

D R E A M M A K E R

LYRICAL NOVEL #2

In the Series
THEY MET JESUS



KATHERYN MADDOX HADDAD

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DEDICATED TO
Everyone Who Has Ever Doubted

IN PRAISE OF DREAM MAKER

JEAN WILLIAMS, AUTHOR contributor to eight book anthologies. I got goose bumps and tears in my eyes. Fantastic! I'm telling you this is pure genius. Katheryn Haddad's book is breaking molds, and she may be a leader of this type of book.

KENNETH F. MADDOX, USN ETIRED: "It's dynamite!"

DICK ELL, NEW AGE UNIVERSALIST: The author has captured feelings that they must have had, and done it in a dramatic fashion. This is very interesting reading, capturing the fears, worries, doubts, obstacles in the lives of those that knew Jesus. Exciting to read. This is very good. She is a story teller and does it well."

LINDA ASHLEY, LADIES RETREAT IRECTOR, CANADA: I read it to the ladies...you could have heard a pin drop...I found myself pulled into it waiting breathlessly for the next sentence. It has all the earmarks of a great love story, with the beauty of the story of Christ, and the accuracy of the biblical perspective. What a treasure this will be to people everywhere.

VIRGINIA HELMDINGER, RETIRED IN FLORIDA: As I read this version of Jesus' birth, I was touched by the unfolding events and awed by the author's tremendous talent and ability to communicate so expressively. Such a moving expose.

INSERT YOURSELF INTO THE STORY

Although the events take place shortly before and during the first century AD, this story is written to help you in our modern world identify with the characters who lived then. While true to the life of Christ in every known aspect, conversations often take a modern flavor as though the characters were speaking today. After all, did they not speak what was “modern vocabulary” in their day, even in the Aramaic language?

You will see places in the story where you are invited to participate either as an encourager or discourager of a character, as though you were there with them. This is your chance to become their friend. You will easily spot those places in the story. Instead of wondering who is talking, remember, it is you.

A COMMENTARY IN NARRATIVE FORM



1—THE ZEALOTS ***Weapons of Dust***

*T*here's the kingdom of heaven—whatever that is— and

the kingdom of earth. The empire of earth. The Roman Empire. With an iron hand, procurators throughout the earth rule anyone Rome chooses to conquer. Pilate governs of one of those kingdoms, the bothersome Jewish one. He has his hands full. But he is good at his job. He will always be the victor.

Can it survive, the kingdom of earth? Jesus says no, the kingdom of heaven is the only one that can and will endure and thrive.

The zealots say no, the kingdom of the Jews IS the kingdom of heaven and therefore the only one that can and will live on.

All fighting for dominance. Fighting, in their own way. Dominance in their own interpretation. But can it ever be permanent? The kingdom? Which kingdom?

Weapons of steel. Weapons of strategy. Weapons of money. Weapons of dust which cannot touch that which is ethereal.

AD 21

A Hideout in Province of Galilee

Commander Judas is in charge. His militia of zealots is tough. If the men aren't strong when he gets them, he toughens them up. He has his ways. He has always had his ways.

"All right, men," we're going through this again! To be a true follower of Commander Judas and defeat the enemy, you're going to have to do this right!" Reuben, Judas's lieutenant, barks.

Reuben is the envy of every man serving in the zealot forces. He towers head and shoulders above nearly everyone else and is built like a guerilla.

The young men shuffle from one foot to the other, sweat pouring off their faces, trickling down their bare chests, and permeating their dirty loin cloths, the only garment needed in the hideaway during maneuvers.

"Listen up! My count to ten is all you have to go either under, over or through those barricades. Time is of the essence. If you can't do it, you'll be an open target for the enemy!" His dark eyes dart toward every man under his control and keeps them in line.

Drilling, grilling. Getting the maneuver right.

Discipline. That's what it takes. Discipline and brash regimentation. Never show them you're weak. Defeat the enemy. Defeat!

Muscles surging like a panther. Stretching necks and legs. Propelling across the rocks, stirring up the dust. Straining to reach the goal. Huffing, panting, wheezing.

Once more the men go through the routine. A hundred times if that's what it takes. Never, never give up. Never, ever quit.

Get the enemy! Get the enemy! Get the enemy!

"Reuben, report to me at the end of maneuvers," orders Commander Judas who has been observing the maneuvers for the past hour. He is not as tall as his subordinate, and walks away from him with a slight limp, but his back is still straight and proud, and his eagle eyes shift from one man to another as though watching for disloyalty within the camp. He looks at each man with eyes that pierce their facades. He is good at it, and they know

it.

“Yes, sir!” Reuben, a few paces away, responds to his commander with a salute.

The barricade maneuvers over, Reuben commands all the men to grab their weapon of choice and hone their skills. One band practices with their axes, another with their slings, yet another with sickles. Scattered around the field learning better how to kill. Kill the Roman occupation government and its hooligans.

The sun begins its descent with Reuben disgusted with the day’s military exercises.

“Get rid of that man who collapsed. I don’t care where. Just take him out of my sight. I don’t want to see him again. We will not have quitters and weaklings!”

With a growl, he dismisses the men with his usual warnings, then quick steps to the headquarters, the largest cave on the compound, while retying the headband that controls his bushy black hair.

Reuben salutes his revered commander and stands at attention.

Judas is settled in his chair, his version of a portable throne, a symbol of Judaism regaining what is rightfully theirs.

“The past fifteen years have been bad. Romans sending their own men to govern us and procure tax money from us,” Commander Judas explains. “They must be stopped!”

“Yes, sir! We’re stronger, sir!” Reuben responds, still at attention.

“Get off it, Reuben. Sit down. There’s trouble stirring out there, and when it strikes, we must be ready.”

Reuben sits but is not relaxed. His back is straight and his big hands are on his knees. “Our new procurator, right, sir?”

“Right. He has been appointed. His name is Pontus Pilate. He is stubborn. We’re going to have to break him.”

“Sir! What’s the plan, sir?”

“The word is he’s moving his army headquarters from Caesarea on the coast inland to Jerusalem, our holy city.”

“You’re right. That spells trouble. What are we going to

do?”

“Be ready when he gets there, of course.”

“We’ve got to recruit more men, sir.”

“You are very observant, Reuben. I want you to pick your most loyal men to go into all the towns of Galilee, and hang out where the tough guys are.”

“Expose our tattoos?”

“Yes, expose your secret tattoos. We’ve got to be bold. We’ve got to take more chances for the cause.”

“What if our men are arrested?”

“We never heard of them.”

Reuben stands to leave. He comes to attention once again and salutes sharply. The self-appointed commander stiffens in his chair in response.”

“Freedom or death!” Reuben bellows.

“Freedom or death,” Commander Judas barks in return.

Jesus, you’ll be trampled in a violent world like this. Don’t even think about leaving your carpenter’s shop.

AD 22

Canaanite Sector of Phoenicia

“Father, the time has come for me to join the cause.”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Simon’s mother, Elissar, responds.

“I wasn’t talking to you, Mother,” he interrupts rudely. “I was talking to Father.”

“Son, this isn’t the way,” his father, Hiram, replies.

“I’ve made up my mind and I’m joining.” Simon has always been big for his age and over the past year has matured physically to the point that his bushy black head of hair is now complimented with an ever-thickening black beard. He has never been known to take care of his appearance or anything else he considers unmanly.

“You’re making a bad mistake, Son,” his father continues.

Simon paces. He had known his parents would react like this. They had always disagreed with whatever he wanted to do.

He spins around.

“You’re just too old to understand. Force is all the foreign enemy understands,” he says, shaking his fist. “We must fight swords with swords. Besides, God is on our side.”

“It isn’t even our fight. We don’t even live in Palestine,” his mother interjects.

“No, but it could happen here too. They took over Syria, then Judea. Phoenecia could be next. It’s got to stop somewhere.”

“But, Son...” What can his mother say? Elissar tries to hide the tears that long to escape her eyes and reveal her deepest pain.

Simon turns toward his father and points his finger. “Taxation without consent. That’s what we face, and you know it, Father!”

He resumes his pacing. “They want to send our tax money to Caesar way up there in Rome,” both arms out now. “True, it’s the people in Judea who are being taxed. But we will be next. We give in to that, and we’re slaves next.” He slams a fist into his other hand and swings around to face his mother.

“But the Jewish religion is different from ours,” his mother replies.

“I believe in the God of the Jewish scriptures.”

Hiram’s eyes suddenly squint and his mouth twists. “When did this happen?”

Elissar stares at her oldest son in disbelief.

Simon sits and speaks with a quieter voice. “I’ve been studying with some guys. The Jewish scriptures predicted the destiny of entire nations many years beforehand. Jehovah is certainly the originator of those scriptures.”

“So you’re talking a religious crusade,” his father concludes.

“Yes, you could call it that.”

“Killing in the name of God?”

“Yes, Mother. So what?”

The parents become silent. They’ve been through most of this before. Except for Simon’s conversion to Jehovah God. That is a new one. They do not know what else to say.

“I don’t care what you say or do. I’m joining them.” Simon

looks at both parents with defiance.

“When?” his mother whispers.

“Tonight.”

“Not tonight! You can’t!”

“So is tomorrow better, Father? Will you agree with me tomorrow?”

Simon leaves the room, his parents sitting on their mats staring uneasily into space. “He’s really going to do it, Elissar. He’s going to do it this time.”

“Oh, Hiram. Where did we go wrong with that boy?”

A moment later Simon returns with a large pack. He raises his tunic to his thighs, straps on a dagger, slings the pack over his shoulder, and looks at his parents as if etching a memory of them. He knows he will miss them, but would rather die than tell them that.

“You’ll be glad someday I took a stand. You’ll be proud of me some day. I always wanted you to be proud of me. This time you will be. I know you will.”

His parents stand and embrace their son. Elissar cries.

Simon goes to the outer gate. He finally feels important.

“I’ll send a message to you when I am settled in,” he calls out over his shoulder. He stops briefly in the street. “Won’t be able to tell you where I am, but at least you’ll know I’m okay.”

The gate closes. Their son is gone.

Darkness approaches. Darkness outside their gate. Darkness in their soul. The darkness swirls in their mind, for they do not know what to say or do. And in their darkness, they pray to their god.

A month later they find a small scroll attached to their front gate by an unknown messenger.

“Everything as planned. I’m over in Galilee, but can’t tell you where.”

That was it. So far their son was safe. But would they ever see him again? Alive?

More months pass.

Jesus, you may think Simon will be one of your apostles someday, but you’re wrong. He’s found Commander Judas

instead. Mess with Simon and he'll slide his dagger right into your heart.

Caesarea, Province of Samaria. Palestine

“The legion is ready to be transferred, sir!” Tribune Seneca wears a fine toga and enough armor to signify his position and demand the respect of his legion. He would wear more armor were he expecting a fight, but he is not. He holds his bronze helmet tucked under one arm.

“Good,” Pilate responds, looking out of his balcony to the blue sea beyond. “We need them closer to Jerusalem, the Jews’ religious capital. These people are stubborn. They may need to learn some lessons.”

“Yes, sir! Understood, sir!”

“How long will it take the troops to arrive?” Governor Procurator Pilate turns back into the room. His short, wavy brown hair has been teased out of place by the sea breeze on the balcony.

“Two days, sir!”

“That’s fine. When they do, I want them to converge on Jerusalem as soon as night comes. That way, they will be in place when the local citizens wake up the next morning. Use the element of surprise.”

Pilate returns to his chair, swinging his blue-trimmed toga out of his way.

“Yes, sir!”

“Good luck, Tribune.”

The tribune salutes. Procurator Pilot returns the salute sharply, having been in the Roman legions himself during his youth. That is when the prominent nose on his long face acquired its slight but aristocratic bump in the middle.

Jesus, this Pilate is ruling the land that you claim is yours. He’s even more powerful than the commander of those zealot guerillas.

Jerusalem, Province of Judea

“Open up, Samuel,” Daniel shouts, banging on the gate of his merchant neighbor. “Open up!”

Dawn approaches, but Samuel is already up and ready to go to the market to restock his booth for the day. A small loaf of bread in his hand, breaking off another bite as he goes, he opens the outer gate without demanding to know who is there.

“Brace yourself, Samuel!” Daniel says.

“You interrupted my breakfast just to say that guy who wants my spot in the market has moved in on me, haven’t you?”

“That’s nothing! Listen to me! Troops arrived during the night! They’ve taken over Jerusalem!”

Samuel throws down the bread without taking his eyes off his closest friend. “Oh, no! Has there been killing?” Samuel’s forehead furrows and his hand balls into a fist.

“No, not that bad. Yet.”

“Spill it, Daniel. What else is going on?”

“They want us to worship Caesar. They claim Caesar is a god and they’ve brought his image into the city.”

“Set it up in our temple?” Samuel asks, leading their way out his gate and locking it behind his friend.

“No,” Daniel responds, trotting to keep up with the taller Samuel. “But he’s pictured on the banners they’ve got flying everywhere.” The two turn up the street toward the market, their robes flowing behind them.

“Those Roman dictators just don’t know when to quit, do they?” Daniel says, winded, as he keeps up with his friend.

“Shoving it down our throats.” This is a day Samuel has been dreading, but he has not really been surprised at its coming.

Without another word, they arrive at the market and look around.

They see the usual merchants, all long-time friends of Samuel.

Then they see a traffic jam of carts having entered the city from the fields outside the walls. The farmers are not unloading.

Instead, some stand beside their ox or their donkey, but are not doing anything. Some have joined other farmers in small groups, talking among each other.

“Oh, Jehovah God,” Daniel declares, “where are you? Do not let this happen to your city.”

Looking at Samuel, he continues. “I’m headed for the temple to see what’s going on with the priests. They could be organizing the temple guards to fight back.”

Samuel disappears among the crowds of others filling the street and heads up the hill toward the holy sanctuary.

Jesus, you claim to be captain of heavenly hosts, don’t you? Now’s your chance. Can you do anything about all this? Or do you even know what a weapon is?

A Hideout in Province of Galilee

“All right, men! Listen up! Commander Judas has an important announcement to make!”

The commander steps forward. As always, the men are awed by him. He reminds them of the Maccabees brothers who took back control of their country from the Grecian Seleucid Empire two centuries earlier. The older generation still talks about the Maccabees. The younger generation sometimes thinks of their commander as a reincarnation of his namesake, the general who led the early revolts—Judas Maccabees.

“Men! Today our entire country is counting on us. Most men are weak like women and children. They won’t stand up for themselves. Well, we’re going to do it for them.”

The zealots stiffen in readiness. This is what they’ve been training for. The battle first. Then the glory.

“We received word the Roman legionnaires have moved their headquarters from Caesarea on the Great Sea to our holy Jerusalem.” He pauses to let the news sink in. “Further,” he barks, “they have brought with them the image of Caesar-god on their banners. We cannot tolerate images in our country,” he roars. “We cannot and will not tolerate images in our country!”

Commander Judas stops and steps back. With that signal, young Simon steps forward. He has gained some status. He has been given a special honor.

“Hail to Jehovah!” Simon bellows.

The zealots respond in kind. “Hail to Jehovah!”

“Jehovah or die!” Simon proclaims.

“Jehovah or die!” the men respond in unison.

Commander Judas steps forward again. “Now, men, we’re going to give them a fair chance first, the kind of chance they didn’t give our citizens. We’re going to the governor procurator personally. He’s back in Caesarea. If he refuses to take those images of Caesar-god out of Jerusalem, we fight back!”

“Freedom or death!” He bellows.

“Freedom or death!” the army replies in unison.

“Freedom or death!”

“Freedom or death!”

The assembly is over. One hour later the zealots are on the highway openly headed west toward the coast. They travel in small groups or alone.

They have no uniforms. But they have their weapons. Some with javelins, some with bow and arrows, some with nets, some with swords, and many with more than one.

These are the real soldiers, not those who require armor to protect them.

Some hide their weapons under their robes and tunics. Others carry them openly.

As they progress, travelers on the road scurry out of the way of the more openly defiant ones. They know who these ruffians are. They know they have come out of hiding to represent them. They hope they will be as successful as the Maccabees had been when they led their revolts generations earlier.

Their presence will be powerful. Procurator Pilate will have no choice but to listen to them. After all, Palestine is his new assignment by Caesar. If the country goes into rebellion, he loses his new post as procurator. He dares not resist them.

Jesus, they’re willing to give their lives for the cause. Are you?

Caesarea, Province of Samaria

“And so, for the order of the day...”

The presiding tribunal is interrupted.

“Procurator Pilate!” The commanding voice bellows from a raised platform outside on the city square, but which is not nearly as high as the official city forum.

“Procurator Pilate! I have a message from the people of Judea in Palestine!” The voice booms.

Pilate stands and looks down at the street and out among the buildings. His heart races. He cannot tolerate a rebellion.

He shouts back. “Who are you?” Pilate must maintain order. Control.

“This isn’t all of us,” Judas shouts. “If you’ll look behind you, you’ll have another surprise. Go ahead! Look!”

Commander Judas waits while all of the government officials step outside onto the expansive marble platform of the forum and look around. Zealots appear behind them on the roof tops of nearby buildings. From every side street, they file into the city square, weapons in hand, bows and arrows hanging over their shoulders. Young Simon marches with them, tall and proud. He is afraid of nothing.

“Now, are you ready to listen, Procurator Pilate?” The voice is smug.

“What do you want, Judas? Your reputation precedes you. It’s you, isn’t it Judas?”

“You have a quick mind, Pilate. Yes, it’s me. Your nemesis. I will bring you down, Pilate.”

“What do you want?” the governor procurator shouts back in Judas’ direction.

“We want the images of Caesar taken out of our nation’s capital.”

“Where the troops go, Caesar goes!” Pilate has a commanding voice. He will control this.

“I’m warning you, procurator. Things could become messy,”

calls out his challenger.

“Never!”

Pilate turns toward his senior officer, Tribune Seneca. “Bring out the guard. Now!”

“The rest of you are dismissed,” he says to his tribunals who quickly disappear back into a small building adjoining the forum. Now Procurator Pilate stands alone on the forum except for his six legionnaire body guards. “You’ll be sorry for this!” he calls out to Judas. Then, he too disappears into the building.

Now, all that are left are the zealots in the square, but it does not last. Emerging Roman legionnaires line up in front of the forum, shields in one hand, swords at the ready. A standoff of Roman legionnaires and the zealots. No one moves. All wait for their respective commanders to give the order to charge.

Procurator Pilate walks out onto an upper balcony. He stands in silence. Then he goes back inside.

Commander Judas has now climbed onto a grand marble statue of Caesar in the middle of the square and calls out.

“All right, men! This is where we stay until he decides to come to terms with us.”

“Freedom or death!” he bellows. “Freedom or death!”

“Freedom or death!” the zealots respond.

“Freedom or death!”

“Freedom or death!”

He walks among his freedom fighters, sword held above his head and pointing toward heaven.

Young Simon is proud to be part of this historic moment. The country will thank him for it someday. His parents too. He watches as his commander remounts his steed.

“Freedom or death!”

“Freedom or death!” For two hours.

Procurator Pilate reappears. The chanting stops.

“What are your terms to leave peacefully?”

Commander Judas climbs back onto the statue and calls back. “We are given confirmation from our men in Jerusalem you have removed Caesar’s images, and we won’t set fire to your city.”

“Burn down grand Caesarea? That’s insane!”

“Watch us!”

Young Simon is near his commander. He calls up to him. “I’ve got a torch, sir. Give me the honor of starting the fire that will destroy Rome’s glory.” Commander Judas looks down at Simon, says nothing, and looks back toward the balcony.

But the procurator has disappeared inside again.

Two more hours pass. The eerie quiet in the square and the agitation inside Judas’ gut grows to the point of erupting. He climbs down off the statue and onto his black stallion, as black as the hearts of the occupation government, the pagan Romans.

He leads his horse back and forth in front of the forum and the standoff. Judas intends to end it his way.

“We’re coming out!” Procurator Pilate’s tribune declares from the balcony. He waits for a response.

“What’s this?” Commander Judas growls, jerking his head from one target to another. Roman legionnaires have taken over the roofs of nearby buildings. Swords, spears, bows with poison arrows. He sees war.

“Procurator Pilate, you may come forward! No one else! Or we set fire to the city!” Judas bellows.

Moments later Procurator Pilate comes out the lower door by the forum. “I’m coming out. I’m unarmed and alone,” he shouts. The procurator walks forward toward his judgment seat.

The zealot commander dismounts, climbs some steps and approaches the Roman intruder.

“Well?” the commander inquires.

“Let’s go inside and talk,” the procurator tells him.

The two men withdraw into the small building behind the forum.

As soon as they disappear, from the other buildings surrounding the forum, Roman legionnaires appear in full armor. Sounds of invasion. A trap. While the spider had toyed with the fly, the scorpions have rushed in for the kill.

Warning arrows whizzing over heads. The zealots have been caught off guard. This cannot be! Procurator Pilot has not kept his promise. The zealots are forced to give up their weapons.

“What’s the meaning of this?” Commander Judas demands,

rushing back out to the forum platform.

“You can’t set fire to the city,” the procurator gloats. “Cut them into pieces!” he shouts, and the Roman legionnaires draw their swords.

At once, Judas drops to the platform in surrender position, his neck exposed to the Roman blade. As soon as his men see what has happened, they too fall to the ground and expose their own necks to enemy swords.

The Roman legionnaires wait for their tribune’s signal to behead them all. It does not come.

Pilate stares in disbelief, disappears back into the building, then appears back out on his balcony. He watches. He says nothing. Everyone waits. Silence.

More silence.

The Roman tribune calls to the procurator from his position on the forum platform.

“Well, do we cut them up and destroy of them, sir?” he growls almost inaudibly.

The procurator stares ahead. He says nothing.

“Sir, do we kill them now?”

Finally, “No.”

“Pardon me, sir. What did you say? No?”

“That’s right,” Pilate says in a louder voice. “No!” He is firmer now. “Let’s just see if they’ll try to make a run for it. That’ll be better for our reputation. Can’t kill men while they’re down. That’s not honorable.”

Confused, the tribune complies.

The standoff begins.

Night comes. The Roman legionnaires cannot maintain the same standing position all night. The zealots maintain theirs on the ground. The zealots are in control really.

“Sir, let’s kill them.”

“What kind of procurator will that make me? I was just assigned to this country.”

“Permission to bring in reserves to take over.”

“Permission granted.”

Procurator Pilate leaves.

All night Roman legionnaires stand over the zealots. Young Simon has had no choice but to obey orders and lie down on the street with the others. He hadn't wanted to. He had wanted to see some blood. The enemy's blood. God would like that

But he does not move. He is a trained commando. He alternately sleeps, prays, and imagines himself giving his life for his country and his God.

All the next day. Pilate's troops stand over Judas' troops. Flies buzz around the growing smell of the zealots. Sweat and bodily fluids mix in defiance of all that Rome considers decent.

Young Simon is stiff. But he does not move, other than to flex his muscles to try to keep them from seizing. He knows his parents will be proud of him.

Day three. No movement by the zealots. Hunger has come and then receded as the body has gotten used to fasting. Fasting for the Lord. Fasting for what is right and good. Young Simon stays true to the cause. Still the standoff.

Day four. Everyone knows who is winning. The zealots are. Commander Judas knows it. Pilate knows it. Caesar will know it.

Day five. Pilate returns to the forum.

He sits. He stares. How can these men do it? Just lie there with their necks exposed? They will never leave until he gives in. He knows yielding to the enemy is inevitable.

He calls out. "Gentlemen! You are brave. Insanely brave. And cunning. I don't think I have ever come upon a shrewder enemy. Commander Judas, I am withdrawing my men. After they have left, you may leave peacefully and go back to whatever God-forsaken place you crept out of."

"You have taken Caesar's images out of Jerusalem?"

"Yes, you have my word. They'll all be taken out by this time tomorrow."

Within the hour rough, motley guerillas return to the streets of glorious Caesarea. They turn and head east back toward their secret camp.

Winners, but losers. No blood shed to prove how much they love Jehovah God. Maybe another time, another day.

Jesus, everyone knows blood must eventually be spilled.

How about yours?

Hills in Province of Judea AD 26

It has now been two years since Procurator Pilate's arrival. Some think his power is weakening. But he has had time to regroup and fortify his army. His dignity too.

The zealots have not been idle. Continuing to be a scourge to Pilate and Rome, the zealots, following the example of the Maccabees, have met all Simon's expectations and more. Sniping Roman legionnaires along highways. Burning strategic bridges across deep ravines. Harassing the enemy. All in the name of God, of course.

Simon's zealot unit has been transferred closer to the capital city. To be closer to Jerusalem where Procurator Pilate spends most of his time now in Herod's palace. Commander Judas will be leading them.

Night engulfs the camp. Simon is sharpening his dagger

"John the Baptizer is no man's fool, Joseph," he says to a friend in their small tent. "He's telling all our national leaders to repent because the new Kingdom of God is about to take over. He even says God is going to burn up everyone who doesn't."

"Sounds like my kind of man," Joseph responds.

"Me too," says Simon. "Does Commander Judas know about this guy?" He tests the tip of his dagger with his rough thumb.

"You better believe he does. Apparently, he's taking a wait-and-see stance for now," Joseph tells his friend, toying with the arrowhead he plans to attach to a shaft in a few moments.

"Well, I think I want to go hear him in person." Simon shoves his dagger back into its sheath and sets it beside him. "I'm taking some leave time."

"Do you know where he is?" his friend asks.

"He's a baptizer, isn't he?" Simon stands to pull off his tunic for the night. "He must be somewhere along the Jordan River. I'll just follow the river. I'll find him."

Jesus, if you want Simon on your team, now is your chance.

Jordan River

Simon makes his way north along the Jordan River road.

Will John the Baptizer be more powerful than Commander Judas? He's got the ear of the Pharisee sect leaders, so they say. What if he does? What if he can persuade the Pharisee leaders to join him in rebelling against Rome? They'd have access to the temple guards. They'd have weapons.

"Sir, do you have any idea where John the Baptizer might be?"

"Nope. Not interested either."

Simon continues on the road. He is wearing a long tunic now, better to hide the dagger tied to his lower leg.

But what if Commander Judas is stronger? After all, he has more men than the temple guards. And we know more about hand-to-hand combat. Better not write off Judas just yet.

"Sir, do you know where John the Baptizer is?"

"I heard he's about ten *milles* north of here, but he may have moved by now."

On up the river. The meandering river that flows like Simon's mind, snaking its way down from the far mountains in the north. Back and forth, sometimes to the east, sometimes to the west, but steadily flowing to the south. Ever flowing in the general direction of Jerusalem the holy. But not always. The meandering. How deceptive the river can be.

Eventually, Simon sees up ahead a couple of men diverting travelers off the road and closer to the river. *Are they John's aides? Are they directing people to John's camp? Have I finally arrived? Will I have my questions answered now?*

He follows the crowd and works his way toward the river until he is as close as possible to where he thinks the speaker, John the Baptizer, will be. His guess is right.

"Repent!" he hears at last. It must be John. Simon had heard John is famous for saying that. Says God isn't content

unless people at least try to do better.

“Repent because the new Kingdom of God is right around the corner. Draw closer to God. Be on God’s side.”

Yes. That’s John all right.

“Hey, John! What should I do?” a man in the crowd interrupts. John recognizes the man wearing the fine clothes.

“Don’t collect more taxes than is required.”

“Atta boy, John! Be straight with them!” Simon shouts. “They’re traitors anyway,” he mutters to himself.

People around him nod in agreement. He is proud to be their spokesman.

“What about us? What should we do?”

Simon is shocked to see two Roman legionnaires on the other side of the crowd. He is glad he has brought along his dagger. He touches his leg to make sure his weapon is secure. He glares at the soldiers, then back at John to see if trouble is brewing between them. He stiffens in preparation to rush to John and protect him against the enemy. He has been trained by the best. Commander Judas would be proud of him. God too.

“Don’t demand bribes from people. Be content with your pay,” John shouts back to them.

The two soldiers stay where they are. They do not charge at John, but neither do they retreat. They stand their ground.

John does too. Eye to eye, John stands firm.

“Man, he’s got guts, ordering those Romans around like that,” Simon tells a stranger next to him. But he keeps his hand close to his dagger.

Jesus, can you match that? Can you confront those foreigners any more powerfully than John does? You’ll be lost in his dust.

Hills in Province of Judea

“Hey, Joseph! I’m back,” Simon announces.

Joseph is sitting outside his tent eating some dried fish he had brought from home some weeks back.

“So, did you see John?”

“Yeah! He’s got some good ideas. And never backs down. You should have seen him order people around.”

“I don’t think Commander Judas likes him,” Joseph replies, handing a piece of fish to Simon.

“Why’s that?” Simon squats on the ground near his friend.

“He’s just talk,” Joseph responds, popping a bite of fish in his mouth and taking time to chew. He takes a swig of water. “Always threatening,” he resumes. “Never backing up his story. He’s got a good line. But he’s soft. Too soft.”

Simon says no more. But he continues to seek out reports of John. *Joseph wasn’t there. He doesn’t know how commanding this John can be. But maybe not. Is he just talk?*

He decides to keep his mouth shut in case Commander Judas has a jealous streak in him, which he does.

After several months of restless nothingness, Simon’s unit is once again put on alert. Commander Judas, himself, addresses the men.

It happens right after morning maneuvers. Two of their strongest men had pitted themselves against each other, and both had finally collapsed in guffaws. It has been good entertainment for Simon and the other men.

The men are called into formation. Simon puts his dagger back in its sheath and takes his place in the lineup. Commander Judas walks forward.

Simon unconsciously flexes his muscles. He envisions blood. He is surprised how much he has missed the threats, the weapons, the blood. He envisions acts of heroism. He envisions one more step closer to kicking the foreign rulers out of his country.

Ah, it will be good to be back in action. Forget that John what’s-his-name.

“Procurator Pilate is up to his old tricks!” Commander Judas bellows. “My spies report that he has tried to get on the Jews’ good side by improving Jerusalem’s water system. Now the word is out where he got the money.”

His militia stands at attention. Judas pauses for effect.

“The temple treasury!”

Judas is riled. The two white scars on his head—one from a dull axe in a battle and the other from a dagger grazing his skull—turn red. The wind whips his thinning black-and-gray hair around the scars treacherously.

“This Roman atheist bought off some of the priesthood with part of the money.”

The zealots stiffen. Judas sees it. He recognizes the twitching of muscles and shifting from one foot to the other foot ever so slightly. That is good.

“We will infiltrate Jerusalem. The taverns. The synagogues. Athletic games. Anywhere people are assembled.”

Once more he pauses. Reuben, always behind him and to one side, takes his cue, raises his arm high and shakes his fist.

“Kill Pilate!”

“Kill Pilate!”

“Down with Rome!”

The young troops respond in kind.

“Down with Rome!”

“Down with Rome!”

Judas raises his hand and the troops immediately but begrudgingly grow silent. “Our target date is one month from today. Each of you will bring your recruits to the arena. You will slip in by night any way you can, but not through the gate. From there we will begin the march.”

Emmaus, Province of Judas

The following day, Simon and the others in the zealot unit disburse to various parts of nearby cities and rent rooms at their hostels.

Simon has done this before. Makes the blood rush through his veins faster. When he can motivate dull and scared citizens to stand up for their rights, he feels a real sense of power. His parents will come to be proud of him yet.

Simon goes to Emmaus. After renting his room, he goes out

to the tavern and orders an ale. He looks around the room for a likely candidate and sees a table with two men sitting across from each other but not talking.

“Mind if I join you?”

The two look up. One smiles. The other does not.

“Sure. Pull up a stool,” the smiling one says.

Simon ducks his head toward the two and mutters, “Did you hear what Pilate did with our hard-earned money donated to the temple?”

The other men do not respond, but look at him. That is all Simon needs to continue.

“Something has to be done about this. We cannot tolerate what these foreign rulers are trying to do with our country.” Simon checks himself when the volume of his voice starts to elevate and lowers it again. “We must rise up.”

“But how can we? There are too many of them?” The stranger’s smile is now gone.

“Join us,” Simon mutters as he looks side to side to see if anyone at nearby tables is paying attention to the trio. “We’re going to march on the palace in one month. The great Commander Judas will be leading us. Can we count on you? The day before, I’ll come back and give you the details. You with us?”

Both men stare at Simon, look at each other, shrug, and agree. “Yeah. Sure. Why not?”

Simon’s work done for the morning, he goes out into the street and down to the market.

“Did you hear what Pilate did with our hard-earned money donated to the temple?”

“No, and I don’t care,” the shop owner replies. “They’re going to do what they’re going to do. Go away from me before a spy hears you and arrests us both.”

Simon moves on and stops at a perfumery.

“Did you hear what Pilate did with our hard-earned money donated to the temple?”

“Yes, and I don’t like it,” the shop keeper says under his breath, looking around to see if anyone in the narrow street is looking at him.

“I don’t either,” Simon responds as he picks up an alabaster bottle and examines it. “We need to do something about it.”

“Yes, but what?” the shop keeper says, taking the priceless bottle back from Simon.

“We can band together.”

“The shop keeper looks at the stranger.”

“What do you mean? What’s going on?”

“One month from now,” Simon says in hushed tones, “we are all going to march on the palace. If we stick together, we can do it.”

“Yeah, strength in numbers,” the shop keeper responds, finally looking straight at Simon.

“You with us?”

The shop keeper takes a deep breath. “Yes. Why not? What can we lose?”

“That’s the spirit,” Simon says as he reaches across the counter and pats the man on the shoulder. “I’ll be back the day before the march and fill you in on the details. The great Commander Judas will be leading us.”

On the Sabbath, Simon is at the synagogue. He sits with the men, but in the back, and listens carefully as the Torah is read, and the rabbi expounds on it eloquently. As the sermon progresses, Simon watches. Who among the men are vigorously nodding at the sermon points about the coming Deliverer? Who among the men are shaking their heads whenever the foreign occupation government is mentioned? One man sitting toward the front is giving the most spirited responses, even with an “Amen” shouted out now and then. Simon has his mark.

After the services, Simon keeps his eye on the man up front until they are out of the building. He is not joined by a wife. Perfect. Simon sidles up next to him.

“Did you hear what Pilate did with our hard-earned money donated to the temple?”

The worshiper stops in his tracks and turns toward Simon. “What? What did you say?”

Simon begins to repeat himself, but the man interrupts him.

“I know what you said. I was just startled to hear someone repeat it out on the street like this. It could be dangerous. How do you know I’m not a spy?”

“I watched you during synagogue. Your heart was in it. I could tell. So what do you think of the way the Lord’s money was spent?”

“It’s outrageous. They shouldn’t be allowed to get by with it.”

“There’s something you can do. Something we all can do if we stick together.”

“What do you mean?”

“Three weeks from now we are going to march on the palace. Join us. Be a part of us. Make history with us.”

The man grows quiet and Simon lets him think. But not for long

“Well, are you with us?”

“The man grins. Yeah! I’m with you.”

“I’ll be back at the synagogue the day before the march. I’ll see you there and give you the details. Oh, and uh, the great Commander Judas will be leading us.”

Day after day, stirring up people, arguing with people, recruiting people.

Evening after evening Simon gets people to thinking how oppressed they are.

Gradually he finds and stirs up the patriotism and religious zeal within most of the men he talks with. Not all, but most. How dare these foreign atheists use temple money for city improvements! Pilate, you’re history.

And Jesus, just stay out of this. You don’t understand the running of kingdoms. That’s for real men.

Jerusalem, Province of Judea

Finally, the day arrives. Simon is good at what he does. He has probably fifty people ready to join the demonstration. By ones and twos through the night, Simon has slipped them into the

arena. Ropes dropped down from the top make scaling the outside wall into the arena easy in the dark.

Simon assures them it will be a peaceful demonstration. He does not tell them the zealots are ready to retaliate with deadly weapons if it backfires. He sees no reason for that to happen. But he is a good soldier and does what he is told.

Morning. A short trumpet blast is heard in the arena the Roman legionnaires had thought was empty. The signal to assemble. A prayer is pronounced from the top of the risers. Commander Judas pronounces it.

“Oh God. We march for you. It’s your money these Roman atheists are spending. We march for Moses. We march for all of Palestine. We march for you, Jehovah God.”

The prayer over, cheers echo through the arena. The gates are swung wide. There are too many for the Roman legionnaires who had been on watch outside the gates. They flee just as everyone had known they would.

The singing begins. “Oh God our help...” Commander Judas then leaps into his chariot pulled by his great black steed, and heads up the procession out into the street leading to the palace and forum. They brazenly march in front of laden oxen, camels, donkeys, and peddlers until all traffic other than the demonstration is at a standstill.

Some carry banners declaring the blasphemy of the Roman rulers. They shout taunts.

“Pilate will kill next! Down with Pilate!”

“Pilate will kill next! Down with Pilate!”

“Pilate will kill next! Down with Pilate!”

People stand on the sides of the streets cheering them on. Simon knows they’re doing the right thing.

They are at the edge of the forum. Onlookers move in closer to the marchers. A few at first. They mingle among the marchers. Then more on-looking crowd mingling. Too many.

Something is wrong. Simon senses it.

Suddenly men from the on-looking crowd pull out hidden daggers, and zealots around Simon begin to fall in their tracks. Even while reaching for their own hidden weapons, the zealots

are assaulted. Blood spatters in all directions. Wide eyes. Mouths agape. Searching for the enemy. But which ones are the enemy? Three men in front of Simon fall. Two beside him. Simon runs for cover.

Other supposed onlookers appear with their daggers. They throw off their disguises and reveal their uniforms. They are the Roman procurator's legionnaires. The civilian recruits run in every direction trying to escape the bloody blades. Many do not make it. Soon the zealots themselves follow, looking for cover.

Simon manages to move to a nearby building and work his way around to the back. Quickly he throws off the head band that declares he is a zealot. In disgust, he works his way through the streets until, an hour later, he comes to an unassuming orchard on the Mount of Olives. He stops there and rests. No one suspects.

This isn't the way to do it. How could Commander Judas have let this happen? Those atheists don't understand anything but blood.

Simon sees a small caravan rushing out of the city. He runs up to it and merges with the group. He doesn't care where they are going. It gets him farther away from Jerusalem.

Eventually, he makes it back to the zealot camp. Time to retreat. A trickling of his fellow patriots arrives here and there until eventually all return. All that are left alive, that is. So does Commander Judas. They are embarrassed for their commander. He orders all of them to go back up north where they were more successful. Recruit more men. Collect more weapons.

Hills in Province of Samaria

A month later, Simon's unit is back into hiding, this time in Samaria. Away from Roman Procurator Pilate. Away from John the Baptizer. Away from all the confusion.

Now, Jesus! Now!

Indeed, a new potential national leader seems to be making himself known up in Galilee. His name is Jesus. Simon and the others will be on hand to destroy him if need be. Or to stand by

him if Commander Judas likes him. Simon doubts the commander will. Don't trust anyone.

Watch out, Simon. That Jesus will change your destiny. And you will let him.

Jerusalem, Province of Judea

And Procurator Pilate? He is proud that he has infiltrators in Commander Judas' ranks. He knows their every move. No one will outsmart the Roman occupation government. After all, the Kingdom of Rome rules the world.

Pilate is amused by some vague rumors of some obscure carpenter up north who actually claims to be starting a new Kingdom of God that will overcome the Roman kingdom of earth.

Commander Judas hears the same rumors. Of course, that Jesus will get nowhere. Just like all the others. Pilate will send a few spies in his direction. Just routine, though. That Jesus doesn't even have weapons.

Beware, Judas. You can't win. Physical can't fight spiritual. Beware, Pilate. Get ready for him, Pilate. Some day you will personally interrogate him and even execute him. But he won't turn to dust and disintegrate. He will be impossible to really kill. Watch out for that Jesus. Watch out for his kingdom—his eternal kind

LIFE APPLICATION

1. Name something your local government is doing you disapprove of. What will you as an individual do to try to get them to change the policy?
2. Think of someone you know who always seems to be getting into trouble. Without dwelling on their problems, how will you reassure them they can use their temperament and inclinations for good?
3. Tell about a time when you were militant and forceful, but using love as your weapon instead of hate. How will you use such tough love toward a problem in your community?

CITATIONS IN THIS CHAPTER (In Order of Appearance)

NEW TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE: Luke 3:1-2; Matthew 10:2-4; Matthew 15:22; Matthew 26:52-53; Ephesians 6:17; Matthew 3:12; Luke 3:1; Luke 3:12-14; Acts 5:37

OLD TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE: Joshua 5:15;

FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS: Wars of the Jews, Bk. 2, 8:1; Wars of the Jews, Bk. 2, 4:1; Wars of the Jews, Bk. 2, 9:2; Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 18, 1:1; Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 18, 2:2; Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 18, 1:1; Antiquities of the Jews, Bk. 18, 3:1-2

TACITUS: Annals, 15:44

REFERENCES TO OTHER BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

made in this chapter in order of appearance

Book 3, *Hearts Afire*, “Cloud Burst”

Book 7, *Shadow of Death*, “Soaring to Nothingness”

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