so convincingly? A simple
favor will send us on our way.

With weapons drawn, two soldiers race inside, come into view.

SOLDIER 1
Sir. Is everything alright?

MAGNUS
I'm almost done here.

Magnus waves, dismisses his soldiers. They exit, out of view.

BENJAMIN
What more does Rome require from
our poor village?

MAGNUS
Fishermen. Two, to be exact.
(sneers)
Harboring fugitives will not end
well for the children you teach.

BENJAMIN
They stopped a few days ago, on
horseback. They left in a hurry,
and didn't tell me where they were
going. That's all I know.

EXT. SEA OF GALILEE, NORTH SHORE - DAY

The tide is rough; the sky gray. Winds rock an eight meter,
fishing vessel anchored offshore. Small pebbles and shells
pepper the beach. The Arbel Cliffs tower in the b.g.

With skilled, calloused hands, Peter, helps John untangle a
casting net.

JOHN
I'm surprised this net has held up
as long as it has.

They're on their knees in moist sand. Both are bearded.

Simon unsnags a mullet, tosses it inside one of several
baskets filled nearly to the brim with fish. He stands, lifts
a basket over his tall, muscular frame.

SIMON
Is this the same net we used when
Jesus was with us?

John carefully folds the net, places it inside a burlap sack.

JOHN
(nods)
Almost four years, to the day.

Simon wades in the water, retrieves another net from a boat.
He dips the net in the surf, rinses it, strides ashore.

SIMON
 (grins)
 I remember it well.

Simon and John unfurl the tangled net; they carefully inspect the net for tears.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SEA OF GALILEE, FISHING BOAT - DAY

SUPER: "Four Years Earlier"

An orange sun peeks out from the cloudless horizon.

John, Simon, and James glide across the calm, golden lake in a flat-bottom craft, tacking windward as a slight breeze fills the triangular sail.

James releases the jib, ties it to the mast. The vessel coast. Simon and John grab oars, paddle. James controls the tiller at the helm, guides the boat toward shore.

JAMES
 At least we won't have to clean the fish.

Simon pulls in his oar, lifts a basket upside-down.

SIMON
 Yeah... since we caught nothing.

They LAUGH. Simon hands James his oar.

JAMES
 It's your turn to paddle.

James shifts to port. Simon stands, stretches; he notices smoke rising from a campfire on the beach. A MAN in a robe to his knees, strides barefoot into the shallow surf, waves his arms toward them.

MAN
 (yells)
 Friends. Did you catch any fish?

Simon raises his hands outward, shakes his head, yells back.

SIMON
 No... not one.

John and James continue to paddle. They're about ninety meters from shore.

MAN
 (yells)
 Toss your net, starboard. Prepare for a catch.

Simon scans the right side of the boat. Not a ripple; he sees no movement beneath the clear, blue water. He turns to his mates, shakes his head.

SIMON

He knows nothing of night fishing.

JOHN

Only a fisherman would use the correct nautical term for right.

(shrugs)

We've lost nothing unless we don't try.

Simon and John prepare a net. Simon cast it from the boat. The line rips with tension immediately; fish are trapped, flop everywhere.

Startled and amazed, Simon pulls the net toward the boat.

SIMON

Need some help here.

James comes to his aid. John looks toward the man on shore.

JOHN

It's the Lord.

Simon removes his outer garment, dives in, swims to shore.

BACK TO PRESENT

John measures a gap with his fingers on a corner of the net.

JOHN (CONT'D)

The boat nearly sank from the weight of the catch.

SIMON

One-hundred, thirty-four fish.

JOHN

(nods)

Our largest catch. Ever. No thanks to you.

SIMON

Who threw out the net?

JOHN

Who trusted his word?

Simon pulls out a roll of twine, snaps off a piece with his teeth, repairs the gap in the net.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Were you hoping to walk on water,
again?

Simon grins, releases a shell caught in the net's center,
heaves it into the clear, blue-green water.

SIMON
That same day, Yeshua reminded me
of my high calling... his mission
of what he wanted me to do.

JOHN
Three times, if I recall.

SIMON
It gets your attention when he
tells you something more than once.

From his peripheral vision, Simon notices soldiers on horses
in full gallop rapidly approaching along the shoreline, far
away in the b.g.

Simon firmly nudges John, who has his back turned.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Soldiers. Your brother. They're
here for one thing.

Simon sighs, glances at the boat and baskets of fish.

JOHN
Leave them, Simon. The boat will be
fine.

John grabs the net; Simon, the bag. They leap to their feet,
race inland toward the cover of tall bunch-grass with
delicate, wheat-like heads.

SIMON
I thought we would be safe here.

The soldiers, on horseback, close their distance.

Breathing hard and running fast, Simon and John duck behind a
palm. Simon signals for John to split up; he stares at the
cliffs.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Avoid Magdala. It's the first place
they'll search. Circle back to the
Arbel Cliffs, the southern terrace.

JOHN
God speed.

John dashes through thick, leafy horsetail grasses.

John follows a well-hidden trail. Using finesse and stealth, Simon zig-zags from olive and fig trees to clusters of prairie cordgrass.

EXT. ARBEL CLIFFS, NATURAL ROCK TERRACE - DAY - LATER

Beads of sweat roll down John's face. He rest against a rust-colored, rock face. A cave opens behind him.

He waits. Breaking the silence, a HAWK flies overhead, announces his presence with a SHRILL.

In the valley below, John spots a man wading, at a rapid pace, through a shallow stream as it meanders between cliffs.

JOHN
(sigh of relief)
Simon, you made it.

John completes a full scan. Following a distant, earthen road, he watches a six-man SQUAD of Roman soldiers, lead by a Centurion, trot on horseback.

The road connects the Sea of Galilee to a farming village, and intersects with the stream.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Turn around. Simon. Hurry. Hurry.
Get down.

The pace of the Centurion's horse changes suddenly to a racing gallop.

JOHN (CONT'D)
(shakes his head)
Oh no.

John watches the squad join the pursuit toward the stream. Simon's quickly overtaken, apprehended. They tie his hands to a saddle, force him to walk behind one of the soldiers.

The Centurion scans the cliff face. John turns aside, ducks into the shadow of the cave. He pounds his hand to his thigh.

EXT. JORDAN VALLEY, ROADWAY - DAY

Magnus leads his squad, who travel in three pairs. Stepping in a slow walk, the horses create multiple CLICKS and CLACKS from strap-on, solid-bottomed hoof-boots on the stone road.

Simon staggers behind the last horse. His lips are cracked, his eyes are swollen, his face weary. Simon falls.

Simon's pulled several meters before the soldier notices the drag. His wrist are raw and blistered from the rope line.

SOLDIER 3

Whoa girl.

The soldier dismounts, helps Simon to his knees. He unleashes a goat skin from his belt, offers the skin to Simon. Parched, Simon rapidly empties it of water.

SOLDIER 3 (CONT'D)

We're nearly there.

The elevated, stone wall surrounding a Roman fortress is in the b.g. Magnus trots on his stallion to their position.

MAGNUS

What's the problem?

The soldier mounts his horse.

SOLDIER 3

Nothing.

Magnus kicks the flank of the soldier's horse. The horse leaps forward. The rope tightens, yanks Simon onto the stone-paved road. Simon's head hits the elevated footpath.

MAGNUS

(a stern rebuke)

Keep moving!

SOLDIER 3

Yes-sir.

Simon's dragged further. Magnus trots to the front of the squad. The soldier slows long enough for Simon to regain his footing.

Simon's forehead has a knot and bruises; blood seeps from a laceration above his eye. The soldier briefly turns in his saddle.

SOLDIER 3 (CONT'D)

Another furlong. Hold fast.

The horses cross a bridge with a stream flowing beneath it. The soldier points to the main gait of a Roman fort, in the b.g. The gate is decorated with a golden eagle above it.

Sunlight reflects off the metal from the eagle into Simon's eyes. Simon is dazed.

FLASHBACK - EXT. JORDAN VALLEY, ROMAN FORTRESS - MORNING

TWO WORKERS, on a scaffolding, attach a large, metallic image of an eagle to bronze pegs above the gate.

THREE WOMEN, TWELVE DISCIPLES, and JESUS wade through a stream, stroll past the gate of the Roman fortress of Alexandrium, set on a hillside, built mostly of large stones.

JESUS
What parable did Isaiah use to reveal our hope?

SIMON
(uncertain)
When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you?

JOHN
(uncertain)
We shall mount up with eagle's wings. We shall walk and not faint?

Jesus grins, pats Simon and John on the shoulder.

JESUS
Your answers remind me of recitation in synagogue school.
(laughs)
That we shall do. As long as we have plenty to drink.

Jesus sits on a boulder on the hillside, sips water from a lamb skin, passes it to another.

The women and disciples follow Jesus's lead; they sit, drink, rest.

A ROMAN SERGEANT (mid 30's), rock solid as a bull, on patrol guarding the entry, holds up his hands, jogs toward them.

SERGEANT
What business do you have in Alexandrium?

Peter steps forward, protective of Jesus.

SIMON
We travel to Shiloh with our teacher and Lord.

The sergeant brings out several silver coins from a pouch, tosses them in his palm.

SERGEANT
In your travels, does your teacher pay taxes to Caesar? Or does he seek to avoid the duty?

SIMON
Of course we...

Jesus nudges Simon gently, faces the sergeant.

JESUS
(interrupts)
... hold up Simon. Why do you ask,
my friend?

SERGEANT
We risk our lives everyday to
provide you safe passage. What do
we have to show for it?

JESUS
There is none greater than one who
serves. Do you believe this?

The sergeant puts his arms across his chest, leans back.

SERGEANT
I suppose.

Jesus lifts his hands toward the sky, smiles. Jesus grasps
the sergeant's hands, gazes directly into his eyes.

JESUS
Aurelius. Do not complain of your
wages, my son... for you are not
far from the Kingdom of Heaven.

The sergeant pulls away, surprised.

AURELIUS
How do you know my name?

SIMON
Oh, he knows a whole lot more than
just your name.

AURELIUS
Is a servant not worthy of his
wages?

JESUS
He is... but the wages I speak of
are not of this world. It's an
investment, of sort.

AURELIUS
You speak in riddles.

JESUS
Service involves the attitude of
one's heart. And as you think in
your heart, so are you.

AURELIUS
Kind of like a farmer reaping what
he sows?

Jesus smiles, pats Aurelius on the back.

JESUS
You are quick to understand the
most important law of my kingdom.

Jesus meanders ahead with his disciples and women around him.
With a longing on his face, Aurelius holds his ground,
watches the group. Jesus stops, looks back, motions to him.

JESUS (CONT'D)
Follow me.

With a look of regret, Aurelius points to an insignia on his
uniform, raises his arms outward.

AURELIUS
I want to, but I can't.

EXT. SHILOH, VILLAGE - HOUSE, FRONT PORCH - DAY - LATER

Jesus pulls a silver coin from a bag, shows it to Simon.

JESUS
Simon. From whom do the kings of
the earth collect duty and taxes...
... from their own sons or from
others?

SIMON
(points to himself)
You're looking at him. Us.

JESUS
(nods)
Correct. Their sons are exempt.
Remember the stream we crossed near
the Roman fort?

Simon nods; Jesus gives him the coin.

JESUS (CONT'D)
Go to that stream and throw out
your line. The first fish you catch
will have a four-drachma coin in
its mouth. Take it to Sergeant
Aurelius, along with this coin.
It's for my tax and yours.

SIMON
What shall I say?

JESUS

Befriend him, then tell him to be content with what he has, and that God will not abandon nor forsake him.

BACK TO PRESENT

The horses, with Simon in tow, remain in line as the gate to the fort is raised.

EXT. VILLAGE OF MAGDALA - INN - NIGHT

Three PATRONS dine on brazen lamb and fresh vegetables, served with olive oil and flatbread on a table near the door.

They hear RICKETY SOUNDS of a push cart roll by their window. One patron turns, shakes his head toward TWO MEN sitting in the shadows of a secluded room in the rear.

SECLUDED ROOM

John sits at a table across from a stout, nearly bald man, BARNABAS ALTO (mid 40's) who's always faithful with a servant's heart. Barnabas drinks from a copper chalice.

They eat from a platter, mixed with dates, apples, almonds, and cheese, along with olive oil and flatbread.

JOHN

The persecution has begun.

BARNABAS

There may be a price on all our heads.

Barnabas nods, tears off a piece of bread, dips it in the oil, eats it.

JOHN

I'm certain Caiaphus, the Roman puppet, is behind it.

John refills his chalice from a pitcher of wine mixed with water.

BARNABAS

Peace at all cost, both in Jerusalem and Judea.

JOHN

It's his way to maintain his status with Caesar... keep the money flowing into the Temple treasury.

John nibbles on apple slices and cheese.

BARNABAS
And his pockets.

JOHN
For us to succeed, we'll need a
distraction to draw the Captain
away from his men.

ENTRANCE - LATER

Compassionate and fearless, MARY MAGDALENE (late 30's), with long, red hair woven in braids, opens the the front door for Salome. A bell RINGS; they enter. Salome carries a satchel over her shoulder. John greets them with a hug. Mary holds an oil lamp.

JOHN
Ladies. Glad you're here.

They stroll to the back room. The women's cheeks are red, streaked with tears already dried.

SECLUDED ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Barnabas rises, extends his hand to Salome.

BARNABAS
I'm so sorry for your loss.

SALOME
First Stephen, then my eldest, now
Simon.

Tears well up in Salome's eyes. Mary takes Salome's hands in hers.

SILENCE.

MARY
God is for us... we take him back
with the sword.

JOHN
Agreed. An ambush.

BARNABAS
(overlapping)
That's the plan we've been
discussing.

With determination in her eyes, Mary leans in, speaks softly.

MARY

John, contact Simon's brother,
Andrew. He'll get in touch with
Phillip and Bartholomew... and
don't forget Thomas.

BARNABAS

I'll travel at first light to
Jerusalem. Cleophas will bring
recruits from the church in Emmaus.

JOHN

What of Paul? He's got connections
all across the empire.

John STRUMS his fingers on the tabletop.

BARNABAS

Let's hope he hasn't already sailed
to Laodecia.

JOHN

We need to act soon, before they
reach the next garrison.

MARY

(shakes her head)
Too late... my son suggested we
wait 'til they arrive at the Roman
prison in Jerusalem.

BARNABAS

He's right. Fewer guards, and they
wouldn't be expecting it.

MARY

I believe I've found a way inside.

BARNABAS

A bribe? It's risky.

Mary shakes her head, lifts up the platter of food on the
table.

BARNABAS (CONT'D)

Ah... subterfuge.

Barnabas eats a fig, smiles at Mary.

MARY

No risk.

JOHN

Most likely, Simon won't be heavily
guarded on his way to the Temple.

BARNABAS

Or on his return trip to the prison.

(nods)

We'll work out the details when everyone has assembled in the synagogue in Bethany.

Mary pushes back her chair, helps Salome from her seat.

MARY

Come. I'll walk you home.

Mary picks up her oil lamp, leads Salome from the room.

INT. BETHANY, SYNAGOGUE - RABBI'S STUDY - DAY

RABBI HILLEL YAAKOV (60's), sits across from a TEMPLE GUARD in a police uniform. Hillel wears a linen robe with fringes on the sleeves; long, twisted locks of hair curl beside his ears; his head is covered by a kippah.

An architectural drawing of Herod's Temple and a tubular hat lay on the table between them.

TEMPLE GUARD

(points to the drawing)

I've guarded the walls along the colonnades on numerous occasions.

HILLEL

You believe that's their best option?

The Temple Guard nods, puts his hat on his head.

TEMPLE GUARD

I feel it may be their only option. But there's always a risk.

The Temple Guard stands. Hillel starts to stand.

HILLEL

I'll inform Barnabas.

TEMPLE GUARD

(motions with his hand)

Rabbi, keep your seat. I'll find my way out.

INT. ROMAN PRISON, UPPER LEVEL - HOLDING CELL - DAY

Sunlight disperses through two small openings into a large room with a stone arch for a door. Stocks are lined along all four walls.

Wearing a cloth over his nose and mouth, Gaius unlocks Simon's stocks, frees his upper body and arms.

He shoves Simon to his knees, attaches a chain to his wrists, SNAPS the lock. Simon's ankles are manacled by a short chain.

GAIUS
(sarcastic)
On to a better place.

Gaius grabs Simon's elbow, leads him toward a second arch. Simon shuffles his feet. His wrist and ankles are raw.

ATTACHED CELL - MOMENTS LATER

Gaius and Simon duck beneath a low archway into another cell.

One small opening, along the arched ceiling, provides minimal light. Two iron rings are fixed on each stone wall.

GAIUS
How's this for comfort?
(laughs)

Multiple chains of differing lengths hang from a rack.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
I'm doing you a favor. You won't
have to stand the whole time.

Gaius selects a medium chain, slides it through a ring.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Sit!

Simon sits. Gaius slips the chain through a ring, links it to Simon's ankle and wrist chains, SNAPS the lock. Gaius checks that Simon's locks are secure.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
You escape... I'm a dead man.

SIMON
As a sheep is lead to the
slaughter.

GAIUS
Ah, your Passover. You can't get
around in the city this time of
year. I despise it.

Gaius scampers through the arch, out of view. Simon GAGS, vomits.

GAIUS (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Wish I could promise you that
 you'll get used to the smell.

INT. HEROD'S PALACE, BATHHOUSE - DAY

A domed ceiling. Frescoes on the walls. Steam hovers above the large circular pool created from under-floor heating.

King Herod Agrippa sits between TWO, scantily-clad WOMEN (early 20's) in a pool elevated on a terrace.

The terrace has mosaic floors. Agrippa CLAPS his hands.

AGRIPPA
 Wine.

A SERVANT fills his goblet and those of the women. Magnus approaches quietly, stands erect beside a potted palm, in view of Agrippa.

SILENCE. Seconds pass. Magnus doesn't move.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
 Magnus. If you must.

Magnus steps forward.

MAGNUS
 Your excellency. Simon is in our
 custody.

Herod's eyes light up.

AGRIPPA
 Alive I hope.
 (Magnus nods)
 Where did you track him down?

MAGNUS
 Galilee. Hiding along the Northern
 shore.

Magnus waits at attention. Herod sips wine from a silver goblet. He waves his hands for Magnus to leave.

AGRIPPA
 Can't you see I have important
 business to attend to.

Agrippa reaches below the surface of the water. One of the women GIGGLES in delight.

MAGNUS
 My sincere apology. Caiaphus
 request that he be released into
 (MORE)

MAGNUS (CONT'D)
his custody.

AGRIPPA
What's the rush? Roman justice,
like an aged wine, must be savored.

Agrippa LAUGHS, raises his goblet, toast with the women.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
The High Priest can wait.

MAGNUS
Passover week. The pilgrims.

AGRIPPA
Caiaphas's offering to please the
masses in return for their loyalty.

One of the women blows into Agrippa's ear.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
A speedy trial of which we already
know the verdict.
(snaps his fingers)
Release him. That will be all.

Magnus bows, backs away, strides briskly, out of view.

INT. ROMAN PRISON, UPPER LEVEL - HOLDING CELL - NIGHT

Rain dribbles through two small holes in the rock wall. An oil lamp at the door provides lighting.

A RAT scampers along the wall with a TABBY CAT in chase. The cat follows the rat through the arch.

ATTACHED CELL - MOMENTS LATER

The cell's lit by an oil lamp beside the arch. Drainage water spills out through an opening near the arched ceiling.

Simon, with eyes closed and his back against the wall, is manacled.

The tabby closes, pounces on the rat near the corner. The cat bites, flips the rat in the air. The rat SQUEALS, flops on the dirt floor; he's stunned.

The cat grabs the rat's tail with one paw, PURRS, licks his other paw.

Coming to life again, the rat escapes, races onto the chain which holds Simon in place; the rat clammers up, clings to the iron ring secured to the wall.

The tabby leaps in the air, claws into the rough-hewn rock. The rat's out of reach. The cat falls, lands in Simon's lap.

Simon awakens, startled. The tabby dashes into the attached, holding cell, out of view. Simon follows the cat's movement.

SIMON
Here kitty, kitty.

The rat climbs the irregular rock face, squeezes into a crevice. The tabby peeks his head out from behind the arch.

SIMON (CONT'D)
(whistles)
Here boy.

The cat zig-zags into Simon's cell. He stops suddenly, darts onto Simon's lap, claws extended.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Ouch.

The tabby perks his ears in the air, scrambles out of view through both cells. A light from a torch glows brighter through the arch of the holding cell.

GAIUS (O.S.)
This way. Watch your head.

ATTACHED CELL - LATER

A clean, outer cloak lies on top a folded blanket. A woven basket, covered by a linen cloth, sets beside Mary Magdalene.

A blue shawl covers her head. Simon finishes the last chunk of goat cheese, reaches in the basket for a pear.

SIMON
Gaius ate the rest?

Simon feels the firmness of the pear.

MARY
He doesn't like goat cheese, or you wouldn't have what little you do.

Mary applies salve to a laceration on Simon's forehead.

MARY (CONT'D)
How'd you get so many cuts and bruises on your neck?

Simon nods his head toward the holding cell, CRUNCHES down on the pear.

SIMON
Stocks.

MARY
They don't want prisoners escaping
from here, do they?

Simon nods. Mary rubs salve across scrapes and bruises on
Simon's neck and shoulders.

SIMON
(sighs)
Ahh. Thank you, Mary. Finally, some
relief.

MARY
We've found a way.

Mary tilts the basket, points toward a corner.

SIMON
What?

ON BASKET: A slip of paper is hidden, tucked beneath a wicker
strand.

MARY
Be ready.

Mary sets the basket down, just as Gaius slips under the
arch, comes into view. He holds a tabby in his arms; a mask
covers his nose and mouth.

GAIUS
It's time.

Mary ignores him, removes a vial from beneath the cloth.

MARY
Now for those wrist.

Chains CLANG as Simon holds out his arms. Mary pours oil over
his raw and blistered wrists.

SIMON
(winces)
They feel a whole lot worse than
they look.

MARY
They look horrible.

The tabby squirms from Gaius grip, jumps down, leaps onto the
shirt and blanket, circles around, sits, grooms. Simon pets
him. The cat PURRS, curls up, closes its eyes.

SIMON
What's his name.

GAIUS
Apollo. He doesn't usually take up
with strangers, mind you. Most
confined within these walls don't
survive long.

Mary pours oil onto Simon's ankles.

MARY
Almost done.

GAIUS
Get up. I'm at risk letting you
stay here this long.

Mary returns the vial to the basket. Simon reaches out, holds
Mary's hands, smiles.

MARY
It's not over.
(to Gaius)
The basket stays... a few figs and
pomegranates are all that's left.

Gaius lifts the cloth cover, helps himself to a pomegranate.

GAIUS
(reluctant sigh)
Let's go. Now!

Gaius holds Mary's elbow, escorts her from the cell, out of
view.

SIMON
The Lord bless you, Mary, for all
you've done.

Simon peels back a strand on the bottom of the wicker basket,
unfolds a small slip of paper.

ON PAPER: The Court of the Gentiles.

Simon finishes the pear, swallows it along with the paper
slip.

EXT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - MARKET STREET - DAY

MERCHANTS sell their goods - fruits and vegetables, dried
fish, clothes, perfumes, and jewelry. Craftsman work in
open-air shops - weavers, potters, bakers, and tailors.

Striding through the bazaar, Magnus grabs an apple from a
stand, feeds it to his stallion.

A MAN raises his hand in protest, stops when he realizes who it is.

MAGNUS

Ah, ah, ah.

Tying his horse's reins to a post, Magnus strolls inside a tent.

TENT - MOMENTS LATER

An attractive WOMAN (30's), dark eyes, dark braided hair, crushes a golden spice using a porcelain mortar and pestle.

MAGNUS

Aromatic. I need to visit the bazaar more frequently.

The woman looks up, sets down her pestle, grabs Magnus in her arms, kisses him passionately.

WOMAN

You surprised me.

MAGNUS

As I said, I don't come to the lower city often. What have you discovered?

Disappointed, the woman returns to her table, continues to grind the myrrh.

WOMAN

They're planning an ambush.

MAGNUS

As I suspected.

Magnus leans over, lifts her chin, kisses her, elevates the passion.

WOMAN

Somewhere around the temple proper. When? I don't know.

Magnus sniffs a vial of perfume, tilts it in his hand, touches the oil onto the woman's neck.

MAGNUS

You like it?

The woman nods, tilts her neck toward his soft touch. Magnus smiles, places a gold coin, and three silver denarii on the table.

MAGNUS (CONT'D)
Tonight. That should cover it.

INT./EXT. ROMAN JAIL, FOYER - DAY

Felix unlocks Simon's chains around his wrists and ankles. He tosses them on a hanger near the door.

FELIX
Captain, he's all yours.

As Gaius wraps a rope to Simon's wrist in front of him, a CAPTAIN, in the uniform of the TEMPLE POLICE, stops him. He carries a rope, wears a helmet, and has a dagger at his side.

CAPTAIN
(sneers)
Noted.

The Captain pulls Simon's arms behind his back. He tightly wraps Simon's wrists in the rope, yanks the knot. Simon grimaces, MOANS.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
You can plead your case in front of Caiaphas.

The Captain gags Simon's mouth, opens the door, shoves him into the stoned-paved street.

A CROWD scurries aside to make a broad path for the Captain as he drags Simon through the thoroughfare.

EXT. JERUSALEM, UPPER CITY - DAY

FAMILIES and Jewish PILGRIMS fill the streets.

The Captain leads Simon, surrounded by a TEN MAN SQUAD of TEMPLE POLICE in two rows. The MEN wear helmets and daggers; four of them carry spears; two flag-bearers are in front.

CAPTAIN
Halt!

A frail, ELDERLY MAN yanks the reins of his oxen, pulling a cart filled with wooden cages of doves.

ELDERLY MAN
Whoa. Whoa. Hold up.

The beasts clamber ahead; one wheel of the cart runs over a curb. A crate crashes onto the pavement. Five doves escape, take flight in a FLUTTER.

The Passover CROWD follows behind the cart.

Barnabas and John are among the crowd. The squad is forced to stop their march.

CAPTAIN

Make a way.

The squad marches ahead. A SHEPHERD (30's) guides a small flock of sheep past an intersection which connects Herod's palace to the Temple.

The sheep MEH and BAA as they wander and flow around the squad of Temple Police. The Captain pulls the shepherd aside.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Get these animals out of my way.

SHEPHERD

It's the feast of unleavened bread.
Get used to it.

The shepherd hurries ahead, calls the sheep by a distinctive, REPETITIVE WHISTLE. They scamper behind him.

BRIDGE - MOMENTS LATER

Simon struggles to ascend the bridge with Temple Police all around him. Mary Magdalene stands at the bottom. Her eyes meet Simon's. She sends him a lively smile.

A TEEN BOY beside Mary yells out from among the MASSES of PEOPLE.

BOY

Keep the faith, Simon.

The Captain and squad stop, search with their eyes, try to locate the one who called out. Several Temple Police shove some PEOPLE aside. The boy and Mary blend back into the CROWD, out of view.

CAPTAIN

Let's move.

At a safe distance, Mary and the teen, DARIUS (18), her son, a muscular, bright-eyed young man, follow the squad as they march Simon toward the steps of Herod's Temple.

Mary turns to Darius, a serious look on her face.

MARY

What were you thinking back there?

Darius throws up his arms.

DARIUS
 Mom. What if it was me?

Mary crosses her arms.

MARY
 Watch your attitude! Simon saw us.
 He knows our plan.

DARIUS
 They wouldn't have arrested me.

MARY
 Oh, really?

Mary opens Darius's robe; a sheathed dagger is on his belt at his waist.

MARY (CONT'D)
 You saw them search the crowd.
 (shakes her head)
 You remind me so much of Simon.

Mary rubs her son's thick, red hair.

DARIUS
 That's a good thing, right?

Mary puts her arm around her son.

MARY
 Of course.

INT. HEROD'S TEMPLE, COURT OF THE WOMEN - DAY - LATER

Four massive lampstands are in each corner of a large plaza, filled with mostly WOMEN. Some dance, some SING, others drop coins into one of eight, bronze trumpet-shaped receptacles.

PRIESTS, in white linen robes and tubular hats, sit beside each of the receptacles.

The Captain and Simon ascend fifteen, semi-circular steps, stand in front of a huge, arched entrance, the Nicanor Gate.

CAPTAIN
 Far enough.

Four TEMPLE POLICE, fully armed, come into view through the gate, escort Caiaphas in a blue linen robe with a golden sash at his waist. On his head is a white turban.

One Temple Policeman has a long, silver trumpet over his shoulder.

CAIAPHAS
Well done, Captain. Unbind him.

The Temple Police take position on Simon's left and right. The Captain releases Simon's gag, cuts the rope from his wrist.

Caiaphas nods to the Policemen. He puts the trumpet to his lips, blows it, REPEATEDLY. Sounds ECHO through the plaza.

Priests and the women stop their activity, assemble.

SILENCE

Caiaphas hands a small scroll to the Captain; he unfurls it.

CAPTAIN
(reads)
Simon Peter, a follower of the way,
is hereby charged with blasphemy of
Yahweh, the most high God.
(pushes Simon forward)
He bewitches others to believe in
the falsehood of three gods.
(shoves him to his knees)
Many riots have occurred beyond
Judea because of his teaching.

Caiaphas steps forward, speaks as an orator.

CAIAPHAS
Remember Yeshua, whom many of you
saw crucified by Pilot in the place
of the skull. This man claims that
Yeshua is God.
(a long beat)
He also teaches that he's risen
from the dead... and has become
Lord over all.

PRIEST
He's instigated riots in the city
of Antioch. To this I bear witness.

CAIAPHAS
What evidence is there that he has
infected our holy city as well?

A woman nudges women around her; they nod together.

WOMAN
We've seen him incite our people by
his teaching outside Solomon's
Porch. He proclaims a power to
heal.

CAIAPHAS

According to our sacred Torah,
given by Moses, you are witnesses
to these charges. The required
penalty is death. Do you concur?

The CROWD stirs, raise their arms, SHOUT.

WOMEN AND PRIESTS

(simultaneous)

Blasphemer. Stone him. Kill him.
Death by crucifixion. Rid this
sinner from among us.

Caiaphas leans over, WHISPERS into Simon's ear. Simon shakes
his head.

CAIAPHAS

As your witness before the one and
only true God, Yahweh, this man
refuses to deny these charges.

One Priest climbs several steps, turns toward the crowd.

PRIEST

(yells)

Away with him.

CROWD

(chant)

Away with him. Away with him.

Caiaphas faces Simon, grins in satisfaction.

CAIAPHAS

The people have spoken.
(to the Captain)
You have your orders.

The Captain nods, lifts Simon to his feet, binds his hands
behind him, and gags him.

CAPTAIN

Caiaphas, may I have a word... in
private?

Caiaphas hesitates, sneers.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

It's important.

CAIAPHAS

Make it quick.

Caiaphas turns abruptly. Two Temple Police remain with Simon.

Two Temple Police - personal guards of Caiaphas - escort him through the Nicanor Gate, out of view. The Captain follows them.

TEMPLE COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The Captain and Caiaphas stand just beyond the Gate of Nicanor. Two body guards of the Temple Police keep watch.

The Captain and Caiaphas face the actual Temple with a large, brazen alter to one side.

CAIAPHAS

How did you learn of this?

CAPTAIN

Within every scheme, there's a traitor willing to bargain.

CAIAPHAS

I see.

(motions to a personal guard)

Go with the Captain. Do what he ask.

The Captain and one of Caiaphas's personal guards stride across the courtyard, pass beside the alter, turn toward a main gate in the western wall, out of view.

CAIAPHAS (CONT'D)

Bring him.

Caiaphas's body guard scampers through the Nicanor gate, out of view. Moments later, the guard returns with two Temple Police holding Simon.

EXT./INT. HEROD'S TEMPLE, COURT OF THE GENTILES - DAY - LATER

An enclosed outer court with three colonnades. Sunlight pierces into the lengthy, stone platform.

The sun's rays don't reach behind the huge, supporting columns.

Behind most every second column nearest the outer wall, MEN hide in the shadows, armed with swords and daggers at their sides.

Barnabas races behind a column where John is concealed.

BARNABAS

What's the hold up?

JOHN
Patience. We're all set.

Mary Magdalene and Darius stride onto the platform, into view. Darius carries a young lamb over his shoulders.

Mary glances behind the columns, sees no one. Her voice is raised as she speaks.

MARY
What did you pay for the lamb?

DARIUS
(raised voice)
Not nearly as much as he's worth.

The Police Captain, SIXTEEN TEMPLE POLICE, Magnus, and TWO fully armed SQUADS of LEGIONNAIRES, lead Simon in a march up the steps, coming into view on the platform between columns.

Simon turns his head slightly, notices the strain and panic contained on Darius's and Mary's faces.

The MEN lean against the stone columns, cover their weapons with their robes. They don't breath until all the SOLDIERS and Temple Police march past them, out of view.

Each MAN, one by one, slips away along the Temple wall, out of view.

EXT. JERUSALEM, UPPER CITY - ROMAN PRISON - DAY

FOUR ROMAN SOLDIERS, with swords and lancets, guard the entrance to the prison. FOUR other armed SOLDIERS stride through the street, stop PILGRIMS, search for weapons hidden among their clothing.

Darius and Mary Magdalene stroll along the sidewalk, come into view in the b.g. Mary carries a covered basket. They stop and turn aside when they notice the heavy presence of soldiers.

MARY
Get rid of your knife.

DARIUS
(a disgruntled sigh)
Mom.

MARY
Don't argue. One of them may have seen us on the portico. We don't need you arrested.

Darius opens his outer garment, loosens his belt, drops the sheath and dagger on the pavement, kicks it behind a curb.

MARY (CONT'D)

Wait here.

Mary strides to the prison entrance, uncovers the the basket of food, shows it to the soldiers. One of the soldiers grabs a chicken leg, takes a bite of the meat.

The soldier gnaws into the leg, intensely enjoying it.

A second soldier attempts to grab something from the basket. Mary smacks his hand.

MARY (CONT'D)

Gaius will have your hide and mine.

SOLDIER 2

(laughs)

Take it up with him. He's inside.

Mary covers her basket, opens the door, steps into the foyer, out of view.

EXT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - STREETS - NIGHT

Mary and Darius stride quickly through the streets, circle back, duck in the shadows of an open-air, vegetable market.

They wait, see no one.

DARIUS

We must of lost them.

MARY

Hurry. We're late.

The scamper into the night through the maze of streets.

INT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - HOUSE - DINING AREA - NIGHT

John and Barnabas view a hand-drawn map lying on a table.

ON MAP: A Roman prison in the upper city is marked among the intersecting streets.

RAP, RAP, RAP.

Barnabas strolls to the door, opens it.

Mary Magdalene and Darius dash inside, come into view; they quickly close the door.

DARIUS

We were followed.

Darius notices the worried look on John's face.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
 (snickers)
 The sun will be overhead before
 they find their way back.

JOHN
 (a long sigh)
 How far did you get?

MARY
 Gaius grabbed the basket, wouldn't
 let me past the foyer. He told me
 not to return... ever.

Mary, Darius, John, and Barnabas gather around the table.

BARNABAS
 How many guards?

DARIUS
 Eight at least. All heavily armed.
 Three, maybe four, were on the
 streets...
 (points to map)
 ... here, here, and here.

MARY
 They're suspicious, stopping
 everyone.

DARIUS
 (shrugs)
 Thanks to them, I lost my knife and
 leather sheath.

MARY
 Gaius and two other guards were in
 the foyer. Below that? There's no
 way to tell.

DARIUS
 The good news... the Temple Police
 were nowhere to be found.

BARNABAS
 Dispersed back to Caiaphas when the
 Roman soldiers arrived, no doubt.

JOHN
 At least he took your basket.

Barnabas paces back and forth.

BARNABAS
 (shakes his head)
 We can't be certain that Simon ever
 received it.

MARY

Especially since Gaius scolded me
in front of the guards... screamed
that no food ever reaches the
dungeon.

John sighs, throws the map on the floor.

JOHN

Simon will not see the light of
another day.

BARNABAS

Not if Herod has anything to say
about it. He relishes in public
executions.

MARY

I do know this. We've got two days.

INT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - SYNAGOGUE - DAY

A small structure with three rows of seats and an open
balcony. Partitioned apart in the front, are two chairs and a
portable ark containing multiple scrolls inside it.

Candles from four Menorahs light the room.

Barnabas, John, Mary, Darius, and Salome, along with a GROUP
of MEN, WOMEN, and TEENS, gather around Rabbi Joseph
Arimathea, in a silk robe and wearing a kippah.

JOSEPH

Caiaphas never called members of
our council together. He informed
no one of Simon's arrest, nor his
trial.

BARNABAS

Rabbi, can you do nothing?

JOSEPH

Judgment has passed to Herod. It
appears that Simon's execution is
imminent.

A FEW of the WOMEN start to CRY.

JOHN

We can't lose hope.

BARNABAS

Can Simon appeal to Caesar?

JOSEPH
Not at this point.

DARIUS
Nothing is impossible with God.

JOSEPH
Yes, Simon's fate is in God's
hands.
(to Salome)
Salome.

Salome reaches into her satchel, pulls out two vials, gives
then to Joseph. She faces the GROUP.

SALOME
Costly myrrh that remained from
James's burial.

JOSEPH
If you are willing, gather around.
I shall anoint you with this
precious oil of sacrifice.

The CROWD eagerly gather around Joseph in a semi-circle, drop
to their knees. Most close their eyes.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)
We will pray here, now, and plead
our case before the Father of
lights.

Mary raises her arms; tears roll down her cheeks.

MARY
And we will continue to pray at our
houses, nonstop, as long as it
takes.

Joseph slowly, systematically moves from ONE PERSON to the
NEXT, anoints their forehead with oil.

JOSEPH
We cry out to you Father, in the
name of Yeshua, your precious Son,
to move heaven and earth on behalf
of our beloved brother. Send your
angels to deliver him.
(beat)
With this oil, symbolic of our
Comforter, the Holy Spirit, we ask
that you prepare a table before
Simon Peter in the presence of his
enemies.

INT. HEROD'S PALACE, BANQUET HALL - DAY

Elaborate murals are on the walls. A royal chair decorated in gold sets on a small stage in the front of the room.

Ten tables and chairs are aligned in a row. King Herod Agrippa dines with Magnus. Roasted duck, vegetables, cheese, wine, and flatbread set on the table.

AGRIPPA
Who's next in line?

MAGNUS
Caiaphas desires Paul, of course...
... along with a man named
Barnabas. Whereabouts unknown.

Agrippa pushes his plate aside, leans back, sips wine from a goblet.

AGRIPPA
We can't have you tramping across
the empire, now can we?

MAGNUS
(nods)
I have jurisdiction only in Judea.

AGRIPPA
Even in Judea, there will be
expenses.

Magnus eats a bite of duck.

MAGNUS
The High Priest sends word that
he's willing to help finance such
an expenditure.

AGRIPPA
Isn't the duck marvelous? They came
all the way from the Nile valley.
(beat)
What of James's brother?

SILENCE between bites, Magnus hesitates.

MAGNUS
It seems he's disappeared, as well.

AGRIPPA
Come. Come. You brought me Simon
Peter. And you so enjoyed the hunt.

Magnus follows the duck with a large swig of wine.

MAGNUS
I will not deny either.

AGRIPPA
John it is! Now was that so
difficult?
(giggles with glee)
Paul and Barnabas must wait their
turn. Caiaphas won't be
disappointed.

Herod lifts his goblet in a toast with Magnus.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
And we have his treasury at our
disposal.

INT. JERUSALEM, UPPER CITY - PRISON - DAY

TWO ROMAN SOLDIERS stand at attention outside the dungeon.

Oil lamps light the hallway. Gaius carries two sets of
chains. Felix unlocks the door, picks up an oil lamp.

GAIUS
You must be joking?

FELIX
I wish.

Felix and Gaius enter the cell, close the door. Simon sits on
the dirt floor, his feet in chains; his eyes are closed.

GAIUS
Whose idea was this?

Felix KNOCKS on the door. The lock CLICKS behind him. He sets
the oil lamps on a rock outcropping on the wall.

FELIX
Who do you think?

The men both nod. Felix stretches out his arms, touches the
sides of the rock walls.

GAIUS
I'd like to sink my teeth into him.

Gaius separates the chains, strings them out in a line. He
counts using his fingers.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
We've got four soldiers guarding
the door. Three in the foyer. Two
in the guard room. Two more in the
hallway.

FELIX
Three. Three in the hall.

Felix attaches one chain to a ring on the wall, locks it.

GAIUS
Right. And us... of all places.

Gaius links a second chain to the opposite wall, locks it.

FELIX
Not including the two on watch
outside the cell.
(spits)
Magnus, be damned.

They wrap a cloth around their nose and mouth.

GAIUS
Even my good eye waters from the
stink in this hell hole.

Simon stirs, opens his eyes.

SIMON
What's going on?

Felix and Gaius CHUCKLE.

FELIX
(sarcastic)
Rome's being invaded.

EXT. BETHPHAGE, VILLAGE - HOUSE - NIGHT

A tall, wooden fence surrounds the house. RHODA TURSTIN (16), a servant girl, closes the gate, locks it. She turns to leave, takes several steps along a stone path.

BANG. BANG. BANG.

RHODA
State your name.

BARNABAS (O.S.)
Barnabas. John's with me.

Rhoda sets an oil lamp on the ground, bends down, looks through an opening caused by a missing knot in the wood.

RHODA
Why should I believe you?

JOHN (O.S.)
Ichthys.
(translation)
(MORE)

JOHN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Jesus Christ, son of God, Savior.

Rhoda unlock the gate. John and Barnabas step quickly inside.
 John hugs Rhoda.

RHODA
 Your voice, I recognize... we
 weren't expecting you.

Rhoda closes the gate, locks it.

BARNABAS
 Change of plans.

RHODA
 Glad you're here. Everyone's
 inside.

Rhoda turns, strolls along a cobblestone path toward the
 front door. The men follow.

RHODA (CONT'D)
 Come. Join us in worship.

Sounds of a CHORUS of PRAISE from a group of PEOPLE grow
 LOUDER as they near the house.

PEOPLE
 (chorus)
 "The Lord thy God in the midst of
 thee is mighty, is mighty... he
 will save, he'll rejoice over thee
 with joy, with joy... he will rest
 in his love, he will joy over the
 with singing."

JOHN
 God inhabits the praises of his
 people.

EXT./INT. JERUSALEM, UPPER CITY, PRISON - NIGHT

Magnus dismounts, salutes four armored FIELD TROOPERS who
 carry spears (late 20's). They're standing guard, hold the
 rank of Lancearii.

Magnus hands the reins of his stallion to one of the
 Lancearii.

He hops up the steps, opens the door, stomps inside.

A DECANUS, who holds the rank of a decorated SERGEANT, and
 two Evocati, VETERANS come to attention, salute him.

MAGNUS
Sergeant.

SERGEANT
Everything's secure, sir.

MAGNUS
Our man in the dungeon.

SERGEANT
Two men inside, two at his door.

MAGNUS
Short chained.

SERGEANT
Yes-sir. As you ordered.

MAGNUS
A detachment will relieve you at
daybreak.

Magnus turns briskly, exits out of view. The sergeant and two
vets hear a horse's HOOFBEATS gradually DIMINISH outside the
prison. They relax, take a deep breath.

VETERAN #1
What's all the fuss about this runt
guarded and chained in the dungeon?

SERGEANT
Caiaphas's project to appease the
masses.
(expression of sadness)
He'll be tortured and executed just
after we are relieved of duty.

VETERAN #2
After the rat-hole bellow...
(chuckles)
... hell, he's probably looking
forward to it.

INT. ROMAN PRISON, LOWER CHAMBER - DUNGEON - LATER

Felix and Gaius lean against the wall across from Simon. With
his wrist and ankles in separate chains manacled to different
rings above him, Simon has limited movement.

Simon sits on the floor with his knees raised.

FELIX
We don't like it here any more than
you do.

SIMON
You can stand, move about.

GAIUS
Orders.

SIMON
Although I can barely move, I'm probably in a more comfortable position than both of you.

Gaius motions across his throat as if being sliced.

GAIUS
I doubt that.
(snickers)
Enjoy your rest. First light will be here soon.

The oil lamp flickers. Gaius checks it.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Why is it, that the little things in life annoy you the most?

FELIX
I'll go.

GAIUS
On no, my hips are hurting... I need to stretch.

Gaius pulls a die from his pocket.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Roll you for it?

FELIX
No way.

Gaius reaches in his pocket, places a bronze-copper coin on his thumb.

GAIUS
Your call.

FELIX
Heads.

Gaius flips the coin. It lands in the dirt.

ON COIN: The head of a Roman Emperor.

GAIUS
Damn.

Felix LAUGHS, KNOCKS. A GUARD unlocks the door; Felix exits, out of view. Apollos races in as the door closes.

CLICK; the door locks.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Where have you been, Apollos?

The tabby cat moves along the wall, rubs against Gaius's leg.

SIMON
Here kitty, kitty.

The cat prances to Simon with his tail held high. Simon tries to pet him but is stopped by his confinement.

Apollos weaves in and out through Simon's knees, plops down between them.

SIMON (CONT'D)
(chuckles)
Can I borrow one of your nine?

The tabby PURRS.

SIMON (CONT'D)
(deep sigh)
I never imagined my life would end like this.

GAIUS
The gods can be cruel.

SIMON
That's not what I meant. I knew my fate would end this way, just not quite so soon.

GAIUS
The flip of a coin, the roll of the dice... your time's up, your time is up.

SIMON
We do have a purpose, Gaius. Even my death.

Gaius stretches his legs, rubs his hips, shakes his head.

SIMON (CONT'D)
How long have your hips been hurting?

GAIUS
Ever since I fell from a scaffolding a few years back.

SIMON
Alexandrium? Aurelius stood guard?

GAIUS
(astonished)
What has Felix told you?

SIMON
(apologetic)
I was there. I didn't see you fall,
but you must of been one of the men
hanging the golden eagle above the
gait.

Gaius bends over, touches his knees, stands with his back
straight against the wall.

GAIUS
What were you doing there?

SIMON
Traveling with a group on our way
to Shiloh. I'm a disciple of
Yeshua, the son of the most high
God.

GAIUS
I understand all I need to know
about him... and you.
(shakes his head)
Your so called, Messiah, the man
you speak of, was crucified. The
whole city turned dark in the
middle of the afternoon.

SIMON
Do you? Really?

Gaius stands, his fist raised.

GAIUS
The man's dead; he's certainly not
a god.

Gaius RATTLES Simon's chains. Simon grits his teeth.

SIMON
You won't find true peace until you
encounter him, the prince of peace.

GAIUS
Peace? Ha! You'll shortly arrive in
Sheol just like him.

SIMON
Would you allow me to pray for you?

GAIUS
I don't want to hear it.

Gaius removes his mask briefly, spits at Simon's feet.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Absolutely not.

SIMON
The Lord can heal your hips, right here in this dungeon. He paid the price. He can straighten that crooked eye of yours, too.

GAIUS
Stop. I'll gag you if I have to.

SIMON
His desire is you, Gaius. He wants to be with you in eternity.

CLICK. The door opens. Felix enters into view, carries two oil lanterns. The door closes behind him. CLICK.

GAIUS
Get me out of here. He's trying to bewitch me.

FELIX
Settle down, Gaius.

Felix sets the lamps on two, flat-stone outcroppings. He twirls a cloth, wraps it around Simon's mouth, ties it.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Problem solved, my friend.

Simon relaxes, drops his head, closes his eyes.

Felix snorts, reaches in his pocket, pulls out several small, silver coins.

FELIX (CONT'D)
Want to try your luck again?

GAIUS
Anything to pass the time.

Gaius searches his pockets, pulls out a few copper pennies.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
All I've got.

FELIX
You can pay me back if you lose.

QUICK FLASHBACK - MEMORIES OF HEALING

Peter and John stroll past a lame BEGGAR at the Beautiful Gate outside Herod's Temple.

BEGGAR
Alms. Alms for the poor.

SIMON
I have no silver or gold, but what
I do have, I give to you.

Simon takes his hand, lifts him. His feet straighten.

SIMON (CONT'D)
(simultaneously)
In the name of Yeshua, rise and
walk.

Leaping in the air, the lame beggar walks; He skips and dances his way into the Temple alongside Simon and John.

BACK TO PRESENT

FELIX
Your call.

GAIUS
Tails.

Felix flips a coin. It rolls beneath Simon's outer cloak. Simon snores.

FELIX
Look at him. Already asleep.

GAIUS
This man's either crazy, or maybe
there's something to his claims.

Felix picks up the coin.

FELIX
Tails it is.

Felix holds out the silver coin, pulls it back as Gaius tries to grab it.

FELIX (CONT'D)
I'm teasing... double or nothing?

GAIUS
(nods)
Go.

FELIX

Heads.

Felix flips the coin in the air.

DUNGEON - NIGHT - LATER

Felix and Gaius sit with their backs against the stone wall. Simon's asleep.

Wind blows across the cell; both oil lamps are extinguished.

Suddenly, a brilliant, glowing light appears in the cell. In between Gaius and Felix, stands a tall, muscular MAN in white linen clothing; he wears a purple sash around his waist and head.

The man bends down, blows across across Gaius's face and eyes. With each breathe, the air sparkles. Felix and Gaius are stunned and bedazzled, enter a trance-like state.

MAN

(a soft whisper)

His light dispels all darkness.

The man removes his sash from his head; he teases Apollo from between Simon's knees. His white hair glimmers like fresh fallen snow. His face begins to radiate light.

The man lifts the tabby onto Gaius's lap. Apollos doesn't stir, PURRS.

The man draws near to Simon, gazes upon his face. After several seconds, the light from the man's face intensifies.

Simon slowly opens his eyes. Without wincing, Simon stares into the eyes of the man.

SIMON

I must be dreaming.

The dungeon begins to shake; the shaking increases. Simon's shackles fall from his wrist and ankles. The iron rings fall from the wall, shatter on the ground.

MAN

Get up, Simon. Hurry.

Simon, too, is in a trance-like state, but is very much aware of the man's presence.

The man nudges Simon's side, shakes his shoulder.

MAN (CONT'D)

Put on your cloak and sandals. We must leave quickly.

Simon's dressed in an instant. The man points his finger toward the door. The door swings open. Simon stands walks through the door, guided by the man.

The man leaves his purple sash in the cell.

PRISON, LOWER LEVEL - MOMENTS LATER

Both Roman guards in the hallway are flat on the ground, don't move, their eyes are closed.

Light emanates in all directions from the man's body, as he and Simon stroll down the hall.

The two of them step over three more guards, lying with their faces to the ground.

The guards don't budge, totally unaware of anything around them.

MAN

This way, son of Adam.

With his arm around Simon, the man leads him up the stairs. They pass a guard station. Two guards sit beside each other; their eyes are shut. They don't move.

A sword and a spear lie on the floor beside them. Light fills every space. The man and Simon ascend another set of stairs.

MAN (CONT'D)

Keep moving.

INT./EXT. ROMAN PRISON, FOYER - NIGHT - MOMENTS LATER

Simon and the man reach a foyer. They step over Roman guards who lie across one another; the guards appear as if they're sleeping. None of them move.

MAN

Follow me.

The hinges to the prison door are gone. The door lies in the street, several meters from the prison. Spears are scattered everywhere.

Four soldiers are are piled on the porch and into the street. All of them have their eyes shut, appear to be asleep.

EXT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - NIGHT - LATER

Simon follows the man through the maze of streets. They pass numerous houses, turn at several intersections, travel beside closed markets and a synagogue.

The man and Simon scoot by houses, cross narrow alleys.

In every area they traverse, not an animal or person is present. The man picks up his pace. Simon falls behind.

MAN
(urgently)
Simon, catch up.

Simon jogs ahead, runs beside the man; they turn onto a wide thoroughfare paved with stone. An iron gate exiting the city lies before them.

The man waves his hand; the gate opens.

EXT. JERUSALEM, OUTSIDE THE WALLS - DAYBREAK - LATER

The man and Simon stride, side by side, through the gate.

Simon leans over, catches his breath. The man leads him to the next corner where a signpost points toward Bethphage.

MAN
(smiles)
John Mark and his mother.

The man disappears.

Simon hears the SHRILL CALL of a jackal in the distance. Nearing sunrise, in the morning glow, Simon shakes himself from his stupor. He slaps his cheeks, jogs in place.

SIMON
He was real.

An orange sun peeks out from behind the hills in the western horizon. John skips along the road, leaps for joy.

INT. ROMAN PRISON, LOWER CHAMBER - DAYBREAK

Lying against the dungeon wall, Gaius stirs, shakes his head, opens his eyes. The cell is in semi-darkness; a lamp from the hallway shines light into the cell. Apollos is gone.

GAIUS
What a night.

Gaius turns around, sits up. Upon seeing the chains scattered on the floor and Simon gone, he's dumbfounded. He picks up a purple sash, tosses it aside.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
This can't be.

Gaius shakes the shoulders of Felix, lying beside him.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Felix. Felix. Felix. Wake up.

Felix is slow to arouse, rolls over, doesn't stir.

Gaius dashes through the open cell door into the hallway, trips over a Roman guard lying on the floor. The guard's in a fog, lifts his head briefly, plops back down in a stupor.

GAIUS (CONT'D)
In the name of the gods, what's
going on?

Gaius scraps his knuckles across the rough rock wall. Skin's peeled back; his knuckles bleed.

Gaius hops over another guard, races through the hallway, ascends the steps, out of view.

GUARD STATION - MOMENTS LATER

Gaius stops at the guard station. Two guards are flat on their back, oblivious to the world. Gaius plops down on a step, pulls his hair.

GAIUS
(screams)
Aaaaah! I'm a dead man.

Magnus strolls up behind him. Gaius jumps out of his skin.

MAGNUS
My head's on the platter right
beside yours. What happened here?
You're the only one standing.

Gaius shrugs, throws up his hands.

GAIUS
That last thing I remember was
losing a few denarii to Felix.

MAGNUS
Try to awaken the other guards in
the dungeon and hallway... see if
we can get our story straight...
... try to save our skin.

Gaius turns to descend the steps.

MAGNUS (CONT'D)
Wait. What happened to your eye?

Gaius faces Magnus.

GAIUS
 What do your mean? It's been this
 way since I was born.

Magnus moves his finger across Gaius's line of vision.

MAGNUS
 Straight as an arrow... your eye's
 not cock-eyed.

EXT. BETHPHAGE, VILLAGE - HOUSE - DAY

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK. Simon RAPS on the wooden gate; a fence
 surrounds the house.

SIMON
 Somebody. Come on... I know you're
 in there.

Rhoda jogs along the cobblestone path, reaches the gate.

RHODA
 Who's there? What's the code?

SIMON
 Rhoda, it's me. Peter.

RHODA
 Simon? How can this be?

SIMON
 An angel of the Lord rescued me out
 of the dungeon.

Rhoda's mouth drops; she's shocked, steps back several steps.
 She dashes toward the house. Simon tries the handle. Locked.
 He continues KNOCKING.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 Rhoda? Rhoda? You still there?

INT. HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Gathered on their knees in the open living and dining areas,
 are a GROUP of MEN, WOMEN, TEENS, BOYS and GIRLS. Mary
 Magdalene, Barnabas, Darius, and John are with them.

Rhoda races inside the door, closes it.

RHODA
 (with exuberance)
 It's Peter. Simon's outside, stands
 at the gate.

JOHN MARK (early 20's), dark hair and eyes, handsome, stands, motions for Rhoda to sit in a chair. He feels her forehead.

JOHN MARK
Rhoda, are you feeling alright?

Darius and Mary gather around her.

MARY
You must be mistaken. Simon's in jail in Jerusalem.

RHODA
No he's not. I recognized his voice.

Darius glances at Mary. He pats Rhoda's hand.

DARIUS
Have you gone mad?

Rhoda covers her face, now in tears.

RHODA
It is him. I know it.

John strolls beside her, kneels.

JOHN
Tell us what happened. You may have encountered Simon's guardian angel.

Rhoda suddenly dashes to the door, her face red.

RHODA
Come. See for yourself.

She slams the door behind her, SOBBING, exits out of view.

EXT. FRONT GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Rhoda stumbles as she reaches the fence. She dusts off her knees, unlocks the gate. She immediately wraps her arms around Simon Peter. Tears flow from her eyes.

RHODA
(between sobs)
I tried to tell them it was you.
They wouldn't... believe me.

Simon wipes her tears with his tunic. He kisses her hair, gently pats her back.

SIMON
Rhoda. I understand. I'm sorry.

Darius and John Mark scamper into view, their eye's as large as goblets, struck with amazement.

DARIUS

Simon?

Darius hugs Simon's neck.

JOHN MARK

How did you get here?

SIMON

Long story.

Simon holds Rhoda's hand; the four of them stroll toward the house.

EVERYONE from inside the house has arrived, gather around them. They GASPS simultaneously. Their faces reveal astonishment in seeing Simon.

RAP. RAP. RAP. The gate swings open.

Sergeant Aurelius, in a toga, meanders inside, comes into view. He's relaxed, unarmed, and carries a huge smile on his face.

Simon approaches him.

SIMON (CONT'D)

(surprised)

It can't be.

AURELIUS

It is.

(nods)

I was told you were in jail awaiting execution.

Simon and Sergeant Aurelius hug for some time.

SIMON

Temporarily.

Simon puts his arm around the sergeant's shoulder, introduces him to the CROWD.

SIMON (CONT'D)

This is my good friend, Sergeant Aurelius from the Roman fortress in Alexandrium.

AURELIUS

I'm stationed in Judea now.

Simon and Aurelius stroll, side by side, toward the front door of the house. The PEOPLE open a path for them.

INT. BETHPHAGE, HOUSE - LIVING/DINING AREAS - LATER

Simon, front and center in the living room, holds up his hands to quiet the BUZZ of exuberant CONVERSATION all around him.

SIMON

Everyone. Quiet. Let me tell all of you exactly what happened. Be sure to pass it on to our brothers and sisters who are not here... to encourage their faith.

The CROWD grows SILENT.

JOHN

Don't leave out a single detail, like you're prone to do.

Several PEOPLE LAUGH. It grows quiet again.

SIMON

(a deep sigh)

Where do I start? First of all, I've never been kissed and hugged by so many women in all my days.

EVERYONE LAUGHS. It quickly gets quiet.

SIMON (CONT'D)

I was alone in a dark cell, when two guards entered, shackled me to the wall. They stayed inside with another guard outside the door.

(beat)

I witnesses to a guard, and was gagged because of it. Believing I was to be executed when the sun arose, I bowed my head and prayed, drifted off to sleep... then a man awakened me, told me to get dressed in a hurry. So I did. I was no longer bound in chains.

BARNABUS

Was this man the Lord? Like what happened to Paul on his way to Damascus? Or an angel?

SIMON

At the time, I didn't know. I believed it was a dream or a vision. Light radiated all around him, and I could still look at him... into his eyes. The light was amazing... warm, inviting, peaceful.

Simon places both arms over his chest.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 You felt it deep inside. I realized
 it was an angel when he escorted me
 outside the city gates.

BACK OF DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Sitting on the floor along the wall in the corner are Rhoda,
 John Mark, and Darius.

Simon continues telling his story, but John Mark, Darius, and
 Rhoda are only half listening.

DARIUS
 The Lord rescued Simon, pulled him
 out of the fire like in the days of
 the prophet, Daniel.

RHODA
 I thought you didn't believe God
 did things like that anymore?

DARIUS
 (shakes his head)
 Who told you that?

JOHN MARK
 Stories of Yeshua's life have been
 drilled into me by my mom for so
 long, how can one not believe.

RHODA
 (to John Mark)
 Are you feeling alright?
 (to Darius)
 You've gone mad.
 (she pats Darius's hand)
 That hurt... it really did.

Rhoda's eyes are moist. Darius and John Mark drop their
 heads, sorrowful.

DARIUS
 We're sorry. We didn't know what to
 say.

JOHN MARK
 Will you forgive us?

RHODA
 Well... at least you were
 concerned. I'll give you that.

Rhoda looks at them, one by one, squeezes each of their hands.

RHODA (CONT'D)
 (grins)
 Of course I do.

John Mark and Darius breath a SIGH of relief.

DARIUS
 Simon's rescue was pretty amazing,
 wasn't it?

LIVING/DINING AREA - MOMENTS LATER

The Lord, Jesus Christ, in a robe with a golden sash across his chest and shawl on his head and shoulders, strolls into view, apparently enters though the wall.

A glory cloud fills the room. ALL kneel before him.

JESUS
 Fear not, brothers and sisters. My
 glory shall be revealed in you.
 Mary, Barnabas, John, and Rhoda...
 ... all of you...
 (looks into their eyes)
 ... in order that you may be glad
 with exceedingly great joy... when
 you are reproached in my name,
 happy are you. Continue to reap my
 harvest until my return. Take
 heart. I will be with you always,
 even until the end of the age.

Jesus winks at Darius and John Mark. He turns to Simon, gently touches Simon's chin, lifts his face, grins.

JESUS (CONT'D)
 Simon. Thank you for shepherding my
 sheep. I have work for you to
 accomplish in another place.

Jesus and Simon disappear. The glory cloud remains. EVERYONE raises their arms and PROCLAIM.

EVERYONE
 (repeated several times)
 The Lord is good, and his mercy
 endures forever.

EXT. HOUSE, COURTYARD - LATER

John, Barnabas, and Sergeant Aurelius stroll casually along the footpath through the courtyard. They reach the gate.

JOHN
Where do you suppose Yeshua took
him?

John opens the gate.

AURELIUS
My best guess... somewhere safe,
where Agrippa can't get his grips
on him.

Barnabas leans on a fence post, John against the other post.

BARNABAS
Following his conversion, Paul
found safety in the desert after he
escaped the Jewish plot on his life
in Damascus.

JOHN
(to Aurelius)
Barnabas, James, and I lowered him
over the city wall in a basket.

AURELIUS
(chuckles)
Consider this, John. You may be
next to be translated.

JOHN
(smiles)
I'm ready... we'll have to ask
Simon what it felt like.

BARNABAS
If ever we find him.

John, Aurelius, and Barnabas stride into the street. Barnabas
closes the gate, out of view.

JOHN (O.S.)
Wherever he is, we know he's in
good hands.

EXT. JERUSALEM, UPPER CITY - ROMAN PRISON - DAY

FOUR strong, husky MEN hoist an elaborately decorated, gold
cart on poles through the street. White, linen curtains are
closed. They set the cart down, stand at attention.

One of the men releases a horn from a strap on his waist,
BLOWS it TWICE.

MEN
(simultaneously)
Hail, King Herod Agrippa.

Agrippa exits the cart; he wears a white linen toga with a blue sash across his chest. He lifts a portion of the broken door frame lying in the street using his scepter.

ONE HUNDRED ROMAN SOLDIERS, in full armor with swords, march into view, along with a GENERAL in command; they surround Magnus, Felix, and FOURTEEN PRISON GUARDS.

FOUR SQUADS, of SIX soldiers each, force the prison guards to their knees. They empty them of their weapons, and pile swords, knives, and lancets on the pavement, out of reach.

Agrippa strolls along the line of guards, returns to face Magnus. Agrippa raises the Centurion's chin with his scepter.

AGRIPPA

(scowls)

Earthquake be damned. Where's the prisoner?

Magnus shakes his head in silence, fails to make eye contact. Agrippa rips the scepter across his cheek, knocks Magnus to the pavement.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

I asked you a question, Centurion.

Magnus wipes blood from his lips, proudly stands upright, with his chin held high and a fixed gaze straight ahead.

The General takes a whip, lashes Magnus across his back and shoulders. Magnus grimaces with each blow. Welts form along his neck and arms.

GENERAL

Answer your king.

Magnus recoils, kneels in submission, holds up his hands.

MAGNUS

Of which I have no answer, your majesty.

AGRIPPA

Who can you trust these days.

Agrippa nods to the GENERAL. The General motions to several squads who immediately tie the hands of the guards behind their backs. A collar is placed around each of their necks.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Of which swift Roman justice is required.

Agrippa places the scepter on Magnus's shoulder.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

This one. Upside down.

The General draws a scabbard, slices a gash across Magnus's back. Blood oozes from the wound, saturates his outer garment.

GENERAL

It shall be done.

Agrippa counts the guards, one by one, with his fingers, cocks his head to one side.

AGRIPPA

What's this? Has Gaius lost his nerve and ran?

Magnus attempts to stand, but is quickly subdued by the General's whip.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)

Let him speak.

MAGNUS

Gaius believes he's found his way. On his honor, he has promised to return voluntarily into your custody.

Agrippa is furious, his face red with rage.

AGRIPPA

If he doesn't, your wife and three children will face your same torturous fate.

Agrippa strides back to sit inside the cart. He closes the curtains. The four men lift the cart on their shoulders, carry him away.

INT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - SYNAGOGUE - DAY

A simple design of a fish is posted on a scroll on the wall.

Gaius kneels at an alter in the front. He wears a purple sash left by the angel around his waist. His eyes are aligned correctly.

GAIUS

My hips no longer ache.

Rabbi Joseph Arimethea, in a linen robe, serves Gaius striped, matzah bread. The Rabbi wears a cross around his neck.

JOSEPH

The night he was betrayed, Yeshua took bread, saying, this is my body. Eat... in memory of my brokenness for you.

Gaius bows his head, closes his eyes, eats the bread. Joseph hands a goblet to Gaius, partly filled with red wine.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

That same night, he lifted the cup of salvation, saying, drink all of it... for it represents my blood poured out for the remission of sin.

Gaius drinks, empties the goblet.

GAIUS

Thank you Rabbi. I must return. I am many things, but not a coward.

JOSEPH

I will pass the word to Mary and Darius of your commitment into the new covenant.

Joseph kisses Gaius cheeks. He places his cross necklace over Gaius's head, embraces him.

JOSEPH (CONT'D)

You'll need this reminder, Gaius. Today especially. Go in peace. He will uphold you with his righteous, right hand.

Gaius removes his purple sash, gives it to Joseph.

GAIUS

It's a gift from heaven. May it serve you well.

EXT. JERUSALEM, OUTSIDE THE WALLS - THOROUGHFARE - DAY

Attached by ropes to their outstretched arms, Felix, Gaius, Magnus, along with FOURTEEN SOLDIERS, carry large wooden beams across their shoulders.

EACH ONE is bloodied; they bear the bruises and lacerations from a cat-of-nine tail's lashing across their back, neck, and thighs.

HUNDREDS of ROMAN SOLDIERS line the streets. Few of the CITIZENS of Rome are present to watch.

A Roman Legion COMMANDER rides a white stallion, in a high-step walk, in front of the procession.

LEGION COMMANDER
Due punishment for these who
allowed a prisoner of Rome to
escape.

As the Commander passes, the soldiers SNAP their boots together, salute.

SOLDIERS
No god but Caesar.

A hillside with the facial appearance of a skull lies in the b.g.

INT. HEROD'S PALACE, PRIVATE CHAMBER - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Herod Agrippa tosses and turns in his bed. Covers lie on the floor. His eyes twitch beneath his eyelids.

DISSOLVE TO:

NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE - PALACE, DINING HALL - NIGHT

FOUR WOMEN, wearing masks and costumes resembling dragons, dance to the rhythm of DRUMBEATS, played by THREE MALE MUSICIANS. They perform on a large stage.

Agrippa, in royal garments, dines alone at a table.

Platters of fish, cheese, and flatbread is served. The king CLAPS.

A SERVANT brings out a pitcher of red wine; he pours the wine into Herod Agrippa's silver goblet.

The DANCERS move from the stage, climb onto tables beside Agrippa, sway to the RHYTHMIC BEAT of the drums.

Agrippa lifts his goblet in a toast to the dancers. He takes a drinks from the goblet. Instead of wine, worms fill his mouth.

He vomits the worms violently from his lips. The worms turn to flies.

END NIGHTMARE SEQUENCE.

Agrippa awakens SCREAMING. Panic fills his eyes. Sweat pours off his forehead. He trembles. His face is void of color.

A TEMPLE GUARD races into the King's chamber.

AGRIPPA
Get out. Out. Leave now.

The Temple Guard does an about-face, exits out of view.

Agrippa gets up, wets his face from a basin of water; dries it with a towel. He takes several deep breaths.

AGRIPPA (CONT'D)
It's just a dream.

He returns to his bed, lies down, turns onto his side.

Suddenly, a large hand descends, glowing white. With one finger, letters are written across the wall.

ON WALL: Worms shall devour your vile body.

Agrippa shivers uncontrollably.

EXT. JERUSALEM, OUTSIDE THE CITY - ROMAN FORTRESS - DAY

Numerous horse stables are among the hills, in the b.g. A trumpet SOUNDS throughout the camp.

In front of the barracks, Sergeant Aurelius stands at attention with his SQUAD of TEN SOLDIERS in the courtyard.

NINE SQUADS of SOLDIERS, TEN MEN each, assembled in GROUPS, are lined alongside the Sergeant's flank.

In total - one hundred soldiers stand at attention.

All soldiers wear muscled-bell cuirass on their chest; they bear swords, hold shields. Two squads carry spears.

Two additional FLAGBEARERS post their flag, one flag has the insignia of an eagle, another with a horse insignia.

A Centurion Princeps Prior, the COMMANDER, strolls between the columns, BARKS out an order.

COMMANDER
Your orders are simple. Track down
and kill, on sight, an escaped
prisoner... one Simon Peter.

The Commander stops in front of Sergeant Aurelius, glares into his face like a pit-bull.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Last known location, sergeant?

AURELIUS
Bethphage.

The Commander strides between the squads.

COMMANDER

His name.

Every Squad SHOUTS simultaneously with Aurelius.

AURELIUS

Simon Peter. Sir.

COMMANDER

Galilee, Judea, Samaria. Throughout
Caesar's Empire. Find him.

The Commander stares down another SERGEANT.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

The search parameter?

SERGEANT

Throughout Caesar's Empire. Sir.

In unison, each SQUAD repeats the Sergeant's reply.

SQUADS

Throughout Caesar's Empire... sir.

Strolling in front of his soldiers, the Commander salutes,
speaks in a SOFTER TONE.

COMMANDER

Take good care of the horses, men.
Happy hunting. Dismissed.

EXT. CITY OF CAESAREA, THEATER - DAY

A CROWD of ROMAN CITIZENS attend a festival honoring Caesar Augustus. The wine flows freely among them. MANY are intoxicated and stagger about.

King Herod Agrippa circles the front of a stage with his arms raised. He wears a full-length robe covered in silver sequins.

Suddenly, the sunlight breaks out from behind the clouds. Agrippa's robe sparkles; light's reflected in all directions from the sequins. The light sparkles, dazzles the CROWD.

The crowd, seated around the stage, begins to SHOUT; then EVERYONE, from all around the theater, join in and CHANT.

CROWD

(simultaneously)

Herod Agrippa has become a god.
Agrippa's no mortal man. Honor to
Herod, the supreme one. We bow to
(MORE)

CROWD (CONT'D)
our god, Agrippa.

Suddenly, as if being pushed, Agrippa falls backward. He BANGS his head upon a banister. Blood pours from around his nose and mouth. His skull's fractured.

He rolls over; his body convulses. He GASPS and dies.

ON FACE: Red and brown centipedes crawl from Agrippa's nose and mouth.

SILENCE. The crowd is aghast, in shock.

As if awakened from their stupor, they disperse quickly. They push, shove, and stagger from the theater as if they risk the same fate.

EXT./INT. MESOPOTAMIA, ASSYRIAN MOUNTAINS - CAVE - TWILIGHT

HIGH PITCHED HOWLS from gusts of wind sound outside the cave. A large boulder covers much of the entrance, offers protection from the wind.

Wool blankets, large stone jars, oil lanterns, flasks of oil and honey, and woven baskets filled with grain and fruit are against the rock walls. Wineskins hang from a natural shelf.

Jesus and Simon warm their hands around a campfire of burning coals built behind the boulder. Portions of fish and flatbread on stone-ware plates, leftover from a meal, lie beside them on small stones.

SIMON
Lord, you're truly amazing. You
always supply my needs.

JESUS
Do you remember the last time we
shared a meal?

SIMON
(nods)
You prepared a campfire on the
beach after your resurrection. All
twelve of us ate our fill of bread
and fish... with plenty left over.

JESUS
You convinced everyone to return to
fishing.

SIMON
I realize I was slow of heart to
believe.

Jesus grins, pats Simon on the shoulder.

JESUS

Much has happened in the church since then with your guidance, and much is yet to be fulfilled, but my message to you remains the same.

SIMON

To feed your sheep.

Jesus looks directly and intently into Simon's eyes.

JESUS

Always.

(a long beat)

If I want you to remain alive until my return, what is that to you? You must follow me, never losing sight of your calling.

Jesus stands, picks up an oil lamp, strolls out of view. Moments later, he returns carrying a small stone jar with a lid. He hands the jar to Simon.

JESUS (CONT'D)

Go ahead.

Simon opens the lid. He lifts out numerous pages of parchment, all blank.

JESUS (CONT'D)

There are several quills and ink in a pouch in one of the baskets.

Simon wrinkles his forehead in a look of confusion. Jesus reaches out his hands, places them in Simon's, smiles warmly.

JESUS (CONT'D)

Open your heart to the teacher...
... the Holy Spirit. You are his pupil now. Trust his voice as he speaks with you.

Jesus stands, opens his arms toward heaven.

JESUS (CONT'D)

As the heavens are higher than the earth, my ways are higher than your ways.

Jesus glances at Simon, motions for Simon to continue.

SIMON

... and your thoughts are higher than mine.

(a long beat)

You're leaving, aren't you?

Jesus nods.

Tears stream down Simon's cheeks. Jesus lifts him up, wipes Simon's face, and wraps his arms around him. They embrace for an extended period.

JESUS
Are you alright?

SIMON
I wish you would stay.

Jesus kisses Simon on both cheeks.

JESUS
Take heart. I'll contact Barnabas,
and have him send you some company.

Jesus immediately disappears from sight, out of view.

INT. JERUSALEM, LOWER CITY - HOUSE - BEDROOM - NIGHT

An oil lamp on a shelf lights the room, revealing a bed, two wicker stools between a circular table, and a small closet.

Barnabas lies in bed beside his wife, REBEKAH ALTO (40's), a strong supporter and encourager of Barnabas.

Barnabas rolls over, opens his eyes, sits on the side of the bed. He's sweating. Rebekah awakens.

REBEKAH
Honey, what is it?

BARNABAS
It's the second time this week.

Rebekah stands, puts on a robe from the closet. She grabs the lamp, sits on a stool, and motions for Barnabas to join her.

REBEKAH
Tell me the dream again. We'll
figure it out with the Lord's help.

Barnabas sits across from her on a stool.

BARNABAS
It's daylight. In no hurry, I'm
strolling along a mountain path,
one that I seem to recognize. I
turn to find Jesus jogging
alongside. He motions for me to
follow him along a steep trail. He
dashes ahead, and I lose sight of
him for a moment. I race ahead, and
the next thing I know... I bump
(MORE)

BARNABAS (CONT'D)
 into him. He's standing in the
 mouth of a cave, coaxing me inside.

REBEKAH
 It's definitely a night vision and
 not just a dream.
 (beat)
 Does Jesus say anything?

BARNABAS
 Nothing that I recall... but I have
 a strong feeling... a knowing
 somehow... that Jesus wants me to
 meet with somebody inside that
 cave.

REBEKAH
 It's not Paul, is it? Or John?

Barnabas shakes his head.

REBEKAH (CONT'D)
 Simon?

Barnabas shivers when Rebekah speaks Simon's name.

BARNABAS
 That's him. I felt the hair on the
 back of my neck stand up when you
 said his name.

Rebekah reaches out, holds Barnabas's hands in hers.

REBEKAH
 Now to find the trail and the cave.
 The couple bow their heads, close their eyes.

BARNABAS
 Lord, thank you for revealing the
 meaning of the dream to us. We ask
 that you show me, Rebekah, or
 someone else close to us where this
 cave is located.

EXT. JUDEA, COUNTRYSIDE - GROVE - DAY

Darius carries a basket, gleans figs from mature trees. He
 plucks a ripe, dark red fig from a branch, bites into it.

MARY (O.S)
 It's extremely quiet over there.
 Are you eating more than you're
 gathering?

DARIUS

(laughs)

You know me too well, mom.

A MALE GARDENER, with deep blue eyes and a trimmed beard (mid 30's) comes into view, strides toward Darius.

He holds a pair of pruning shears, and carries a bundle of sticks over his shoulder which are tied together.

GARDENER

Son, this way. There are several trees near the shed that haven't been picked over.

The gardener tosses the bundle aside, ducks beneath several overhanging branches, and leads Darius down a row to five trees bunched together. Fruit is abundant and within reach.

GARDENER (CONT'D)

Help yourself.

The gardener helps Darius fill his basket with ripe figs.

DARIUS

Nice... they drop off into your hand.

(shouts)

Mom, over here.

Darius continues picking, moves behind another tree, out of view. From another direction, Mary comes into view, GASP when she sees the gardener.

MARY

Oh my. It can't be.

The gardener winks at Mary, embraces her. Tears of joy fill Mary's eyes.

GARDENER

Hello Mary. Although I hear your voice in prayer every morning, it's so good to see you again.

The gardener brushes away Mary's tears, revealing his nail-scared hands. He kisses the top her head, now bowed before him.

MARY

Yeshua. My Lord.

Jesus steps back, grasps her shoulders, keeps her from falling. He gently strokes her red hair.

JESUS
You're as beautiful as I remember.

Mary WEEPS. Jesus holds her face to his chest.

JESUS (CONT'D)
Mary. Sweet Mary. Your tears have
always been precious to me and my
Father.

Jesus pats Mary gently on her back.

JESUS (CONT'D)
Your son reminds me of Simon Peter
when he was a young man.

Mary SNIFFLES, nods, smiles. Darius comes into view from
behind a tree. His basket overflows with luscious figs.

With his spiritual eyes opened, Darius drops to his knees,
bows his head in reverence.

MARY
That's what I've been telling him.

EDGE OF THE GROVE - LATER

Jesus, Mary, and Darius sit in the grass, face one another.
Two baskets of figs set beside a shed with a hatch roof.

JESUS
So Darius... how are you at reading
a map?

Using a stick, Jesus outlines a map in the dirt of the the
Mediterranean Sea and the surrounding regions of Egypt,
Arabia, Phoenicia, Syria, Galatia, and Cappadocia.

He places a pebble on a spot near the western edge of the
Mediterranean Sea.

JESUS (CONT'D)
Jerusalem. Got it?

Darius nods. Mary smiles, enjoys their interaction.

DARIUS
(points)
Cyprus, Phoenicia, and Syria.

Jesus places two pebbles close together near the eastern
shore of the Mediterranean.

JESUS
Seleucia and?

Darius hesitates, then blurts out.

DARIUS
Antioch. I traveled there last year
with Barnabas and John Mark.

JESUS
Very good. Paul was with you as I
recall.

Jesus scratches out a wavy line east of Antioch. Mary and
Darius look on attentively.

JESUS (CONT'D)
And this?

DARIUS
That's got to be the river,
Euphrates.

Jesus nods his approval. He traces north along the full
length of the line representing the river, then scratches a
large area on the left border in the dirt.

JESUS
In this region, along the western
ridge of these mountains, I've
hidden Simon. The Assyrian range.
(chuckles)
I'm sure he would enjoy some
company about now.

Darius looks bewildered. Jesus LAUGHS.

JESUS (CONT'D)
I've revealed pieces of the puzzle
to Barnabas and his wife, Rebekah.
They've prayed for an answer. Are
you ready to give it to them?

Darius takes a lengthy breath, holds up his hands in
surprise.

DARIUS
Me? What do I say?

JESUS
Don't worry. Barnabas has been
there before, but he is uncertain
that it's the same location. With
his map of the region, it won't
take him long to realize where
Simon is hidden.

Jesus smiles, turns to Mary, winks.

JESUS (CONT'D)

Mary. You've stayed with Barnabas and Rebekah from time to time. Take Darius with you. Let him have a real adventure.

Jesus pats Mary on her back.

JESUS (CONT'D)

I'll protect your son as my own...
... and it won't be his last. My Father and I have some great things in store for him.

Mary tears up. Jesus leans over, kisses Mary on her cheeks. He turns to Darius, gives him a lengthy hug.

JESUS (CONT'D)

Enjoy your time together with these two men. They have much wisdom to share with you.

Jesus grins, then disappears.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA, ASSYRIAN MOUNTAINS - DAY

SUPER: "Four Months Later"

The sun is directly overhead. A BUZZARD catches a thermal, circles higher in the cloudless sky.

Simon Peter meanders from a rock shelter, comes into view. He carries an empty stone jar on his shoulders.

Darius ascends a trail, comes into view. Water spills from the stone jar he carries.

Darius sets the jar down, points toward the eastern horizon.

DARIUS

The caravan of one is on its way.

SIMON

(shakes his head)
Probably just another wind storm.

DARIUS

Today's Friday, right?

SIMON

You're asking me?
(laughs)
I stopped etching off the days weeks ago.

Simon shades his eyes, squints, searches the horizon.

DARIUS
 You sure you're looking in the
 right direction?

Simon sets his stone jar on the ground. He places his arm
 around Darius's shoulder.

SIMON
 Darius... I'll take your word for
 it. I'm just glad you volunteered
 to come and stay with me.

DARIUS
 To tell you the truth, it was
 Jesus's plan all along.

SIMON
 He is full of surprises, isn't he?

Darius grins, nods.

DARIUS
 Between you and me...
 (laughs)
 I can't stand much more of this
 desert heat.

Darius ruffles Simon's hair.

SIMON
 Perhaps Barnabas brings some good
 news.

Simon lifts up the jar, strides toward the trail.

SIMON (CONT'D)
 If you can barely see the camels,
 it'll be evening before he arrives.

Darius lifts his jar, watches Simon as he descends the trail,
 out of view.

SIMON (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 Straighten up our dwelling while
 I'm gone.

DARIUS
 (snickers)
 I'll leave the new batch of
 scorpions for you, Simon.

Simon's LAUGHTER reaches Darius.

SIMON (O.S.)
 In that case, you handle the
 snakes.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA, VALLEY - NIGHT

The Assyrian mountains are close, in the b.g.

FOUR CAMELS graze on tender grasses around a creek flowing through a rock crevice. Their humps are swollen with water. Reins bind them to bags of supplies on the ground.

Stars shine brightly in the blackness of the night sky.

BARNABAS

Brrr.

Barnabas, Simon, and Darius warm their hands around a campfire.

DAIUS

Bake in the day. Freeze at night.
That's been our motto for months.

Barnabas and Simon CHUCKLE.

SIMON

I'm so glad you remembered the tender.

BARNABAS

We passed a tree about twenty-five kilometers back, so I thought I better pick up a few branches.

They all LAUGH. Barnabas stands, turns his back to the fire.

BARNABAS (CONT'D)

Word around Caesarea has spread that an angel of the Lord killed Herod while he paraded on stage, boasting he was a god.

DARIUS

Caesarea?

BARNABAS

Moved to the Mediterranean shore soon after you were whisked away into the night.

Simon adds a few sticks of wood into the fire, pokes around. The fire blazes hot as spark fly.

CHARACTER

You realize you may still be in danger.

SIMON

I'll take my chances. Fear no longer grips my heart.

(MORE)

SIMON (CONT'D)

(nods)

This is not exactly the location I had in mind, but in some ways, I'll miss it.

DARIUS

Catching wild hares is the fun part... I've gotten good at skinning them, too.

BARNABAS

(sarcastic)

We'll let you remain, if you prefer.

Darius hops to his feet, punches Barnabas on his arm. Barnabas LAUGHS.

DARIUS

Oh no you won't.

Barnabas turns, faces the fire.

BARNABAS

So what's it like... to be carried on eagle's wings by the Lord of glory himself?

SIMON

Blink.

BARNABAS

(confused)

What?

SIMON

Close your eyes... open them. Blink.

(chuckles)

You don't feel a thing... it's that fast. I was in John Mark's and Mary's house one moment, here the next instant.

BARNABAS

We were all wondering.

DARIUS

Would be nice if our return journey was just as quick.

SIMON

(nods)

We've got a long trip tomorrow. Let's get some sleep.

Barnabas and Simon roll out three blankets on the ground.

Darius builds up the fire. They lie down, gaze into the sky.

DARIUS
We have a wonderful creator God,
don't we, Simon?

Simon lifts his head, smiles at Darius.

SIMON
That we do son. That we do.

BARNABAS
What's astounding... he knows every
star by name.

They close their eyes, drift off to sleep.

DISSOLVE TO:

DREAM SEQUENCE - ANTIOCH, STREET - DAY

A large, metropolitan city. CROWDS line the street.

Barnabas and John Mark carry flags with a lion emblem on each. They march along a street, stop in front of Darius.

BARNABAS (CONT'D)
We sail to Cyprus.

From the opposite direction, Apostle PAUL OF TARSUS (mid 40's) marches with SILAS OF ANTIOCH (early 30's) at his side. Their flags have an emblem of a lamb. They also stop before Darius.

PAUL
We travel to Syria.

Darius hears a lion ROAR in the distance. He turns his head in the direction of the roar. The lion ROARS twice more; it grows LOUDER each time.

Darius turns back; he faces a male LION with a large mane and piercing, green eyes.

LION
Whom do you choose?

END DREAM SEQUENCE.

Darius sits straight up, his eyes are wide open. He nudges Simon. Simon rolls over, yawns, his eyes are barely cracked.

DARIUS
Simon, I believe I had a vision
while I slept.

Simon immediately sets up.

SIMON

Tell me.

DARIUS

I was in a city, and Barnabas with John Mark marched up carrying flags with a lion emblem on them. Then Paul and another man, marching from a different direction, carried flags having a lamb emblem. Paul planned to travel to Syria, while Barnabas was sailing to Cyprus.

(shrugs)

This is where it got really weird.

SIMON

It's sounding that way already. Go on.

DARIUS

I heard this lion roar three times. The next thing I know... the lion was right before my eyes... and he spoke, although I'm not sure how.

SIMON

What did he say?

DARIUS

He asked me to choose.

SILENCE.

SIMON

It's definitely a vision from the Lord... the lion and the lamb symbols on the flags... the lion roaring three times, then speaking so clearly.

(a long beat)

Which of these men do you trust the most?

DARIUS

That's the easy part.. Barnabas. John Mark's my best friend.

SIMON

If, and when, the decision comes... .. follow Barnabas and John Mark.

Simon lays down, covers up, rolls over.

DARIUS
What of Paul's powerful ministry?

Simon turns, faces Darius.

SIMON
(chuckles)
The Holy Spirit gave you the
vision, not me.

DARIUS
Thanks Simon. I think I'll stay up
a while.

Darius pokes around the embers, builds up the fire.

EXT. MESOPOTAMIA, VALLEY - DAYBREAK

On their knees, four CAMELS are lined up, their backs laden
with supplies.

Darius scrambles down the trail comes into view. He carries a
stone jar covered with a lid.

DARIUS
Can't forget these.

BARNABAS
A stone jar?

Simon lifts the lid, pulls out pages of parchment.

SIMON
My letter to the churches.

BARNABAS
Oh?

Simon hands Barnabas the parchment papers.

BARNABAS (CONT'D)
(reads)
Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.
To God's elect, strangers in this
world, scattered throughout Pontus,
Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and
Blithynia, who have been chosen
according to the foreknowledge of
God the Father, through the
sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Barnabas raises one eyebrow, gives Simon a curious look.

SIMON
You'd be surprised how well you can
hear in a forsaken place like this.

BARNABAS
You had another visitation?

Simon nods, smiles.

DARIUS
The Holy Spirit this time.
(grins)
He spoke to me, too... just not
exactly that way.

BARNABAS
What's happening to Paul and John
is happening to you. I carried
Paul's inspired letter to the port
city of Thessalonica, and read it
to the church.

SIMON
We must encourage the church by
reminding them, in writing, of our
hope and inheritance.

Barnabas turns to the next page.

BARNABAS
(reads)
As newborn babes, desire the
sincere milk of the word, that you
may grow in abundance, and know you
have tasted that the Lord is
gracious.

Barnabas flips through numerous other pages.

BARNABAS (CONT'D)
From the looks of it, the Holy
Spirit has much to say.

SIMON
To anyone who's chosen.

Barnabas returns the pages into the jar, covers it with the
lid. He packs the jar inside a leather pouch on a camel.

BARNABAS
The scribes will have their work
cut out for them.

SIMON
I was hoping Paul might take copies
with him on his next missionary
journey.

BARNABAS
I'm traveling with him... soon. I'm
not particularly fond of seafaring
(MORE)

BARNABAS (CONT'D)
on the Mediterranean.

SIMON
Storms can be brutal at times, even
on the Sea of Galilee.

BARNABAS
It's not the storms so much, it's
the shipwrecks.

The three men burst out in LAUGHTER. Barnabas helps Darius
and Simon onto their camels, coaxes them to stand.

SIMON
I'm sore already.

Barnabas links the last camel to another with a rope. He
mounts the camel, cajoles it to stand.

BARNABAS
(chuckles)
It doesn't get any better.

Using a thin stick, Barnabas gently strikes the neck of his
camel. The camel jerks forward, the others follow behind him.

DARIUS
(to Barnabas)
I had a vision about you last
night.

BARNABAS
Oh? Let's hear it. The Lord knows
we've got plenty of time.

The camels stride methodically, in line, across the barren
landscape along an ancient trail.

EXT. BETHPHAGE, VILLAGE, COURTYARD - NIGHT

Rhoda unlocks the gate. Darius and Simon, enter into view.

Simon carries a small, stone jar. Rhoda greets them with an
exuberant hug. She scratches Darius's beard.

RHODA
(grins)
What's this?

DARIUS
Kind of fits me, don't you think?

RHODA
Becoming.
(nods)
They're all inside. It's supposed
(MORE)

RHODA (CONT'D)
to be a surprise.

SIMON
We'll act like we don't know.

DARIUS
Can't wait to see me mom.

Simon pats Darius on the back.

DARIUS (CONT'D)
We've got some great stories to
tell. I hope your guests are
prepared to stay a while.

RHODA
They're eager to hear everything
that has happened.

SIMON
It may be a long night.

The three of them LAUGH. They stroll along the path toward
the house.

FADE TO BLACK.

SUPER:

"Following Herod's untimely death,
his son, Julius Marcus Agrippa, is
appointed King. With no interest in
capturing Simon Peter, he's no
longer a fugitive of Rome for many
years."

"A strong tradition of the Early
Church suggests that Simon founded
the church in Rome with Paul, and
served as its first bishop."

"Simon penned two inspired letters
to encourage the growing Church in
the first Century which are
included in the New Testament."

"Early Church historians stated
that Simon was crucified in Rome
about 68 AD while Emperor Nero
watched."

FADE OUT.