

# DAWN

A Complete Account  
of the Most Important Day  
in Human History

Nisan 18, AD 30

Mark Miller



*good turn*  
PUBLISHING

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## *Death at Mid-Afternoon*

*Bethany: A Comfortable Home about Two Miles East of Jerusalem*

*Nisan 14, AD 30, the Eighth Hour (Nearing 2 p.m.)*

Though it was mid-afternoon, a deep and frightening darkness enveloped the entire land. Martha, standing in the courtyard outside of her home, was barely able to discern a man coming down the road, leading a donkey and a lamb. She quickly strode to the door, stepped inside the house, and closed the door behind her. She addressed her brother Lazarus, who was holding an oil lamp, together with the nine disciples of Jesus in the room.

“Our neighbor Shua is coming!” she blurted, with a mixture of concern and urgency.

“May he bring us good news,” said Lazarus. The disciples instantly rose and quickly moved to an adjacent room, where they would be able to hear the news that Shua was bringing, without being seen.

Martha scurried to remove evidence of the other occupants as Lazarus began pacing back and forth.

As expected, there came a knock on the door. Lazarus quickly opened it with the lamp in his other hand.

“Shua,” greeted Lazarus, “We have awaited you with such hope. Do you bring good news? Please come inside.”

Shua continued to stand at the door, framed in the yellow glow of the lamp. He frowned and slowly shook his head in the negative.

“I’m sorry,” said Shua, “It was the only thing people were talking about in the city. Your friend Jesus—I know he was a good man—our priests and leaders persuaded Pilate this morning that he must be killed. Pilate had him cruelly whipped, and he hangs on a cross as we speak. I’m so sorry.”

Inside, the disciples silently glanced at each other, eyes wide.

Martha hugged her midsection and began to cry.

Shua started turning to go, then turned back, “Oh, and there were two other men crucified with Jesus. I was hoping to find out their names, but with the darkness...” Shua glanced up at the sky, “...such an ominous sign. So I was eager to purchase our Pesach lamb and get home quickly.” Looking at the grief evident on Lazarus’ face, Shua added, “I hate the Romans. May our Lord deliver us from them.”

“Thank you for coming, Shua. You are a good friend,” said Lazarus as Shua departed. Lazarus slowly turned to his sister.

Simon the Zealot whispered loudly, “Crucified!”

Thaddeus added, “With two others—Peter and John!”

The nine disciples returned to the entrance room, where Lazarus and Martha were in a hug of grief.

“What do we do now?” asked Matthew.

The disciples turned and looked at James Zebedee, the oldest among them.

“What else can we do right now but wait and pray?” replied James.

Lazarus addressed James, “I also asked another neighbor, Shimeath, to inquire after Jesus. And our sister Mary should be bringing us further news. Let’s not abandon all hope.”

“Hope,” echoed Nathanael reflexively as a prayer, as a question, and with a note of despair.

### *Jerusalem: The Temple*

#### *The Eighth and a Half Hour (about 2:30 p.m.)*

The daily afternoon sacrifice had just finished being offered on the enormous stone altar. Caiaphas and his father-in-law Annas stood side-by-side and adjacent to the raised platform of the altar, observing the great crowd as it slowly dispersed.

Caiaphas said, “I thought this darkness might keep some people away from the afternoon sacrifice, but attendance is equal to or greater than usual.”

“It certainly has many very frightened,” observed Annas. “But, where would they go for comfort and courage? To the temple, of course. I expect the offerings to be unaffected.”

“Of course,” returned Caiaphas. “Although, my comfort comes from knowing that the Galilean is on a cross. He was an elusive adversary. And I will give him this much praise—he was a clever schemer.”

“It’s good for you that one of his own led you to him,” said Annas, a bit reproachfully.

Caiaphas didn’t appreciate the obvious insult, implying that he never would have arrested Jesus without inside assistance. Even so, he ignored the barb and said, “It’s good for the whole nation that the Galilean has no magic that enables him to come down off a cross.”

Pressing his insult, Annas responded: “The nation owes a debt to Judas Iscariot. He redeemed himself by his action.”

Though Caiaphas was annoyed, that was the end of the discussion. There were pressing exigencies and much to be done by both men over the next half hour in preparation for the great Passover offering ceremony.

*Jerusalem: The Praetorium<sup>7</sup>*

*Approaching the Ninth Hour (about 3 p.m.)*

Darkness had fallen over the entire land about midday. The disk of the sun was barely visible in the cloudless sky, and the illumination coming from it was less than from a full moon; even the constellations were visible. A palpable nervousness had grown among the soldiers, attendants, and slaves in Herod’s Palace-fortress, headquarters of the Roman governor of the province of Judea, Pontius Pilate. The streets of the city, normally boisterous with families and pilgrims on this preparation day before the Passover feast, were noticeably subdued. With a sense of trepidation, women hustled their children to their homes or quarters, and men on the way to temple with animals for the Pesach sacrifice whispered among themselves as to the meaning of the darkness.

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<sup>7</sup> This was the courtyard, or common hall, of Herod’s Palace. It was within the largest residence in Jerusalem, used by the governor Pontius Pilate for temporary stays in the city during the major feasts.

Pilate stood silent and expressionless on top of the wide wall surrounding Herod's Palace, one hand on the carved sandstone railing, the other on the pommel of the pugio at his belt. On each side of him stood a fully armed soldier, in constant attendance to the governor.

Silently, Gallus, one of Pilate's counselors, approached him but stopped at a respectful distance. After a moment, Gallus spoke up:

"Have you ever seen a sky like this one?"

Pilate turned to see who was addressing him. Turning back and looking upward, Pilate simply said, "No."

"I've seen an eclipse before, but this is no eclipse," continued Gallus. "It's too dark and has lasted about three hours. Everyone is unnerved by it."

When Pilate did not respond, Gallus added with a wry smile, "Perhaps the gods are angry."

Pilate turned towards Gallus. "And which god would that be, Gallus? The god of the Jews? One of Rome's gods? Or one from the Greeks, or a barbarian god? If there are gods, I'm sure I have as little influence on them as I have on the sky, so I worry about neither."

"Indeed. But if some god is angry over the mob scene from this morning, I can understand that," said Gallus, "It was an ugly business."

"It was," said Pilate. He paused for a moment. "These Jews are impossible to govern. This morning was an example. First, the Pharisees—they are damn religious fanatics. They've got laws for everything; I swear, they must have a law for which sandal to put on first! And you can't control them with intimidation or money."

Pilate spat. "And the Sadducees? They're greedy bastards that feign religion but worship gold. Sometimes you can work with them. But here's the thing: Normally you can't find three Jews that agree on anything except hating Romans."

"But this morning was different," Pilate observed, "they all seemed in agreement against that Galilean."

Pilate turned and started for the stairs down to the Praetorium

pavement. Gallus joined him.

“Do you think this fellow was truly any threat?” inquired Gallus.

“To Rome?” returned Pilate rhetorically. “Not at all. There was no rebellion in his eyes. Reports about his followers said that they were an odd mix: old, young, more women than men, and almost none of them carried weapons. His supporters were no army of zealots. To me, he seemed more like a philosopher or teacher type.”

“But he called himself a king,” Gallus said.

“Yes, but king of what? The Jews? The same crowd that screamed for his execution this morning? Better to be king of a hive of bees! If this Jesus wanted to be king of them, I am sorry for him. The only threat he posed was to the Sanhedrin. They were jealous because of his popularity with the people. You could see the envy in their faces.”

“I think it was also about money,” Gallus replied.

Pilate raised an eyebrow. “How so?”

Gallus said, “I heard that two days ago Jesus cleared the money-changers out of the temple with a whip.”

“Eh,” retorted Pilate, with half a laugh. “That was not reported to me. That would explain the vehemence of the chief priests—they relish that temple revenue. You know about the bloody riot that happened when we took the temple treasury money to fund the aqueduct to the city.”

“It left a big impression on me,” said Gallus, “to hear that the priests would rather keep their gold and let their own people thirst for water.”

“But about this morning,” continued Gallus, “I’m curious why you offered the Jews a choice between Barabbas and Jesus.”

“That was an unfortunate miscalculation on my part,” confessed Pilate. “I underestimated the number of conspirators the Sanhedrin had brought in to pack the crowd. And I overestimated the number of followers of Jesus in the crowd, though there were some.”

“You didn’t have many options once they claimed that Jesus was opposing Caesar,” sympathized Gallus.

Pilate stopped walking and faced his counselor with a frown. "I had none that I could see," said Pilate. "Tiberius has received some negative reports about my administration here, but he has no idea how intransigent this backwater nation is, or how difficult it is to maintain peace here. Believe me, Gallus, I would rather spend this week seaside at our Caesarea headquarters than be here monitoring the temple for signs of sedition!"

"Certainly," said Gallus. "What now?"

Pilate said, "They forced my hand this morning, and I resent it. They know it, too, so they must have calculated that the political coin they were spending was worth destroying this man. I doubt that; there will be a price to be paid for this morning's ugliness."

"For forcing an execution?" asked Gallus.

"No," said Pilate, "but for thinking they can force their will on Rome's governor."

He paused. "Nevertheless, it gives me no pleasure to execute an innocent man. This Jesus might have done something useful with his life, had he lived."

*Golgotha: A Hill outside the Walls of Jerusalem*  
*The Ninth Hour (3 p.m.)*

Three crosses, each bearing a crucified man, stood on the hill called Golgotha. Near to the cross, in the middle, stood Jesus' relatives: his Mother Mary, his aunts Salome and Mary Clopas, and his cousin John, who was also one of the twelve disciples. At a respectful distance stood friends and followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna and her friend Susanna, and others. Also in the crowd were two members of the Sanhedrin Council, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

Joseph was a rich and prominent member of the Council, from the Jewish city of Arimathea. He was a good and righteous man, an observant Jew, who had not consented to the Council's plan and action against Jesus. While waiting for the fulfillment of God's promises in the Scriptures, Joseph had become a disciple of Jesus, but a covert one, for fear of the Jews.

Jesus said softly, "It is finished!" Only those closest to the

cross heard it. John wondered what it meant. He had been hoping, against all hope, that somehow God would intervene, that Jesus would come down off the cross.

Then, astonishingly, Jesus cried with a loud voice, loud enough for all of the onlookers to hear: “Father, I commit my spirit into your hands!” Then he gave up his spirit and breathed his last.

Sosia, the centurion who was keeping guard over Jesus (and standing right in front of him) saw how he breathed his last, as though in triumph. He praised God, saying, “Surely this man was innocent!” Sosia had watched over dozens of crucifixions, and every man had been unconscious well before the time of death from slow asphyxiation, but not this man. Suddenly, the earth shook, and the rocks were split, and the centurion and his fellow soldiers became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

*Jerusalem: The Praetorium*  
*The Ninth Hour (3 p.m.)*

Pilate and Gallus both turned to begin walking farther across the courtyard. Just then, they heard a shout in the distance.

“That sounds like it came from Golgotha,” remarked Gallus.

“Maybe a friend of one of the condemned,” said Pilate, “...no man would have any voice left after six hours on a cross.”

A moment later, there was a rumbling sound, and the ground shook.

“Earthquake!” exclaimed Gallus. Both men bent their knees instinctively to retain their balance. The shaking lasted only a few seconds, and both men slowly straightened up.

Pilate shrugged his shoulders with a smile, “Perhaps the gods are angry.”

*Jerusalem: The Temple Mount*  
*The Ninth Hour (3 p.m.)*

In the darkness, illumined by hastily arranged torches, everything stood ready for the Passover ceremony within the



court of the priests, situated immediately in front of the grand temple. All twenty-four courses of priests stood ready to assist in the duties associated with sacrificing tens of thousands of animals.

The great altar, directly in front of the temple, was built entirely of uncut stones, and covered with whitewash. The base was forty-eight feet square, and over ten feet high. A long ramp ended at the top of the base on the south side. On top of the base was the altar platform, thirty-six feet square and rising three feet above the base, thus providing for a six foot wide pathway on all sides, three feet below the platform, for priests to circuit as they performed their duties. At the four corners atop the platform were four "horns," hollow rectangular projections that rose another foot and a half above the platform. The total height to the top of the horns was fifteen feet.

The first of three divisions of Jewish men with their sacrificial lambs had been admitted into the great court, and the massive doors of the Nicanor Gate to the court were shut.

These heads of households stood in defined rows, each holding the rope collar that was around the neck of their sacrifice, each man with a sharp knife sheathed at his waist. The men filled the area all around the temple, within the walls defining the court, except where only the priests were permitted: that is, immediately around the altar and between the altar and the temple. Two rows of priests extended across the court, up to the middle of the eastern side of the altar. One row held silver bowls; the other row held gold bowls.

Caiaphas stood on the elevated walkway that circumscribed the stone altar, in the center of the eastern side; Annas stood an arms-length to his side. Although Annas would provide a couple of prayers, this event belonged to Caiaphas, as he wore the vestments and the ephod<sup>8</sup> of the high priest. Ordinarily, Caiaphas basked in the glory of this moment, when he was the

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<sup>8</sup> Ephod: a richly embroidered, apron-like vestment having two shoulder straps and to which was attached the breastplate, with its twelve precious stones

most important man, on the most important stage, on the most important day in worldwide Judaism. But this day was different.

Caiaphas furrowed his brow. “When will this darkness end?” he wondered. He had no concern for what the darkness may have portended—he was too much of a Sadducee for that kind of superstition—but he was very concerned about the uneasiness of the crowd before him.

Behind him, the upper portion of the sanctuary, that stunning gem of their ancient religion, was not even visible in the blackness. On the steps of the sanctuary stood rows of priests and Levites. Before him, the court was packed with orderly rows of dimly lit worshippers. From his elevated position, he could sense the nervousness of the crowd, and he was greatly concerned there could be a stampede of the worshippers if panic took hold. It had happened before in the days of Hillel, when a single old man was crushed. That year was remembered as the “Passover of the Crushed,” and Caiaphas was determined that no such event should attach itself to his occupancy of the supreme office.

Caiaphas muttered under his breath, “I will have no man’s blood on my hands today.” He resolved to prevent any disaster from happening now.

“Shalom, brethren!” Caiaphas sang out, as he lifted his hands towards the crowd. “Praise the Lord!”

At that moment, the earthquake struck. Annas and Caiaphas both leaned in towards the altar platform to avoid falling off the elevated walkway. Caiaphas felt panic engulf his stomach as he brought both hands down to stabilize himself on the platform’s edge behind him. Fortunately, the shaking was brief.

Inside the sanctuary, devoid of all priests because of the ceremony, the tall, thick veil—which separated the Holy of Holies from the holy place—ripped in two from top to bottom, with a deafening roar.

Caiaphas heard the sound, but his attention remained on the crowd. He could see that the lines were distorting, the crowd was losing all focus, and panic was rising.

“Brethren, listen to me!” Caiaphas screamed over the rising

murmur of the people. “Ah...God has just *blessed* us, ah...blessed us, with this extraordinary sign from heaven!...” The murmur only grew louder.

Amazingly, serendipitously, the sun came back in the time it took for Caiaphas to slowly exhale, and he now stood in the new shadow formed by the 100-cubits-tall temple with the sunshine from the west. The temple’s four polished marble columns and entablature<sup>9</sup> again shone bright white in the reflected sunlight, with its gilded facade mirroring the temple’s environs in breathtaking beauty. The crowd froze in stunned silence.

“As I said,” continued the chief priest, “God has done an extraordinary—a supernatural—thing today. A thing you will remember all your lives—a thing you will tell your children and your grandchildren. Yes, God has given us a sign—a miracle from his own hand—testifying by the shaking of the earth and the glory of the sun at this special moment, of his great pleasure in our nation, the priesthood (Caiaphas waved his hand towards the priests), and of you, the obedient, who are here this day to remember the Passover and to sacrifice according to the sacred command given by Moses. Praise the Lord!”

The crowd broke into spontaneous praise and worship. Many of them had tears in their eyes.

Subsequent to that unscripted introduction, Caiaphas gave a hand-sign to the priests who were holding silver trumpets, and they sounded three blasts to initiate the Passover ceremony. Immediately, ranks of Levites between the altar and the sanctuary began leading everyone in a responsive hymn of praise based on the psalms.

“Praise the Lord!” sang the Levites.

“Praise the Lord!” sang back the worshipping crowd.

“Praise him, O servants of the Lord!” sang the Levites.

“Praise the Lord!” responded the crowd.

As the hymn commenced, the great sacrifice started. The two rows of priests holding the silver and gold bowls turned towards

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<sup>9</sup> Entablature: the upper construction of a temple between the tops of the columns and the eaves

the worshippers facing them and held the bowls under the necks of their lambs. In a brief moment, the worshippers slit the necks of their lambs, and the blood gushed out into the bowls. When the blood slowed to a trickle, the men with the slain lambs picked up their sacrifices and carried them to the butchering tables, north of the altar, for evisceration and skinning. As they did, a new line of men with live lambs stepped forward to take their places adjacent to the priests with the bowls.

While the line-changes were happening, the priests passed the blood-filled bowls up the line toward the altar, while passing empty bowls back down the line. At the altar, two priests (one handling the silver bowls, and the other the gold bowls) tossed the blood at the base of the altar with quick motions.

And so continued the most efficient sacrificial slaughtering operation in the history of humanity. There were still two more divisions of men to go, and many thousands of animals to be slain.

Caiaphas watched the proceedings with relief and satisfaction. The priests were splendid in black-and-white vestments, the sky was clear, and the river of bright crimson blood from the sacrifices brought a euphoria to the gathering. The chief priest smiled.

Annas stepped toward Caiaphas and said, “‘God has blessed us with an extraordinary sign from heaven.’—that was clever, Caiaphas, very good.”

Caiaphas kept smiling as he thought, “This *has* been a good day: a near disaster averted in the ceremony, the Nazarene is gone, and you pay me an uncharacteristic compliment. A very good day indeed.”

### *The Crucifixion Site*

When all of the crowds at Golgotha saw what had happened, they began to slowly leave, beating their breasts. But many of his devoted followers, including many women, remained standing there, looking on from a distance—people who had followed and ministered to Jesus when he was in Galilee and who had

traveled with him to Jerusalem from Galilee. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary Clopas (the mother of James the Younger and Joseph), and Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of disciples James and John.

Jesus' Mother Mary was wailing in grief. The other family members were also sobbing. John looked up at the cross and whispered through his tears, "Jesus, this cannot be." Salome and Mary Clopas clung to Mother Mary. Mary Clopas turned and saw her good friends Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna at a distance. She then turned to Salome and John, "I must speak with Mary Magdalene. I will join you at the house before nightfall."

They nodded.

Mary Clopas approached Mary Magdalene. "Oh Mary," they said in unison as they embraced and wept together. Mary Clopas then hugged the others in the little group.

Joanna said, "Susanna and I need to return to Antipas' Palace. Let me know if there is anything we can do. Let me know if there is any news of the disciples."

Mary Magdalene said, "We will stay and see what is done with his body. We will talk again soon." Joanna and Susanna hugged and kissed the two Marys, and began a slow walk to Herod Antipas' Palace. The two Marys turned and walked towards the cross.

Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had stood for hours watching the crucifixion, each with a pair of attendants beside him. Nicodemus was known in the Council as having sympathies for Jesus, but Joseph had been a secret follower of Jesus, for fear of the Council's opinion. Now the two men looked at each other silently, tears streaking both faces. Finally, Joseph felt it was time to voice his convictions: "This Jesus was the One spoken of by Moses and the Prophets, the One we have been waiting for."

Nicodemus closed his eyes briefly, nodded, and acknowledged, "He was."

Following another pause, Joseph said, "The Romans will throw his body in a common grave, like a criminal. I must try to

prevent this final indignity.”

“What do you intend? We have very little time before sundown and the High Sabbath begins,” asked Nicodemus.

“In the garden near here is my new family tomb, recently carved from the rock. No other body has been placed in it,” said Joseph. “We can lay his body there. The Agora market is closed, but I will obtain the burial cloths.”

“And I will procure spices and help you prepare the body,” said Nicodemus. He then turned to his attendants and said, “Let’s go,” and headed into the city.

Joseph turned to one of his attendants. “I need to request the body from Pilate,” he said, “so go to the first street in the Essene quarter, find Zephath the cloth merchant, and purchase for me a set of burial cloths.” Then he tapped the man on his chest with his finger, and added, “And get the best he has. The very best.”

### *Jerusalem: The Praetorium*

In Jerusalem, the Jews, concerned because it was preparation day for the Passover, and not wanting the bodies to remain on the cross into the Passover Sabbath (especially since that Sabbath was a high holy day), came to Pilate with a request.

Their spokesman, a Sanhedrist, asked Pilate, “As you know, Most Honorable Governor Pilate, at sundown begins our most holy day of Passover Sabbath rest. It would be an unholy and unclean thing to allow the bodies of those three crucified men to remain unburied on the Sabbath. Therefore, we respectfully request that their legs might be broken to hasten death, and that they might be taken away before the sun sets.”

Pilate gave his assent, “I will take care of it.”

Pilate therefore called Sylvius, his centurion, and gave him orders to dispatch the crucified men and remove them before sundown. Sylvius in turn called two soldiers, relayed the orders, and sent them to Golgotha.

As the soldiers went through the Gennath Gate, they passed Joseph and his attendant Micah traveling in the opposite direction.

So the soldiers came from Pilate to Golgotha, and after reporting to the centurion Sosia, they took a heavy hammer and broke the legs of the two men who were crucified with Jesus. When they came to Jesus, however, they saw that he was already dead and therefore did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

John cringed as he watched this happen, and felt sick. Much later, John understood that these things came to pass to fulfill the prophecy in Scripture: “Not one of his bones will be broken” (Ps 34:20) and “They will look on him whom they pierced” (Ze 12:10).

The two men whose legs had been broken were now incapable of pushing themselves up to gasp for breath, and they died quickly. Sosia spoke to the two soldiers who had come from the Praetorium, “Take word to Sylvius that all of the condemned men are dead.”

### *Golgotha: By the Foot of the Cross*

John felt a great urge to get Mother Mary back to the home of his parents, Salome and Zebedee, in the southwest corner of Jerusalem.

John turned to Salome, “Mother, we need to take Mother Mary home now.” Salome nodded and, holding Mother Mary’s arm, began to guide her in the direction of the Zebedee home, as John took her other arm.

Mary Magdalene had been standing with Mary Clopas a few feet behind the others out of respect for Jesus’ mother. But Mary Magdalene’s heart also ached with grief, and even though Jesus was now dead, she wanted to be nearer, to say goodbye. As Mother Mary, Salome, and John moved away, Mary Clopas stepped to where they had been, dropped to her knees, bent her face to the ground, and wept.

Mary Magdalene stepped towards the very foot of the cross. She dropped to her knees, then leaned forward and grasped his bloody left foot, suspended less than two cubits off the ground.

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Then she slowly bowed forward and placed her forehead against his foot.

Her whole body began to shake, with great sobs, with such pain she hadn't known existed. Her tears dropped onto his foot and mixed with his blood. After several minutes, when she became aware of this, she took the small alabastron that was hanging around her neck, unsealed it, and poured a little spikenard ointment onto each of his feet.

Then Mary took her hair and wiped his feet one last time.