

PERUSAL SCRIPT

Yeshua

A Gospel Play in Two Acts

by

Mahonri Stewart



Newport, Maine

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YESHUA

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LBT ORDER #3320

*For my children, that they may always know that their father believes in the Son of God
and for my wife Anne, whose spiritual journey has been so aligned with mine:
Spiritually, we understand each other.*

“What we choose to embrace, to be responsive to, is the purest reflection of who we are
and what we love.” —Terryl and Fiona Givens, *The God Who Weeps*

CAST OF CHARACTERS 25+ characters (including 8 female, the remainder male) (some doubling is encouraged)

Yeshua (Joshua, Jesus)

Whisperers

Mother Miriam (Mother Mary)

Servant (at wedding)

The Baptist (John the Baptist)

Pharisee #1

Pharisee #2

Other Pharisees, part of the Sanhedrin

Andreas (Andrew) Disciple of both John The Baptist and Jesus, also an Apostle

Other Sadducees, part of the Sanhedrin

Miriam (sister to Marta and Eleazar[below])

Yochanan Zebedaya (John) Apostle

Ya'aqov Zebedaya (James)

Dark Voices

Voice of Elohim

The Beloved (John the brother of Christ) (Apostle)

Satan 'El

Malach #1

Other Malachim (one male, one female)

Ya'aqov The Just (Barsabas Justus) (Apostle)

Herodias (wife to Herod)

Herod Antipas

Salomé (Daughter to Herodias)

Shimon Cephas (Simon Peter) (Apostle)

Yehudah Sicarri (Judas Iscariot) (Apostle)

Shimon Kanai (Simon Zelotes) (Apostle)

Barabba (Barabbas)

Taddai (Thaddeus) (Apostle)

Marta (Martha) (sister to Miriam and Eleazar)

Eleazar (Lazarus) (brother to Miriam and Marta)

Brother Ya'aqov (brother to Yeshua)

Ruth

Woman of Samaria

Thau'ma (Thomas) (Apostle)

Mattay (Matthias) (Apostle)

Bar'tolmay (Bartholomew) (Apostle)

Phillipos (Phillip) (Apostle)

Ya'aqov Alphaeus

Nicodemus, a Pharisee, Member of the Sanhedrin

Kayafa, a Pharisee, Member of the Sanhedrin

Pilate, Roman prelate

Claudia, Pilate's wife

Shimon the Leper

Crippled Man
Woman
Little Girl
Cleopas
Heavenly Figure
Temple Guards
Citizens of Jerusalem
Accusing Woman
Accusing Man
Kayafa's Man
Witness #1, #2, #3
Roman Captain
Herod's Servants
Guard #1, #2

YESHUA by Mahonri Stewart. Run Time: 2.5 hours. 25 + characters can be doubled to under 20, including 8 females) In this unique and beautiful adaptation of the New Testament Gospels (mainly the Gospel of John), particular attention is paid both to the historical context of the time period, the humanity of those who occupy the story, and the deep feeling of Jesus—or, as he was called in his own tongue, Yeshua. Both as man and as Son of God, Yeshua shines with warmth, power, and vulnerability in this re-telling of the most important of Christian stories that is simultaneously epic and intimate. **ORDER #3320**

Mahonri Stewart is an award winning writer and educator. He has written over two dozen plays, most of which have been produced throughout the U.S. and Europe, including productions in Los Angeles, Scotland, and Switzerland. In 2004, his premiere play *Farewell to Eden* won the Kennedy Center's American College Theater Festival's National Playwriting Award (Second Place) and their National Selection Team Fellowship Award. Since then he has also received numerous other awards and honors as he continues to expand his writing into various mediums, including screenplays, graphic novels, poetry, and novels. He received his MFA degree in Dramatic Writing from Arizona State University. He received his Bachelor's degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University. He's a former Playwright in Residence at the Noorda Regional Theater for Children and Youth.

REVIEW EXCERPT:

“Mahonri Stewart's *Yeshua* tells the familiar story of Jesus, but unlike so many retellings of the Savior's life, it does not play like a highlights reel of the Gospels. At its heart, *Yeshua* is about our need for deeply personal relationships—not only with the divine, but with all of humanity. *Yeshua*, like the title character Himself, invites us to reach out in love to God and our neighbor.” — **Scott Hales**, Literary Critic and Award Winning Cartoonist of *Garden of Enid*

Yeshua

Act One

SCENE 1

YESHUA lays still, almost as if he were dead, on a slab of stone that is used as a bed, tomb, and table throughout the play. The lights are dim. There is a low, vibrating, humming sound. It is not manmade, nor is it overpowering. Subtle, yet unmistakably present, the sound has the sense of an ancient energy rather than a modern creation. As if it came from a source that has existed long before the earth was even formed, an energy that perhaps has always existed. Before too long the humming is accompanied by whispers. They are not sinister, but are certainly mysterious. We cannot yet quite make out what the whispers are saying at first, but then certain words are distinctly heard, among the indiscernible ones:

WHISPERS: Word ... Beginning ... God ... Made ... Life ... Life ... Light ... Light!

(On the last “Light!” a bright light appears above Yeshua and shines down upon his body. More whispers are then discerned among the indistinguishable words)

Witness ... Believe ... World ... Knew Him Not ... Receive ... Power ... Sons of God ... Believe ... Blood ... Flesh ... Of God ... Dwelt Among Us ... Glory ... Grace ... Truth ... Witness!

(The lights fade down to their previous dimness. A door opens and light then floods in from that source, silhouetting the figure within the door frame. The bright light behind the figures fades to reveal MOTHER MIRIAM, the mother of Yeshua. She walks to YESHUA and shakes him gently.)

MOTHER MIRIAM: Wake up—Yeshua. Yeshua, wake up.

(YESHUA awakes, rising strongly, taking in a deep breath. The whispers and the deep humming are suddenly cut off.)

YESHUA: Mother?

MOTHER MIRIAM: I didn't mean to startle you.

YESHUA: I was dreaming. The same dream as last night. There's still parts of it I am trying to ...

MOTHER MIRIAM: I need you.

YESHUA: Mother, can you wait a moment? I'm trying to understand what is being said ...

MOTHER MIRIAM: Your brother's wedding ...

YESHUA: Has that already started? Why didn't anyone wake me?

MOTHER MIRIAM: We couldn't find you—like usual. What are you doing down here?

YESHUA: I was tired.

MOTHER MIRIAM: Well, you've missed the wine then. It's all gone. That's why I need your help ...

YESHUA: Well, if it's gone, I don't see how I can ...

MOTHER MIRIAM: Yes, you can.

(YESHUA understands what she is asking him.)

YESHUA: Mother, this is not just something I can call on for every unimportant ...

MOTHER MIRIAM: This is important.

YESHUA: I know that you're stressed, but my Abba has intended it for ...

MOTHER MIRIAM: It's your brother's wedding and there is no more wine.

(YESHUA looks at his mother searchingly. A soft smile breaks on his face.)

YESHUA: Mother if you always pray like this, my Father will give you any righteous desire—if only because you weary him so much!

MOTHER MIRIAM: There's got to be some advantage to being a stubborn, old widow.

(YESHUA softly, affectionately touches his mother's face and then kisses her on the top of her head.)

YESHUA: Tell them to bring the jars in here. I'll take care of it.

(MOTHER MIRIAM embraces her son tightly and kisses him on the cheek.)

MOTHER MIRIAM: Thank you, Yeshua.

(MOTHER MIRIAM exits. YESHUA looks after her and then seems weighed down by the heaviness of some intense thought. He then laughs ironically. He looks up to God, his Father.)

YESHUA: I often wondered how it would start. But wine at a wedding? Not exactly what I would call dignified.

(The lightness of the joke fades as the heaviness comes back.)

Abba, I don't think I'm ready yet.

(A few SERVANTS start bringing in jars of water; the SERVANT's lines can be divided amongst them.)

SERVANT: Master Yeshua ...

YESHUA: Do not call me Master. There is only one Master, our Abba.

SERVANT: Yes, Yeshua. But this water—surely it's not appropriate for such an occasion. It's meant for cleaning.

YESHUA: Then it's perfect. It will be how they remember me.

(YESHUA comes over the water; whose clear, bright, moving light reflects upon his face. As he changes it, the light turns to a red, moving light shining upon his face. YESHUA closes his eyes for a moment, exhaling, as if energy has passed away from him. The SERVANTS are stunned.)

SERVANT: As red as blood ...

(YESHUA dips a cup into it and hands it to one of the SERVANTS.)

YESHUA: Drink.

(Each SERVANT drinks.)

SERVANT: That's the good stuff!

(The SERVANTS laugh, but then YESHUA looks at each of them searchingly.)

YESHUA: This is not a mere trick.

SERVANT: Of course not.

YESHUA: Remember me.

(The SERVANTS nod and then, still in awe, pick up the jars and bring them out. YESHUA looks up to his Abba.)

Please, Abba, prepare me for this.

SCENE 2

A group of men and women have surrounded THE BAPTIST, among them are YOCHANAN ZEBADYAH, YA'AQOV ZEBADYAH, and ANDREAS, as well as members of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and other members of the Jewish community. On the outskirts is a woman, MIRIAM: She is nervous to be there. THE BAPTIST is standing in water (whether literal water, or portrayed through some other way such as lighting, etc.). He is a wild looking man, with camel hair and leather clothing, austere and stoic.

THE BAPTIST: Come, be immersed and cleansed! Confess your sins and be clean!

(PHARISEE #1 makes his way through the crowd towards PHARISEE #2: MIRIAM, unaware of him, almost bumps into him and the PHARISEE recoils from her. She falls to the ground.)

PHARISEE #1: Get away from me!

MIRIAM: I am sorry, sir.

PHARISEE #1: Don't talk to me! If you touched me—well, can you imagine? Go—go!

(MIRIAM retreats to a group of other women. The BAPTIST notes this, disapprovingly, but then continues.)

THE BAPTIST: Prepare the way of Adonai and make his paths straight! Show your commitment to Adonai with a clean heart and clean hands!

PHARISEE #1: I will submit to this, Yochanan. It is prudently done. The Law tells us to be clean vessels. As a Pharisee, I see the wisdom in this.

THE BAPTIST: What I offer can't clean you.

PHARISEE #1: I keep the law, I purify myself in all things. I do not eat any unclean thing, I do not touch the impure person, nor the dead. I am clean!

THE BAPTIST: You are not clean. What I offer is so much more than washing your hands, reading off a list, or a ritual bath!

(There is murmuring among the group.)

PHARISEE #2: Do you dispute the law?

THE BAPTIST: No.

PHARISEE #1: Then baptize me—I'm clean! I follow the Law of Moses. The Law has said, "You shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." It is so with me. I tithe, I sacrifice, I should not be denied anything.

(Enter YESHUA, unnoticed by everyone. He watches quietly.)

THE BAPTIST: The Law also says, "You shall not hate your brother in your heart ... You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself."

(Indicating MIRIAM.)

From what I have seen, you have not kept the Law after all.

PHARISEE #1: Then I don't believe you understand it.

THE BAPTIST: Bring forth fruits of repentance—apologize to this woman, and I will baptize you.

PHARISEE #1: To a woman? Who do you think you are?

THE BAPTIST: I immerse people in water, to help them repent. But there comes a man after me who is mightier. I am not worthy to bear his shoes. I can baptize you with water. He can baptize you with fire.

(PHARISEE #1 is about to turn away until the BAPTIST says)

The next question then is: who do you think you are?

PHARISEE #1: I am a son of Abraham, he is my father. I don't have to answer to you.

THE BAPTIST: God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. The day will come when people of all nations will be able to adopt Abraham as their father.

PHARISEE #2: Blasphemy!

THE BAPTIST: You're a generation of vipers! Who has warned you to flee the wrath to come? The axe is laid against the root of the trees, those who don't grow good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire.

(PHARISEE #1 seems rattled for a moment, as if he is considering it. He looks towards MIRIAM, but then shakes it off and angrily exits, followed by other PHARISEES. YOCHANAN ZEBEDYAH and YA'AQOV ZEBEDYAH step forward.)

YOCHANAN: May I be baptized, Yochanan?

YA'AQOV: Me as well?

THE BAPTIST: Yochanan, Ya'aqov, good to see the sons of Zebedyah back again. Have you brought forth the fruit of repentance?

YOCHANAN: We are—imperfect. But we want to love like you love.

THE BAPTIST: No. Not like me. Like God loves.

YA'AQOV: Yes. I want to be truly clean.

THE BAPTIST: Good answer.

(ANDREAS also stands forth.)

ANDREAS: So do I.

THE BAPTIST: And what is your name, sir?

ANDREAS: Andreas. I desire to follow Adonai with all my heart.

THE BAPTIST: Then come, my brothers. Come and bury the man of sin and be reborn.

(As the BAPTIST baptizes YA'AQOV, ANDREAS, and YOCHANAN, MIRIAM makes her way to the front of the group. When the two brothers are baptized, she seems enamored with the process and is full of desire to follow them. But something in her makes her hesitate. She almost frantically leaves, before she runs into YESHUA and tumbles to the floor.)

MIRIAM: Oh, I am so sorry, so sorry.

(YESHUA doesn't recoil from her touch, but rather gently takes her hand and lifts her back to her feet. He doesn't let go of her hand. MIRIAM looks down at the touch, confused.)

Don't you know who I am?

YESHUA: Tell me who you believe you are.

MIRIAM: I am Mad Miriam.

YESHUA: I know you by another name.

MIRIAM: I am Mad Miriam! The woman with seven devils. They don't touch me. I am unclean.

(Suddenly DARK VOICES are heard, whispering and hissing. MIRIAM reacts to them. We see dark shadows play on MIRIAM, which she also reacts to. No one else, except YESHUA hears or sees them. There are those that discretely distance themselves from MIRIAM.)

DARK VOICES: Unclean! Like an issue of black blood—flow, flow like a river—unclean! Your spirit like a river, flowing out of you—never to return—Mad Miriam—Mad, Mad Miriam—unclean!

MIRIAM: No—no!

(YESHUA touches her cheek and the DARK VOICES are suddenly gone. MIRIAM looks up at YESHUA with surprise. His gentleness eases her nerves.)

YESHUA: Go. Be baptized by him.

(MIRIAM turns towards the BAPTIST, yearning. The BAPTIST, finished with the other two, reaches his hand to MIRIAM.)

MIRIAM: I—I am unclean!

(MIRIAM exits in a frightened rush.)

YESHUA: Miriam!

THE BAPTIST: Yeshua.

(The BAPTIST scrambles out of the water and embraces YESHUA, as they both laugh and

exclaim in joy.)

YESHUA: You were missed at Ya’aqov’s wedding. Not very becoming of a cousin.

THE BAPTIST: Well, you know how I live now—we’re very strict not to—imbibe in riotous living.

YESHUA: I also hear that you are dabbling in politics.

THE BAPTIST: My comments about Herod—those are nothing.

YESHUA: That’s not what I’ve heard. Are you being careful? Your Essenes aren’t supposed to express anger. Agree with your adversaries quickly or they’ll think you are their enemy.

THE BAPTIST: I do not mind if he thinks I am his enemy.

YESHUA: He is a powerful man. He could put you in prison—or worse.

THE BAPTIST: Don’t worry yourself about me.

YESHUA: I have a foreboding about this ...

THE BAPTIST: I will not hide and mince in the face of evil, Yeshua. Antipas Herod is no better than his butcher father!

(The crowd picks up on this. Some nod and voice assent, while others whisper disapprovingly to each other. Some even leave as the BAPTIST turns to them and addresses his views publicly after noting their eavesdropping.)

The Herods pretend to follow the law, to convert to our religion, and want to be called orthodox—but despite how they clamor about their marriage ties to the Maccabee line, they are not children of God—only their actions can make them children of God! Herod’s marriage to his brother’s wife is not lawful, and so he has truly shown where his allegiance lies: in his passions!

(This stirs more intense reactions from those gathered. YESHUA takes the BAPTIST aside.)

YESHUA: Don’t give that which is holy to dogs, Yochanan. If you give your pearls to swine, they will turn and rend you.

THE BAPTIST: Then let them rend me. I am not afraid of the consequences of speaking my heart.

YESHUA: I’m worried about you.

THE BAPTIST: The day will come when you, too, will have to stand before the powerful and tell them the simple, insulting truth.

YESHUA: In the right time, in the right place.

THE BAPTIST: Well then, maybe this is my time and my place. But why are you really here, Yeshua? I doubt an intense desire to discuss the current political climate brought you all the way out here.

YESHUA: I have come to be baptized.

THE BAPTIST: But—I need to be baptized by you, not the other way around.

YESHUA: Allow it to happen this way for now. I need to fulfill all righteousness.

(The BAPTIST nods. They go into the water together. The group gathers around to witness it, and

YOCHANAN, ANDREAS, and YA'AQOV seem especially drawn to the ordinance. The BAPTIST immerses YESHUA, and when he arises, we either see some kind of representation of a dove, or at least hear it cooing and flying. A VOICE is also heard)

VOICE: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

(The voice is neither loud, nor dramatic. Yet, although it is quiet, it is piercing. Most of the crowd seems not to hear it, except for YESHUA, the BAPTIST, YA'AQOV, ANDREAS, and YOCHANAN.)

THE BELOVED: Did you hear that?

YA'AQOV THE JUST: Yes. I thought I was crazy for a moment ...

ANDREAS: He—he can't be ...

(YESHUA hugs his cousin and then walks out of the water and exits.)

THE BELOVED: Follow him.

(YOCHANAN, YA'AQOV, and ANDREAS try to follow YESHUA, but are cut off by the people who are crowding around the BAPTIST.)

YA'AQOV: We're losing him!

THE BELOVED: I can't see him. Where did he go?

YA'AQOV: He's gone.

SCENE 3

The crowd around the BAPTIST freezes in place. SATAN'EL enters. He does not look traditionally demonic or sinister. His appearance isn't modern, nor contemporary to YESHUA's era. Instead he has a simple otherworldliness. He looks over the crowd, looking for YESHUA:

SATAN'EL: He's gone.

(SATAN'EL snaps and the lights turn off, making the crowd disappear, except for a single light on SATAN'EL.)

Again.

(A multitude of stars appear. SATAN'EL climbs some stairs. At the top of the stairs suddenly appears one of the MALACHIM (angels) with a flaming sword. This MALACH is a truly intimidating, awe inspiring being, a knight, guardian, or sentinel of the universe.)

I need access to him.

(The MALACH is silent.)

Yeshua. I need access to Yeshua. Or Yahweh. Or whatever you want me to call him now.

(More MALACHIM (of both genders) gather around the bottom of the stairs, similar in appearance to the first. SATAN'EL goes back down the stairs to confront the ones at the bottom.)

Look, I understand that you're protective, but this is necessary.

(The MALACHIM raise their swords a bit, in warning positions.)

Oh, please! Look, really, I understand that we've had a rough history, but it's my right. I am Ha-Satan, "The Accuser." I am Satan-El, the god to obstruct and oppose!

MALACH #1: You may be the god of that earth, but you are no true god.

SATAN'EL: This is my title, this is my priesthood, this is my responsibility. You may not like it, but I have my role, just as you have yours. And he is not exempt! Especially him!

(SATAN'EL tries to move past the angels, but they encroach upon him.)

What, are you afraid? That he'll fail? Don't you Malachim have faith in this god of yours?

(The MALACHIM hesitate.)

You try to hide him from me, don't think that I haven't noticed. You're not supposed to do that.

(The MALACHIM become defensive again.)

Where is he?

(YESHUA suddenly appears praying.)

Talking to Father. Fasting even. For quite some time, by the looks of it. It looks hot, too. Where is he, the desert? He'll be weak with hunger, exhaustion, and heat. Perfect.

(SATAN'EL advances towards YESHUA, but the MALACHIM stop him.)

Don't you get it?

(SATAN'EL goes back up to the stairs and confronts the MALACH on top of them.)

Do I need to bring this to the Ophanim or the Cherubim or the Seraphim? Perhaps the Sons of El? Get me Micha'el or Gabri'el or Rapha'el—get me Metatron!

MALACH #1: Lucifer, Son of the Morning ...

SATAN'EL: Why does everyone still insist on calling me that? One person interprets a Hebrew's reference to a defeated Babylonian King to be me and suddenly it's all the rage!

MALACH #1: It fits your fallen nature ...

SATAN'EL: *(Suddenly hostile.)* You don't know my nature, nor my wrath.

MALACH #1: You are not worthy. You are the Dragon who drew away one third of the stars of heaven ...

SATAN'EL: I have a job to do. Every court needs a prosecuting attorney.

(MALACH hesitates and then motions to the other MALACHIM. They exit.)

MALACH #1: You have bounds.

SATAN'EL: I know my boundaries. Now leave me to my work.

(Exit MALACH #1. SATAN'EL descends the stairs, now finally alone with YESHUA. The lights become harshly bright and there is sound of buzzing, desert insects.)

YESHUA: Abba! Please, don't leave me yet!

(YESHUA becomes aware of SATAN'EL.)

SATAN'EL: Hello, Yeshua. Sorry to break up the conversation, I know it's been a while. I had to clear up a bureaucratic nightmare up top, but you'll be seeing more of me from here on out.

(YESHUA doesn't answer and goes over and sits away from him.)

They're already spreading rumors now—speculating. They thought the Baptist was impressive, but after he deferred to you—well, the tongues are flapping now! They think you're someone pretty great.

YESHUA: No one is great, except our Father.

SATAN'EL: Oh, you deign to answer me this time! That's progress. Yes, get those fools talking about you. Oh, but what would they say if they heard who you really think you are?

(YESHUA doesn't answer.)

Tell me, you little man from Galilee, how do you expect anyone to believe you when you tell them that you're the literal Son of God?

YESHUA: You know who I Am.

SATAN'EL: I know who you are, son of man. But do you know who you are? Yes, I know about all those visions, visitations you think you've been receiving—you think that they've told you that you're something special. Tell me, you insignificant carpenter's son, how do you know you're not delusional? Yes, your mother tells you that she had a miraculous conception—and she had your step father believing that story, certainly. But perhaps it's much more simple than that. Perhaps it was merely the story made up by a young woman who was desperate not to become outcast as a single mother.

(This makes YESHUA visibly angry. He stands and walks to SATAN'EL. YESHUA then calms himself and sits back down, again facing away from SATAN'EL.)

I have seen it so many times. These little actors, these little liars, using other people's good faith to manipulate their own place in the world. But you—yes, I know that you're different. I see that, an honest face like yours. You believe. Why, you're self-deceived! And your broken little mind has made you mad with it, with hallucinations, day dreams, and voices. Sadly pathetic.

YESHUA: I know who I Am.

SATAN'EL: Well then! You know, you know! Just keep telling them that you know! Not much of a logical argument, but perhaps you can convince them with sheer earnestness. I'm sorry, my simple, small, Galilean carpenter, these worldly Sadducees, learned Pharisees, and entrenched sinners aren't going to buy that. No, they'll want proof. Evidence. Can you give them that?

(YESHUA doesn't answer.)

You're looking pretty hungry there, Yeshua. Do you religious types think that such waste does anybody any good? The Romans sacrifice their food, too, burn it like your Jews. They think the smoke ascends to their gods and then the gods eat it. Pretty preposterous.

(YESHUA doesn't answer.)

Well, you'll certainly need to be more Cosmopolitan in your approach, that's certain. That trick with the wine was nice. Why, that's it—you saw how those servants looked at you afterwards. Now that's a statement, that's showmanship! You'll need some of that, if you want to get anywhere with this self-proclaimed godship of yours. In fact, let's go with that, shall we? Let's kill two birds with one—stone.

(SATAN'EL picks up a stone and places it before YESHUA.)

We'll give you something to eat, hungry as you are, and prove your divinity in the process. If you are truly the Son of God, make this stone into bread.

(YESHUA finally stands and faces SATAN'EL, speaking calmly)

YESHUA: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.”

(SATAN'EL pauses, but then continues as if nothing had happened.)

SATAN'EL: Yes, this Son of God business is going to be tricky, that's certain. Especially with these Jews. Let's face it, after King Josiah they became pretty entrenched with this one god idea. Stubborn Deuteronomists. Yes, putting a second god on their roster is going to be a hard sell, believe me, I've tried. They tend to stone people who try and do that. It's all rather—precarious.

(SATAN'EL snaps his fingers and the lights change. YESHUA suddenly finds himself on the ledge of a tall temple. We hear the sounds of a brisk wind, which makes YESHUA's situation all the more precarious.)

Herod's temple. An impressive piece of workmanship. The man was a scoundrel, but at least he understood the religious devotion of the people.

YESHUA: Why have you brought me here?

SATAN'EL: Look, they're gathering. Look at all these devout pilgrims. Going through the ache and agony of their oppressed lives, being punished by the Caesars and the Herods and the Sanhedrins and the tax collectors—they cry to God, but does their God listen? These poor Israelites, driven and enslaved and misused by one nation after another, one leader after another. Do they receive any reward for their faith? Please, show them a God who loves them, who recognizes their sacrifices. If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down off this temple, for it is written, “He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Prove yourself to them. Prove yourself to yourself. Show them their God.

YESHUA: It is written again, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”

(SATAN'EL pauses again, for the first time seeming to crack his collected exterior. It's only momentary, as he smiles gently and snaps his fingers. There is a light change again, as they hear the sound of birds and a light breeze. The stars appear again.)

SATAN'EL: Who wants a man made heaven of stone, when you can have what our Abba already created for us? This mountain is a greater temple than any man has made. From here we can see the entire world. Every nation, every kingdom. This is my sanctuary, where I go to find—solace. From my loneliness, to my loneliness. A person like me has a lot to ponder on. But it's beautiful, and mankind just wants to destroy it all. They're ungrateful creatures. They mock every sacrifice we give them, they squander every chance of progress that we offer. You'll discover that very soon, if you keep on the course you're on. You may not remember this, but you and I used to have long discussions about those people down there. About what they were capable of—for good and evil. I had an idea once, can I share it with you?

(YESHUA doesn't answer.)

People talk about power as if it were a bad thing. I don't believe that. In the right hands, it's the only good thing. In your hands, for example, you would make that world good. Give you enough armies, enough leverage, enough force, why you could crusade through that world down there and create Zion, a new Jerusalem! They don't know what they need. They need a strong hand, a good hand to force them

into their happiness, into their peace. I'm the Prince of that World now, and I haven't always had the best of help. But you, Yeshua, both you and I know that you're special. With your help, and the resources at your command, we can finally give that world peace. Everything you see down there—I'll give it to you. All these people and places and civilizations, I will give all of it to you, if you but recognize me as your ruler. Fall down and worship me, and then they will fall down and worship you.

(There is a tense silence, where SATAN'EL is hopeful that he may have finally gotten through to YESHUA. But YESHUA disappoints him)

YESHUA: Get away, Satan; for it is written, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

SATAN'EL: *(Pause.)* Good work, Yeshua. But we're not done.

(The MALACHIM appear.)

MALACH #1: You most certainly are.

SATAN'EL: Yes, the "boundaries."

(SATAN'EL disappears. The MALACHIM bring YESHUA bread and drink.)

MALACH #1: Adonai, Father is pleased. Your fast is over.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 4

The BAPTIST is sitting at the edge of the water. He looks within it, lost in thought, as if the water possibly held the answers to some deep seated questions of his. Enter YOCHANAN, YA'AQOV, and ANDREAS:

YA'AQOV THE JUST: You should hear them! Truly, you have caught the heart of this people!

(The BAPTIST looks at these disciples of his, somewhat forlornly.)

YOCHANAN: What is wrong, Rabbi?

THE BAPTIST: Wrong? Nothing is wrong.

YA'AQOV THE JUST: You should be happy. You have fulfilled your duty.

THE BAPTIST: Yes. I am fulfilled.

(The disciples glance at each other uneasily.)

ANDREAS: The man from Galilee that came those weeks ago ...

THE BAPTIST: Yeshua.

ANDREAS: Yeshua. You seemed to—revere him.

THE BAPTIST: He is the one to truly cleanse us from sin. He is the one I often spoke of.

ANDREAS: How do you know this?

THE BAPTIST: I saw an angel once.

YOCHANAN: An angel?

THE BAPTIST: The angel told me of my mission to baptize with water. And he told that whoever I would see the Spirit descend upon, he was the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. When I baptized Yeshua, I saw ...

YOCHANAN: The Holy Spirit in the shape of a bird. A dove.

THE BAPTIST: You saw this?

YOCHANAN: Yes, all three of us did.

THE BAPTIST: Then you must follow him.

(Enter YESHUA: They are all stunned to see him there, just as they were discussing him. The BAPTIST stands and acknowledges him in reverence. YESHUA returns the respectful attention.)

THE BAPTIST: Behold the Lamb of God.

(YESHUA turns to the disciples.)

YESHUA: What are you looking for?

YOCHANAN: Rabbi, where do you live?

YESHUA: Why does that matter?

YOCHANAN: Because where you go, that is where I want to be.

YESHUA: Then come and see.

(YESHUA exits and YOCHANAN and ANDREAS immediately follow, exiting with him. YA'AQOV hesitates. He turns to the BAPTIST.)

YA'AQOV THE JUST: What is to happen to you?

THE BAPTIST: That doesn't matter.

YA'AQOV THE JUST: Of course it matters. You have built up this tremendous following, you have influence now. That shouldn't go to waste. God built you up, and now you're just going to let this man take that away from you?

THE BAPTIST: A man can receive nothing, unless heaven gives it to him. Yeshua is preferred before me.

YA'AQOV THE JUST: You are a great man.

THE BAPTIST: Do not mistake this, Ya'aqov. I am not the Mashiach, but I have prepared you for him. The one at the marriage who is to marry the bride is the Bridegroom. I am the Bridegroom's friend who rejoices to see the wedding. Do you understand?

YA'AQOV THE JUST: I think so.

THE BAPTIST: He is going to increase, I am going to decrease.

YA'AQOV THE JUST: Where are you going to go? What are you going to do?

THE BAPTIST: Don't worry about me. Ya'aqov, believe him. Believe in him.

(YA'AQOV nods. He then turns away from the BAPTIST and exits. The lights fade on the BAPTIST. In the darkness, vibrant music is heard. We are revealed chambers in the palace of HEROD: Among a group of Herod's admirers and grovelers, there is merriment, wine, and raucous laughter. HERODIAS', the wife of Herod, approaches her husband. SATAN'EL hovers in the background.)

HERODIAS: Herod—Antipas, my dear, I'm still not satisfied with our earlier conversation.

HEROD: Blast it, woman, can't you see that I'm trying to enjoy myself here? I absolutely refuse to mix pleasure and politics!

HERODIAS: No, this needs to be addressed now. He has insulted both of us!

HEROD: Do you think I like the man? The Baptist is no friend of mine.

HERODIAS: Then show your displeasure. Let him know who he's dealing with!

HEROD: Lower your voice, Herodias. You will not speak to me like that.

HERODIAS: I—I am sorry, my lord. But, truly, who really cares about the traditions of these little religionists? So what, you are divorced and I was married to your brother. Why should they care if I was married to your father! Why, that nice, little play we saw in Rome— er—*Oedipus the King!* We're not so bad as that, are we? Compared to that, the The Romans wouldn't even bat an eye at our relationship.

(SATAN'EL soothes HEROD slightly.)

HEROD: It's not Romans I worry about. What does a woman know about these things? Referencing Sophocles as if she understood him.

(SATAN'EL places his hand on HERODIAS's shoulder, encouraging her boldness.)

HERODIAS: He undercuts your power. If you let him go unpunished, others will follow his example.

HEROD: The more I oppress their leaders, the more I defy their traditions, the more I silence their voices, the more they will resent me. I went against my good sense in marrying you!

(The merriment is dying down, as the party goers are subtly riveted on this domestic drama unfolding before them.)

HERODIAS: So you think I am your mistake? Your blunder?

HEROD: What I think is that if I push them anymore, I shall have a revolt on my hands. The Baptist has a following!

HERODIAS: Then you have no power. You are no ruler. You are no man! Everyone laughs at you as soon as they know you're not in earshot.

(HEROD ferociously slaps HERODIAS, who falls to the floor, then raises her hands to deflect any further blows.)

HEROD: Do you want me to show you how much power I have? You want me to show all of these people

how I have power in my own household?

(SATAN'EL soothes both HEROD and HERODIAS.)

HERODIAS: I'm sorry. Of course, you're right.

(Grudgingly, HEROD accepts this. He then sits, as his guests stand around in shocked silence.)

HEROD: Well, laugh! Get drunk, joke, flirt, grovel. That's why all of you sycophants are here, isn't it?

(Nervously, the party resumes. SATAN'EL whispers in HERODIAS's ear. HERODIAS smiles.)

HERODIAS: My lord, I have prepared a gift for your birthday.

HEROD: A gift?

HERODIAS: To show my devotion to you.

(Sensual music begins to play. HERODIAS's daughter SALOME enters, dressed in dancer's clothing.)

HEROD: Herodias, what on earth is your daughter wearing?

HERODIAS: Just watch, Antipas. I think you will enjoy this.

(SALOME begins to dance.)

All for you, my dear.

(HERODIAS begins to massage HEROD's shoulders, he visibly relaxes.)

Yes, that's right, relax ...

(SALOME continues to dance. When she finishes, HEROD beckons to her.)

HEROD: My dear, come here.

(SALOME approaches HEROD.)

You're a true artist. Now just as I can punish those who displease me, I can also reward those who please me. Now think, think of me, my dear. Think of how powerful I am, and how far I can reach. Think of my influence and my strength. Now, as you think of all of that, think of something that I, and only I, can give you. Ask for it, and I vow to you that it will be yours. I am a man of my word and I can fulfill that word with the strength of my arm.

(SALOME dashes to her mother to consult with her.)

SALOME: Mother, I don't know what to ask for.

HERODIAS: Do you love me?

SALOME: You know I do.

HERODIAS: Then ask him this for me, and my love will reward you for the rest of your life.

(HERODIAS whispers into SALOME's ear. The daughter nods and walks over to HEROD.)

HEROD: What riches have you decided upon, my love?

SALOME: Uncle—I mean Father. Father, I would like ...

(SALOME looks back to her mother, nervously. HERODIAS encourages her.)

Since you have promised me with an oath that whatever I want, I can have, there is nothing more sweet

to me than this: I want the head of the Baptist in a charger.

(HEROD pales and looks over at HERODIAS: HERODIAS looks at him with resolve and indicates all the people watching this exchange.)

HEROD: *(His gaze still on Herodias.)* Call in my executioner.

(Blackout.)

SCENE 5

We hear the sounds of the sea, including gentle waves lapping, seagulls, etc. SHIMON (who is later called CEPHAS) is there with ANDREAS, YA'AQOV THE JUST, and the YOCHANAN, all of them helping SHIMON mend his fishing nets.

YOCHANAN: It's true, Shimon. Every word of it.

SHIMON CEPHAS: You must think I'm the most gullible man alive.

ANDREAS: Brother, we have seen this man do uncanny things. He has healed the blind, cured diseases, accurately prophesied ...

SHIMON CEPHAS: This is a joke.

YA'AQOV: He said he'd meet us back here. You can see for yourself.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Look, we're fishermen. What do prophets have to do with us?

ANDREAS: Shimon, don't you ever just feel like we're living so little of the life Father and Mother intended for us?

SHIMON CEPHAS: Andreas, what I feel is that I have a family to feed. Can this prophet of yours be like Moses and give my wife and children bread to eat from heaven? For, if he can't, then I still need to go back to these nets every day.

(Enter YESHUA.)

YESHUA: Moses didn't give the bread from heaven. It was from Adonai.

(SHIMON CEPHAS looks over at YESHUA and gives him a scrutinizing stare.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: You must be the man my brother is talking about. Tell me, Yeshua, have you even worked a day in your life?

YESHUA: I was a carpenter.

(SHIMON goes to YESHUA and inspects YESHUA's hands.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: *(Searching pause.)* Good. Come fishing with us, Yeshua. Let's see if those arms of yours still know how to strain.

YESHUA: I would love to.

(Lights fade on YESHUA and the fishermen and then rise again to show the passage of time. It is now night and the stars are out. They all draw in an empty net.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: Well, Yeshua, some of that manna from God would be awfully nice about now.

ANDREAS: Shimon ...

SHIMON CEPHAS: Don't worry, Andreas, I hold him no more responsible than I do anyone else. I am the one who is responsible for my family, and only me. But that's the thing, Yeshua, people will start blaming you if you start claiming to be God's mouthpiece. And no one can live up to those kinds of expectations, even a nice man like you.

(YESHUA smiles at SHIMON and then looks up at the stars above them.)

YESHUA: It's a beautiful night, isn't it?

(SHIMON looks up. He also smiles.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: You know, I hadn't noticed.

(YESHUA looks at him knowingly and then hands his part of the net to SHIMON.)

YESHUA: Cast the net on the other side.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Yeshua, we've been trying all night. We're tired.

YESHUA: One more time.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Yeshua ...

YESHUA: Trust me.

SHIMON CEPHAS: *(Laughs.)* Well, I'll keep you to your word then.

YESHUA: Do.

(SHIMON is taken aback by this. The fishermen glance at each other and then they all anxiously throw their net onto the other side of the boat and are immediately startled.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: What! What!

YOCHANAN: Pull, men! Pull!

(YESHUA then joins them and pulls on the net also. They're all laughing with joy as they pull in a huge net of fish.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: We're sinking! We need to throw some over!

ANDREAS: Amazing!

(Once they've stabilized the boat, the fishermen look at each other in amazement and then all look at YESHUA: SIMON immediately kneels before YESHUA.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: Leave me, Rabbi, I didn't believe.

(YESHUA pulls SHIMON to his feet.)

YESHUA: I will draw close to you, if you draw close to me, Shimon. You worried about your family. As

you now can see, you're all better off with me, than without me. But I'm going to ask you to become fishers of men.

(Lights fade on YESHUA and the fishermen.)

SCENE 6

Enter YEHUDAH SICARRI, SHIMON KANAI, and TADDAI:

YEHUDAH SICARRI: This had better be worth our time, Taddai.

TADDAI: Believe me, Yehudah, this could be the most important meeting you ever attend.

SHIMON KANAI: Where is Barabba? You told us that Barabba had agreed to be here.

(Enter BARABBA.)

BARABBA: And so I did.

(They gather around BARABBA, who carries himself with authority.)

TADDAI: Barabba, this is Shimon and this is ...

BARABBA: Yehudah.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Barabba and I are well known to each other, Taddai.

TADDAI: Excuse me, I didn't know.

BARABBA: Well met, brethren. Kanai.

YEHUDAH, TADDAI, and SHIMON: Kanai.

BARABBA: And what does kanai mean, Taddai?

TADDAI: One who is zealous on behalf of God.

BARABBA: Good, my friend. Zealous—that is the new name the Romans are giving us. Zealots. I like it, don't you? It's a name they have come to respect—even fear.

SHIMON KANAI: But that fear is turning into anger, Barabba. Is what we're doing having any effect?

BARABBA: Don't despair, Shimon. Our cause is just, our rebellion deserving. The Great Master of the Universe wants his covenant people free from oppression. He wants us free from this Roman yoke! And he will qualify all of us for the task at hand.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Speaking of the task at hand, let's get into it. Why have you brought us here?

SHIMON KANAI: Tell him, Taddai.

TADDAI: I—I have a brother. He has become very prominent of late. He is a kind of rabbi, or teacher. Like Yochannan the Baptist ...

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You are brother to the Nazarene? Yeshua?

(Enter SATAN'EL, unseen and unnoticed the entire scene.)

SHIMON KANAI: So you've heard of him!

BARABBA: He is beginning to create a following.

TADDAI: Growing up, Mother and Father always treated him differently, had these strange stories about him and his—mission. Many of my brothers and sisters didn't take any of it seriously—until recently. Some of us were even—resentful—some of them still are. But the more I watch him, the more I am impressed. He is becoming a great man—a great man!

SHIMON KANAI: His doctrines are impressive and—and he has done miraculous things. Unexplainable things. Like Moses! Some are even calling him—they are calling him the anointed one.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: *(Genuine interest)* The Mashiach?

(Then glancing at BARRABA.)

And what bearing has this upon us?

TADDAI: Don't you see? He has an audience! He has the people's attention! He can lead our people to revolt! He can lead us to freedom!

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Barabba is our leader.

BARABBA: Yehudah, it doesn't matter who the leader is. What matters is the liberty of the Covenant People. And if this Yeshua can better further that end than I can, then who am I to stand in the way? I want you two to keep following this Yeshua of Nazareth. If he has the influence, and if he is one with our cause, I want you to tell me. Now, if you'll excuse Yehudah and I, we have some other matters to discuss. Kanai.

TADDAI and SHIMON. Kanai.

(Exit TADDAI and SHIMON KANAI.)

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You're not serious about stepping aside for this man, are you? I mean, really, can any good thing come out of Nazareth?

BARABBA: I need you to be more careful with what you say, Yehudah. You are too impulsive. Especially for what I want you to do.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You have an assignment for me then?

BARABBA: Pull out your dagger.

(YEHUDAH SICARRI pulls out his dagger, which has been hidden beneath his robes, and kneels before BARABBA, raising his dagger in front of him.)

YEHUDAH SICARRI: In the name of Adonai, I have covenanted to be a Sicarri, one of the dagger men. I am like a blade in the hand of the Holy One, to cut off the wicked from the righteous, like diseased flesh from the bone. I am willing to die, to burn as fire, if that fire will bring down the enemies of Adonai. Amen.

BARABBA: Amen. Now with that holy oath, I give you your sacred mission.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Thank you for your trust in me.

BARABBA: Yehudah, I want you to become a follower of this Yeshua. Become his friend, gain his trust, become part of his inner circle. If he can be of any use to us, I want you to sway him to our cause.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I understand.

BARABBA: But, Yehudah, if this Yeshua stands in our way, you are to find a way to sweep him from our path—with whatever method that's necessary.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Barabba ...

BARABBA: Is this not part of your oath?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Yes, but ...

BARABBA: Are you with me or against me?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I am with you.

BARABBA: Then go, Yehudah Sicarri, and bring our people closer to freedom. Kanai.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Kanai.

(SATAN'EL whispers something in BARRABA's ear.)

BARABBA: And Yehudah?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Yes?

BARABBA: You're right. I wouldn't willingly give up my power. But I am willing to share it for the good of our people. I would share it with Yeshua of Nazareth. If you serve me well, you also would rise high in our great nation to come.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You honor me.

(Exit YEHUDAH. Exit BARRABA.)

SCENE 7

It has become very dark. SATAN'EL is about to exit as well, until he sees MIRIAM enter. MIRIAM can see him and tries to retreat from him, but is unable to.

MIRIAM: Get away from me!

SATAN'EL: You resist too much, Miriam. How many of my friends have taken up within you now? Only seven? Why, I know mortals who have a whole Legion and they live completely normal lives. If you don't resist their presence, your guests can make life sensational for you. If you make room for me in there, there's no limit to what we can do for you. I'll even crowd out the others for you, if you'd like. Make your mind more focused. I have some authority with them, you know.

MIRIAM: I don't want anything to do with you, any of you!

SATAN'EL: That's a shame. Then I'm afraid it's not going to get any better for you. We know human psychology backwards and forwards. We know which chords of the brain to pluck and strike to get just the right amount of dissonance ...

MIRIAM: Please ...

SATAN'EL: Please? Oh, well since you said please!

(Entertained, SATAN'EL laughs but then voices are heard.)

YESHUA: *(Voice Over)* Do you believe that I can ... ?

MARTA: *(Voice Over)* Please, I know you can help my sister!

ELEAZAR: *(Voice Over)* We both believe!

SATAN'EL: No—dig in, you idiots! He's here! Fight for her!

(A change happens in MIRIAM as the devils within her take over. Suddenly YESHUA appears.)

MIRIAM: Let us alone! What do we have to do with you, Yeshua of Nazareth?

YESHUA: Let her go.

SATAN'EL: Leave them alone! Haven't you done enough to our kind, you tyrant?

MIRIAM: Have you come to destroy us? Holy One of God! Please, don't torment us! Don't send us into the deep!

YESHUA: Hold your peace! Get out of her!

(MIRIAM screams, as does SATAN'EL, but suddenly SATAN'EL is gone and there is a great deal of light that gradually appears, with a group of people surrounding MIRIAM and YESHUA, including MIRIAM's sister MARTA and her brother ELEAZAR; Yeshua's disciples, male and female; and curious onlookers, both believing and hostile. MIRIAM, whose devils are finally gone, looks around in wonder.)

MARTA: Miriam? Are you all right?

ELEAZAR: How do you feel, sister?

MIRIAM: *(Pause.)* I can hear birds.

(Pause.)

Marta. Eleazar.

YESHUA: Miriam, stand.

MIRIAM: How is this possible?

YESHUA: Your sister Marta and your brother Eleazar have great faith. Your family is happy to see you.

(MIRIAM embraces ELEAZAR and MARTA. There is some fervent debate among those gathered, until one confronts YESHUA.)

PHARISEE #1: You cast out devils by the power of the devil. You cast them out by the chief of devils Beetzlebug!

YESHUA: (*Laughs.*) Well, that would be rather foolish of Beezlebub! If Satan is divided against himself, how can his house stand? A house divided, falls.

MIRIAM: Then what does this mean?

YESHUA: The kingdom of God has come upon you. It is within you.

MIRIAM: Adonai, if you will have me, I will follow you.

YESHUA: Miriam—with you I didn't even have to ask.

(Enter BROTHER YA'AQOV, MOTHER MIRIAM, RUTH, TADDAI, SHIMON KANAI, and YEHUDAH SICARRI. They approach ELEAZAR.)

BROTHER YA'AQOV: You are with Yeshua?

ELEAZAR: I guess I am now.

BROTHER YA'AQOV: He is my brother. Can you get his attention for us? It's very important.

ELEAZAR: Of course.

(ELEAZAR approaches YESHUA.)

YESHUA: Not now, Eleazar, I'm having an important conversation with your sister.

ELEAZAR: But, Rabbi, it's your family.

YESHUA: I know. Not now.

ELEAZAR: All right.

(ELEAZAR goes back to YESHUA's family.)

He can't see you right now.

BROTHER YA'AQOV: Tell him that it's urgent. Something terrible has happened.

ELEAZAR: He was insistent.

BROTHER YA'AQOV: Then tell him that *I'm* insistent!

MOTHER MIRIAM: Ya'aqov, calm down.

(Back to ELEAZAR.)

Sir, tell him that his mother wishes to see him. He's never denied his mother.

ELEAZAR: I'm sure you're right.

(ELEAZAR approaches YESHUA again.)

Rabbi ...

YESHUA: Don't call me rabbi. I am not your master. No man is your master, except our Father in Heaven, our Abba.

ELEAZAR: Yes, Yeshua. But your mother ...

YESHUA: I already told you.

ELEAZAR: Excuse me, but your mother is a great woman. Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts that fed you.

YESHUA: Blessed are those that hear the word of God and do it. Tell them to come later. I will speak to them privately then.

BROTHER YA'AQOV: (*Who has approached and heard a good deal of the conversation.*) You selfish ingrate! You'd rather spend your time with these admiring strangers than with your own family!

YESHUA: Who is my family? Who are my brothers, my sisters, my mother? Those who keep my commandments are my family.

(*Grabbing MIRIAM's hand and presenting her.*)

Behold my brothers, my mother, and my sisters!

MOTHER MIRIAM: Yeshua, you wound me.

YESHUA: You wound me, Mother.

MOTHER MIRIAM: How do I wound you?

YESHUA: You wish again to prevent me from my Father's business.

MOTHER MIRIAM: Never.

YESHUA: I see the fear in your heart. Just as you were afraid when you thought I was lost when I was a boy. You must trust my Abba, and that I am in His care!

BROTHER YA'AQOV: Yes, your Abba, your Abba! Well, my Abba was a carpenter named Yosef and he was the one who raised you well, taught you his profession. You repay his memory by heaping insults and injuries upon his wife and children, while neglecting the trade he taught you by wandering in the wilderness and delivering pointless maxims!

MOTHER MIRIAM: Ya'aqov, don't speak to your brother like that.

BROTHER YA'AQOV: He insults you and still he is preferred. I don't know how to please you, Mother. If this is the son you want to be remembered by, then so be it.

(*Exit BROTHER YA'AQOV.*)

MOTHER MIRIAM: Ya'aqov! Ya'aqov ...

(*Then to YESHUA.*)

Yeshua, if I have offended you ...

YESHUA: Mother, I am your sacrifice to lay on the altar. Except there will be no other lamb to replace me. I am the Lamb.

(*This effects MOTHER MIRIAM immensely, as she holds back tears of grief, but she nods.*

YESHUA then comes over and embraces her comfortingly. He then guides her to ELEAZAR.)

Eleazar, thank you for the honor you showed my mother. Would you do me a great favor?

ELEAZAR: After everything you have done for Miriam? Anything.

YESHUA: I want you to get to know the great woman you have defended. Marta, come over here.

MARTA: Yes, Yeshua?

YESHUA: I need someone to accompany my mother back to her home tomorrow. Can you and Eleazar do

that for me?

MARTA: Of course.

ELEAZAR: We'll take good care of her.

YESHUA: I knew I could trust both of you.

MOTHER MIRIAM: No, I want to come with you.

YESHUA: Mother, the day will come when you can't come with me, but you'll accompany me to the very brink. The very brink. But I now must be about my Abba's business.

MARTA: What about Miriam?

YESHUA: Miriam will be coming with me.

MARTA: Oh—is that appropriate?

YESHUA: She is my disciple. She must follow me.

MARTA: But why—why Miriam?

(ELEAZAR and MARTA remains with her as YESHUA approaches the other newcomers.)

YESHUA: Now, Taddai, come here ...

TADDAI: Yes, brother.

YESHUA: And your friend as well. Shimon the Zealot.

SHIMON KANAI: How do you know that?

YESHUA: My friends, both of your hearts are right. But you have been misled in many things by political posturers who would manipulate your faith. Such people seek the kingdom of this earth, not the kingdom of heaven.

TADDAI: What would you have us do?

YESHUA: You need to become wise as serpents and harmless as doves. I am calling apostles, those who I will endow with priesthood, keys, and authority. I have already called others. You two shall also be part of that group.

SHIMON KANAI: I am honored—but you hardly know me.

YESHUA: My sheep hear my voice and know me, and I know them.

SHIMON KANAI: Yes—yes.

YESHUA: And you are Yehudah.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Rabbi, you are well informed.

YESHUA: You don't know how well informed.

(YEHUDAH kneels.)

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I have come to serve you. To be your man, if you'll have me.

(YESHUA gives YEHUDAH a long, penetrating look. YEHUDAH is trying to mask his sudden nervousness. YESHUA finally helps YEHUDAH to his feet and silently stares him straight in the eyes. YEHUDAH tries to maintain the gaze, but briefly looks away. YESHUA grabs him gently by the chin and makes him maintain the gaze.)

YESHUA: *(Unheard by the others, this is just between him and YEHUDAH.)* I know you, Yehudah Sicarri.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Sicarri?

YESHUA: Your dagger is beneath your cloak. But you shall not betray me with a dagger.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I shall not betray you at all. I am your man.

YESHUA: Then what would you do for me, Yehudah?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I would fight for you, lord. I would sacrifice for you, lord. I would die for you, lord.

YESHUA: Yes, you would. But many come to me and say, lord, lord! I'm telling you right now, Yehudah Sicarri, it is those who do the will of my Father who enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Then I shall do your Father's will.

YESHUA: And Barabba's will?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Who is Barabba?

YESHUA: Who indeed? His name means son of the Father. I am here to tell you that I am the Son of the Father. I am his Only Begotten. Do you believe me?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: *(Sincere, but rattled.)* Yes. And I believe you can free us!

YESHUA: You want to be free?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: More than anything.

YESHUA: If you continue in my word, then you shall be an apostle and free indeed. The truth will make you free.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I believe.

YESHUA: Then choose which son of the Father you shall serve. Is it me or Barabba?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You know my past—my heart ...

YESHUA: You can't serve God and Mammon ...

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You! I choose you!

YESHUA: Then come. Follow me.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I will. To the very end.

(YESHUA finally turns away from YEHUDAH and motions to his sister RUTH.)

YESHUA: And you, Ruth, my dear sister, I—I can't see why you are here. Why did my family even come?

RUTH. Don't you know yet?

YESHUA: Don't I know what?

RUTH. Yeshua, it's our cousin. It's Yochanan ...

YESHUA: What about him?

RUTH. It was Herod. Herod killed him. He—I am sorry, so sorry. Herod cut off his head.

(YESHUA is startled by this, and emotionally confused. He goes off, turning away from the other and addressing his Father.)

YESHUA: Abba, you didn't tell me about this—why?

(MIRIAM comes to YESHUA tentatively.)

MIRIAM: Yeshua, I am so—so very sorry about your cousin. He was loved by all of us ...

YESHUA: Yochanan was right ...

(To the group)

The Baptist was right! Herod is a corrupt leader and we would be wrong to let wickedness go unchallenged!

RUTH. Yeshua, you can't say things like that. Herod killed the Baptist and he would kill you. You must be cautious.

YESHUA: Go tell that old fox that I cast out devils and I cure people today and tomorrow, but the third day I will be perfected! But as for today and tomorrow, he can't harm me: for it can't be that a prophet can perish out of Jerusalem.

(YESHUA stumbles a little from grief. MIRIAM and MOTHER MIRIAM go to him, and hold him up.)

O Jerusalem, O Jerusalem! You kill the prophets and stone them who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her children under her wings and you wouldn't come! And now look! Your house is left to you as a house of desolation! And I'm telling you, you won't see me again until the time comes that you say, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of Adonai!"

(YESHUA is unable to contain the emotion any longer and breaks down weeping. MIRIAM embraces him and he accepts the embrace.)

MIRIAM: We are here for you, Yeshua.

(Lights dim to black.)

SCENE 8

The lights raise on the WOMAN OF SAMARIA: She is at a spot called Ya'aqov's Well, from which she is drawing water. YESHUA enters. There is a long silence. The WOMAN OF SAMARIA casts her eyes down and is about to take her water and leave, when YESHUA speaks.

YESHUA: Please, give me something to drink.

(The WOMAN OF SAMARIA stops. Caught off guard she looks at YESHUA with searching eyes and is about to turn away again.)

I mean you no harm. Very much the opposite.

(The WOMAN OF SAMARIA stops again, and then comes back. She puts down the water, draws some for YESHUA, but then hesitates before giving it to him.)

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: I don't think you know who I am. I'm a Samaritan.

YESHUA: I know who you are. But I don't believe you know who I Am.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: I know that you are a Jew. Jews think they are above us, that we are half breeds and apostates. I know that much about you. Jews have no dealing with Samaritans.

YESHUA: If you truly knew me, truly recognized me by the memory of God within you, I wouldn't be the one asking you for water. Instead you would ask water from me. And then I would have given you living water.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Sir, you have no jar or rope. The well is deep. How would you give me living water? Are you greater than our father, the great Patriarch Ya'aqov who gave us this well?

YESHUA: If you drink from Ya'aqov's well, the time will come when you will be thirsty again. But if a woman drinks from the water I give her, it will be within her a water springing up to eternal life.

(The WOMAN OF SAMARIA sets aside the water she had drawn, and comes near to YESHUA.)

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Oh, sir, I have been a thirsty woman all my life.

YESHUA: I know.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Give me this water, please, so that I'm quenched. I'm tired of drawing from other men's wells.

YESHUA: Go, call your husband here, so that he can hear, too.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: I—I don't have a husband.

YESHUA: Yes, that's right. You've had five husbands. And the man you live with now isn't your husband either. Thank you for being honest with me.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Sir, how did you..? I see that you are a prophet.

(There is a silence. The WOMAN OF SAMARIA then becomes more courageous.)

And, since you are a prophet, I will trust your word. We Samaritans believe that we are the true keepers of the law, the Shamerim. We are descendents of Yisra'el, from Levi and Yosef, Efrayim and Manassah. We are the keepers of the true law which existed before the exile by Babylon.

YESHUA: You want to ask me a question, not give me a history lesson.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Sir, it's the great dispute between our peoples— we say that it's here in Mount Gerizim that is the holy place, that it's here that we should worship. It's here that Moses told Yeshua to gather the people. But your people say it's in Jerusalem at your temple that we should worship. You're a holy man, I'll believe your word either way.

YESHUA: Good Lady, do you worship a mountain?

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: No.

YESHUA: Do the Jews worship a temple?

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: No.

YESHUA: You're right, because it's our Father who you worship. And the time will come, when you won't worship the Father here or in Jerusalem. For I'll send the Spirit of God, and it's through that Spirit that you can worship the Father, wherever you are. That is what will distinguish the true worshippers: the Spirit of God.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: God is a Spirit?

YESHUA: You don't know who you worship. The Jews know who they worship, and that's why salvation is of them. This is Eternal Life, to know Elohim—and to know Elohim's son.

(Something dawns on the WOMAN OF SAMARIA, as she feels this Spirit testify to her.)

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: I—I don't want to blaspheme, but—there are stories about the Mashiach. When he comes, it's said that he will tell us all things. I know these stories are true.

YESHUA: I will answer what you already know. What the Spirit has told you. I am he. I am that I Am.

(Enter SHIMON CEPHAS, ANDREAS, YOCHANNAN, YA'AQOV, TADDAI, YEHUDDAH SICARRI, SHIMON KANAI, MIRIAM, as well as new apostles, including YA'AQOV ALPHAEUS, MATTAY, PHILLIPOS, BAR'TOLMAY, and TOMA. The Woman of Samaria takes YESHUA's hands, but then pulls them back upon seeing the apostles, afraid of offending YESHUA. YESHUA take her hands back, and she looks up gratefully.)

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: The I Am ...

YESHUA: You understand. You have studied ...

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: I—I know that a woman is not supposed to ...

YESHUA: You *are* supposed to. You have the truth, now strengthen those around you.

WOMAN OF SAMARIA: Rabbi?

YESHUA: Bring this man you live with and let him drink. Bring those in your town and let them drink. I'll wait for you.

(Thrilled, the WOMAN OF SAMARIA exits, completely forgetting and leaving behind her water pot. The APOSTLES who looked on with some silent shock approach him. YESHUA offers them some of the water, which they accept.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: Rabbi, who was that?

YESHUA: A Samaritan woman.

(The APOSTLES look at each other uncomfortably, except MIRIAM who is cheered by this, but none of them dare question him further on the subject. ANDREAS breaks the awkwardness by bringing forward food they had brought.)

ANDREAS: Rabbi, you must be hungry. This has been a long journey. I have some food. Here, eat.

YESHUA: Thank you, but I'm not hungry.

ANDREAS: Please, I don't know when was the last time I saw you eat.

YESHUA: I have meat you don't know even know I have.

ANDREAS: Miriam, have you been feeding him?

MIRIAM: No.

ANDREAS: Shimon?

SHIMON CEPHAS: No.

YESHUA: So far you have been disciples, students. Now you will be messengers, teachers. I will send you.
I am the vine, you will be the branches.

MIRIAM: What shall we teach, Adonai?

YESHUA: Who is your neighbor, Beloved? Is that Samaritan woman your neighbor?

MIRIAM: You tell me, Yeshua.

YESHUA: I love you, as the Father has loved me. Continue in love. This is my commandment, that you love each other, with the kind of love that I have loved you with.

MIRIAM: Then she is my neighbor and I will love her and love all people.

YESHUA: Yes! But, Miriam, what happens when trouble comes?

MIRIAM: We will continue in love.

YESHUA: Yes! A man can't have greater love than laying down his life for his friends. And you are my friends, if you do what I ask you to do. So you are no longer my servants, or my students. You are my friends. Everything the Father tells me, I'll tell you.

MIRIAM: Then we shall choose you every time, my friend.

YESHUA: You haven't chosen me, Miriam. I have chosen you. So lift up your eyes. You see a town of Samaritans over there. I don't see a town, I see a field. A field which is white and already to harvest. Come, there is the Woman and her friends.

(YESHUA and MIRIAM exit. The remaining apostles look awkwardly at each other.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: I don't know how I feel about this.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Samaritans.

SHIMON CEPHAS: And the way he acts towards Miriam. Why is she suddenly preferred above us?

THAU'MA: Oh, come on, are we following him or not following him?

MATTAY: I'm with Thau'ma on this one. We did want change, right?

BAR'TOLMAY: Change benefits some of us more than others, Mattay.

MATTAY: What do you mean by that?

BAR'TOLMAY: You were the tax collector, not me. I already had a place at the table.

MATTAY: Yeshua called me. I did not ask for this. Are you or are you not following Yeshua?

BAR'TOLMAY: I don't need to be questioned by you.

ANDREAS: Come on everyone, let's not ...

PHILLIPOS: I for one am following Yeshua and accepting those who he tells us to accept. You all should know better

THAU'MA: Phillipos, Ya'aqov Alphaeus, Mattay, come on. Let's catch up with Yeshua.

(Exit THAU'MA, YA'AQOV ALPHAEUS, PHILLIPOS, and MATTAY.)

YA'AQOV THE JUST: I'm not sure how I feel about some of these new recruits.

YOCHANNAN. I thought Phillipos would have sided with us Galileans.

ANDREAS: *(Sighs.)* We're already splitting up into factions. And, Shimon, really, speaking that way about Miriam ...

SHIMON CEPHAS: I don't need any lectures right now, Andreas.

ANDREAS: We'll—we'll work it out. But we're all with Yeshua, right?

SHIMON CEPHAS: Of course we are. Which is why it's important that we are the ones who have the most influence on him.

(Exit SHIMON CEPHAS.)

ANDREAS: That's not exactly what I meant.

(Exit ANDREAS, YOCHANNAN, YA'AQOV THE JUST, and BAR'TOLMAY.)

TADDAI: This isn't going very well.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Why do you say that?

SHIMON KANAI: Maybe you didn't see the moment we just did.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: My brothers, if you keep your eyes open you will see what I see.

TADDAI: And what is that?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Opportunity. I see opportunity everywhere.

(Exit YEHUDAH SICARRI. TADDAI and SHIMON KANAI exchange worried glances and then exit as well.)

SCENE 9

A home in Bethany. ELEAZAR enters with YESHUA and MIRIAM.

ELEAZAR: Marta! I have a wonderful surprise!

(MARTA enters. MIRIAM runs to MARTA and impulsively hugs her. MARTA extricates herself.)

MARTA: *(Scolding.)* Miriam! What were you doing alone with Yeshua? Did anyone see you?

MIRIAM: Oh, calm down, we just walked a short way over here. The apostles are staying elsewhere. I didn't want to burden you. But I thought—well, the chance to see Yeshua again ...

MARTA: Of course I want to see Yeshua again. But I wish you would have sent notice! Nothing's prepared. Thoughtless as always, Miriam. Send advance word in the future. Please, Yeshua, pardon the state of my house ...

YESHUA: Truly, Marta, I don't mind those things. Better a clean inner cup than a clean outer cup. We're all dear friends, aren't we?

MARTA: You need to be careful, Yeshua. Having Miriam travel with your group is bad enough—but to be seen alone with you. A woman's reputation is a fragile thing. I have heard women called prostitutes for the most seemingly benign of actions.

ELEAZAR: Come on, Marta, let's not be unpleasant.

MARTA: You're no better than Yeshua. I don't like that you both encourage her wild notions. We're already reaping gossip on her behalf. There are already those who consider her a sinner ...

MIRIAM: I haven't done anything wrong.

YESHUA: We all know the quality of Miriam's spirit.

(MARTA looks them all over, sighs, and smiles warmly at YESHUA.)

MARTA: Well, I'll defer to the men then. But I seriously wonder about my brother sometimes. We'll see to dinner. Come along now, Miriam.

MIRIAM: Wait a moment, Yeshua and I were discussing something.

MARTA: Miriam ...

(MIRIAM ignores MARTA and turns to the men.)

Eleazar, Yeshua, please tell her ...

ELEAZAR: Marta, can't that wait? Talk to us.

MARTA: You were raised better than this, Eleazar. Go, talk out your business with Yeshua. That's for the men. Miriam and I have our own place, our own duties.

(YESHUA comes over to MARTA and takes her by the hand, which makes her uncomfortable.)

YESHUA: Please, Marta, I want to talk to all of you.

(MARTA takes her hand away.)

MARTA: Please, Yeshua, I must ask that you be more appropriate.

(MARTA exits into the kitchen.)

ELEAZAR: Excuse her, Yeshua. I don't think she exactly understands who you are yet. What you will mean...

MIRIAM: How could she? If she just would sit with him, listen to him, she would know ...

YESHUA: Don't worry, my friends. It's not so much that she doesn't know who I am—it's that she doesn't yet know who *she* is. But she will prove herself more than you know. Eleazar, how was my mother the last you saw her?

ELEAZAR: A great woman, your mother. She is in good health and good spirits. We got along swimmingly.

YESHUA: You are all now more than my friends. You are my family. You are all now my Beloved family.

ELEAZAR: Yeshua, I have heard that you gave a masterful sermon. Can you share it with us?

YESHUA: Yes, please, sit. You need to hear this.

(MIRIAM and ELEAZAR sit at YESHUA's feet.)

Listen and ponder these things. This is not my Wisdom, but the Wisdom of our God in Heaven. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled ...

(MARTA enters and is scandalized to see MIRIAM at Yeshua's feet.)

MARTA: Miriam ...

YESHUA: Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

MARTA: Miriam!

MIRIAM: Not now, Marta.

YESHUA: Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

MARTA: We have responsibilities.

ELEAZAR: Oh, let her be, Marta ...

MARTA: And so I'm supposed to be the one doing all the work? That meal won't prepare itself!

MIRIAM: I'm listening. I'm trying to learn ...

MARTA: And that's another thing. Look at you, sitting at his feet as if you were one of his disciples.

MIRIAM: I am. I am one of his disciples.

MARTA: As if you were a man who was at liberty to do that kind of thing! It's completely inappropriate.

MIRIAM: Why can't I? Why can't I be like those other men who follow him and devote themselves to him and be his disciples?

MARTA: If you want to help Yeshua with this ministry of his, then come and help me serve him dinner! We can support him in that way!

YESHUA: Marta ...

MARTA: Is this what you're encouraging, Yeshua? Miriam is not a man, she can't go galloping across the

countryside with you.

YESHUA: New wine can't be put into old bottles, Marta.

MARTA: Oh, don't go off into one of your esoteric analogies, Yeshua. I like people to talk straight with me.

YESHUA: You need to have ears to hear ...

MARTA: Please, Yeshua, I'm asking you to assert your rightful place and tell Miriam to help me!

YESHUA: Marta, Marta, you're worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Miriam has chosen the better part, and I won't take it away from her.

(MARTA is taken back by this.)

MARTA: Why do you rebuke me for doing what I need to do?

YESHUA: What I need you to do is sit by your sister and talk with us. We want you here.

(MARTA pauses, processing, and then, somewhat reluctantly, she sits.)

MARTA: This is madness.

(MIRIAM, ecstatic to have Marta sitting with them, takes Marta by the hand and snuggles into her a bit. Marta seems a little uncomfortable from the touch, but endures it stoically.)

YESHUA: Blessed are you, when men will revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill can't be hid ...

(Lights dim on YESHUA, etc., although they remain on stage and are very still. NICODEMUS enters. KAYAFA enters and reaches NICODEMUS: Both characters are Pharisees who are members of the 71 member council of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious and civil authority among the Jews at the time.)

KAYAFA: Nicodemus!

NICODEMUS: Rabbi Kayafa—erm, good to see you.

KAYAFA: I don't blame the coolness in your voice. I know my group of Sadducees were causing trouble today. Always wanting to create a conflict, eh?

NICODEMUS: You're a minority in the council. Without you, they would have no real power.

KAYAFA: That's why I like you Nicodemus. Always level headed and shrewd. Not a reactionary who is likely to cross over into extreme positions.

(NICODEMUS becomes more guarded at this.)

My father-in-law Annas says that you have earned a solid reputation for methodical thinking. This is good, this is good. He likes you very much, you know.

NICODEMUS: I am honored by Annas' good opinion. His former term as the high priest before you was of great service to our people. Of course, his illegal trials and stonings didn't please Rome, did they?

KAYAFA: *(A little angry.)* Of course, Annas still holds a good deal of sway with many other members of

the Sanhedrin. But you know this, you know this ...

NICODEMUS: Yes, your wealth and influence is well known to all of us. Everyone here is so willing to wear everything on the outside.

KAYAFA: (*Indicating NICODEMUS's traditional clothing.*) As are you. But that is neither here nor there. Something has been troubling me, Nicodemus, and I was told that you could help me.

NICODEMUS: How so?

KAYAFA: I was told that you have talked to this Yeshua fellow. That you had a very interesting conversation with him.

NICODEMUS: I haven't told anyone such.

KAYAFA: Oh, perhaps I was mistaken then. But this one gentleman said he could have sworn he saw you late at night with this Yeshua person. Even caught snippets of your conversation ...

NICODEMUS: I'm really in a hurry, Kayafa. Perhaps we can discuss this at another ... ?

KAYAFA: Of course, of course, but I'll just take a moment more of your time. Nicodemus, you don't need me reminding you of the fragile position we're in right now with our Roman overlords. Barabba and those violent extremists are attracting a lot of attention to our nation—all the wrong kind of attention. The Zealots being hunted by the Romans, and, if we're not careful, we may be next. Then the whole exchanges between Herod and Yochanan the Baptist, well, that didn't do us any favors, did it?

NICODEMUS: No, it didn't.

KAYAFA: We can't have any more fractious groups dividing us. The Romans are tolerating us right now, we are very lucky. We have the temple, we are allowed to practice our religion with some degree of freedom and govern ourselves to a certain extent—our culture is intact. Other cultures have not been so lucky.

NICODEMUS: God has been very good to us.

KAYAFA: Yes, and so have the Romans. Nicodemus, we have been entrusted with the safety of our people. That is a sacred trust.

NICODEMUS: God will protect us, if we do right.

KAYAFA: God protects those who are willing to protect themselves. We have tempted the Empire's hand before when we denied Pilate access to the temple ...

NICODEMUS: You were brave in that moment, Kayafa.

KAYAFA: Brave or foolish, I could have died that day.

NICODEMUS: Then you would have gone to the bosom of Abraham.

KAYAFA: No! No, I wouldn't have. We Sadducees don't fall for those fairy tales of yours. It is a false hope of an afterlife you Pharisees have built up for yourselves. We are dust, and unto dust we shall return!

NICODEMUS: How can you really believe that?

KAYAFA: God has given us *this* life, Nicodemus, and no fate, no destiny will make anything of it, unless

we make something of it ourselves. We must protect our people from any threat that would expose them to the vengeance of Rome. Do you agree with that at least? (*Expectant pause.*) Do you agree?

NICODEMUS: I agree.

KAYAFA: Good. It's best that we leave these fringe elements alone. The Romans have made the Sanhedrin the established authority. We need to teach the people to trust their leaders. These sort of rebels are charismatic, certainly. But when the passions burn out, it will always be the cooler, more experienced heads who prevail. Thank you for your time.

(KAYAFA goes to leave, until stopped by NICODEMUS's voice.)

NICODEMUS: Kayafa?

KAYAFA: Yes?

NICODEMUS: We have waited for the Mashiach for a long time. We need him now more than ever ...

KAYAFA: Believe me, Nicodemus, I more than anyone know the need we have of deliverance. But deliverance will not come in the form of a dusty street preacher. If this Mashiach is real—he will need to be mightier than the Empire itself. And can you really say when you look at that dirty man from Galilee that he can overcome the power of Rome?

(Exit KAYAFA, then NICODEMUS. Lights rise back up on YESHUA, MIRIAM, MARTA, and ELEAZAR.)

YESHUA: Come to me, all of you who work, and carry heavy things. I will give you rest. Take my yoke with you instead, and learn from me, for I am meek, with a lowly heart. You shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(There is an electric pause.)

ELEAZAR: So, Marta, are you in such a rush to do your chores now?

MARTA: That was one of the most beautiful things I have ever heard.

(MIRIAM snuggles into MARTA even closer and hugs her tightly.)

MIRIAM: I told you so.

MARTA: I just have one question, though.

YESHUA: What is it?

MARTA: That “consider the lilies” part—do you really believe that God will just take care of us like that?

YESHUA: The laborer is worthy of his—or her—hire.

MARTA: And what about you? Is God providing for you?

YESHUA: I'm sure of it.

MARTA: Well, as a carpenter who hasn't had much time to work, I'm frankly worried about you. And, as you said, God knows that you have need of food, and shelter, and clothes—well, you know that we are a family of means. Eleazar?

ELEAZAR: I agree, Marta. It's a wonderful idea.

MARTA: You are certainly seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness. So let us be your food, your shelter, and your raiment. And we can help with your work with the poor. We want to help finance your work. Let us be your patrons.

YESHUA: You are certain about this?

MARTA: Whatever of ours you need, even if it is everything, it is yours.

MIRIAM: Marta, I could kiss you!

MARTA: Please don't.

YESHUA: *(Clearly moved by their sacrifice.)* I met a rich, young man the other day. He told me that he was righteous, that he was keeping all the commandments from his youth. I loved and honored him for that. But then he asked me what more he needed to do. I told him that now he needed to sell all his many goods and give to the poor. He despaired and left me. But you, my Beloved friends, without me even asking you, are willing to do what that good man could not.

(MIRIAM laughs for joy and gives YESHUA a huge hug. YESHUA laughs in return. MARTA looks wryly over at ELEAZAR.)

MARTA: This is wonderful and all, but we do have to do something about all the hugging.

YESHUA: Miriam, I have your new name for you now. You shall be called Magdala.

ELEAZAR: Oh, "tower!" "Fortress!" I would have thought that a more appropriate name for Marta.

(MARTA slaps ELEAZAR on the shoulder.)

YESHUA: It also means "elegant, elevated, great, magnificent."

MIRIAM: I don't deserve that name.

MARTA: Yes, you do, dear.

YESHUA: I don't give people new names because the name describes the person, or the person somehow deserves the name. I give a person a new name to transform that person. I will elevate you, Miriam, in ways that you don't understand yet. They called you Mad Miriam, well, now they will call you by the magnificent name of the Magdala. I shall make all things new—I shall make all of *you* new.

SCENE 10

YESHUA's apostles, as well as ELEAZAR and MIRIAM, are on the boat. The weather is looking fair at first. SATAN'EL walks upon the water and onto the boat. With a smile SATAN'EL touches the water one last time, which is when we hear our first peal of thunder and the weather starts to look bleak.

BAR-TOLMAY: I don't like the look of those clouds.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Nor do I like that thunder. And we're still a long way from the shore.

(SATAN'EL smiles, and moves onto YEHUDAH SICARRI, who is looking darkly contemplative. Throughout the scene, he spurs YEHUDAH's thoughts with nudges, whispers, etc.)

YA'AQOV ALPHAEUS. *(To SHIMON KANAI)* Five thousand—he fed five thousand people! I'm still trying to wrap my head around it.

SHIMON KANAI: All from five loaves and a few fishes. At first I thought he was just some great teacher—but this is something else entirely. What do you think, Yehudah?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: His comments about people eating his flesh— what do you think he meant by that?

YA'AQOV ALPHAEUS. He miraculously feeds five thousand and you care what he *says*?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: What he says is the most important thing, Ya'aqov. Even he would tell you that. I'm here for more than a free meal.

THAU'MA: I thought what he said was interesting, too.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Interesting isn't quite the word I would use, Thau'ma.

THAU'MA: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”
Yeshua's quite the poet. His figurative language is certainly vivid.

YA'AQOV THE JUST: And you have quite the memory, Thau'ma.

ELEAZAR: I think we'll have to remember these things and try to understand them. They're important. They need to be written down.

MATTAY: Don't worry, some of us have already begun.

MIRIAM: Good.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: You're all idiots! Don't you get it? He's saying hard things, if you'll just open your ears and listen. I've understood everything he's said.

SHIMON CEPHAS: And you don't like what you're hearing, Yehudah? I thought you were with us.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Yeshua can be the greatest man alive, if he doesn't throw it away. I have more admiration for that man than any of you, for I strive with his words and I see his abilities! But he said that we were going to eat his flesh—that he was going to give his life for the world! He's not being as figurative as you think! How can he do any good for the world, if he's dead?

SHIMON CEPHAS: I won't let that happen. We'll protect him.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: I'm afraid it won't be that easy, Shimon. That man *wants* to be a martyr.

(Suddenly the boat is rocked with waves and a ferocious storm begins.)

ANDREAS: Whoa! That's no mere breeze!

SHIMON CEPHAS: The sails! Wrap up the sails!

(The apostles scramble to prepare the boat against the storm, with SHIMON and ANDREAS)

directing them. Waves crash, strong winds blow, thunder sounds, lightning flashes, and thick darkness starts to surround them.)

ANDREAS: Shimon, we weren't prepared for this!

SHIMON CEPHAS: Then prepare now!

ANDREAS: I don't think this boat can take this kind of beating! It's not like ours at home ...

SHIMON CEPHAS: Quite the time to comment on shoddy workmanship!

BAR-TOLMAY: We might not make it through this!

(The storm only intensifies, with the darkness becoming blacker and bleaker, when suddenly a bright flash appears on YESHUA who is walking on the water a distance away from them.)

PHILLIPOS: Ghost!

MATTAY: *(Looking around the boat.)* Did we already lose somebody?

THAU'MA: Don't be ridiculous!

TADDAI: Well, don't *you* see it?

THAU'MA: It's—it's—an optical illusion.

YOCHANAN: No, don't you see, it's Yeshua!

THAU'MA: Impossible!

YA'AQOV THE JUST: No, he's right—it is Yeshua!

(YESHUA holds up his right hand.)

YESHUA: Peace! Be still!

(The storm suddenly stops and the light returns.)

THAU'MA: Who is this man that even the waves and wind obey him?

YESHUA: Calm down! It's me.

SHIMON CEPHAS: You're walking on water!

YESHUA: *(With a good humored smile.)* Why, yes, I see that.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Adonai, if it's really you, invite me to come out there with you on the water.

YESHUA: Come.

(SHIMON climbs out of the boat and onto the water. He is not tentative at first, but acts bravely. But then SATAN'EL, startled, touches the water and the wind picks up a bit, and SHIMON suddenly starts to sink.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: Yeshua, save me!

(YESHUA comes to SHIMON and lifts him out of the water.)

YESHUA: Shimon, such little faith. You started out so well—why did you doubt?

(YESHUA and SHIMON climb onto the boat. All of them are in awe of YESHUA. YESHUA notes SATAN'EL briefly and, though he can see him, YESHUA generally ignores him.)

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Who are you?

YESHUA: Who do people say that I am?

THAU'MA: Some say that you're Eliyahu, or one of the old prophets risen again. You have Herod half convinced that you're the Baptist come back to haunt him.

YESHUA: And who do you say that I am?

(SHIMON stands forward at this, certain and strong.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: You are the Mashiach. Truly, you are the Son of the living God.

YESHUA: You're blessed for that testimony, Shimon. Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you. My Abba has revealed it to you.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Yeshua, I—I feel a—a burning. What is this?

YESHUA: You'll have a new name, my friend. You'll be called Cephas, the Rock, like the Urim and Thummim of the Tabernacle, like the ancient seer stones of old. And upon this revelatory bedrock, that burning within you now, I will build my Church; and the gates of hell won't prevail against it.

(At this SATAN'EL pays rapt attention to SHIMON CEPHAS.)

SHIMON CEPHAS: How can I accomplish such a huge job, Adonai?

YESHUA: I will give you keys of the kingdom. With those keys, whatever you seal on earth, will be sealed in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Then let's tell the whole of Israel! Let's tell the people and they'll unite behind us!

YESHUA: No, Yehudah, you mustn't tell anybody yet.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: What?

YESHUA: My time hasn't come.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: But it will.

YESHUA: Yes. But I must suffer. I must die.

(SATAN'EL is becoming very anxious about YEHUDAH and SHIMON. He pushes his tactics with increasing aggressiveness.)

YEHUDAH SICARRI: No ...

YESHUA: The elders, the scribes, the Sadducees, the Pharisees, they're all conspire against me and they will make me suffer.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: No.

YESHUA: They will kill me, Yehudah. But the temple that is destroyed will be rebuilt on the third day.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: No!

SATAN'EL: *(To SHIMON CEPHAS.)* Speak up, you imbecile! Do you want to see your leader die?

SHIMON CEPHAS: Yehudah is right, Adonai! We won't let this happen to you!

YESHUA: *(Looking squarely at SATAN'EL.)* Get behind me, Satan! You're an offense to me.

(SATAN'EL pauses, unsure, but then exits obediently. Then, without a beat, YESHUA turns back to SHIMON CEPHAS.)

Cephas, you don't savor the things of God, but are hungering after the things of man.

SHIMON CEPHAS: Adonai ...

YESHUA: If any man will come after me, he needs to deny himself. He needs to take up his cross and follow me. For who would save his life, will lose it. And who would lose his life for my sake, will find it.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: What else does a man have, if he doesn't have his life, Yeshua?

YESHUA: What is a man profited, if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul? How much will a man give in exchange for his soul? How much, Yehudah?

(YEHUDAH is startled by this and withdraws a bit.)

YA'AQOV THE JUST: We're with you, Yeshua. I'll give whatever is required.

YESHUA: Ya'aqov, the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

ELEAZAR: Then, to prove our love to you, we'll work.

YESHUA: *(Smiling at ELEAZAR.)* Truly, there are some standing here which won't taste of death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

(YESHUA goes to YEHUDAH, speaking to him quietly.)

Did this offend you?

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Leave me alone.

YESHUA: No man, putting his hand to the plough, but then looking back is fit for the kingdom of God.

YEHUDAH SICARRI: Shut up!

(YEHUDAH exits to the underquarters.)

YESHUA: *(To the other apostles.)* Will you go away, too?

SHIMON CEPHAS: Adonai, who would we go to? You have the words of eternal life.

YESHUA: Haven't I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?

ELEAZAR: Yeshua—I'm not feeling so well.

(Blackout.)

END ACT ONE

Act Two

CONTAINS 8 SCENES IN 40 PAGES