

The People of the Pages

*who they were, what they wanted,
and where we met them*

87 lives · twelve groups · 256 cross-references to the ground

From a childless nomad walking out of Iraq
to an old man in Ephesus writing that God is love.

*“For man looks at the outward appearance,
but Yahweh looks at the heart.”*

1 SAMUEL 16:7

Places Are the Easy Part

why this half of the library matters more

You can stand on a hill and read a chapter and something happens. I have watched it happen to hundreds of people. But the Bible is not really a book about geography, and if we stop at the stones we have stopped one step short. **It is a book about 87 difficult, specific, recognisable people**, and the reason it has lasted four thousand years is that it refuses to tidy a single one of them up.

Nobody in here is a plaster saint. Abraham lies about his wife twice. Sarah is cruel to her servant. Jacob cheats everybody he meets. Moses commits manslaughter. Aaron folds under peer pressure. David arranges a murder. Solomon drifts. Elijah asks to die the week after his greatest victory. Jonah sulks because God was merciful. Peter denies Him. Thomas will not take anyone's word for it. Mark runs away, twice. **And the book reports all of it, which is exactly why we can trust the rest of what it says.**

So this is the other half of the library, and it is arranged as twelve groups running from the fathers to the generation after the resurrection. For each person you get four things: **where they came from, who they were, what they were actually after** underneath the religion, and **the turn**, which is what happened when they met God, because almost nobody in this book comes out the same shape they went in.

For the prophets there is a fifth thing, and it is the one I get asked about most on the bus. **Where they were standing when they wrote.** Isaiah in Jerusalem, inside the palace and the Temple, through four kings. Jeremiah in the capital for forty years and then dragged to Egypt against his will. **Ezekiel on a canal bank in southern Iraq, a thousand kilometres from the only building his priestly training was for.** Amos at the royal shrine at Bethel as a foreign national with no theological education. Zechariah and Haggai on an unfinished building site in 520 BC, trying to convince exhausted people that the small thing they were building mattered. **None of them wrote from a study. Every one of them was somewhere, and the somewhere is in the writing.**

And every entry names the ground. **Peter in Capernaum. Mary Magdalene in Magdala. David in Bethlehem and in the cave at Ein Gedi. Ruth in the corners of a barley field. Jonah on the quay at Jaffa, buying a ticket west when he had been told to go east.** On the website those are links straight into the site studies. In this book they are printed under each name so you can find the chapter and the hill.

Read the entries. Then read the **Connected to** line at the bottom of each one, and follow it. What you will find is that there are remarkably few degrees of separation between a Moabite widow gleaning barley and an old man in Ephesus writing that God is love, and that this library is not sixty-five separate stories at all. **It is one story, and there is a place in it for you.**

The 87 Lives

twelve groups, in the order they happened

I The Fathers

Abraham · Sarah · Isaac · Jacob, who became Israel · Joseph

II Out of Egypt, Into the Land

Moses · Aaron · Miriam · Joshua · Caleb · Rahab

III The Judges, and the Bloodline

Deborah · Gideon · Naomi · Ruth · Boaz

IV The Kings

Samuel · Saul · David · Solomon · Hezekiah · Josiah

V The Prophets, and Where They Stood

Elijah · Elisha · Amos · Hosea · Jonah · Isaiah · Jeremiah · Ezekiel · Daniel · Zechariah the prophet · Haggai · Nehemiah · Ezra

VI The Doorway

Zechariah the priest · Elizabeth · John the Baptist · Mary · Joseph of Nazareth · Simeon · Anna

VII Yeshua

Yeshua

VIII The Twelve

Simon Peter · Andrew · James, son of Zebedee · John, son of Zebedee · Philip · Nathanael, called Bartholomew · Matthew, called Levi · Thomas, called the Twin · Simon the Zealot · James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus · Judas Iscariot

IX The Ones He Met

Mary Magdalene · Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it · Martha of Bethany · Mary of Bethany · Lazarus · The woman at the well · Jairus · The woman He called Daughter · Bartimaeus · Zacchaeus · The centurion of Capernaum · The Syrophoenician mother · The man called Legion · The widow of Nain · Nicodemus · Joseph of Arimathea · Simon of Cyrene · The thief on the cross

X The Powers

Herod the Great · Herod Antipas · Caiaphas and Annas · Pontius Pilate

XI The Four Who Wrote It Down

Matthew, the first Gospel · Mark, the first one written · Luke, the physician · John, the last one

XII After the Stone Moved

Paul, who was Saul · Stephen · Barnabas · James, the brother of Yeshua · Cornelius · Lydia · Timothy

The Fathers

the four generations the whole book rests on

Abraham אַבְרָהָם

C. 2000 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Hebron, the Cave of the Patriarchs · Beersheba, his well · Shechem, his first altar · Moriah, the Temple Mount · The NIPs · Part II

FROM

Ur of the Chaldeans, in southern Iraq, by way of Haran in Turkey

WHO THEY WERE

A wealthy, successful, **childless** man in his seventies, from a moon-worshipping city that had writing, law codes and plumbing while the rest of the world had none of it. He left the most advanced civilisation on earth with one instruction and no map: **go**. He is the first man in the Bible called an **Ivri**, a Hebrew, from the verb to cross over. His entire identity is a direction of travel.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Not glory. **A son**. Every promise God makes him runs through a child he does not have, and the drama of his life is a man trying to hold a promise steady while his body ages out of it. Twenty five years of waiting. Twice, under pressure, he lies about his wife to save his own skin, and the Bible reports it without softening a word, which is exactly why we can trust the rest.

THE TURN

Genesis 22, on a mountain in Moriah, asked for the boy the whole promise depends on. He goes. And at the top he names the place **Yahweh Yireh**, the Lord will see to it, which is the sentence of a man who has finally stopped needing to see the plan himself. Two thousand years later the Temple went up on that ridge, and the crucifixion happened on the same limestone spine.

“Get out of your country, and from your relatives, and from your father’s house, to the land that I will show you.”

GENESIS 12:1

CONNECTED TO Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, who became Israel, Ruth, David, Yeshua, Paul, who was Saul

Sarah שָׂרָה

C. 2000 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Hebron, the Cave of the Patriarchs

FROM

Ur, then Haran, then sixty years of tents

WHO THEY WERE

The only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded, which tells you how much the writers thought of her. Beautiful enough that two kings wanted her, sharp enough to be furious about it, and childless for ninety years in a world where that was a woman's whole standing.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

A child, and her own dignity back. She takes matters into her own hands with Hagar, it goes badly, and she turns cruel about it. Nobody in Genesis is airbrushed.

THE TURN

She laughs at the promise from behind a tent flap, and God asks her why, which must have been terrifying. Then she names her son **Yitzchak**, laughter, so the joke becomes the boy's name. Very few people are given the chance to rename their own cynicism and keep the word.

“Is anything too hard for Yahweh?”

GENESIS 18:14

CONNECTED TO Abraham, Isaac

Isaac יִצְחָק

C. 1950 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Hebron · Beersheba

FROM

born in the land, and he never once left it

WHO THEY WERE

The quiet middle generation. The only patriarch who never emigrates, never takes a second wife, and never starts a fight. Where his father is a pioneer and his son is a schemer, Isaac mostly **re-digs wells his father dug** and moves on when the neighbours fill them in. Being the calm one between two storms is a job too, and nobody thanks you for it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Peace, and continuity. He would rather move than argue, which reads as weakness until you have tried it.

THE TURN

Genesis 22, and notice that he was old enough to carry the wood up the hill and ask the obvious question. Whatever he understood on the way down, he never wrote a word about it. Some things a man carries without narrating them.

“Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”

GENESIS 22:7

CONNECTED TO Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, who became Israel

Jacob, who became Israel יַעֲקֹב

C. 1900 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethel, the ladder · Shechem, his well · Hebron · The Jordan, and the Jabbok ford

FROM

Beersheba, then twenty years in exile in Haran, then home the long way

WHO THEY WERE

The most morally complicated of the fathers and the most emotionally open. He deceives his brother, his blind father and his father-in-law, and every one of them deceives him back, which is the tidiest moral accounting in Genesis. He is also the only patriarch who loves one woman his whole life and grieves a son for twenty years without recovering.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

The blessing, and he is willing to lie for it. Later, much later, only one thing: to see his son's face before he dies. The ambition burns off and the love does not.

THE TURN

A wrestling match at a river ford, alone, at night, in his nineties, against somebody the text refuses to name. He will not let go. He comes away with a **dislocated hip and a new name**, and the whole nation is called after a man who fought God and would not release Him. Israel means he wrestles with God. That is what we are called.

“I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”

GENESIS 32:26

CONNECTED TO Isaac, Joseph, Abraham, Yeshua

Joseph יוסף

C. 1850 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Shechem, where his bones were buried

FROM

Hebron, then a pit, then Egypt

WHO THEY WERE

A gifted, spectacularly tactless seventeen year old who told his brothers his dreams about ruling them and was thrown down a dry cistern for it. Then a slave, then a convict on a false accusation, then the second most powerful man on earth, and all of that before he turned forty.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

At the start, recognition. He wanted to be seen, and he was insufferable about it. By the end he wants nothing except his family in the same room.

THE TURN

The moment he tests his brothers, hears them confess to each other in a language they think he cannot speak, and breaks down so loudly the Egyptians outside can hear him. Then he says the most theologically mature sentence in Genesis. He names their evil accurately **and** God's purpose accurately, in one breath, without excusing anybody. That is what forgiveness sounds like when it is not denial.

"You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."

GENESIS 50:20

CONNECTED TO Jacob, who became Israel, Moses, Yeshua

Out of Egypt, Into the Land

the ones who crossed over

Moses מֹשֶׁה

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Timna, the Tabernacle · On the mountain of the Transfiguration · The NIPs · Part X · Learn Hebrew, the IAM

FROM

born to slaves in Egypt, raised in Pharaoh's household, then forty years hiding in Midian

WHO THEY WERE

Three lives of forty years each: **prince, shepherd, prophet**. The Bible calls him more **anav**, humble, than any man on earth, and the same Bible records him committing manslaughter, smashing the tablets of the Law, striking a rock in a rage and arguing with God to His face more than any other human being. Humility in Hebrew clearly does not mean mild.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

First, justice by his own hand, and he kills a man for it and has to run. Then, for the rest of his life, one thing only: **to see**. *Show me your glory*. He is refused the land and shown the back of God, which he seems to have considered the better deal.

THE TURN

A thorn bush burning without being consumed, and a Name given as a **verb**: Ehyeh asher ehyeh, I will be what I will be. He arrives at that bush a failed prince and a competent shepherd and leaves it carrying the God of the universe's phone number.

"I AM WHO I AM."

EXODUS 3:14

CONNECTED TO Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Elijah, Yeshua

Aaron אַהֲרֹן

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Timna, the Tabernacle and the priesthood

FROM

Egypt, the tribe of Levi, three years older than his brother

WHO THEY WERE

The brother who could speak, and therefore the mouth of the exodus. The **first high priest**, wearing the breastplate with twelve stones and carrying the whole nation's names into the presence of God.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To be liked. That is his flaw and it is a very modern one. Left alone with a nervous crowd for forty days, he does not say no. He collects their gold, makes the calf, and then gives Moses one of the great cowardly sentences in scripture: *I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf*.

THE TURN

He is never removed. He makes the worst mistake in the book and stays high priest, and his rod is the one that buds. The Bible's judgment on Aaron is that a man can be a moral coward and still be genuinely used, which should frighten and comfort us in about equal measure.

"They said to me, 'Make us gods.' ... So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, let them take it off.'"

EXODUS 32:23-24

CONNECTED TO Moses, Miriam, Zechariah the priest

Miriam מִרְיָם

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Timna, and the song at the sea

FROM

Egypt, the eldest of the three

WHO THEY WERE

The girl who stood on the riverbank watching a basket, and then walked up to Pharaoh's daughter and arranged for the baby's own mother to be paid to nurse him. Bold, quick, and about seven years old. The **first woman in the Bible called a prophetess**, and the one who leads the national song with a tambourine on the far shore.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Standing. She led worship for a nation and then watched her younger brother become the only voice that mattered, and she said something about it out loud, and she was struck with leprosy for a week.

THE TURN

There is no recorded repentance scene. What there is: the whole nation of two million people **stopped moving and waited seven days** until she was healed. Her name is where Mary's name comes from. Every Miriam and every Mary in the Bible is named after the girl at the river.

"Sing to Yahweh, for he has triumphed gloriously."

EXODUS 15:21

CONNECTED TO Moses, Aaron, Mary

Joshua יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jericho, and the walls · Ai, and the failure · Shechem, his last speech · Tel Hazor, the northern campaign · Gilboa and Megiddo, the valley he opened

FROM

born a slave in Egypt, tribe of Ephraim

WHO THEY WERE

Moses' aide for forty years before he ever led anything. That is the whole man. The Bible's model of the capable second-in-command who waited, carried somebody else's bags, stood outside the tent while another man talked to God, and did not go sour. He was one of only **two men of his entire generation** who walked out of Egypt and into the land, because he and Caleb were the only two spies who came back and said it could be done.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

The land, and plain obedience. He is the least psychologically tangled major figure in the Bible, and that is precisely his character: a soldier who does what he is told, for sixty years, without drifting off course. He is what faithfulness looks like when it is boring.

THE TURN

The night before Jericho, a man with a drawn sword. Joshua asks the soldier's question, **are you for us or for our enemies**, and gets the answer that reorganises his whole command structure: *neither. I am the commander of Yahweh's army.* His leadership begins the moment he is told he is not the general.

And the name. Yehoshua means Yahweh saves. Shorten it the way Aramaic speakers did and you get **Yeshua**. The man who brought Israel into the land and the man who brings us in have the same name, and the New Testament expects you to notice.

"As for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh."

JOSHUA 24:15

CONNECTED TO Moses, Caleb, Rahab, Yeshua

Caleb כָּלֵב

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Hebron, the hill he asked for

FROM

the tribe of Judah, and originally a Kenizzite, so probably not even ethnically Israelite by descent

WHO THEY WERE

The other one who believed the report. Forty five years later, at **eighty five years old**, when the land is being divided and everybody is choosing valleys, Caleb walks up and asks for the hill country. The part with the fortified towns and the giants on it. Because that is the piece he was promised, and because he wants the hard one.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To finish what he saw at forty. He describes himself as being as strong now as he was then, which may be bravado, and he takes the hill anyway.

THE TURN

There is no turn. That is the point of Caleb. The text says four times that he **wholly followed Yahweh**, and the whole story of his life is that his forty year old convictions and his eighty five year old convictions were the same convictions.

“Now therefore give me this hill country.”

JOSHUA 14:12

CONNECTED TO Joshua, Moses

Rahab רָחָב

C. 1400 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jericho, her house in the wall · The NIPs · Part II

FROM

Jericho. A Canaanite, and the text never once softens her profession

WHO THEY WERE

A prostitute running a house built into the city wall, which is where you put people you tolerate and do not respect. She had also been listening. Her speech to the spies is a **theological statement**: she has heard what happened at the sea forty years earlier and she has drawn the correct conclusion while every official in her city drew the wrong one.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Survival, for herself and every relative she could cram into one house. She negotiates like somebody who has had to negotiate for everything.

THE TURN

She hangs a **scarlet cord** out of the window and stakes her whole family on a God she has only heard rumours about. And then she is not merely spared. She marries into Judah, and Matthew puts her in the **genealogy of the Messiah**, four names above King David.

“Yahweh your God, he is God in heaven above, and on earth beneath.”

JOSHUA 2:11

CONNECTED TO Joshua, Ruth, Boaz, David, Yeshua

The Judges, and the Bloodline

a dark age, and one quiet love story inside it

Deborah דְּבוֹרָה

C. 1200 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley · Mount Tabor

FROM

the hill country of Ephraim, under a palm tree between Bethel and Ramah

WHO THEY WERE

Judge, prophetess and war leader in the same person, in the roughest century of Israel's history. People came **up** to her to have disputes settled, which means she had authority nobody granted her and everybody accepted. Her song in Judges 5 is among the oldest Hebrew poetry in existence.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Order. She is not looking for a battle. She is looking for a nation that stops behaving like a collection of villages, and she gets one for forty years.

THE TURN

Her general Barak refuses to go unless she comes with him, and she agrees, and then tells him the honour of the victory will go to a woman instead of him. She was right. She takes the field, wins at the Kishon in the mud below Tabor, and hands the credit to somebody else entirely.

“Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!”

JUDGES 5:12

CONNECTED TO Gideon, Joshua

Gideon גִּדְעוֹן

C. 1150 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The NIPs · Part X · Beit She'an and the Jezreel

FROM

Ophrah, in Manasseh. Hiding in a winepress when we meet him

WHO THEY WERE

The most nervous man God ever recruited. An angel calls him a mighty warrior while he is threshing wheat in a hole in the ground so the Midianites will not see him, and his answer is a full self-assessment: **my family is the poorest in Manasseh and I am the least in my father's house.**

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Certainty. He asks for sign after sign, wet fleece then dry fleece, and God gives him every one without complaint, which tells you something about how God handles anxious people.

THE TURN

His army is cut from thirty two thousand to **three hundred**, and God states the reason out loud: *lest Israel brag against me, saying, my own hand has saved me.* Gideon's whole story is God removing every resource except Himself, from a man who had no confidence to begin with.

“O Lord, how shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh.”

JUDGES 6:15

CONNECTED TO Deborah, Amos, Moses

Naomi נְעֻמִי

C. 1100 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethlehem · The NIPs · Part III

FROM

Bethlehem, then ten years as an economic migrant in Moab, then home with nothing

WHO THEY WERE

A woman who left in a famine with a husband and two sons and came back with none of them. Her name means **pleasant**, and when the women of the town greet her she tells them to stop using it: *call me Mara*, bitter. She is the Bible's most honest griever, and nobody rebukes her for it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

At first, only to release her daughters-in-law from any obligation to her, which is a generous instinct in a ruined woman. Later, to see one of them safe.

THE TURN

She never gets a vision or a voice. What she gets is a slow return through a foreign daughter-in-law's stubborn loyalty, a barley harvest, and eventually a grandson on her lap whom the neighbours call **a son born to Naomi**. Sometimes God's answer to bitterness is not an explanation. It is a baby and time.

"Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."

RUTH 1:20

CONNECTED TO Ruth, Boaz, David

Ruth רוּת

C. 1100 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethlehem, the barley fields · The NIPs · Part III

FROM

Moab, on the eastern side of the Dead Sea. A nation with an ugly origin story and a law excluding it

WHO THEY WERE

Stack up her disadvantages and there is no category of vulnerability she misses. **Moabite**, with an accent everyone could hear and a specific verse in Deuteronomy barring her people from the assembly. **Widow**, with no husband, sons or property. **Foreigner** in Judah. And poor enough to **glean**, which means walking behind other people's harvesters picking up what they drop.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Not a husband. Read her vow again. What she wants is **Naomi**, and Naomi's people, and Naomi's God, in that order, and she swears it with a curse formula on herself if she breaks it. It is the most quoted loyalty oath in the world and it was made by a foreign woman to her mother-in-law.

THE TURN

She goes out to the **corners of a field**, because there is a law in Leviticus commanding farmers not to harvest the edges. Then a wealthy man uses his money in the opposite direction from every other rich man in the Bible and redeems her. Four verses from the end of her short book, the genealogy lands: Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David.

"Where you go, I will go; and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God."

RUTH 1:16

CONNECTED TO Naomi, Boaz, David, Rahab, Yeshua

Boaz בֹּאֵז

C. 1100 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethlehem · The NIPs · Part III

FROM

Bethlehem. A substantial landowner, and Rahab's descendant, which he surely knew

WHO THEY WERE

The one genuinely admirable rich man in the Hebrew Bible, and he is admirable in small ways. He greets his workers with a blessing. He tells his young men to leave her alone. He instructs them to **drop extra grain on purpose** so she does not know she is being helped. He does the paperwork properly at the gate in front of witnesses instead of taking what he could have taken.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To do the right thing without humiliating anybody, which is a rarer ambition than heroism.

THE TURN

He becomes the **goel**, the redeemer: a relative with the legal right and no legal obligation, who spends money he did not have to spend on somebody who could never repay him. If you want to know what the Gospel means by redemption, it means Boaz at the gate of Bethlehem, buying back a field to give a foreign widow a future.

“Yahweh be with you. ... All that you have done for your mother-in-law has been fully reported to me.”

RUTH 2:4, 11

CONNECTED TO Ruth, Naomi, Rahab, David, Yeshua

The Kings

the throne, and what it did to the men who sat on it

Samuel שמואל

C. 1050 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Shiloh, where he slept by the ark · Nebi Samuel, his tomb · The NIPs · Part IV

FROM

Ramah, born to a woman who had been mocked for infertility and prayed so hard the priest thought she was drunk

WHO THEY WERE

Handed over to the sanctuary as a small boy and raised in it. Prophet, priest and the **last of the judges**, and the hinge between two whole eras of Israel's history. He is also the boy who heard a voice at night three times and thought it was the old man in the next room.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

For the nation to stay under God rather than under a king. He loses that argument, takes it personally, and God has to tell him plainly: *they have not rejected you, they have rejected me*. Then he anoints the king he argued against, and does it properly.

THE TURN

At Jesse's house in Bethlehem, God corrects his **eyes**: don't look at the height of his stature, man looks at the outward appearance but Yahweh looks at the heart. The greatest prophet of his generation nearly anointed the wrong brother because the wrong brother was taller.

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but Yahweh looks at the heart."

1 SAMUEL 16:7

CONNECTED TO Saul, David, Ruth, Boaz

Saul שאול

REIGNED C. 1050-1010 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Gilboa, where he died · Beit She'an, where they hung his body · Ein Gedi, where he hunted David

FROM

Gibeah, in Benjamin, the smallest tribe. A head taller than everybody else

WHO THEY WERE

Israel's first king and its great tragedy. He begins beautifully: taller than every man in the country and **hiding among the baggage** on his coronation day out of sheer embarrassment. He ends consulting a medium in the dark because God has gone quiet.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Approval. That is the whole diagnosis, and it is the most contemporary psychology in the Hebrew Bible. Every one of his fatal decisions comes from the same place: he offers the sacrifice himself because the men were scattering from him, he spares the plunder because the people wanted it, and when confronted his confession names the real god he served: *I feared the people, and obeyed their voice*.

THE TURN

There is no turn, and that is the horror of the account. He gets multiple chances, several genuine prophecies, a son who loves David more than the throne, and he cannot let go. He dies on Gilboa with his own sword, four sons dead beside him, and the men of Jabesh Gilead walk all night to take his body down off the wall at Beit She'an because he had once rescued them.

"I have sinned; for I have transgressed Yahweh's commandment ... because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."

1 SAMUEL 15:24

CONNECTED TO Samuel, David, Josiah

David דָּוִד

REIGNED C. 1010-970 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The City of David · Bethlehem, where he was anointed · Ein Gedi, the cave and the robe · Jerusalem 3000 · The NIPs · Part IV, the eighth son · The NIPs · Part VI, the broken heart · Up to Jerusalem · the Son of David

FROM

Bethlehem, the eighth son of a farmer, out with the sheep

WHO THEY WERE

The most fully documented interior life in the ancient world, because he left us **seventy three psalms** and did not edit out the ugly ones. Shepherd, musician, guerrilla commander, outlaw, king, adulterer, murderer by proxy, penitent, and the standard every later king was measured against. He is the only man in the Bible called **a man after God's own heart**, and the Bible tells you in detail why he did not deserve it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Early on, simply to be counted. He was the son nobody thought to call in from the field, and Samuel had to **send for him**. Later, one obsession runs through everything: to be **near**. He wants to build God a house, he dances in the street without dignity, he writes one thing I have desired, that I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life.

THE TURN

Two turns, and you need both. The first is a slingshot in the Elah valley. The second is a prophet standing in his throne room saying **you are the man**, after adultery and an arranged death. And David, who could have had Nathan killed in about four seconds, says *I have sinned against Yahweh*, and then writes Psalm 51, which changed how a whole civilisation prays. The king who could afford any sacrifice in the kingdom concluded that God does not want the animal. **The offering is a broken heart.**

The deep link to Yeshua. It is not mainly the throne. Yeshua quotes the Psalms more than any other book, prays Psalm 22 and Psalm 31 from the cross, and applies David's own rejected-stone verse to Himself. And His teaching on repentance **is** David's: the tax collector's eight words in Luke 18 are Psalm 51 in miniature, and the man who prays them goes home right with God while the man with the achievements does not. Son of David is not only a bloodline. It is a doctrine.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

PSALM 51:17

CONNECTED TO Samuel, Saul, Ruth, Boaz, Solomon, Yeshua, Simon Peter

Solomon שלמה

REIGNED C. 970-930 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount, his Temple · Megiddo, his chariot city · Tel Hazor, his fortress · Timna and Eilat, his copper and his ships · The City of David

FROM

Jerusalem. The second son of David and Bathsheba, born after the first one died

WHO THEY WERE

The wealthiest and most cultured king Israel ever had, and the saddest book in the Bible is attributed to him. He asked for **wisdom instead of long life or riches** and was given all three, built the Temple, wrote or collected three thousand proverbs, ran a trading empire from the Red Sea to Phoenicia, and hosted a queen who came a thousand miles to check whether the reports were exaggerated. They were not.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Everything, and that is exactly the problem. Read Ecclesiastes as a case file: *I made myself great works, I built houses, I planted vineyards, I gathered silver and gold, I got singers, I withheld nothing from my eyes* and then the verdict, **hevel**, vapour, breath, all of it. He is the only man in history who ran the experiment with unlimited funding and published the negative result.

THE TURN

This is the tragedy, and Tai should say it plainly on the Temple Mount: the wisest man who ever lived **drifted**. Not through one catastrophe, through seven hundred political marriages and a slow accommodation, until there were shrines to other gods on the hills opposite his own Temple. Wisdom is not a possession. It is a practice, and he stopped practising.

Yeshua's verdict on him is startling and worth quoting in the Temple courts: *consider the lilies of the field. Even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these*. And, of the queen who travelled to hear him: **a greater than Solomon is here**.

"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity. ... Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

ECCLESIASTES 1:2; 12:13

CONNECTED TO David, Hezekiah, Yeshua

Hezekiah חִזְקִיָּהוּ

REIGNED C. 715-686 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Siloam tunnel he cut · The City of David · The broad wall of the Old City

FROM

Jerusalem, son of one of the worst kings Judah had

WHO THEY WERE

The king who saw the Assyrian empire eat the northern kingdom and every fortified city in Judah, and then arrive at his gates with an army that had never lost. His response was **engineering and prayer**, in that order and both seriously. He cut a **533 metre tunnel** through solid rock from two ends at once to bring the spring inside the walls, and you can still walk it with water round your knees.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To survive, and to be remembered as faithful. He is genuinely one of the good kings, and also vain enough to show a Babylonian delegation his entire treasury, which Isaiah tells him was a catastrophic error.

THE TURN

Sennacherib's field commander shouts a psychological warfare speech in Hebrew at the wall, so the soldiers will understand it. Hezekiah takes the letter, walks into the Temple, **spreads it out in front of God** and prays one of the most dignified prayers in the Bible. The siege ends. The Assyrian annals admit they never took the city, which is the closest thing to independent confirmation you get in the ancient world.

“Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you are Yahweh, even you only.”

2 KINGS 19:19

CONNECTED TO Isaiah, Josiah, Solomon

Josiah יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ

REIGNED C. 640-609 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Megiddo, where he died · The Temple Mount

FROM

Jerusalem. Crowned at eight years old after his father was assassinated

WHO THEY WERE

The last good king, and the most thorough reformer in the history of either kingdom. He came to the throne as a child in a country that had forgotten its own scriptures, and at twenty six, during building repairs, somebody **found the book** in the Temple and read it to him.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To put it right, all of it, immediately. When he hears the Law read he tears his clothes, because he understands at once how far off they are. Then he does something almost nobody does: he acts on the reading. He cleans out the Temple, ends the child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom, and keeps the largest Passover since Samuel.

THE TURN

The discovery of the scroll is one of the most consequential moments in the Bible: a nation rediscovering the text it already owned. And his end is heartbreaking. He rides out to Megiddo to intercept an Egyptian army that was not coming for him, is shot, and dies at thirty nine, and Jeremiah writes his funeral song.

“Great is Yahweh's wrath ... because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book.”

2 KINGS 22:13

CONNECTED TO Jeremiah, Hezekiah, Ezra

The Prophets, and Where They Stood

every one of them was standing somewhere when he wrote

Elijah אליהו

C. 870 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Carmel, the showdown · The Jordan, where he was taken · On the mountain of the Transfiguration

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he worked: the northern kingdom, in open confrontation with the palace at Samaria. He left no book. Everything we have of him is narrative, written by somebody else, which suits a man who mostly appeared, said one devastating sentence, and vanished.

FROM

Tishbe in Gilead, east of the Jordan. A rough outsider from the wrong side of the river

WHO THEY WERE

The most confrontational figure in the Hebrew Bible. He walks in off the street with no introduction, tells the king there will be no rain, and leaves. He is fed by ravens, outruns a chariot, calls down fire, and then, immediately after the greatest public victory any prophet ever had, **asks God to let him die**.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

For the nation to stop hedging. His question on Carmel is not really about Baal, it is about **double-mindedness**: how long will you keep limping between two opinions? He cannot bear a people who want both.

THE TURN

Under a broom tree in the desert, suicidal and exhausted, God does not rebuke him. He is fed twice, allowed to sleep, walked to a mountain, and then given wind, earthquake and fire, and God is in none of them. The voice comes as a **kol demamah dakah**, a sound of thin silence. The loudest prophet in the Bible was taught that God's usual volume is very low.

"How long will you waver between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him."

1 KINGS 18:21

CONNECTED TO Elisha, Moses, John the Baptist, Yeshua

Elisha אֵלִישָׁע

C. 850 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jericho, where he healed the spring · The Jordan · Nain and Shunem, the other raised son

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he worked: all over the northern kingdom, in and out of ordinary houses. He left no book either.

FROM

Abel Meholah, in the Jordan valley. Ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, which means a wealthy family farm

WHO THEY WERE

The disciple who asked for **a double portion** and got it, and then spent his career doing the opposite kind of miracle from his master. Where Elijah brought fire and drought, Elisha purifies a poisoned stew, makes a borrowed axe head float, multiplies a widow's oil, and heals a foreign general of leprosy. Domestic, local, practical mercy.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To be a real successor rather than a shadow. When Elijah offers him anything, he asks for capacity, not comfort.

THE TURN

He burns his ploughing equipment and cooks his own oxen for the farewell meal, which is a way of saying there is nothing to come back to. Nobody who slaughters their own means of production is planning a fallback.

"Please let a double portion of your spirit be on me."

2 KINGS 2:9

CONNECTED TO Elijah, Yeshua

Amos אָמוֹס

C. 760 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethel, where he preached · Tekoa and the Judean desert · The NIPs · Part X

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he spoke: at the royal shrine of **Bethel**, in the northern kingdom, as a foreign national from Judah, during the most prosperous decade the north ever had. He walked north on purpose, to the one place he would be least welcome.

FROM

Tekoa, in the Judean wilderness south of Bethlehem. Livestock and sycamore figs

WHO THEY WERE

The bluntest curriculum vitae in the Bible. Confronted by the official priest and told to go home, he answers with what amounts to: **I am not one of you, I never was, I have no theological training.** A herdsman with a vocabulary of drought and locusts, addressing the wealthiest religious establishment of his century.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Justice, specifically economic justice, and he names the mechanisms: rigged scales, selling the poor for a pair of sandals, and doing it all while attending the festivals. He is the first person to say that God actively dislikes worship offered by people who are cheating.

THE TURN

He has no call narrative to speak of, no vision of a throne, no burning coal. Just: *Yahweh took me from following the flock, and said, go.* Some people are not converted, they are conscripted.

"I hate, I despise your feasts ... But let justice roll on like rivers, and righteousness like a mighty stream."

AMOS 5:21, 24

CONNECTED TO Hosea, Isaiah, Gideon

Hosea הוֹשֵׁעַ

C. 750 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Samaria-Sebaste, the capital he warned · The NIPs · Part X

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood: the northern kingdom in its last generation, watching it come apart. He is the only prophet whose **marriage** is the message.

FROM

the northern kingdom itself, so he was warning his own people, not somebody else's

WHO THEY WERE

The prophet of the broken heart. He is told to marry a woman who will be unfaithful to him, and to name their children **Not Loved** and **Not My People**, so that every time he calls his own children in for dinner the whole village hears the sermon. Then he is told to go and buy her back.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants his wife. That is not a metaphor, it is the point of the book: God gave a man the experience of being betrayed by somebody he could not stop loving, and then said, now you know how I feel.

THE TURN

Hosea 3:1, and it may be the hardest verse any prophet was handed: **go again, love her**. Not tolerate, not receive back grudgingly. Love. And out of that comes the sentence Yeshua quoted twice at religious professionals who were criticising His dinner guests.

"For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

HOSEA 6:6

CONNECTED TO Amos, Isaiah, Yeshua

Jonah יוֹנָה

C. 780 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jaffa, the port he ran from · You Are in the Pages · Movement III

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood: on the quay at **Jaffa**, paying a fare to go as far west as ships went, when he had been told to go east. You can stand in that harbour. It is the only place in the Bible where somebody buys a ticket to run from God.

FROM

Gath Hepher, three miles from Nazareth. Which means Yeshua grew up walking distance from Jonah's hometown

WHO THEY WERE

The only prophet in the Bible whose mission **succeeded completely** and who was furious about it. A whole city repents, from the king down to the livestock, and he goes outside the walls, sits down and sulks. His prayer in chapter 4 is a masterpiece of bad faith: *I knew you were gracious and merciful, that is exactly why I ran.*

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants Nineveh judged. He is not a coward, he is a **patriot**: Assyria was the empire that would eventually destroy his nation, and he did not want it forgiven. His anger is comprehensible and that is what makes the book so uncomfortable.

THE TURN

The book ends on a **question** and no answer. God asks him whether it is right to care more about a shade plant than a hundred and twenty thousand people, and the scroll simply stops. It is the only book in the Bible that ends mid-argument, and the reader is left holding the reply.

Yeshua uses him as **the only sign He would give**: as Jonah was three days in the fish, so the Son of Man in the heart of the earth. And He adds the sting: the men of Nineveh repented at Jonah's preaching, and **a greater than Jonah is here.**

"Should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons?"

JONAH 4:11

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Simon Peter

Isaiah יְשַׁעְיָהוּ

C. 740-680 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount, where he saw the throne · The City of David · Qumran, where the great scroll was found · The NIPs · Part VII · Three Years by the Sea · Part III, Galilee of the nations

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he wrote: Jerusalem. Not in exile, not in a desert. Inside the city, with access to the Temple courts and to the palace, through the reigns of **four kings**, for roughly sixty years. He is the insider prophet: he argues with monarchs face to face, walks out to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct, and advises Hezekiah during the Assyrian siege. And in **1947 a shepherd boy found a complete scroll of his book in a cave at Qumran**, a thousand years older than any copy we had, and it read the same. You can see it in Jerusalem.

FROM

Jerusalem, and by long tradition of noble or royal birth, which fits his access and the quality of his Hebrew

WHO THEY WERE

The most sophisticated writer in the Hebrew Bible, and the closest thing to a VIP in the prophetic gallery. Which is why what happens to him in chapter 6 matters so much. The moment he actually sees God, the thing that disintegrates first is the one thing he was good at: **I am a man of unclean lips**. The orator's professional advantage is the first casualty in the presence of holiness.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To be sent, once he has been cleaned. **Hineni**. Here I am. And then he is told the appalling truth that his ministry will largely not work, and he takes the job anyway, which is a species of faith almost nobody talks about.

THE TURN

A burning coal off the altar, held with tongs, touched to his mouth. And afterwards this refined nobleman is told to walk **naked and barefoot for three years** as a living sign concerning Egypt. So much for standing. He went on to write the four Servant songs, including the one that describes a man with no beauty that we should desire him, despised and rejected, seven centuries before the fact.

“Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips ... for my eyes have seen the King.”

ISAIAH 6:5

CONNECTED TO Hezekiah, Amos, Hosea, Yeshua, John the Baptist

Jeremiah ירמיהו

C. 627-580 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The City of David, and the cisterns under it · The Temple Mount · Megiddo, where he mourned Josiah · The NIPs · Part VIII

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he wrote: Anathoth and Jerusalem, then, against his will, Egypt. He was born in a priestly village about three miles northeast of Jerusalem, and he preached in the capital for roughly **forty years**, right through the siege, and watched the city fall and the Temple burn. He dictated to a scribe named **Baruch**, which is why we have the book at all, and at the end he was dragged down to Egypt by refugees who would not listen to him even after everything he said came true.

FROM

Anathoth, a village of priests just outside Jerusalem

WHO THEY WERE

The most emotionally exposed man in the Bible. If you have ever wanted to quit something God gave you, he is your prophet. He begins by refusing on grounds of age, he is a **na'ar**, a boy, and God overrules the objection without flattering him. He is forbidden to marry as a living sign. He is beaten, put in the stocks, accused of treason by his own people for telling the truth about the war, and lowered into a **cistern** where the text gives one unforgettable detail: there was no water in it, but mire, and he sank in the mire.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants to stop. That is the astonishing thing about him. He writes it down: I said I will not mention him nor speak in his name again. And then he cannot, because the word had become **a burning fire shut up in my bones**. No other prophet lets us watch the internal argument.

THE TURN

At the lowest point of the whole disaster, with the Babylonians at the wall and himself in prison, God tells him to **buy a field**. Do the paperwork, seal the deed, hand it to Baruch, keep it in a jar. Houses and fields and vineyards shall be bought again in this land. He signs a mortgage on a country that is about to be flattened, which is the most stubborn act of hope in the Hebrew Bible. And the same man wrote the words **new covenant**, six hundred years before an upper room on Mount Zion.

"If I say, 'I will not make mention of him,' then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones."

JEREMIAH 20:9

CONNECTED TO Josiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Yeshua

Ezekiel יְחֶזְקֵאל

C. 593-571 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount, where he trained to serve · The Eastern Gate, where he saw the glory return · The NIPs · Part IX

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he wrote: Babylon. A refugee camp called **Tel Abib** on the **Chebar canal** in what is now southern Iraq, roughly a thousand kilometres from the Temple. He was a **priest**, deported at about twenty five, and his call came in year five of the exile, in unclean foreign territory, among displaced people. He never saw Jerusalem again. Every word of his book was written by a man who could not reach the only building his training was for. And the modern city of **Tel Aviv** took its name from the verse that names his camp.

FROM

Jerusalem, a priestly family, then a canal bank in Iraq

WHO THEY WERE

The hardest of them to be, and his loss is professional annihilation: a priest without a temple is unemployable in the deepest possible sense. And notice what God calls him. **Ninety three times** in his book God addresses him as **ben adam**, son of man, son of Adam, son of dust. Of every title available for a priest and a prophet, God chose the one that means *you are made of ground*.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To make people see. He is the most theatrical prophet in scripture because words alone were not working: he lies on one side for months, cooks over dung, shaves his head and weighs the hair, packs a bag and walks out through a hole in the wall while they watch. When they will not listen, he **performs**.

THE TURN

The sentence that stops every reader. His wife, whom the text calls **the desire of your eyes**, would die, and he was forbidden to mourn her publicly, as a sign. *So I spoke to the people in the morning; and at evening my wife died. I did in the morning as I was commanded.* And to **this** man, the most humiliated prophet in the Bible, God gave the most hopeful visions in it: the valley of dry bones coming to life, the heart of stone traded for a heart of flesh, and the glory coming back in through the Eastern Gate.

“Son of man, can these bones live? ... Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live.”

EZEKIEL 37:3, 5

CONNECTED TO Jeremiah, Daniel, Yeshua

Daniel דניאל

C. 605-535 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Babylon and Persia, through the exile studies

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he wrote: the imperial capitals. Babylon and then Susa, inside the administration, serving **four rulers across three regimes** as a senior civil servant. The only major prophet who spent his whole career in a government office.

FROM

Jerusalem nobility, deported as a teenager in the first wave

WHO THEY WERE

A gifted foreign teenager put through an elite re-education programme designed to erase his identity, including a new name that honoured a Babylonian god. He submits to the language, the literature and the administration, and draws the line at the **menu**, which sounds trivial until you realise it was the one daily act that kept him himself.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To serve honourably in a system he did not choose without being absorbed by it. That is the whole book, and it is why Daniel is the text for anybody working inside an institution they cannot reform.

THE TURN

An edict makes prayer illegal for thirty days, and he **opens his window and prays three times a day exactly as before**. Not louder, not in secret. Unchanged. And he was in his eighties. Then a night with lions and a king who could not sleep. His courage is never dramatic. It is simply consistent for seventy years.

“He knelt on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did before.”

DANIEL 6:10

CONNECTED TO Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Joseph

Zechariah the prophet זְכַרְיָה

C. 520-480 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount, the second Temple · The Mount of Olives, his last chapter · Up to Jerusalem · Part IV, the donkey

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood when he wrote: Jerusalem, 520 BC, on a building site. He came back with the returning exiles to a city that was still rubble and a Temple foundation that had sat unfinished for sixteen years. He was himself from a **priestly family**, so he was working on his own future workplace. Everything he wrote was written among discouraged people with trowels in their hands.

FROM

born in Babylon during the exile, returned to Jerusalem as a young man

WHO THEY WERE

The most visionary of the post-exilic prophets and the most quoted in the Passion narratives. His book is strange and dazzling: eight night visions, a flying scroll, a lampstand fed by two olive trees, a man on a red horse among myrtle trees. He is trying to convince a demoralised, underfunded remnant that the small thing they are building matters.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To restart the work, and to lift the eyes of people who had stopped expecting anything. His famous line to them is not about strategy: **not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit.**

THE TURN

He is given, centuries in advance, the specific details of a week in Jerusalem: a king coming **humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt the foal of a donkey; thirty pieces of silver** thrown into the house of the Lord; the shepherd struck and the sheep scattered; and **they will look on me whom they have pierced.** Then his book ends on the Mount of Olives, on the exact ridge where Acts 1 happens.

“Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! ... Behold, your King comes to you. He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey.”

ZECHARIAH 9:9

CONNECTED TO Haggai, Nehemiah, Yeshua, Judas Iscariot

Haggai חגי

520 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount, the same building site

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood: the same rubble, the same year, four months before Zechariah. His entire book covers **three and a half months**, the shortest dated ministry in the Bible, and it worked. Building restarted within three weeks of his first sermon.

FROM

probably born before the exile, so he may have been old enough to remember the first Temple standing

WHO THEY WERE

The most efficient prophet in scripture. No visions, no poetry, no cosmic imagery. Four short sermons of pure, uncomfortable practicality, and the first one is a single question that lands like a slap.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants them to stop panelling their own houses while God's house lies in ruins. He is the prophet of **misordered priorities**, and he does not moralise about it, he just points at the timber.

THE TURN

He tells a discouraged, elderly congregation who kept weeping because the new Temple was smaller than the old one that the glory of this later house would be **greater** than the former. Five hundred years later a carpenter from Nazareth walked into that building.

"Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, while this house lies waste?"

HAGGAI 1:4

CONNECTED TO Zechariah the prophet, Nehemiah, Ezra

Nehemiah נְחִמְיָה

445 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Old City walls · The City of David · The Eastern Gate

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood: first the palace at Susa, then on top of a broken wall in Jerusalem. He was **cupbearer to the king of Persia**, the most trusted position in the empire, and he gave it up to run a construction project in a ruined provincial town. He rebuilt the wall in **fifty two days**, with the workers holding a tool in one hand and a weapon in the other.

FROM

born in exile in Persia. He had never seen Jerusalem before he went to rebuild it

WHO THEY WERE

The best project manager in the Bible and one of the great leaders in any literature. He does a **night inspection on a donkey before telling anybody his plan**, assigns families to build the section of wall nearest their own houses so the motivation is personal, handles four separate attempts at sabotage, and refuses the governor's food allowance for twelve years because the people were already too heavily taxed.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

The honour of the city, and he takes it personally. His memoir is full of short, unguarded prayers thrown up mid-sentence: *remember me, my God, for good.*

THE TURN

It starts with a question and a collapse. He asks a visitor how things are in Jerusalem, hears the answer, and **sits down and weeps and fasts for days**. Then he plans for four months, waits for the right moment with the king, and prays a one-sentence prayer between being asked a question and answering it. Grief that turns into logistics is one of the most useful things in the world.

“So the wall was finished ... in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard of it, they perceived that this work was done by our God.”

NEHEMIAH 6:15-16

CONNECTED TO Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah the prophet

Ezra עֶזְרָא

458 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Southern Steps, where the Law was read · The Temple Mount

WHERE HE STOOD

Where he stood: on a wooden platform in a public square in Jerusalem, reading out loud from dawn until midday, with the whole nation standing to listen and Levites moving through the crowd explaining as he went. It is the first description of a Bible study in history.

FROM

Babylon, a priest descended from Aaron, and a scribe by profession

WHO THEY WERE

The man who saved the text. If Nehemiah rebuilt the wall, Ezra rebuilt the **book**, and of the two that was the more durable achievement. Jewish tradition credits him with fixing the canon and the script. He is the reason there was still something to read.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

That the people should **know what it says**. He is described in one memorable line as having set his heart to three things in order: to study the Law, to do it, and then to teach it. That order is the whole man, and it is still the right order.

THE TURN

When he hears how far the community has drifted, he does not preach. He tears his clothes, pulls out his own hair and sits down appalled until evening, and then prays a confession in which he uses the word **we** throughout, never they. A leader who will not separate himself from his people's failure.

"Ezra had set his heart to seek Yahweh's law, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances."

EZRA 7:10

CONNECTED TO Nehemiah, Josiah, Haggai

The Doorway

the generation that opened the door

Zechariah the priest זְכַרְיָה

C. 6 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Ein Karem, his village · The Temple Mount, at the incense altar · The NIPs · Part XI

FROM

the hill country of Judea, a priest of the division of Abijah, married to a daughter of Aaron

WHO THEY WERE

An elderly country priest whose entire life has been faithful and, by the standards of his world, a failure: he and Elizabeth are **righteous and childless**, and in that culture those two facts were not supposed to go together. Then his division comes up on the rota, the lot falls to him, and he draws the one duty a priest might get **once in a lifetime**: burning the incense in the Holy Place.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He had stopped asking. That is the honest reading of his reaction. The angel says *your prayer has been heard*, and he answers with an actuarial objection about his wife's age. He had prayed for so long that the answer arriving was harder to believe than the silence.

THE TURN

He is **struck dumb for nine months**, and I have come to think of it as mercy rather than punishment: a man given three quarters of a year of enforced silence to watch his impossible answer grow. When he finally speaks, it comes out as poetry, and he does something a first century father almost never did: he backs his wife's choice of a name over the whole family's expectation.

"His mouth was opened immediately and his tongue freed, and he spoke, blessing God."

LUKE 1:64

CONNECTED TO Elizabeth, John the Baptist, Mary, Aaron

Elizabeth אֵלִישֶׁבַע

C. 6 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

Ein Karem, the Visitation

FROM

a priestly family, of the daughters of Aaron. Her name is Aaron's wife's name

WHO THEY WERE

An old woman carrying decades of quiet social humiliation, who is the **first human being** to say out loud who Mary's child is. Not a priest, not a scribe, not a prophet at the Temple. An elderly pregnant relative in a village in the hills.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To have the reproach lifted. She says it plainly: the Lord has taken away my reproach among men. And then, given the chance to compare herself favourably with anybody, she does the opposite.

THE TURN

A pregnant teenager walks up her path after a hundred and forty kilometre journey, and Elizabeth, who has every claim to seniority, calls her **blessed** and asks why the mother of her Lord should come to her. The older woman honours the younger one first. That is where Mary's song comes from: somebody believed her.

"Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of the things which have been spoken to her by the Lord."

LUKE 1:45

CONNECTED TO Zechariah the priest, Mary, John the Baptist, Miriam

John the Baptist יוחנן

C. 5 BC - 29 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Jordan, where he baptised · Ein Karem, where he was born · Qumran, the desert community nearby · The NIPs · Part XI · Three Years by the Sea · Part III

FROM

a priestly family in the Judean hills, and then the wilderness, by choice

WHO THEY WERE

Once you see his birth certificate the story is astonishing. He was **priestly on both sides**: his father a priest of the division of Abijah, his mother of the daughters of Aaron. He had a guaranteed career, the rota, the linen, the incense, the income, standing in Jerusalem. **And he walked away from every bit of it.** Camel hair, a leather belt, locusts and wild honey, which is not eccentricity but a **quotation**: it is exactly how the Bible describes Elijah. He dressed as a sermon.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To decrease. He is the only figure in the Bible whose stated career goal is to become less. When his own disciples come to him worried that Yeshua's crowds are bigger, he gives them the line: **he must increase, but I must decrease**, and he means it as good news.

THE TURN

He preached against the very establishment he was born into, and specifically against inherited status: *do not start telling yourselves you have Abraham as your father*. And then, from a dungeon, he sent two men to ask whether he had been right about everything, which is the most human thing in his story. **Yeshua did not shame him for the question.** He sent back a list of what was happening and a blessing. Then John died as a party favour for a dancing girl, with no trial worth the name.

“Among those who are born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptizer; yet he who is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he.”

MATTHEW 11:11

CONNECTED TO Zechariah the priest, Elizabeth, Elijah, Yeshua, Herod Antipas, Isaiah

Mary מרים

C. 18 BC - 45 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Nazareth, the Annunciation · Bethlehem · Cana, the first sign · Golgotha · Mount Zion · The NIPs · Part XII · Three Years by the Sea · Part I

FROM

Nazareth, a village so small it appears nowhere in the Hebrew Bible and nowhere in Josephus

WHO THEY WERE

A teenage girl, probably between thirteen and sixteen, engaged and not yet married, in an insignificant village in an occupied province. And she answers an angel with a question that is practical rather than pious, **how will this be**, and then with a sentence that costs her her reputation for the rest of her life.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Read the **Magnificat** again and notice what it actually is. It is not a lullaby. It is a **revolutionary anthem**: he has put down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly, he has filled the hungry and sent the rich away empty. A village girl with no status sings about the reordering of the world, and she sings it in the past tense, as though it is already done.

THE TURN

Simeon warns her in the Temple that a sword will go through her own soul, and it does. She watches her son become famous, be called insane by his own relatives, and then die in public, and she stands there for it. She is at Cana at the beginning and at the cross at the end, and in Acts 1 she is in the upper room praying with the disciples, which means she stayed.

“Behold, the servant of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.”

LUKE 1:38

CONNECTED TO Joseph of Nazareth, Yeshua, Elizabeth, John, son of Zebedee, Miriam

Joseph of Nazareth יוסף

C. 20 BC - C. 25 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Nazareth · Bethlehem

FROM

Nazareth, of the house of David, working as a tekton, a builder in wood and stone

WHO THEY WERE

A man with a legal right to public vindication who chose to give it up. He is told his fiancée is pregnant, he believes the obvious explanation, and his plan is to divorce her **quietly**, which in that world meant absorbing the humiliation himself rather than making it hers. The text calls him righteous, and that is the evidence it offers.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To protect her and the boy, and to do it without speeches. **Joseph never says a single word in the entire New Testament.** Not one line of recorded dialogue. Everything we know about him is what he did, which is a rare and enviable way to be remembered.

THE TURN

Four times he is warned in a dream and four times he gets up immediately and moves: marry her, go to Egypt, come back, settle in Galilee. He takes a family into political exile in the middle of the night on the strength of a dream. And he raised the Son of God as a tradesman's apprentice, and the neighbours in Nazareth years later still called Yeshua **the carpenter**. Somebody taught Him that trade.

“Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man, and not willing to make her a public example, intended to put her away secretly.”

MATTHEW 1:19

CONNECTED TO Mary, Yeshua, David

Simeon שמעון

C. 4 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount · Bethlehem and the infancy

FROM

Jerusalem. An old man with no title given, which means he held none

WHO THEY WERE

He is not called a priest or a scribe. Luke gives him three descriptions instead: righteous, devout, and **waiting**. He had been told he would not die before he saw the Messiah, and he had grown old on that promise, which means he had also grown old on a great deal of disappointment.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To see, and then to be released. His song is a **discharge notice**: now let your servant depart in peace. He is asking permission to go, having got what he stayed for.

THE TURN

He walks into a crowded Temple courtyard on an ordinary morning where dozens of poor families are presenting babies, and he picks out **that one**. Then he says the tender thing and the terrible thing in one breath: a light to the nations, and a sword through this young mother's soul. Somebody has to tell her, and it is the old man who does it, gently, holding her son.

"Now you are releasing your servant, Master, according to your word, in peace; for my eyes have seen your salvation."

LUKE 2:29-30

CONNECTED TO Anna, Mary, Yeshua

Anna חנה

C. 4 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount

FROM

of the tribe of Asher, one of the lost northern tribes, which is a quiet detail worth noticing

WHO THEY WERE

A widow of about **eighty four**, married seven years and alone ever since, who did not leave the Temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. Luke calls her a **prophetess**, one of very few women given that title in the New Testament.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Nothing for herself, as far as the text shows. Sixty years of prayer in a building with no promise attached to it and no audience watching.

THE TURN

She arrives at exactly the right moment, which after sixty years of daily attendance is not luck, it is **arithmetic**. Then she does the one thing an eighty four year old widow could do: she goes round telling everybody who would listen. The first evangelist in the Gospel of Luke is an old woman from a lost tribe.

"Coming up at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of him to all those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem."

LUKE 2:38

CONNECTED TO Simeon, Mary, Yeshua

Yeshua

the one the whole library is about

Yeshua יֵשׁוּעַ

C. 4 BC - 30 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethlehem, where He was born · Nazareth, where He grew up · Capernaum, His base · The Sea of Galilee · Caesarea Philippi, the question · Gethsemane · Golgotha · The Empty Tomb · Three Years by the Sea · the whole ministry · Up to Jerusalem · the last week · You Are in the Pages

FROM

conceived in Nazareth, born in Bethlehem, an infant refugee in Egypt, raised in Nazareth, based in Capernaum

WHO THEY WERE

A tradesman until He was about thirty. That is the part we skip. **Eighteen years of the record are silent**, and they were spent in a workshop in a village of a few hundred people, on a hill above the road to everywhere, and the neighbours knew Him well enough to be offended when He came back: *isn't this the carpenter?* He read Hebrew in the synagogue, spoke Aramaic in the street, and lived thirty years inside an occupied economy before He said a public word.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Read what He says He came for and it is never a career and never a crowd. He is anointed **to preach good news to the poor**, to bind up the broken hearted, to set captives free. He hides from a crowd that wants to crown Him king. He tells people not to publicise the healings. He deliberately preaches a sermon so hard that most of His followers leave. And He says plainly, three times over, where the road goes and what it costs. **Nobody in history has been less interested in the thing everybody assumed He wanted.**

THE TURN

He is the one person in this whole library who does not have a turn, because He is the turn. Everyone else here is changed by meeting Him. But there is a hinge in His own story, and it is at a pagan cliff at the foot of Mount Hermon, at the farthest point He ever took the Twelve. He asks the safe question first, then moves one word, **but who do you say that I am**, and from the moment Peter answers, He sets His face south and starts talking about the cross.

The names, and they are not decoration. *Yeshua* is the short form of **Yehoshua**, Yahweh saves, which is Joshua's name: the man who brought Israel into the land and the man who brings us in are namesakes. *Messiah* is **Mashiach**, anointed one, the same word used of David. *Immanuel* is **Immanu-El**, God with us, from Isaiah, and it is a sentence, not a title.

And the connections run everywhere in this list. He is Abraham's seed and Ruth's descendant and David's son. He quotes David more than anybody. He calls Himself after Ezekiel's title, **son of man**. He takes Jonah as His only sign. He dresses His forerunner in Elijah's clothes. He fulfils Zechariah's donkey and Zechariah's thirty silver pieces and Isaiah's despised servant. This library is not sixty-five separate stories. It is one story, and He is the reason it holds together.

“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

MARK 10:45

CONNECTED TO Mary, Joseph of Nazareth, John the Baptist, Simon Peter, John, son of Zebedee, David, Joshua, Abraham, Paul, who was Saul

The Twelve

the men He picked, with their faults left in

Simon Peter שמעון כִּיפָא

D. C. 65 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum, his house · Bethsaida, his hometown · Tabgha, the breakfast · Caesarea Philippi, the confession · Mount Zion, the courtyard and the fire · Southern Steps, Pentecost · Jaffa, the rooftop vision · Three Years by the Sea · Parts IV, V, XIV, XVII · Up to Jerusalem · Part X, the rooster

FROM

Bethsaida on the north shore, then married and living in Capernaum with his mother-in-law in the house

WHO THEY WERE

A commercial fisherman with a boat, hired hands and a family to feed, no rabbinical training, and a mouth that ran ahead of his judgement for three straight years. He is the most **quoted** disciple and almost all of it is him being magnificently and publicly wrong. He gets the greatest revelation in the Gospels and is called Satan **six verses later**. He offers to build sheds on the mountain of glory. He cuts a man's ear off. He tells the Son of God to depart from him and, in the same book, that there is nowhere else to go.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants to be **loyal**, and he is desperate to be the most loyal, which is a different thing and it is what destroys him. *Even if all fall away, I will not*. Every one of his failures is an overreach by a man who genuinely loved Him and had not yet learned that he could not do it on his own strength.

THE TURN

Two fires. At the **first fire**, in a courtyard on Mount Zion, he warms his hands and denies three times that he knows the man, and a rooster goes off, and he goes out and weeps. At the **second fire**, a charcoal fire on the beach at Tabgha, Yeshua cooks him breakfast and asks him three times whether he loves Him, and gives him his work back. Watch the vocabulary: Yeshua asks with one Greek word for love, Peter answers with a smaller, gentler one, and on the third question **Yeshua comes down to Peter's word**. He met the broken man where he could actually stand.

"Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

JOHN 6:68

CONNECTED TO Andrew, John, son of Zebedee, Yeshua, Cornelius, Mark, the first one written, Paul, who was Saul

Andrew אֲנָדְרִי

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethsaida, his hometown · Capernaum · The Jordan, where he first heard · Three Years by the Sea · Part XI

FROM

Bethsaida, brother of Simon Peter, and originally a disciple of John the Baptist

WHO THEY WERE

The one who brings people. That is his entire portfolio in the New Testament and it is a better one than it looks. Every time Andrew appears he is **introducing somebody**: he finds his brother Simon and brings him, and his brother goes on to eclipse him completely. He finds the boy with the five loaves and brings him forward while openly admitting it makes no sense. He brings the Greeks who want to see Yeshua.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To connect, not to lead. He is permanently described as *Simon Peter's brother*, which must have stung at least once, and he never seems to have made it a problem.

THE TURN

He is one of the two who hear John say **behold the Lamb of God** and simply follow, and then he spends the same day with Him and cannot keep it to himself. His first recorded sentence is *we have found the Messiah*. First instinct, go and get his brother.

"He first found his own brother, Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah!""

JOHN 1:41

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, John the Baptist, Philip, Yeshua

James, son of Zebedee יַעֲקֹב

D. 44 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum and the lake · On the mountain of the Transfiguration · Gethsemane

FROM

a family fishing business on the lake with hired servants, so reasonably prosperous. Brother of John

WHO THEY WERE

One of the inner three, present at the transfiguration, at Jairus' bedside and in Gethsemane, and Yeshua nicknamed the pair of them **Boanerges, sons of thunder**, which is not the nickname you give quiet men. It was these two who wanted to call fire down on a Samaritan village for poor hospitality, and who asked for the two best seats in the Kingdom.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Position, at least at first, and he was blunt enough to ask for it out loud. Yeshua's answer was a question about whether he could drink the cup, and he said yes, not knowing what he was agreeing to.

THE TURN

He was the **first apostle to be executed**, killed with a sword by Herod Agrippa around 44 AD, roughly a decade in. The man who asked for a throne got the cup instead, exactly as he had promised he could, and Luke records his death in half a verse. He is the only one of the Twelve whose martyrdom is in the Bible.

"Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink? ... They said to him, "We are able.""

MATTHEW 20:22

CONNECTED TO John, son of Zebedee, Simon Peter, Yeshua

John, son of Zebedee יוחנן

D. C. 100 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum and the lake · Golgotha, where he stood · Mount Zion, the upper room · The Empty Tomb · Three Years by the Sea · Part IV · Up to Jerusalem · Part VIII

FROM

the same fishing family as James. Probably the youngest of the Twelve

WHO THEY WERE

He calls himself, six times and never by name, **the disciple whom Jesus loved**, which sounds like arrogance until you notice it is the only thing he wanted on his own tombstone. He started as a **son of thunder**, hot-tempered enough to propose incinerating a village, and he ended writing the most tender sentences in the Bible.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Nearness. He is the one leaning against Him at the table, the one who runs faster to the tomb, the one who recognises Him first on the water at dawn: **it's the Lord**. He wants to be close, and he arranged his whole identity around having been.

THE TURN

At the cross, when almost everybody else had run, John was standing there, and Yeshua **gave him His mother**. A dying man handing over the one responsibility he could not delegate to somebody he trusted with it. John outlived all of them, wrote last, and by then the thunder had turned into one repeated theme: *Beloved, let us love one another*. An old man saying the same thing over and over because he had finally understood it.

"We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us."

1 JOHN 3:16

CONNECTED TO James, son of Zebedee, Simon Peter, Mary, Yeshua, John, the last one

Philip פיליפוס

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethsaida, his hometown · Caesarea Maritima · Three Years by the Sea · Part XI

FROM

Bethsaida, the same village as Peter and Andrew. A Greek name, which suggests a Hellenised household

WHO THEY WERE

The literalist. Told to feed five thousand people, he does not pray, he does **arithmetic**, and reports back that two hundred denarii would not be enough. He is the disciple you want doing your logistics and the one who keeps missing the point in a very recognisable way.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Proof. His most famous line is *Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us*, said after three years of walking beside Him, and Yeshua's reply is gentle and devastating: **have I been with you so long, and you still don't know me?**

THE TURN

His instinct at the very start was the right one. When Nathanael sneers at the address, Philip does not argue theology. He says three words that are still the best method anyone has found: **come and see**.

"Come and see."

JOHN 1:46

CONNECTED TO Nathanael, called Bartholomew, Andrew, Yeshua

Nathanael, called Bartholomew נְתַנְאֵל

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Cana, his hometown · Tabgha, the breakfast

FROM

Cana of Galilee, a few miles from Nazareth, which explains a great deal

WHO THEY WERE

The sceptic, and the Bible likes him for it. His first recorded words are a **regional insult**: can anything good come out of Nazareth? He is a local man being snobbish about the next village over, which is the most human form of prejudice there is. And Yeshua's assessment of him is *an Israelite in whom there is no deceit*, which means the rudeness was at least honest.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He is not looking for a Messiah, he is looking for a reason not to bother. And then he gets one sentence about a fig tree that tells him he has been **seen** when he thought he was alone, and the whole defence collapses in a single verse.

THE TURN

From *can anything good come out of Nazareth* to *Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are King of Israel* in the space of four verses. Nobody in the Gospels changes their mind faster. Cynicism, it turns out, is often just an unmet expectation of being known.

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are King of Israel!”

JOHN 1:49

CONNECTED TO Philip, Yeshua

Matthew, called Levi מַתִּתְיָהוּ

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum, the customs booth · Three Years by the Sea · Part VI · The NIPs · Part XII

FROM

Capernaum, sitting in a tax booth on the Via Maris, the international highway

WHO THEY WERE

Not merely unpopular. A **collaborator**: a Jew who made his living taking Jewish money for a foreign empire, plus a margin. He is the only disciple with a desk. He was the most despised man in a small town, and he was also the only one of the Twelve who could read and write fluently in more than one language, keep records, and take notes, which is almost certainly why we have a Gospel from him.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Money, and then, abruptly, not money. Everybody else left nets they could have gone back to. Peter did go back, in John 21. **Matthew could never go back**: once you walk away from a Roman tax franchise, the seat is filled by evening. His was the only irreversible resignation among the Twelve.

THE TURN

Two words at the booth, the same two Yeshua used on the fishermen, and he got up and went. And then he threw a party. His first act as a disciple was to fill his own house with every tax collector and sinner he knew and put Yeshua at the table with them, which caused the scandal, and which is still the best evangelism strategy anybody has come up with.

“He said to him, “Follow me.” And he arose and followed him.”

MARK 2:14

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, Zacchaeus, Matthew, the first Gospel, Yeshua

Thomas, called the Twin תאומא

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Zion, the upper room · The Empty Tomb · Tabgha

FROM

Galilee. Called Didymus, the twin, and we never meet the other one

WHO THEY WERE

He has been unfairly nicknamed for two thousand years. Before the famous doubt, Thomas is the one who says, when everybody is warning Yeshua not to go back to Judea because they will kill Him there, **let us also go, that we may die with him**. That is not a sceptic. That is a pessimist with real courage, which is a rarer and better thing than an optimist with none.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants it to be **true**, and he refuses to settle for wanting it. He will not manufacture a feeling in place of evidence, which is why his demand is so physical: unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails.

THE TURN

Eight days later Yeshua walks through a locked door, comes straight to him and **offers exactly what he asked for**, with no rebuke for asking. And Thomas does not touch anything. He says the highest confession in the whole of the Gospels, four words that no other disciple manages: **my Lord and my God**. The man we call the doubter produced the clearest statement of who Yeshua is in the New Testament.

“My Lord and my God!”

JOHN 20:28

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, John, son of Zebedee, Yeshua

Simon the Zealot שמעון

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Gamla, the zealot fortress · Masada · Three Years by the Sea · Part VII

FROM

Galilee, and from the political faction that believed Rome should be removed by force

WHO THEY WERE

Understand what the label means and then look at the group photograph. A **Zealot** was a religious nationalist committed to armed resistance against Rome and against anybody who cooperated with Rome. And Yeshua put him in a group of twelve men that also contained **Matthew, a Roman tax collector**. Those two men walked the same roads and ate at the same fires for three years.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

A free Israel, by force if necessary. That is the ambition he brought with him, and the Kingdom he was offered was not the one he came for.

THE TURN

There is no recorded scene for Simon, not one line of dialogue. His whole discipleship is the fact that **he stayed**, in that company, without a knife. The first Christian community was a deliberate collision of a revolutionary and a collaborator, and it held.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.”

MATTHEW 5:9

CONNECTED TO Matthew, called Levi, Judas Iscariot, Yeshua

James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus יַעֲקֹב

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Three Years by the Sea · Part VII, the choosing

FROM

Galilee. Beyond that, nothing is known

WHO THEY WERE

Two of the Twelve about whom the New Testament records **no words and no deeds**. James is distinguished only as *the less* or *the younger*, to tell him apart from the famous James. Thaddaeus, also called Judas son of James, asks one question in John 14 and is otherwise silent.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

We have no idea, and that is the point of including them here. They walked every mile the famous ones walked, saw everything they saw, and left no anecdote.

THE TURN

Their names are on the list. That is the whole record, and by the standard of this library it is more than enough. Revelation says the wall of the city has **twelve foundations with the names of the twelve apostles on them**, and two of those names belong to men nobody can tell a single story about.

"He appointed twelve, that they might be with him."

MARK 3:14

CONNECTED TO Simon the Zealot, Simon Peter

Judas Iscariot יְהוּדָה

D. 30 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Gethsemane, the kiss · Mount Zion, the table · Up to Jerusalem · Part VII, the price · Up to Jerusalem · Part IX

FROM

probably Keriath in southern Judea, which would make him the only non-Galilean among the Twelve

WHO THEY WERE

He held the **money bag**, which means the others trusted him with it, which means for three years nobody suspected a thing. He was there for every miracle, every sermon, every private explanation. He was sent out with the others to preach and heal, and it worked. Whatever went wrong in him went wrong slowly, in the presence of everything that should have prevented it, and that is the most frightening fact in the New Testament.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

John says he was stealing from the fund, and his one recorded complaint is about the **waste** of expensive perfume that could have been converted to cash. Beyond the theft, the likeliest reading is that he wanted a different Messiah, the political kind, and grew bitter when the man kept talking about dying instead of winning.

THE TURN

He is the counter-case to everybody else in this list. At the table Yeshua **washes his feet**, hands him bread, and calls him friend in the garden. Every door was left open. And afterwards, unlike Peter, he cannot believe that he could be forgiven. That is the real difference between the two of them: both betrayed Him within the same twelve hours, and one of them came back to the beach for breakfast.

"He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary and departed. ... "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood.""

MATTHEW 27:5, 4

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, Yeshua, Caiaphas and Annas, Zechariah the prophet

The Ones He Met

the gallery. Most of them get one scene, and it changes them forever

Mary Magdalene מרים המגדלית

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Magdala, her hometown · Golgotha · The Empty Tomb · Three Years by the Sea · Part VIII · Up to Jerusalem · Part XIII

FROM

Magdala, on the western shore of the lake, a fish-processing town whose name means the tower. She is the only woman in the Gospels identified by her town rather than by a man

WHO THEY WERE

Let us be careful, because she has been slandered for centuries. The Bible **never** calls her a prostitute; that was a sixth century sermon, not a text. What Luke says is that **seven demons had gone out of her**, which describes torment, not immorality. And then it says something more interesting: she was one of the women who **funded the ministry out of her own possessions**. She had money, and she spent it on this.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To stay. That is her entire pattern. She is at the cross when the men have gone. She is at the burial, watching where they put Him. She is at the tomb before dawn on the first day, in the dark, carrying spices for a corpse, with no expectation of anything except a body to care for.

THE TURN

She is standing outside the tomb crying, mistakes Him for the gardener, and He says **one word**: her name. And she knows. Then He gives her the first commission of the new creation: go and tell them. In a legal culture where a woman's testimony was not accepted in court, **God made a woman the first witness of the resurrection**, and every apostle in the New Testament heard it from her first.

"Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Rabboni!"

JOHN 20:16

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Simon Peter, John, son of Zebedee, Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it

Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it יוחנה

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Magdala and the lake · Tiberias, Herod's capital · Three Years by the Sea · Part VIII

FROM

Joanna was the wife of **Chuza, Herod's steward**, which means she came from inside the palace at Tiberias

WHO THEY WERE

One verse, and it changes how you picture the whole operation. Thirteen men walking around Galilee for three years had to eat, and Luke tells you who paid: a group of women, one of them married to the **chief financial officer of the man who beheaded John the Baptist**. Joanna was funding a movement her husband's employer was hunting.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

They had been healed, and they responded with their chequebooks. There is no speech from any of them. There is a line item.

THE TURN

Luke, alone among the Gospel writers, names them, and he probably interviewed them. Somebody had to tell him about Gabriel and the stable and the shepherds, and it was not the Twelve. **The infancy narratives most likely come from these women.**

"...and certain women ... who served them from their possessions."

LUKE 8:2-3

CONNECTED TO Mary Magdalene, Luke, the physician, Herod Antipas

Martha of Bethany מרתא

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethany, her house · Up to Jerusalem · Part III

FROM

Bethany, on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, two miles from Jerusalem

WHO THEY WERE

The householder, and it is her house. She is the one who **opens the door**, does the cooking, runs the logistics and says out loud what everyone is thinking. She is also the only person in the Gospels who **complains to Yeshua about His own teaching arrangements** and gets a straight answer instead of a rebuke.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To do it properly. She is not a villain in the famous kitchen scene, she is a woman hosting thirteen unexpected men while her sister sits down. The problem Yeshua names is not the work, it is the **worry**: you are anxious and troubled about many things.

THE TURN

Four days after her brother's funeral she walks out to meet Him and does something braver than anything in the kitchen scene: she tells Him He is late. And then, standing in front of a sealed tomb, this practical woman produces one of the two greatest confessions of faith in the Gospels, the equal of Peter's at Caesarea Philippi. Martha is not the lesser sister. She is the one who says it.

“Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Christ, God's Son, he who comes into the world.”

JOHN 11:27

CONNECTED TO Mary of Bethany, Lazarus, Yeshua, Simon Peter

Mary of Bethany מרים

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethany · Up to Jerusalem · Part III, the perfume

FROM

Bethany, Martha's sister and Lazarus' sister

WHO THEY WERE

Three scenes and in every one of them she is **at His feet**: listening at them, weeping at them, anointing them. She is the one who chose to sit in the men's place, in the students' posture, and Yeshua defended her right to be there against her own family.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To understand. And she seems to have been the only person in the house who actually heard what He kept saying about dying, which is why what she does next is not sentimental.

THE TURN

Six days before Passover she breaks a jar of **pure nard worth a year's wages** over Him and wipes His feet with her hair, and when the room objects to the expense He says she has done it for His burial. She is the only person in the Gospels who prepared Him for it **while He was still alive**. The women who went to the tomb with spices arrived too late. Mary of Bethany got there first.

“Leave her alone. She has kept this for the day of my burial.”

JOHN 12:7

CONNECTED TO Martha of Bethany, Lazarus, Yeshua, Judas Iscariot

Lazarus אֶלְעָזָר

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Bethany, the tomb · Up to Jerusalem · Part III

FROM

Bethany. His name is Eleazar, God has helped

WHO THEY WERE

He is the only major character in the Gospels who **never speaks a single word**. Not before he dies and not after he comes out. He is described three ways and all of them are relational: Martha and Mary's brother, *he whom you love*, and *our friend*. Yeshua wept for him, which is the shortest verse in the Bible and the largest fact about it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Nothing recorded. What is recorded is what happened **around** him: after he came out, the chief priests started planning to kill him as well, because a walking dead man was an argument they could not answer.

THE TURN

Four days in a tomb in that climate meant no ambiguity and no possibility of a swoon. Then a voice outside shouting his name, and a man coming out still tied up in his grave clothes, and an instruction to the bystanders that is worth preaching on its own: **unbind him, and let him go**. Sometimes God does the raising and hands the unwrapping to the people standing nearby.

"Jesus wept."

JOHN 11:35

CONNECTED TO Martha of Bethany, Mary of Bethany, Yeshua

The woman at the well

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Shechem, Jacob's Well · Mount Gerizim, her mountain · The NIPs · Part XII

FROM

Sychar, beside Shechem, in Samaria. A Samaritan, of the wrong nation and the wrong temple

WHO THEY WERE

Wrong nation, wrong gender, wrong marital history, and she is at the well at **noon**, which is when you go if you are avoiding the other women. Five husbands and a sixth man who is not her husband, and the text does not tell us how many of those were deaths and how many were divorces, so neither should we. And she is sharp: she argues theology with Him for the whole conversation and she is good at it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

She came for water and she stays for an argument, because being talked to as an equal by a Jewish teacher was so extraordinary that she pressed her advantage. She raises the real dispute, **this mountain or your mountain**, and He answers it.

THE TURN

She gets the **longest recorded theological conversation** with Yeshua of any human being in the Gospels, and the first plain **I am he** He ever said to anybody. Then she leaves her water jar behind, which is the detail John wanted you to notice, and goes back to the town she had been avoiding to fetch the people she had been hiding from.

"Jesus said to her, 'I am he, the one who speaks to you.'"

JOHN 4:26

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, The Syrophenician mother, John, the last one

Jairus יָאִיר

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum · Three Years by the Sea · Part X

FROM

Capernaum. A **ruler of the synagogue**, so the most respected man in the town

WHO THEY WERE

The senior religious official of the very synagogue where Yeshua had been causing arguments. Which means that when he **fell at His feet in the street** in front of the whole crowd, he was setting fire to his own standing. Fathers of dying twelve year olds do not care about standing.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

His daughter, and he says exactly what he wants, once, with no theology attached: come and lay your hands on her.

THE TURN

He is made to wait. Yeshua stops the whole procession to deal with the woman who touched His clothes, and the delay is unbearable, and while they are standing there the news arrives that the girl is dead. And then, before Jairus can say anything, Yeshua turns to him with five words that are the whole of faith when the worst has already happened: **don't be afraid, only believe**. Then a hand, and **Talitha cumi**, little girl, get up, and an instruction to give her something to eat, because He noticed she would be hungry.

“Don't be afraid, only believe.”

MARK 5:36

CONNECTED TO The woman He called Daughter, Yeshua, The widow of Nain

The woman He called Daughter

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum · Three Years by the Sea · Part X · The NIPs · Part XII

FROM

unnamed, somewhere around the lake, twelve years into an illness

WHO THEY WERE

Twelve years of a haemorrhage meant twelve years of ritual **uncleanness**, which meant no Temple, no synagogue, and in practice no touching anybody in her household. She had spent everything she had on doctors and Mark, with a physician-free bluntness Luke later softened, says she only got worse.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To be healed **without being noticed**. That is the tragedy of her plan. She comes up behind Him in a crowd and reaches for the hem, because twelve years of being untouchable teaches a person to take what they need invisibly.

THE TURN

He stops the crowd to find her. She has to come forward and tell the whole truth in public, which must have been the worst moment of her life and was in fact the healing of the thing the bleeding had done to her. And then He calls her **Daughter**, which He calls **nobody else** in the Gospels. She came to steal healing and He handed her a family word.

“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

MARK 5:34

CONNECTED TO Jairus, Yeshua, Mary Magdalene

Bartimaeus בֶּרְטִמַּי

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jericho, the roadside · Up to Jerusalem · Part II

FROM

Jericho, begging at the roadside on the pilgrim route up to Jerusalem at Passover

WHO THEY WERE

A blind beggar, positioned where the crowds were thickest at the busiest week of the year, which is good business sense. He is named, which is unusual for a healed beggar, and it probably means the early church knew him afterwards.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He shouts the one title that could get him killed. **Son of David** is not a polite address, it is a **royal, messianic claim**, and he yells it down a public street in front of a Passover crowd. The people around him tell him to be quiet, and he shouts louder.

THE TURN

Yeshua stops and asks him the question He asks so often it must be deliberate: **what do you want me to do for you?** And Mark keeps one detail that gives the whole man away: when he is called, he **throws off his cloak** and jumps up. A beggar's cloak was his licence, his bed and the thing he spread out to collect coins in. He threw away his livelihood before he could see.

“Son of David, have mercy on me! ... Rabboni, that I may see again.”

MARK 10:47, 51

CONNECTED TO Zacchaeus, David, Yeshua

Zacchaeus זַכִּי

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Jericho, the sycamore · Up to Jerusalem · Part II

FROM

Jericho, a rich border town on the balsam and customs route. **Chief** tax collector, so he ran the franchise

WHO THEY WERE

Rich and despised, which is its own category. He was not a small operator like Matthew, he was the man other tax collectors paid, and Luke's word for him is *architelones*, the only time it appears in the Bible. And his name, **Zakkai**, means **pure**, which the whole town must have enjoyed enormously.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He climbs a tree. Understand what that meant for a wealthy middle-aged official in a robe in front of everybody who hated him. He wanted to see so badly that he made himself ridiculous, and the crowd would not let him through on purpose.

THE TURN

Yeshua stops under the branch, looks up, uses his **name**, and invites Himself to lunch, which in that culture was a public declaration of acceptance and caused an immediate scandal. And then Zacchaeus does the arithmetic out loud: half to the poor, and fourfold restitution to anybody he cheated, which is **four times what the Law required**. He kept the other half, and Yeshua still said salvation had come to his house. Grace is not poverty. It is a reordered ledger.

“Today, salvation has come to this house ... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.”

LUKE 19:9-10

CONNECTED TO Matthew, called Levi, Bartimaeus, Yeshua

The centurion of Capernaum

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum · Three Years by the Sea · Part VIII

FROM

a Roman officer of the occupying forces, stationed in Capernaum. Almost certainly a Gentile

WHO THEY WERE

A professional soldier commanding roughly a hundred men, and the local Jewish elders speak up for him: **he built us our synagogue**. An officer of the occupation who paid for the local place of worship, which tells you he was that rare thing, an honourable man in an army of occupation.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

His servant's life, and he uses the word *dear* about him, which was not the normal attitude to household slaves. And then he does something extraordinary: he sends a second message to stop Yeshua from coming, because he does not want to put a Jewish teacher in the position of entering a Gentile house.

THE TURN

He explains his faith in **military terms**, which is the only vocabulary he has: I am a man under authority, I say go and he goes, so just say the word. He understood something about how the universe is arranged that the religious professionals did not, and Yeshua stopped in the street and said the sentence He said nowhere else: **I have not found such great faith, no, not in Israel**.

“Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I am not worthy for you to come under my roof. But say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

LUKE 7:6-7

CONNECTED TO The Syrophoenician mother, Cornelius, Yeshua

The Syrophoenician mother

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Acco and the Phoenician coast · Three Years by the Sea · Part XIII

FROM

the region of Tyre and Sidon, in modern Lebanon. A Greek-speaking pagan

WHO THEY WERE

She is the only person in the Gospels who **wins an exchange with Yeshua**, and He is visibly delighted about it. He has left the country for some quiet, she tracks Him down anyway, and He tests her with a hard sentence about children and dogs. She does not take offence and she does not retreat. She takes His own image and turns it: **yes, Lord, and even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs**.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Her daughter, and she is beyond caring how she looks. Mothers of tormented children have no dignity left to protect, and she spends what is left of it in one sentence.

THE TURN

For this saying, go your way. He grants everything on the spot and credits her **argument**. This is the moment in the Gospels that gives permission for holy stubbornness, and it happens in pagan territory, to a woman with no covenant claim on Him at all.

“Yes, Lord. Yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.”

MARK 7:28

CONNECTED TO The centurion of Capernaum, The woman at the well, Yeshua

The man called Legion

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Kursi, the steep bank · Three Years by the Sea · Part X

FROM

the Decapolis, on the eastern shore, living in the tombs above the lake

WHO THEY WERE

The most extreme case in the Gospels and the description is unbearable: living among the graves, naked, **nobody could bind him any more, not even with chains**, crying out night and day and cutting himself with stones. And when asked his name he cannot give one. He gives a number: *my name is Legion, for we are many*. He had lost the ability to say **I**.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Nothing. He is past wanting. He runs at Yeshua from a distance and falls down, and even that action is described as belonging to somebody else.

THE TURN

He is found afterwards **sitting, clothed, and in his right mind**, which is three sentences of restoration in seven words. And then he asks the obvious thing, to come along in the boat, and is **refused**. He is given the harder assignment: go home, to your own house, to your friends, and tell them. He became the first missionary to the Decapolis, and his whole training was one afternoon and his own biography.

“Go to your house, to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you.”

MARK 5:19

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Mary Magdalene

The widow of Nain

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Nain, at the town gate · Three Years by the Sea · Part VIII

FROM

Nain, a small village on the slope of the Hill of Moreh, looking across at Nazareth

WHO THEY WERE

A widow whose **only son** has died, which in that world meant losing her protector, her income and her whole future in one funeral. And she is walking out of the gate with the whole town behind her at the exact moment He is walking in.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

She asks for nothing. She does not know who He is. There is no faith in this story at all, from anybody, which makes it one of the most important healings in the Gospels: it happens purely because **He saw her**.

THE TURN

When the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her. The word underneath is the gut-level one, and the Hebrew equivalent, **rachamim**, comes from rechem, a womb. Then He touches the bier, which made Him ritually unclean, and the bearers stop. And Luke uses a phrase that undoes everything: **he gave him to his mother**.

“He gave him to his mother.”

LUKE 7:15

CONNECTED TO Jairus, Lazarus, Elisha, Yeshua

Nicodemus נִקְדִּימוֹן

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount · The City of David, by night · Golgotha and the burial · Up to Jerusalem · Part XII

FROM

Jerusalem. A Pharisee and a member of the **Sanhedrin**, the ruling council. Wealthy

WHO THEY WERE

The educated, cautious insider. He comes **at night**, which John mentions three times, because he has a reputation to manage. And he opens with a careful, generous, entirely inadequate compliment: we know you are a teacher come from God. Yeshua does not accept the framing and talks to him about being born again instead, and Nicodemus, a professor of religion, does not follow.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants to know without having to commit, which is the most respectable sin there is. Then he begins to move: in John 7 he speaks up in council for due process, which is not courage but it is not nothing.

THE TURN

He shows up at the end, in daylight, with **a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes**, an absurd, royal, ruinously expensive quantity of burial spice, at the exact moment when associating with the executed man could cost him everything he had spent his life protecting. The man who came in the dark buried Him in the open. Some people arrive slowly and then arrive completely.

“Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can't see God's Kingdom.”

JOHN 3:3

CONNECTED TO Joseph of Arimathea, Yeshua, Caiaphas and Annas

Joseph of Arimathea יוֹסֵף

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Golgotha and the Garden Tomb · The Empty Tomb · Up to Jerusalem · Part XII

FROM

Arimathea, and a wealthy member of the Sanhedrin. Luke says he had not consented to their decision

WHO THEY WERE

A rich man on the council that condemned Him, described as a **secret disciple for fear of the Jews**, which means he had spent a long time keeping quiet. He owned a new rock-cut tomb near the execution site, which was an expensive thing to own and which he had prepared for himself.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Safety, for as long as he could manage it. And then, abruptly, not safety at all.

THE TURN

Mark says he **went in boldly** to Pilate and asked for the body, which was a formal request from a council member for the corpse of a man executed for sedition, in front of the Roman governor, and it ended his career. He gave up his own grave. And Isaiah had written, seven hundred years earlier, that the servant would be **with a rich man in his death**. The Bible needed one wealthy coward to become brave for an afternoon, and it got one.

“He was a good and righteous man ... who was also himself waiting for God's Kingdom.”

LUKE 23:50-51

CONNECTED TO Nicodemus, Yeshua, Pontius Pilate

Simon of Cyrene שמעון

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Via Dolorosa · Golgotha · Up to Jerusalem · Part XI

FROM

Cyrene, in modern Libya. A North African Jew who had travelled a very long way for Passover

WHO THEY WERE

A pilgrim from another continent, in the wrong street at the wrong moment, who was **conscripted** by a Roman soldier. The word Mark uses means pressed into forced service. He did not volunteer, he was not a disciple, and he carried the cross of Christ up the last stretch of road.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To keep Passover with his sons and go home. He wanted nothing to do with any of this.

THE TURN

Mark names his **two sons, Alexander and Rufus**, and does not explain who they are, which only makes sense if the congregation he was writing for already knew them. Which means the family became believers. And Paul's letter to Rome greets a Rufus. **The man who was forced to carry it ended up in the family**, and his sons were known by name in the church a generation later.

“They compelled one Simon of Cyrene, who passed by, coming from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to go with them, that he might bear his cross.”

MARK 15:21

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Mark, the first one written, Paul, who was Saul

The thief on the cross

30 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Golgotha · Up to Jerusalem · Part XI · The NIPs · Part XII

FROM

unknown, unnamed, and condemned. Matthew calls him a bandit, which in that period usually meant an insurgent

WHO THEY WERE

A dying criminal who began by joining in the mockery, according to Matthew, and then changed his mind in the last hours of his life while looking sideways at the man next to him. He has **no baptism, no restitution, no good works and no time**, which makes him the purest test case for grace in the Bible.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

At first, escape. Then, extraordinarily, nothing but to be **remembered**: not saved, not rescued, not taken down. Just remembered, later, by a man who was dying at the same rate he was.

THE TURN

He does three things in about a sentence. He tells the other criminal they are getting what they deserve. He declares the man in the middle **innocent**, which nobody else at Golgotha managed. And he calls a naked, dying, convicted failure **King**, and asks for a place in a kingdom no rational person could see. And the answer comes back in the present tense: **today**.

“Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

LUKE 23:43

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Zacchaeus, Pontius Pilate

The Powers

the men who held the whips and the gavels

Herod the Great

REIGNED 37-4 BC

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Herodion, his tomb · Masada, his fortress · Caesarea Maritima, his harbour · The Temple Mount, his platform · The Western Wall, his masonry · Bethlehem

FROM

an Idumean, a descendant of Edom, therefore never accepted as a real Jew by the people he ruled for 33 years

WHO THEY WERE

The greatest builder in the history of this land and one of the most frightening men who ever lived. He built **the Temple platform you still walk on**, a harbour at Caesarea with hydraulic concrete, Masada, the Herodion, Machaerus, and Hebron's enclosure. He also murdered his wife, his mother-in-law, three of his own sons and hundreds of others, and Augustus reportedly joked that it was safer to be Herod's pig than his son.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Legitimacy, and he could never buy it. That is the engine of the whole man. He was a foreigner on a Jewish throne, so he built the most magnificent Temple in the world for a God he did not really serve, and it did not work, and the harder he built the more he was hated. Paranoia is what happens when a man's ambition is bigger than his standing and he knows it.

THE TURN

He is the counter-portrait to every other person in this list. Told by foreign astrologers that a king had been born a few miles from his own palace, he did the only thing his character permitted and killed the children. **And the stones he cut are still here, and so is the Kingdom he tried to murder.** You can stand on his pavement and read about the baby he missed.

“When Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.”

MATTHEW 2:3

CONNECTED TO Herod Antipas, Yeshua, Mary

Herod Antipas

REIGNED 4 BC - 39 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Tiberias, the city he built · Machaerus and the Jordan · Up to Jerusalem · Part XI

FROM

a son of Herod the Great, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. He built Tiberias and named it after the emperor

WHO THEY WERE

The weakest kind of ruler: a man who wanted to be liked, was fascinated by holiness, and had no spine at all. Mark gives us the psychology in one line: he **feared John, and kept him safe, and heard him gladly**, and was perplexed by him. He collected a prophet the way a man collects a curiosity, and then killed him rather than lose face in front of his dinner guests. Yeshua's private nickname for him was **that fox**.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Prestige, and a peaceful life with a wife he had taken from his own brother. He wanted the thrill of the prophet without the cost of obeying him.

THE TURN

Twice he is offered the truth and twice he prefers the room. He beheads John as a party favour for a dancing girl because of an oath made in front of company. And years later, when Pilate sends him a bound Yeshua, he is delighted, **hoping to see a miracle**, asks for entertainment, gets **silence**, and sends Him back in a joke robe. Of all the people in this library, Antipas is the one to whom Yeshua said **nothing at all**.

"He questioned him with many words; but he gave him no answers."

LUKE 23:9

CONNECTED TO John the Baptist, Herod the Great, Pontius Pilate, Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it

Caiaphas and Annas

CAIAPHAS HIGH PRIEST 18-36 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Temple Mount · Mount Zion, the courtyard · Up to Jerusalem · Part X

FROM

Jerusalem. Caiaphas was **Annas' son-in-law**, and the family held the high priesthood for decades

WHO THEY WERE

A political dynasty running the most sacred office in Judaism as a family business, with a monopoly on the Temple market. Annas had been high priest, then five of his sons and this son-in-law after him, which is why the night trial starts at Annas' house even though Caiaphas held the title. In 1990 an ossuary inscribed with the name **Caiaphas** was found in Jerusalem, so we may have looked at the box that held his bones.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Stability, and he genuinely believed in it. His argument to the council is the most chillingly reasonable sentence in the Gospels: it is better for one man to die than for the whole nation to perish. That is not a monster talking, that is a competent administrator doing a cost-benefit analysis, and John points out that he was accidentally prophesying while he did it.

THE TURN

He asks the right question. In the middle of a rigged night hearing that is going badly for the prosecution, Caiaphas puts Him under oath and asks straight out whether He is the Messiah, the Son of God, and gets a plain **I am**, with Daniel 7 attached. He is the only man in this library who asked the central question, got the answer, and **tore his own clothes** rather than accept it.

"You don't consider that it is advantageous for us that one man should die for the people."

JOHN 11:50

CONNECTED TO Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot, Yeshua, Nicodemus

Pontius Pilate

GOVERNOR 26-36 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Caesarea Maritima, his capital and his inscription · The Via Dolorosa · Up to Jerusalem · Part XI

FROM

a Roman equestrian, prefect of Judea, based at Caesarea and in Jerusalem only for the festivals

WHO THEY WERE

A mid-level career official with a bad record for provoking the people he governed, and by 30 AD he was on thin ice with Rome. **In 1961 archaeologists at Caesarea found a stone inscribed with his name and title**, so he is not a literary character, he is a man with a surviving business card. Everything he does in the trial makes sense once you understand he was terrified of a complaint reaching Tiberius.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To make the problem go away without a riot and without a report. He tries every procedural dodge available: send Him to Herod, offer Barabbas, have Him flogged instead, wash his hands in front of the crowd. He states three separate times that he finds no fault in the man, and then hands Him over anyway. **He is the patron saint of knowing better and doing it anyway.**

THE TURN

He asks the deepest question in the New Testament and does not wait for the answer. *What is truth?* and he walks out of the room. Then he writes a title for the cross in three languages and, in the one act of stubbornness in his whole appearance, **refuses to change it** when the priests object. *What I have written, I have written.* The man who would not stand up for an innocent man stood up for a sign.

"Pilate said to him, "What is truth?""

JOHN 18:38

CONNECTED TO Caiaphas and Annas, Herod Antipas, Yeshua, Joseph of Arimathea

The Four Who Wrote It Down

four witnesses, four personalities, four different books

Matthew, the first Gospel

WRITTEN C. 60-80 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Capernaum, his tax booth · Three Years by the Sea · Part VI

FROM

a customs post on the Via Maris. Written for a **Jewish** readership, probably in Syria or the Galilee

WHO THEY WERE

This is an accountant's Gospel and you can see the profession on every page. Look at what Matthew alone keeps: the ten thousand talent debt, the parable of the talents, the labourers and their daily wage, the two-drachma temple tax, the coin in the fish's mouth, the **thirty pieces of silver**. He is the only Gospel writer who tells you what things cost. He also **organises**: he arranges the whole book around **five great discourses**, which is almost certainly a deliberate echo of the five books of Moses, and he opens with a genealogy laid out in three sets of fourteen, because a man who kept ledgers thinks in columns.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He wants to prove one thesis to his own people: **this is the one the scriptures were talking about**. He quotes the Hebrew Bible around sixty times and uses the formula *that it might be fulfilled* over and over, like a man producing receipts.

THE TURN

And here is what the tax collector, of all four of them, chose to put in the family tree of the Messiah. **Four irregular women**: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the one he will not even name, calling her only the wife of Uriah. The man everyone in Capernaum considered unclean opened his book by proving that the Messiah's own bloodline was full of people like that. He knew exactly what he was doing.

“All this has happened that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.”

MATTHEW 1:22

CONNECTED TO Matthew, called Levi, Mark, the first one written, Ruth, Rahab

Mark, the first one written

WRITTEN C. 65-70 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Zion, his mother's house · Gethsemane · Three Years by the Sea · the backbone of it

FROM

Jerusalem. **John Mark**, whose mother Mary owned the house the church met in, and Barnabas' cousin. Wrote in Rome, from Peter's preaching

WHO THEY WERE

The shortest, fastest and earliest Gospel, and it reads like a man out of breath. He uses the word *immediately* around forty times. No genealogy, no birth, no childhood: he starts at full sprint with a grown man coming out of a river. And he keeps the **Aramaic**, the actual sounds in the room, which nobody would invent: *Talitha cumi. Ephphatha. Abba. Boanerges. Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani.* An early source says he was **Peter's interpreter**, and it shows, because Mark preserves all the details that make the disciples look worst, including Peter, and no follower would write those about his hero. **Peter told it that way about himself.**

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To get it down before the eyewitnesses died. He was writing in Rome, probably as the persecution began, which is why his Gospel is so heavy on the cost of following.

THE TURN

He is almost certainly the young man in Gethsemane who ran away and **left his clothes behind**, a mortifying detail no other Gospel bothers with and no author would insert unless it were his own. And he failed again: he **abandoned Paul's first missionary journey** and went home, and the argument about giving him a second chance was so sharp it split Paul and Barnabas apart. Years later Paul asked for him by name and called him useful. **The quitter wrote the first Gospel.** Nobody in this library is finished when they fail.

"A certain young man followed him, having a linen cloth thrown around himself ... and he left the linen cloth and fled naked."

MARK 14:51-52

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, Barnabas, Paul, who was Saul, Simon of Cyrene

Luke, the physician

WRITTEN C. 62-85 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Caesarea Maritima, where he waited two years · Ein Karem and Bethlehem, the infancy he alone records

FROM

probably Antioch. **A Gentile**, and a doctor. Paul calls him *the beloved physician*

WHO THEY WERE

The only non-Jewish author in the entire Bible, and the only one who admits he was not there. He opens by telling you his method: many have written accounts, I have **investigated everything carefully from the beginning**, and I am setting it down in order for you. That is a research statement. He wrote the Gospel **and** Acts, which together are about a quarter of the New Testament, more than Paul. He spent two years in Caesarea while Paul was in custody there, which is very likely where he did the interviews.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Order, and the wounded. The physician shows everywhere. He is the one drawn to bodies and to outsiders: he alone gives us the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the widow of Nain, Zacchaeus, the ten lepers, the tax collector's prayer, and the thief on the cross. He names more **women** than any other Gospel, records Yeshua **praying** more often than the others, and preserves the four great songs, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Gloria and the Nunc Dimittis. He is a careful man with a soft spot for anybody at the edge of the room.

THE TURN

Watch the pronouns in Acts and something quietly wonderful happens. For sixteen chapters it is *they* and *Paul*, and then at Troas the text slips into **we**, and stays that way through the shipwreck. The historian stops reporting the story and joins it. He was still there at the end: in Paul's last letter, when the text says everyone else has left, one line reads **only Luke is with me**.

"It seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write to you in order."

LUKE 1:3

CONNECTED TO Paul, who was Saul, Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it, Mary, The widow of Nain, Zacchaeus

John, the last one

WRITTEN C. 85-95 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Golgotha, where he stood · Tabgha, the breakfast he remembered in detail · The Empty Tomb

FROM

a fishing family on the Sea of Galilee, and by tradition Ephesus at the end of a very long life

WHO THEY WERE

He wrote sixty years after the event, and he wrote a different kind of book. Around ninety percent of his material appears nowhere else. **No parables at all.** Instead: seven **signs**, seven **I AM** sayings, long unhurried discourses, and instead of a genealogy, a **cosmic prologue** that starts before Genesis 1. He is the one who tells you what time of day it was, how many jars, how many fish, how far from shore, which is what an eyewitness remembers when everything else has been told a thousand times.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

He states his purpose outright, which none of the others do: *these are written that you may believe*. He is not compiling a record, he is making a case, and he has had sixty years to think about how.

THE TURN

This is the great transformation in the New Testament and hardly anybody points at it. He began as a **son of thunder**, one of the two who wanted to call fire down on a Samaritan village for bad hospitality, and who asked for one of the two best seats in the Kingdom. He ended as an old man in Ephesus writing *God is love* and, according to an early account, being carried into the meeting and saying the same short sentence over and over: little children, love one another. **Three years with Yeshua and sixty years of thinking about it turned thunder into that.** Of all the arguments in this library for what He does to a person, John is the longest and the most complete.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

JOHN 1:1

CONNECTED TO John, son of Zebedee, James, son of Zebedee, Simon Peter, Yeshua

After the Stone Moved

what the frightened ones became

Paul, who was Saul שְׂאוּל

C. 5-65 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Damascus Gate, and the road out of it · Caesarea Maritima, where he was held · Jaffa and the coast · The Temple Mount, where he was arrested · The Southern Steps

FROM

Tarsus, in modern Turkey. A Roman citizen by birth, a Pharisee by training, educated in Jerusalem under Gamaliel, and a tentmaker by trade

WHO THEY WERE

The most formidable mind of the first century and, by his own account, the worst man in it. He held the coats at Stephen's stoning. He went house to house dragging people to prison. He describes himself with three words in three different letters: **the least of the apostles, the chief of sinners, a miscarriage**. No triumphalism anywhere. He wrote thirteen letters, travelled somewhere near ten thousand miles, and was flogged five times, beaten with rods three times, stoned once and shipwrecked three times, and kept a written list of it.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

Before the road: **zeal**, and he was sincere, which is the frightening part. He was not a cynic, he was a brilliant, devout young man doing terrible things for God. Afterwards, one thing: *that I may know him*, and he says it in his sixties, decades in, still not satisfied.

THE TURN

A light at noon on the Damascus road and a question that reframes everything he had done: **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?** Not my people. **Me**. He learned in one sentence that the Church and Christ are the same subject. Then three days blind, and a nervous local believer named Ananias sent to lay hands on the most dangerous man in the region and call him **brother**.

"I am the least of the apostles ... but by the grace of God I am what I am."

1 CORINTHIANS 15:9-10

CONNECTED TO Stephen, Barnabas, Luke, the physician, Simon Peter, Abraham, Yeshua

Stephen

D. C. 34 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

The Old City and the Lion's Gate · The Temple Mount

FROM

a Greek-speaking Jew in Jerusalem, chosen as one of the seven to **hand out food** to widows

WHO THEY WERE

He was appointed to administer a **meals programme**, which is worth remembering. He was not an apostle and not a teacher by appointment, he was on the welfare rota, and out of that job came the longest speech in the book of Acts and the first Christian death.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To tell the whole story properly. His defence speech is essentially **this entire library in one sitting**: Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, the prophets, all of it in order, building to one accusation, that God has never been containable in a building.

THE TURN

He dies almost quoting the man he is dying for. **Receive my spirit**, and then, on his knees, *Lord, do not hold this sin against them*, which is Golgotha in a courtyard. And Luke, who is a careful writer, adds one detail at the end of the scene: the coats were laid at the feet of a young man named **Saul**. The first martyr's prayer was answered in the person of his own executioner's assistant.

"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. ... Lord, don't hold this sin against them."

ACTS 7:59-60

CONNECTED TO Paul, who was Saul, Yeshua, James, the brother of Yeshua

Barnabas בֶּרֶנָּבָא

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Zion, the early church · Caesarea Maritima

FROM

Cyprus, a Levite, and wealthy enough to sell a field and hand over the money

WHO THEY WERE

His real name was Joseph and the apostles renamed him **Bar-Nabba, son of encouragement**, which is the best nickname in the New Testament and the most accurate. His entire biography is **backing people nobody else would touch**.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To get other people started. He has no ambition visible anywhere in the record.

THE TURN

He did it twice, and Christian history hangs off both. When the newly converted **Saul** arrived in Jerusalem and every disciple there was quite reasonably terrified of him, Barnabas took him personally and vouched for him. And years later, when **Mark** had quit the first journey, Barnabas insisted on a second chance so strongly that he broke up his partnership with Paul over it and took the boy himself. **Without Barnabas we very likely have no Pauline letters and no Gospel of Mark**. The man who wrote nothing made two thirds of the New Testament possible.

"He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith."

ACTS 11:24

CONNECTED TO Paul, who was Saul, Mark, the first one written, Stephen

James, the brother of Yeshua יַעֲקֹב

D. C. 62 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Mount Zion, the Jerusalem council · The Temple Mount

FROM

Nazareth, and then Jerusalem. **He grew up in the same house.**

WHO THEY WERE

Think about what this man had to get over. He is named among the brothers who thought Yeshua was **out of his mind** and went to bring Him home, and John says plainly that His brothers did not believe in Him. And then, after the resurrection, he becomes the **head of the Jerusalem church**, chairs the council that decides Gentiles do not need to become Jews, and writes the most practical letter in the New Testament. Early tradition nicknamed him **the Just**, and said his knees were as hard as a camel's from praying.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To make faith show up in behaviour, and his letter is relentless about it: what use is it if a man says he has faith and has no works. He is also the New Testament writer most concerned with **the poor and the rich**, and he sounds exactly like Amos.

THE TURN

One line in 1 Corinthians 15, in a list of appearances, with no story attached: **then he appeared to James**. That is all we get, and it is enough. Somewhere between the tomb and Pentecost, the risen Yeshua went and found His own brother. Whatever was said in that room turned a sceptical sibling into the leader of the church in the city where it happened.

“Faith apart from works is dead. ... Be doers of the word, and not only hearers.”

JAMES 2:26; 1:22

CONNECTED TO Yeshua, Simon Peter, Paul, who was Saul, Amos, Mary

Cornelius

C. 40 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Caesarea Maritima, his house · Jaffa, where Peter was staying

FROM

Caesarea Maritima, a Roman centurion of the Italian regiment. A Gentile who prayed to the God of Israel

WHO THEY WERE

A serving officer of the occupying army described as devout, generous to the poor, and praying constantly, and **not a Jew**. He is the hinge on which the whole Gentile church turns, and he is a soldier at a garrison town on the coast whom nobody in Jerusalem would have eaten with.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

More. He already had a real spiritual life and he knew it was not finished. When Peter arrives he has **assembled his whole household and his friends** in advance, which is the behaviour of a man who does not intend to receive anything alone.

THE TURN

Two visions, thirty miles apart, on the same afternoon. Cornelius is told to send for a man in Jaffa, and on a rooftop in Jaffa **Peter** is shown a sheet full of forbidden food and told three times not to call unclean what God has cleansed. Notice who actually got converted: God moved two men, and the one who changed his mind was **Peter**. *Truly I perceive that God doesn't show favoritism.*

“Truly I perceive that God doesn't show favoritism, but in every nation he who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”

ACTS 10:34-35

CONNECTED TO Simon Peter, The centurion of Capernaum, Paul, who was Saul, Lydia

Lydia

C. 50 AD

WHERE WE MET THEM

Acco and the purple coast · Caesarea Maritima and the sea routes

FROM

Thyatira in Asia Minor, trading in **purple cloth** in Philippi. A businesswoman, and wealthy: purple was the luxury dye trade

WHO THEY WERE

The first named European convert in history was a woman running her own company. Paul arrives in Philippi looking for a synagogue, does not find one, and settles for a group of women praying by a river outside the gate. One of them owned a house big enough to accommodate a mission team and a congregation.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

She was already a **worshipper of God**, at the edge of the synagogue as Gentiles were, and listening. Luke says the Lord *opened her heart to pay attention*, which is a beautifully undramatic description of conversion.

THE TURN

She is baptised with her whole household and then does something very characteristic of a person who negotiates for a living: she **argues Paul into staying at her house**, and Luke records that she prevailed on them. The church in Philippi, the congregation Paul loved most and wrote his warmest letter to, started in a businesswoman's front room.

"If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay. So she persuaded us."

ACTS 16:15

CONNECTED TO Paul, who was Saul, Luke, the physician, Cornelius, Joanna, Susanna and the women who paid for it

Timothy

FIRST CENTURY

WHERE WE MET THEM

Caesarea Maritima and the roads out

FROM

Lystra in Asia Minor. A Jewish mother, Eunice, a Greek father, and a grandmother called Lois

WHO THEY WERE

The young, anxious, mixed-heritage second generation, and the reason we should all take heart. He was **timid**, physically unwell with recurring stomach trouble, and young enough that Paul had to write to a whole congregation telling them not to look down on him for it. Paul's letters to him read like a father writing to a son who is close to quitting.

WHAT THEY WERE AFTER

To be adequate, and he does not feel it. Paul's counsel to him is not strategy, it is courage: *God did not give us a spirit of fear*. **Fan into flame the gift**. Do not neglect it.

THE TURN

He was taught the scriptures at home by his mother and grandmother before he ever met an apostle, and Paul names them both, which is the New Testament's clearest statement that ordinary family faith is how most of this gets passed on. Paul's last surviving letter, written expecting to die, is addressed to him, and it contains one small domestic request that tells you everything about both men: **bring the cloak I left, and the books**.

"Let no man despise your youth; but be an example to those who believe."

1 TIMOTHY 4:12

CONNECTED TO Paul, who was Saul, Luke, the physician, Mark, the first one written

There Is a Place In It For You

Read the list again and notice what is missing from it. **There is no category of impressive person here.**

A childless nomad. A stammerer. A foreign widow gleaning in the corners of somebody else's field. The eighth son nobody thought to call in from the sheep. A young man sinking in the mud of an empty cistern. A priest with no temple, on a canal in Iraq. A herdsman who insisted he was not clergy. A fisherman who denied Him three times by a fire. A collaborator with a desk on the highway. A woman with seven demons. A beggar who threw away his own cloak before he could see. A criminal with an hour left to live.

That is not an accident and it is not a coincidence. It is the method.

*“God chose the lowly things of the world,
and the things that are despised,
and the things that are not.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 1:28