

# Betrayal and the Day of Crucifixion

## The betrayal

Restlessly I hurried to my cousin's house. There I was told Jonas was not home, but perhaps I could still find him at the High Council. So I ran there at once.

The council was already in heated debate—of course about Yeshua's disturbance on the Temple Mount. When Jonas saw me, he immediately said, "Perfect timing, Judas. We have resolved to arrest Yeshua and put him on trial. He has broken the law more than once. Best to do it tonight—during the day, this could lead to new problems in this heated atmosphere."

At that moment, with all eyes fixed on me and shame burning inside, I felt compelled to aid in the name of law and order. So I declared, "I am ready to help the High Council. I know where he will be tonight."

Relief spread through the chamber. To them I was a gift from heaven. My stomach churned, yet I could not turn back. Standing tall, I added, "I demand thirty pieces of silver—for the merchants he wronged."

Nods of approval rippled through the hall. The High Priest said, "That will not be a problem. At last, an honest man among this false prophet's followers."

"Former follower," I corrected, foolishly.

To this day I am ashamed. By God—I only wanted him held to account, a few weeks in prison perhaps, until he came to his senses. I did not know what grim plans had already been set in motion. By one fatal moment, I had stepped into something dreadful.

They handed me a bag of silver, which I passed on to Jonas. Then a squad of seven temple guards was assigned to accompany me to the Garden of Gethsemane, armed with swords and torches.

Near the place, their leader asked, “How will we know him? It is dark.” I replied, “The one I kiss—that is him.”

Indeed, Yeshua was there with a few disciples, just as he had foretold. I went straight to him and pressed my lips to his cheek without a word. I wanted it over quickly.

He looked at me with sorrow: “Judas, do you betray me with a kiss?”

The realization struck like lightning: You have betrayed your friend, the one you knew since childhood, once dearest to you!

I fled in panic. I glimpsed Simon draw his sword to defend him, but Yeshua rebuked him: “He who takes up the sword will perish by the sword!”

What kind of man was this—and what had I done?

I began to cry and ran around as if I had lost my mind. I was convinced that no one would ever be able to take this guilt away from me.

Only after some time was I able to think clearly again and decided to go to my brother's house to spend the night. Fortunately, it was already late and everyone had gone to bed. So I was able to sneak into my room under the roof unnoticed.

After a terrible night, I didn't want to get up at first. Eventually, I went down to the kitchen, and my sister-in-law made me breakfast. My brother kept me company too. He had already heard everything

from Jonas: “I’m glad you’ve returned to the bosom of your family. That madman won’t be able to do any more harm anymore.”

His lips radiated a mixture of businesslike efficiency mixed with a hint of appreciation: “The High Council decided...” – then he paused briefly – “Uh, it should actually happen right now—that this troublemaker is handed over to Pilate to be crucified. The High Council cannot pass this sentence itself; unfortunately, we need the Romans for that.”

“For God’s sake!” I cried. “I didn’t want that, no, I didn’t want that!”

I jumped up and ran to Herod’s palace, where Pilate resided.

## **The trial and the scourging**

The trial took place in the open air, in full view of the public, and was already in full swing. I looked around for other disciples but could only see Simon. He glared at me with deep sadness and despair.

I whispered to him, “I didn’t want this.”

“I know no one can want something like this, especially if he has truly loved. Why did you do it?” He cried as he said this. There was no reproach in his voice, but rather a lack of understanding and a sincere desire to know.

I confessed the truth to him: “I don’t know, Simon.”

He nodded as if he understood. “Yeshua has demanded a lot from us lately. Even I couldn’t always follow him. But I love him, and I suffer terribly with him.”

It quickly became clear that Pilate did not want to have him crucified. To him, he was a madman, a strange philosopher perhaps. But that was not a crime worthy of death in his eyes. Of course, Yeshua had questioned the authority of Rome when he entered Jerusalem like a king. But Pilate did not consider this a serious matter. If he had entered with weapons, it would have been different. The high priest, however, was determined to have him crucified.

Pilate tried to appease the people and the religious leaders. He ordered that Yeshua be flogged on the spot. His clothes were torn from his body, leaving him naked before the crowd. His hands were tied to a stake in such a way that he faced the people. I was sure he could see Simon and me. I believe that gave him some comfort.

Behind him, two strong soldiers stood, each holding a flagrum. Three long leather straps were tied to a wooden handle, with small pieces of lead attached to the ends.

Without warning, one of the soldiers swung the flagrum through the air and let the lead strike his back with full force. It seemed to me that Yeshua was surprised by the intensity of the pain, as if he had awakened from a dream and, from one moment to the next, found himself in a merciless physical reality that he had not expected. I could see it clearly.

Gone was the dream of the Son of God. From then on, he would be subjected to endless pain until his death.

Yeshua cried out, as if he could somehow take the pain away, somehow endure it, but already the lead pieces of the other soldier were striking his skin – again and again and again. Yeshua began to scream loudly, “Please, no, no...” Then he whimpered like a child. Finally, he slid down the stake, but the soldiers did not stop. The people counted along: “Nine” – reveling in his suffering – “ten”.

I could hardly bear it any longer. Yeshua was only a stone's throw away from me, but I could not help him. Last night at the Sanhedrin, I had felt strong; for a moment, I had even believed I had power over him. Now I felt utterly powerless. Tears ran down my cheeks. I had to look away. After twenty blows, he lay moaning on the ground and was still being maltreated.

I just wanted to get away!

## **Judas' dark night of the soul**

As I pushed my way through the crowd of onlookers, I saw their grinning faces. It was disgusting. When I reached a quieter corner of the street, I had to sit down. I leaned against a wall. I felt sick, buried my face in my lap, and began to cry uncontrollably. I still clung to the last hope that Pilate would leave it at the flogging. He didn't want to execute him. Yeshua would have been scarred for life; he would never again enter Jerusalem as King of the Jews. Maybe he would survive this day after all?

Then a chorus of voices grew louder and louder: "Crucify him, crucify him!"

At that moment, I was overcome by the terrible realization: I had just seen my friend alive for the last time. Like a raging torrent, deepest despair washed away everything in me that could have given me support or hope. I opened my eyes and saw the raging mob. It meant nothing to me anymore. I no longer cared about anything.

Yeshua is going to die!

I was now filled with tremendous anger. Yeshua had once said that it was the will of his heavenly Father that he should suffer and die.

"What kind of God is this who wants that?"

I stood up, walked down the street, and cried out to heaven, "Who are you, God? Pure love? I'll tell you who you are: you are a bloodthirsty monster who demands suffering. Why did I stand on my brother's stand on the Temple Mount these last few days? To sell blood and suffering so that you could forgive sins! But animals are no longer enough for you. Now you want the blood of a man who believes he is your son. You must be insane. If what is happening right now is even remotely what you want, then I say: You're not welcome here anymore. Go away!"

I was simply beside myself.

And then darkness fell completely over me. I realized how alone I was now. I had no friends left, no one I could rely on anymore. What was still true? How many lies had I believed to be true? Suddenly there was a deep emptiness, as if I were falling into an abyss.

I cried out to God, "Why?" But God did not answer.

What gives me meaning? Where can I turn? My family, my brother, my mother? No! Nor will I ever again sell the death of animals for my brother on the Temple Mount. Never again! What about the other disciples? It's over—I am now the "traitor"!

What meaning does my life still have?

## **The rope and the rescue**

At that moment, I had to tie the belt of my new tunic because it had come loose. It was a long rope that I had to wrap around my waist twice. I had already thought about shortening it. But now, as I was tying a new knot, I hesitated at first, as if I were frightened by my thoughts. But then an idea formed; it became as stirring as a storm and culminated in a big, powerful YES!

I was surprised at my courage and determination. "Yes, I will! Over there on the Mount of Olives, in the Garden of Gethsemane, where I betrayed him. That's what you get, God. Now you see what you've done!"

I left the city with a firm step through the Stephen Gate and hurried across the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives, to the place where I kissed Yeshua. A tree was there. It was perfect for my plan. The terrain was open, and I could be seen from a distance, but I didn't care. I began to pull the rope out of my tunic and tie a knot.

Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice in the distance: "Judas, Judas, don't do it!" It was Simon, later called Peter, running toward me. That made me hurry to do what had to be done. He was still too far away to stop me. He was surely running as fast as he could, but it seemed to me as if time had suddenly slowed down, as if everything were caught in a viscous liquid.

"Judas, please don't do it, you mustn't do it!"

I threw the rope over a strong branch and tied it to the tree trunk.

Simon was already close and shouted, "Heaven is always open to everyone, even you, Judas!"

I didn't listen to him; the time for pious words was finally over: "Stop with this nonsense!"

But he shouted back, "It's true! It's from Yeshua! I'm supposed to tell you this!"

I could hardly understand him; he was so out of breath: "Impossible! From Yeshua? When? How? Why?"

I paused.

“Please!” – and he was already standing next to me. He pointed to the spot where the tree trunk grew out of the ground. “Please let’s sit down there.” He was still breathing heavily. “Let me tell you.”

I had just begun to pull the noose over my neck: “All right, then tell me.”

## **Simon's message from Yeshua**

I let go of the rope, we sat down next to each other, and leaned our backs against the tree trunk. He needed time to catch his breath, then he began:

“Shortly after you left, one of the onlookers pointed at me and shouted, ‘You’re one of the Nazarenes too; you are his,’ but I was afraid and denied it. Then a temple guard came up to me: ‘I know you’re one of his disciples; I saw you when he rode through the city on a donkey last Sabbath. ‘No, you’re mistaken, I don’t know him!’ Shortly before Yeshua was led away to be crucified, a third man came. I denied him again and began to weep bitterly over my cowardice.

On the way to the place of execution, Yeshua was pushed right past me. He tried to say something to me. I could hardly understand him: ‘Take care of Judas!’ I gestured that I had no idea what to do. With all his strength, he formed these words: ‘Tell him: Heaven is open to everyone, always, even to you, Judas.’ I tried to convey my helplessness to him. But he only pointed toward Stephen’s Gate and the Mount of Olives. Then the soldiers dragged him away to his execution.

I ran immediately. When I came out of the gate and looked across the valley, I could see you in the distance.”

## **Waves of love and pain**

At that moment, Yeshua's love reached me like a wave. I didn't understand why it had come to this, but one thing became clear to me: He was thinking of me, even in his moment of greatest distress. He wanted me to live. That's why he entrusted Simon with this message, even though he had just denied him three times.

Tears ran down my face: "What a man!" Then I added, "But now he's about to die." At that moment, we embraced and began to cry. Then we sat leaning against the tree in silence for a long time. What could we say? We felt deeply connected in our shame, but also in the forgiveness that had been granted to us by a man who was suffering the worst injustice at that moment.

At some point, Simon began to tell a story that we had both experienced with Yeshua. Then the other remembered something remarkable. This went on for most of the afternoon, interrupted again and again by moments of silence in which we cried or asked "Why?"

Why him, of all people, why?

A thunderstorm rolled in, the sky darkened, and it began to rain heavily. It seemed to us as if even nature was mourning him. At some point, Simon nodded slowly and looked at me with empty eyes, as if to say: "Yeshua is dead now."

Only when evening fell did we get up. Simon went into the city to the other disciples. My destination was my brother's house.

# The Day of Darkness

All night long I tossed and turned in bed, unable to sleep. I kept seeing these images in my mind: the sharp pieces of lead of the flagrum, the torn skin on his back, Yeshua's desperate moans, the chants of the mob—and then the crucifixion. I had witnessed such an execution before, heard the terrible whimpering of the victims. Even when I managed to fall asleep for a short while, I woke up again immediately, drenched in sweat. Guilt constantly gnawed at my heart.

Why did Simon come at all? Wouldn't it have been better if he hadn't shown up and I wasn't here anymore? How can I even go on living?

When I got up the next morning, everyone was still sitting at the table and greeted me warmly. My brother said he was glad that Yeshua could no longer cause trouble. That he had been flogged and crucified by the Romans was terrible. But that was what troublemakers had to expect. For him, that was the end of the matter. He was satisfied with how many sacrificial animals had been sold before Passover and gave me a generous wage for my work.

At some point, he noticed that my belt was missing. It was still hanging on the tree. I had forgotten it there. "Oh, the belt, I must have lost it somewhere," I lied. My brother looked at me critically and gave me one of his old belts.

My mother was silent almost the entire time. She only complained about how cruel the Romans were and what this poor man must have gone through before he could die.

I left the house as quickly as possible. Simon and I had agreed to meet again the next day at noon by the tree in the Garden of Gethsemane. So I slowly marched back to the Mount of Olives.

The belt, along with the noose, was still hanging from the branch, like a memorial. I decided to leave it there because I didn't want to carry anything on my body that I once wanted to use to take my own life. I sat down and leaned against the tree trunk, just like the day before, closed my eyes, and put my head between my knees, perhaps to give me a little comfort and solace.

Suddenly, I felt a gentle touch on my side. It was Simon, who had come and sat down next to me. His eyes were red. The disciples, in their fear, had locked themselves in the upper room where the Last Supper had taken place and told him everything that had happened in the meantime.

“It was terrible!” Then he told the whole story: Yeshua had to carry the crossbeam to the place of execution. Only after he had collapsed three times did a man who happened to be standing by the roadside have to carry the beam for him. On Golgotha, everything happened quickly. Yeshua had to lie down on his back on the ground, and three soldiers held him down. Another drove the nails through his arms. Then he was hoisted up, the crossbeam was fixed, and his feet were nailed to the vertical beam.

Two other men were crucified with him. A small seat was nailed to all three crosses so that the condemned men could find support and breathe more easily. This was intended to prolong their agony. As was customary, the men were crucified naked. To complete the humiliation, a soldier wrote the words “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” on a sign above his head.

Of the disciples, John was the only one who dared to stand directly beneath the cross. Mary Magdalene, his mother Mary, and her sister also stood there. Yeshua spoke to them, asking John to take care of his mother. After he had given up his spirit, a sudarium [linen bag to soften the sight] was pulled over his head as usual.

Nicodemus, a councilman and secret disciple, and his friend Joseph took care of his burial. Yeshua was buried in a cave tomb right next to the place of execution.

The disciples decided to stay in their upper room for a while longer, to pray and mourn together, and—once the situation had hopefully calmed down—to return to Galilee.

Simon asked me if I wanted to go with the other disciples. I declined, too ashamed of my betrayal. We then went together to the place of execution. The crossbeams were stacked on top of each other at the side. You could still see the blood on the wood. In some places where the crosses had stood, the ground was stained dark red. Simon and I held each other's hands tightly. That helped us bear the pain.

After that, it was only a few steps to the tomb. It was eerie. A young man in a light-colored robe was sitting on a large stone right next to the entrance. We didn't know him, so we stood at a respectful distance. Armed men were also camped nearby, presumably to guard the tomb.

As we said goodbye, I told Simon that I wanted to stay with Lazarus in Bethany for a few more days. He could find me there. Then I found a place to sit and sat there for a while, feeling dazed. Occasionally people passed by, some crying, others looking content. When it got dark, I decided to return to my brother's house. I didn't want to be alone now.

The next morning, my mother asked me to have breakfast in her room. She told me the old stories again, while I sat impassively beside her and nodded occasionally. I promised her that I would visit her more often now, and left the house as soon as politeness allowed. That was the last time I saw her.

*Hello Andrew,*

*you think that Judas gets off far too lightly, while at the same time the dark sides of Jesus that are portrayed are unacceptable.*

*Life is not black and white; there are shades of gray that you can only see if you look more closely. It is easier to label others as evil than to acknowledge the complexity of their lives. That does not excuse anything, but it does make their behavior more understandable. I understand that Jesus' sinlessness and thus his perfection are fundamental to your faith. You believe that Jesus was able to take on the sins of humanity as God's sacrificial lamb only because he himself was free from sin. But that would mean that Jesus could not have been fully human, because making mistakes is necessary for being human. Only in this way can we learn from them and develop further. A small child only learns to walk after falling down many times. A Jesus who makes no mistakes would be a supernatural Jesus, a fantasy figure. He would have had to be perfect even as an infant. However, the New Testament tells a different story. Why should Jesus not have been human, with all the light and dark sides that are part of being human?*

*The next chapter may not be easy for you to digest, because it looks at the events of Easter from a new perspective. Although this perspective is compatible with our current scientific worldview, it differs from the account in the New Testament.*

*But would this devalue everything Jesus said and did? This will increasingly become one of the core questions.*

*Warm regards*

*Helmut*

## **Yeshua Lives!**

I reached Bethany in the early afternoon. Pain and gloom hung heavy in the house. Lazarus lay in bed, so depressed that he could not get up. Martha was completely distraught:

"We left very early today to meet with other women at the tomb and anoint Yeshua's body. But when we arrived, the stone had been rolled away. Inside, we saw two young men in bright robes. They asked us, 'Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Yeshua is alive. He has risen.'

We left the tomb even sadder than we already were. What does this mean? Did they steal the body and just tell us a story?"

"Perhaps they want to prevent a pilgrimage site for a martyr from being established there," I replied. But Martha persisted: "A disciple from Jerusalem just passed by. He said that Mary Magdalene had seen Yeshua—that he had appeared to her at the tomb."

I tried to calm her down: "The two loved each other deeply. Maybe she felt so close to him that she thought she saw him?"

To me, these were fantasy stories. "Yeshua is dead, and no power in the world will bring him back to life! We have to accept that. It does us no good to believe in fairy tales and give in to empty hopes. We mustn't let ourselves go crazy!" I decided to stay with them for a few more days so that we could comfort each other.

### **Confusing news**

The next day, another disciple arrived from Jerusalem with a message that confused us even more:

"After the women reported the empty tomb, Simon and John immediately ran there. They also found the tomb empty, with only the sudarium and burial cloth neatly folded on the stone where the body had lain. The men in white robes had disappeared."

What was happening here? Had everyone gone mad? Where was Yeshua's corpse? The following day, I couldn't take it anymore. I had to go to Jerusalem and find out for myself what had happened. I didn't want to go to the disciples, but I knew where they were staying and could hide nearby. Perhaps Simon or Philip would come out, and I could intercept one of them.

It was late afternoon when I nestled into a niche opposite their lodgings. As dusk fell, a figure emerged that I initially mistook for John. But then I recognized a ponytail—only Yeshua wore his hair that way. "That can't be. He's dead!" I thought.

I followed the figure and saw two men supporting him and leading him into a house. My heart was racing. It wasn't my imagination—I had seen him with my own eyes. I memorized the building but didn't dare knock.

When I returned to Bethany, I remained silent. I didn't want to cause any more confusion for Lazarus and his sisters. First, I had to gain clarity myself.

## **A secret is revealed**

The next day, I returned to the house. Standing at the door, I didn't know what was beating faster—my heart or my fist. Finally, a man opened the door a crack. I explained that I was a disciple and had seen Yeshua enter here. I had to speak to him. The man replied curtly, "No, you are mistaken. There is no Yeshua here!"

But I persisted: "I saw him. Only he wears a ponytail. Yesterday evening, he left the house of the disciples and disappeared here. I know that for sure!"

The man wanted to turn me away again, but then a faint voice called out from the background: "It's Judas; he may come in." It was Yeshua's voice.

Reluctantly, he opened the door for me. Inside sat several men and Mary Magdalene. They looked at me as if a secret had just been revealed. An elderly, dignified man—Nicodemus—finally allowed me to see Yeshua briefly.

He was lying on a bed in the back room—alive. I knelt down and sobbed, "I'm so incredibly sorry!"

He smiled gently, took my hand, and said softly: "Judas, how presumptuous you are! Do you think I was crucified because of your betrayal? No, I chose to do it myself. It has nothing to do with you."

I was speechless but relieved that he did not blame me. "I don't understand," I managed to say.

"I'll explain it to you later."

Nicodemus urged me to leave Yeshua alone and go. Reluctantly, he agreed to let me come back—on the condition that I didn't tell anyone about it. Not even the disciples.

## **Nicodemus explains the situation**

Nicodemus looked at me sternly, but there was kindness in his eyes. Small in stature, with a high forehead and worry lines, he seemed unassuming, but he was clearly the man everyone here trusted.

He explained to me: "I'm not worried about Pilate. He won't do anything on his own initiative to avoid having to admit to a failed