



Up to Jerusalem

The last journey of Yeshua, told in order

Fifteen acts · 83 passages, printed in full

From the Galilee, down through Jericho, up over the Mount of Olives,
into the week that split history in half,
and out to the fire on the southern steps.

*“They were on the way, going up to Jerusalem;
and Jesus was going in front of them,
and they were amazed; and those who followed were afraid.”*

MARK 10:32

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Licensed Tour Guide · Havat HaChaim · Natur · Golan Heights

Scripture from the World English Bible

Eight Days and One Road

why the order matters

I have walked this route with groups more times than I can count, and I want to tell you what I have learned about it. Most people meet the last week of Yeshua's life in pieces. A palm branch in the spring, a table on a Thursday evening, a cross on a Friday, an empty tomb on a Sunday morning, each one arriving on its own like a separate story with its own feeling.

It was not separate. It was **eight days and one road**, and the road runs downhill and then uphill in a shape you can trace with your finger on a map: out of the Galilee, down the Jordan valley, through Jericho at the lowest place, then a climb of more than a thousand metres up through the desert to a ridge east of the city, and over that ridge into the week that split history in half.

So this teaching does one thing. It tells the story **in order**, and it gives you the **full passages** rather than the famous verses, because the famous verses are the parts we already know and the connective tissue is where the story actually lives. Fifteen acts, from the day He set His face toward Jerusalem to the morning fire fell on a set of stone steps and three thousand people got wet.

One promise and one warning. The promise: every word of scripture here is printed whole, and where I have shortened anything for reading aloud I say so on the line. The warning: **the Gospels do not agree on every detail of the order**, and I am not going to hide that from you or paper over it. There is an honest note at the back that lays out exactly where they differ and what I have done about it. A teacher who pretends the problems are not there is a teacher you should not fully trust.

Read it slowly. If you can, read it out loud. And if you are ever standing on the ground where one of these acts happened, read that act there, and see what it does to you.

The Fifteen Acts

the story in the order it happened

I	He Set His Face <i>Galilee, and the road south</i>	the weeks before Passover
II	Through the Lowest City <i>Jericho</i>	a few days before the feast
III	Six Days Before <i>Bethany, on the far slope of the Mount of Olives</i>	Saturday evening, most likely
IV	The King on a Donkey <i>Bethphage, the Mount of Olives, the city gate</i>	Sunday
V	The Tables <i>the Temple courts</i>	Monday
VI	The Last Teaching <i>the Temple courts, then the Mount of Olives</i>	Tuesday
VII	The Price <i>Jerusalem, and a room where a deal is made</i>	Wednesday
VIII	The Table <i>Mount Zion, the Upper Room</i>	Thursday evening, Passover
IX	The Press, and the Kiss <i>Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives</i>	Thursday, late night
X	The Courtyard and the Rooster <i>the house of the high priest, Mount Zion</i>	Thursday night into Friday dawn
XI	Pilate, the Way, and the Cross <i>the Praetorium, the Via Dolorosa, Golgotha</i>	Friday
XII	The Burial and the Silence <i>a garden tomb, and the whole Sabbath</i>	Friday evening, and Saturday
XIII	He Is Not Here <i>the garden tomb, the Emmaus road, a locked room</i>	Sunday, the first day of the week
XIV	Forty Days, and a Cloud <i>Galilee, then the Mount of Olives</i>	the forty days, and the ascension
XV	Fire on the Steps <i>Jerusalem, at the Temple, most likely the southern steps</i>	fifty days after the Passover, the feast of Shavuot

He Set His Face

Galilee, and the road south · the weeks before Passover

It begins with a decision, and Luke describes it with a phrase that sounds like a man bracing himself.

Understand the geography of that decision. He was in the Galilee, in the north, where He was loved, where the crowds were, where His mother lived, where the fishing was. Jerusalem was four or five days' walk south, and He had already told them three times what was waiting for Him there. He went anyway, and Mark says something unforgettable about how He walked: **in front of them**. Not dragged along by events. Leading the way to His own execution, at a pace that frightened the men behind Him.

THE DECISION

It came to pass, when the days were near that he should be taken up, he intently set his face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before his face. They went and entered into a village of the Samaritans, so as to prepare for him.

LUKE 9:51-52

ON THE ROAD, GOING UP

They were on the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going in front of them, and they were amazed; and those who followed were afraid. He again took the twelve, and began to tell them the things that were going to happen to him. "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes. They will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles. They will mock him, spit on him, scourge him, and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."

MARK 10:32-34

AND THEY DID NOT UNDERSTAND A WORD OF IT

He took the twelve aside, and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be completed. For he will be delivered up to the Gentiles, will be mocked, treated shamefully, and spit on. They will scourge and kill him. On the third day he will rise again." They understood none of these things. This saying was hidden from them, and they didn't understand the things that were said.

LUKE 18:31-34

WHERE YOU STAND

If you ever drive from the Galilee down the Jordan valley toward Jericho, watch the numbers on the road signs go below sea level and keep going. That is the direction of this whole story. Down, and down, and then one steep climb at the end. He walked it.

THE HEBREW WORD

פָּנִים · **Panim** — a face, and also a presence. Luke's phrase is literally that He set His panim toward Jerusalem, which is the same word Isaiah uses of the servant who set his face like a flint. In Hebrew, turning your face somewhere is not a glance. It is a commitment of the whole person.

WE PRAY

Lord, You set Your face toward the city that would kill You, and You walked in front. Give us that kind of obedience: not dragged, not surprised, walking forward. Amen.

Through the Lowest City

Jericho · a few days before the feast

Jericho is the last stop before the climb, the oldest city on earth and the lowest, an oasis on the desert floor with the road to Jerusalem rising out of it. Every pilgrim came through here. And on His way through, with the cross a week away, He stopped twice: once for a blind beggar shouting a royal title, and once for a small rich man in a tree.

Look at what He was doing with His last days. He was not preparing. He was still working.

A BLIND MAN SHOUTS A ROYAL TITLE

As he went out of Jericho, with his disciples and a great multitude, the son of Timaeus, Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the road. When he heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene, he began to cry out, and say, "Jesus, you son of David, have mercy on me!" Many rebuked him, that he should be quiet, but he cried out much more, "You son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still, and said, "Call him." They called him, and said to him, "Cheer up! Get up. He is calling you!" He, casting away his cloak, sprang up, and came to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "Rabboni, that I may see again." Jesus said to him, "Go your way. Your faith has made you well." Immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.

MARK 10:46-52

A RICH MAN CLIMBS A TREE

He entered and was passing through Jericho. There was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector, and he was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, and couldn't because of the crowd, because he was short. He ran on ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." He hurried and came down, and received him joyfully. When they saw it, they all murmured, saying, "He has gone in to lodge with a man who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my goods I give to the poor. If I have wrongfully exacted anything of anyone, I restore four times as much." Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

LUKE 19:1-10

AND BECAUSE JERUSALEM WAS CLOSE, HE TOLD THEM A STORY ABOUT A DELAY

As he was near to Jerusalem, and they supposed that God's Kingdom would be revealed immediately, he said therefore, "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. He called ten servants of his, and gave them ten mina coins, and told them, 'Conduct business until I come.'"

LUKE 19:11-13

WHERE YOU STAND

Jericho still has sycamore figs, the exact climbable species, and Elisha's spring still pours out sweet water. The city of the fallen walls became the city of the climbed tree: one story tears defences down from outside, the other melts them from inside, over dinner.

THE HEBREW WORD

יְרִיחוֹ · **Yericho** — many hear in it the word yareach, moon, and others the word reach, fragrance, for an oasis you can smell before you see. Either way it is the city of the lowest place, and the last stop before the long climb up to the highest.

WE PRAY

Lord, on Your way to the cross You stopped for a beggar and a tax collector. Stop for us. And make us people who do not shush the ones shouting for mercy. Amen.

Six Days Before

Bethany, on the far slope of the Mount of Olives · Saturday evening, most likely

He does not go into the city. He goes to a house. Bethany is a village on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, over the ridge from Jerusalem, and it was His Judean home: Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the friends who fed Him.

And there, at a supper, a woman does something extravagant and slightly scandalous, and He defends her with a sentence that tells you He knew exactly what week it was.

THE ANOINTING AT BETHANY

Then six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, who had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. So they made him a supper there. Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with him. Mary, therefore, took a pound of ointment of pure nard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. Then Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, one of his disciples, who would betray him, said, "Why wasn't this ointment sold for three hundred denarii, and given to the poor?" Now he said this, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and having the money box, used to steal what was put into it. Therefore Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She has kept this for the day of my burial. For you always have the poor with you, but you don't always have me."

JOHN 12:1-8

AND THE CROWD CAME FOR THE WRONG REASON

A large crowd therefore of the Jews learned that he was there, and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests conspired to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

JOHN 12:9-11

WHERE YOU STAND

The tomb of Lazarus is still in Bethany, cut into rock, down worn steps into a cold chamber. Climb down, then climb back out into the sunlight, and feel the story with your legs. Then remember that the men who wanted Yeshua dead also wanted the evidence dead.

THE HEBREW WORD

בֵּית עֲנִיָּה · **Beit Anya** — house of the afflicted, or house of the poor. He made His Judean home in the town named for affliction, and it was the last ordinary supper He ate with friends who were not about to fail Him.

WE PRAY

Lord, on Your last quiet evening a woman poured out something she could not get back, and You called it beautiful. Teach us that kind of extravagance while there is still time to give it. Amen.

The King on a Donkey

Bethphage, the Mount of Olives, the city gate · Sunday

Now the week begins, and it begins with theatre. He arranges it deliberately, down to the animal, because He is quoting a prophecy on purpose and in public. Every king in that world entered a conquered city on a warhorse. Zechariah had said the true king would come on a donkey, and everyone in that crowd knew the verse.

The road runs down the western slope of the Mount of Olives, and as you come round the bend the whole city rises up in front of you at once. That is where the singing was. And that is where He stopped and cried.

THE ANIMAL, ARRANGED IN ADVANCE

When they came near to Jerusalem, and came to Bethsphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village that is opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them, and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and immediately he will send them." All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken through the prophet, saying, "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold, your King comes to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

MATTHEW 21:1-5

THE PROPHECY HE WAS QUOTING

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; lowly, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

ZECHARIAH 9:9

THE PARADE

The disciples went, and did just as Jesus commanded them, and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their clothes on them; and he sat on them. A very great multitude spread their clothes on the road. Others cut branches from the trees, and spread them on the road. The multitudes who went before him, and who followed kept shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" The multitudes said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

MATTHEW 21:6-11

THE PALMS, AND THE PHARISEES' COMPLAINT

On the next day a great multitude had come to the feast. When they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, they took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet him, and cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!" ... The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, "See how you accomplish nothing. Behold, the world has gone after him."

JOHN 12:12-13, 19

IF THESE WERE SILENT, THE STONES WOULD CRY OUT

As he was now getting near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works which they had seen, saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest!" Some of the Pharisees from the multitude said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" He answered them, "I tell you that if these were silent, the stones would cry out."

LUKE 19:37-40

AND IN THE MIDDLE OF THE SINGING, HE WEPT

When he came near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you, even you, had known today the things which belong to your peace! But now, they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come on you, when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, surround you and hem you in on every side, and will dash you and your children within you to the ground. They will not leave in you one stone on another, because you didn't know the time of your visitation."

LUKE 19:41-44

THEN HE LOOKED AROUND THE TEMPLE, AND WENT HOME TO BED

Jesus entered into the temple in Jerusalem. When he had looked around at everything, it being now evening, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

MARK 11:11

WHERE YOU STAND

Walk the Palm Sunday road down from the top of the Mount of Olives, and stop at Dominus Flevit, where the bend gives you the whole city. The chapel there is shaped like a teardrop with stone tear vials at its corners, and instead of a painting behind the altar there is a window framing exactly what He was looking at when He cried.

THE HEBREW WORD

הוֹשִׁיעַ נָא · **Hoshia na** — save, please. Hosanna is not a cheer, it is a plea, and the crowd was quoting Psalm 118. They were begging for rescue and they got it, but not the kind they were shouting for.

WE PRAY

*Lord, You accepted worship once and wept in the middle of it. Show us today the things that belong to our peace, while it is still today.
And we will not be silent, lest the stones outsing us. Amen.*

The Tables

the Temple courts · Monday

He comes back the next morning, and this is the day of the overturned tables.

It is worth being precise about what He objected to, because the scene is often preached as though He hated commerce. Pilgrims travelling from other countries genuinely needed to change money and buy animals; that was not the offence. The offence was where it had been set up. The only court a Gentile could stand in, the outer court, the one place in the whole complex where the nations could come and pray, had been turned into a market. So when He quotes Isaiah, He quotes the words the market had made impossible: **a house of prayer for all nations**.

And He begins the day with a strange act against a fig tree, which Mark deliberately wraps around the temple scene so that you read them together: something that looks alive, and has no fruit.

FIRST, THE FIG TREE

The next day, when they had come out from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came to see if perhaps he might find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. Jesus told it, "May no one eat fruit from you again!" and his disciples heard it.

MARK 11:12-14

THEN THE TABLES

They came to Jerusalem, and Jesus entered into the temple, and began to throw out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and overthrew the money changers' tables, and the seats of those who sold the doves. He would not allow anyone to carry a container through the temple. He taught, saying to them, "Isn't it written, 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'" But you have made it a den of robbers!" The chief priests and the scribes heard it, and sought how they might destroy him. For they feared him, because all the multitude was astonished at his teaching.

MARK 11:15-18

THE VERSE HE WAS QUOTING, IN FULL

Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh, to serve him, and to love Yahweh's name, to be his servants ... I will bring these to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

ISAIAH 56:6-7

AND MATTHEW ADDS WHO CAME TO HIM ONCE THE TABLES WERE GONE

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children who were crying in the temple and saying, "Hosanna to the son of David!" they were indignant.

MATTHEW 21:14-15

WHERE YOU STAND

Stand at the southern wall of the Temple Mount and look at the scale of Herod's platform, then remember that the biggest court on it was the one for everybody else. He did not clear the temple of foreigners. He cleared it for them.

THE HEBREW WORD

בַּיִת · **Bayit** — a house. He calls it My house, twice in one sentence, and the complaint is about what a house is for. In Hebrew a bayit is not a building, it is a household, the people who belong in it. He was objecting to who had been squeezed out of the family.

WE PRAY

Lord, You cleared a space so that the nations could pray, and we are the nations. Clear what needs clearing in us. And keep our houses of prayer from becoming markets. Amen.

The Last Teaching

the Temple courts, then the Mount of Olives · Tuesday

Tuesday is the longest day in the record and the least famous. He teaches in the temple courts all day, answers every trap set for Him, tells the parables that make the leadership decide finally to kill Him, praises a widow nobody noticed, and then walks up the Mount of Olives in the evening and tells His friends that the building they are admiring will come down.

I want you to notice the last thing He says in public, in Matthew, because it is the same image He used weeping on the ridge: a hen with her wings out.

THE TRAP ABOUT TAXES

They sent some of the Pharisees and of the Herodians to him, that they might trap him with words. When they had come, they asked him, "Teacher, we know that you are honest, and don't defer to anybody; for you aren't partial to anyone, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?" But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test me? Bring me a denarius, that I may see it." They brought it. He said to them, "Whose is this image and inscription?" They said to him, "Caesar's." Jesus answered them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." They marveled greatly at him.

MARK 12:13-17

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

One of the scribes came, and heard them questioning together, and knowing that he had answered them well, asked him, "Which commandment is the greatest of all?" Jesus answered, "The greatest is, 'Hear, Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. The second is like this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

MARK 12:28-31

THE WIDOW NOBODY WAS WATCHING

Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and saw how the multitude cast money into the treasury. Many who were rich cast in much. A poor widow came, and she cast in two small brass coins, which equal a quadrans coin. He called his disciples to himself, and said to them, "Most certainly I tell you, this poor widow gave more than all those who are giving into the treasury, for they all gave out of their abundance, but she, out of her poverty, gave all that she had to live on."

MARK 12:41-44

HIS LAST PUBLIC WORDS, AND THE HEN

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets, and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me from now on, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'

MATTHEW 23:37-39

ON THE RIDGE, LOOKING BACK AT THE TEMPLE

As he went out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Teacher, see what kind of stones and what kind of buildings!" Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone on another, which will not be thrown down." As he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will these things be? What is the sign that these things are all about to be fulfilled?"

MARK 13:1-4

AND A WORD ABOUT A SEED, WHEN FOREIGNERS ASKED TO SEE HIM

Now there were certain Greeks among those that went up to worship at the feast. These, therefore, came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him, saying, "Sir, we want to see Jesus." ... Jesus answered them, "The time has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Most certainly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."

JOHN 12:20-21, 23-24

WHERE YOU STAND

Sit on the Southern Steps, the actual monumental stairway where rabbis taught and pilgrims entered, and read Tuesday there. Then look up at the platform and read Mark 13:1-2. Forty years later it happened, exactly as He said, and the stones He was talking about are lying at the foot of the wall where the Romans pushed them.

THE HEBREW WORD

אלמנה · **Almanah** — a widow. The Torah returns to her again and again, alongside the orphan and the stranger, as the measure of whether a society is righteous. On His second to last day, out of everything happening in that enormous courtyard, the thing He stopped to point at was her.

WE PRAY

*Lord, on Your last full day of teaching You praised a poor woman and warned about a beautiful building. Fix our sense of what is large.
And gather us under Your wings, since we are the ones who would not come. Amen.*

The Price

Jerusalem, and a room where a deal is made · Wednesday

The quietest day, and the darkest. The Gospels record almost nothing of what He did, and two things about what was done to Him: the leadership decides, and one of His own friends goes to negotiate.

Thirty pieces of silver is not a random figure. It is the price the law sets as compensation for a slave gored by an ox, and it is the exact sum Zechariah is told to throw into the temple treasury as the insulting valuation of a shepherd.

THE DECISION

Now the feast of unleavened bread, which is called the Passover, was approaching. The chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put him to death, for they feared the people.

LUKE 22:1-2

THE DEAL

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him to you?" They weighed out for him thirty pieces of silver. From that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

MATTHEW 26:14-16

SATAN ENTERED JUDAS, SAYS LUKE, PLAINLY

Satan entered into Judas, who was called Iscariot, who was counted with the twelve. He went away, and talked with the chief priests and captains about how he might deliver him to them. They were glad, and agreed to give him money. He sought an opportunity to deliver him to them in the absence of the multitude.

LUKE 22:3-6

AND THE PRICE, WRITTEN FIVE HUNDRED YEARS EARLIER

Yahweh said to me, "Throw it to the potter, the goodly price that I was valued at by them!" I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in Yahweh's house.

ZECHARIAH 11:13

WHERE YOU STAND

There is no site for Wednesday, and I have come to think that is fitting. Some of the worst things that happen in this story happen in rooms nobody remembers the address of.

THE HEBREW WORD

קֶסֶף · **Kesef** — silver, and also simply money. It comes from a root meaning to long for, to pale with desire. The language itself admits what money does to a person before it ever buys anything.

WE PRAY

Lord, one of the twelve sold You for the price of an injured slave, and he had walked with You for three years. Search us. Show us what we are quietly negotiating away. Amen.

The Table

Mount Zion, the Upper Room · Thursday evening, Passover

Now everything slows down, because the longest single scene in the Gospels is about to happen, and it happens at a table.

Understand the evening in its Jewish frame and every gesture ignites. This is a Passover seder. There are four cups, and each one is lifted over a promise from Exodus 6. The **third cup**, the one taken after the meal, is the cup of redemption, lifted over the words *I will redeem you with an outstretched arm.* Luke tells you exactly which cup He used: **the cup after supper**. He took the redemption cup and filled it with Himself.

And before any of it, He gets up and washes their feet, including the feet of the man who has already been paid.

THE PREPARATION

On the first day of unleavened bread, when they must sacrifice the Passover lamb, his disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and prepare that you may eat the Passover?" He sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and there a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters in, tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?"'" He will himself show you a large upper room furnished and ready. Make ready for us there."

MARK 14:12-15

THE WASHING

Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his time had come that he would depart from this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ... he arose from supper, and laid aside his outer garments. He took a towel, and wrapped a towel around his waist. Then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ... "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

JOHN 13:1, 4-5, 14-15 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE LONGING, AND THE CUP

When the hour had come, he sat down with the twelve apostles. He said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will no longer by any means eat of it until it is fulfilled in God's Kingdom." He received a cup, and when he had given thanks, he said, "Take this, and share it among yourselves, for I tell you, I will not drink at all again from the fruit of the vine, until God's Kingdom comes." He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me." Likewise, he took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

LUKE 22:14-20

THE TRAITOR AT THE TABLE

When Jesus had said these things, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Most certainly I tell you that one of you will betray me." ... Jesus therefore answered, "It is he to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ... Therefore when he had received that morsel, he went out immediately. It was night.

JOHN 13:21, 26, 30 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE NEW COMMANDMENT

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

JOHN 13:34-35

AND HE TELLS PETER WHAT IS COMING, AND HOW IT ENDS

The Lord said, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you all, that he might sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you, that your faith wouldn't fail. You, when once you have turned again, establish your brothers." He said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death!" He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you deny that you know me three times."

LUKE 22:31-34

THEN HE PRAYS FOR EVERYONE WHO WOULD EVER BELIEVE, INCLUDING YOU

Neither do I pray for these alone, but for those also who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that you sent me.

JOHN 17:20-21

AND THEY SANG, AND WALKED OUT INTO THE NIGHT

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

MARK 14:26

WHERE YOU STAND

The Cenacle shown on Mount Zion today is a Crusader hall standing over much older layers, and beneath it lies the traditional tomb of David: the new covenant poured out literally above the old kingdom. Whatever the archaeology finally decides, every communion table on every continent this Sunday is the accurate replica.

THE HEBREW WORD

בְּרִית · **Brit** — a covenant. In Hebrew you do not sign one, you **cut** one, because covenants cost blood from the beginning. This cup is the new brit in my blood: at that table the cutting and the cup became one thing, and it was handed round a circle of men who were all about to fail Him.

WE PRAY

Lord, You longed for that table more than You feared that night. Pour the cup of redemption over our houses. Break bread with the ones who will fail You, since that is all of us. Amen.

The Press, and the Kiss

Gethsemane, at the foot of the Mount of Olives · Thursday, late night

They walk out of the city, down through the Kidron valley, and into an olive grove He used so often that Judas did not need to ask where He would be.

The name of the place is Gat Shemen, the oil press. Olives from the whole ridge were carried down here to be crushed, and the name had been waiting in the ground for centuries for the night it would explain.

THE PRAYER

He came out, and went, as his custom was, to the Mount of Olives. His disciples also followed him. When he was at the place, he said to them, "Pray that you don't enter into temptation." He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and he knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." An angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him. Being in agony he prayed more earnestly. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he rose up from his prayer, he came to the disciples, and found them sleeping because of grief, and said to them, "Why do you sleep? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

LUKE 22:39-46

THREE TIMES, AND THE HOUR

He came the third time, and said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest. It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Arise, let us be going. Behold, he who betrays me is at hand."

MARK 14:41-42

THE KISS

While he was still speaking, behold, a multitude came. He who was called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He came near to Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus said to him, "Judas, do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?"

LUKE 22:47-48

THE SWORD, AND THE HEALING

Simon Peter therefore, having a sword, drew it, and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant's name was Malchus. Jesus therefore said to Peter, "Put the sword into its sheath. The cup which the Father has given me, shall I not surely drink it?"

JOHN 18:10-11

AND BEFORE THAT, TWO WORDS THAT PUT THEM ON THE GROUND

Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were happening to him, went out and said to them, "Who are you looking for?" They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." ... When therefore he said, "I am he," they went backward, and fell to the ground.

JOHN 18:4-6

THEN EVERYBODY RAN

Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

MATTHEW 26:56

WHERE YOU STAND

The garden holds olive trees of enormous age, gnarled giants growing from root systems that may be older still, shoots of shoots of the trees of that night. Put your hand on the bark. An olive never really dies: cut it down and it comes back from the root. Of all the trees that could have witnessed that prayer, God planted the one that returns.

THE HEBREW WORD

גַּת שֶׁמֶן · Gat Shemen — oil press. Oil in this land means light and anointing, and Messiah means the Anointed One. In the garden named for crushing, the Anointed was crushed, and the light of the world was the yield.

WE PRAY

Lord, in the garden of the press You prayed the prayer that saved us: not my will, but Yours. Teach our mouths that sentence. Stay near us in our own dark gardens, and let the crushing in our lives yield oil and not bitterness. Amen.

The Courtyard and the Rooster

the house of the high priest, Mount Zion · Thursday night into Friday dawn

They march Him up the slope from the Kidron to the upper city, to the houses of the high priests, and hold two hearings in the dark: first before Annas, the old power behind the office, then before Caiaphas and the council.

And in the courtyard outside, at somebody else's fire, the bravest of the disciples falls apart in front of a servant girl. Luke records the detail that changes everything about that story: the direction of a look.

FIRST TO ANNAS, THEN TO CAIAPHAS

So the detachment of soldiers, the commanding officer, and the officers of the Jews seized Jesus and bound him, and led him to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. Now it was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it was expedient that one man should perish for the people.

JOHN 18:12-14

THE COUNCIL, AND THE ANSWER THAT CONDEMNED HIM

The high priest stood up in the middle, and asked Jesus, "Have you no answer? What is it which these testify against you?" But he stayed quiet, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of the sky." The high priest tore his clothes, and said, "What further need have we of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" They all condemned him to be worthy of death. Some began to spit on him, and to beat him with fists, and to say to him, "Prophecy!" The officers struck him with the palms of their hands.

MARK 14:60-65

THE COURTYARD, THREE TIMES, AND A LOOK

They seized him, and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed from a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard, and had sat down together, Peter sat among them. A certain servant girl saw him as he sat in the light, and looking intently at him, said, "This man also was with him." He denied Jesus, saying, "Woman, I don't know him." After a little while someone else saw him, and said, "You also are one of them!" But Peter answered, "Man, I am not!" About one hour later another confidently affirmed, saying, "Truly this man also was with him, for he is a Galilean!" But Peter said, "Man, I don't know what you are talking about!" Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed. The Lord turned, and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the Lord's word, how he said to him, "Before the rooster crows you will deny me three times." He went out, and wept bitterly.

LUKE 22:54-62

AND THE OTHER MAN'S REMORSE, WHICH WENT THE OTHER WAY

Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that Jesus was condemned, felt remorse, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, "I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood." But they said, "What is that to us? You see to it." He threw down the pieces of silver in the sanctuary, and departed. Then he went away and hanged himself.

MATTHEW 27:3-5

WHERE YOU STAND

The church of St Peter in Gallicantu, the cock's crow, stands on that slope, over ancient stepped streets and a rock-cut pit of the kind a prisoner waited in. Two men failed that night in ways that look similar from the outside. One wept and came back. One felt remorse and went out. Same weekend, two different words.

THE HEBREW WORD

תשובה · **Teshuva** — return, the turning of the whole person. It is not the same as regret. Hebrew has a word for the sorrow that circles and a word for the sorrow that turns around, and the difference between Peter and Judas is the difference between them.

WE PRAY

Lord, we have all warmed our hands at the wrong fire. Turn and look at us the way You looked at Peter, so that the look sends us back and not away. Amen.

Pilate, the Way, and the Cross

the Praetorium, the Via Dolorosa, Golgotha · Friday

Morning. They take Him to the Roman governor, because the council can condemn but only Rome can execute. What follows is a trial in which the judge repeatedly says the defendant is innocent and then hands him over anyway, which is the most human thing in the entire story.

Then the walk. It was short, a few hundred metres through a crowded festival city, past shoppers and soldiers and people who never looked up. And then a hill outside the wall but beside the road, where the charge could be read by everybody passing, in three languages.

BEFORE PILATE, AND A QUESTION LEFT HANGING

Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and called Jesus, and said to him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" ... Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then my servants would fight, that I wouldn't be delivered to the Jews. But now my kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to him, "Are you a king then?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this reason I have been born, and for this reason I have come into the world, that I should testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

JOHN 18:33, 36-38 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

SENT TO HEROD, AND BACK AGAIN

When Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he asked whether he also was a Galilean. When he found out that he was in Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem during those days. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad, for he had wanted to see him for a long time, because he had heard many things about him. He hoped to see some miracle done by him. He questioned him with many words, but he gave no answers.

LUKE 23:6-9

BARABBAS, AND THE CROWD'S CHOICE

Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner, whom they desired. They had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. ... The governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!" Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus, who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!" But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!" So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it."

MATTHEW 27:15-16, 21-24 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

BEHOLD THE MAN

The soldiers twisted thorns into a crown, and put it on his head, and dressed him in a purple garment. They kept saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and they kept slapping him. Pilate went out again, and said to them, "Behold, I bring him out to you, that you may know that I find no basis for a charge against him." Jesus therefore came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple garment. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the man!"

JOHN 19:2-5

THE WAY OF SORROW

When they led him away, they grabbed one Simon of Cyrene, coming from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it after Jesus. A great multitude of the people followed him, including women who also mourned and lamented him. But Jesus, turning to them, said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For if they do these things in the green tree, what will be done in the dry?"

LUKE 23:26-28, 31 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE PLACE OF THE SKULL

He went out, bearing his cross, to the place called "The Place of a Skull", which is called in Hebrew, "Golgotha", where they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the middle. Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. There was written, "JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS." ... it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.

JOHN 19:17-20 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM

When they came to the place that is called "The Skull", they crucified him there with the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing." Dividing his garments among them, they cast lots.

LUKE 23:33-34

TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE

One of the criminals who was hanged insulted him, saying, "If you are the Christ, save yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Don't you even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." He said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when you come into your Kingdom." Jesus said to him, "Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

LUKE 23:39-43

WOMAN, BEHOLD YOUR SON

But there were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. Therefore when Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing there, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son!" Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother!" From that hour, the disciple took her to his own home.

JOHN 19:25-27

THE DARKNESS, AND THE CRY

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

MATTHEW 27:45-46

IT IS FINISHED

After this, Jesus, seeing that all things were now finished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I am thirsty." ... When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, "It is finished." He bowed his head, and gave up his spirit.

JOHN 19:28, 30

INTO YOUR HANDS

Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" Having said this, he breathed his last.

LUKE 23:46

THE CURTAIN, THE EARTHQUAKE, AND A ROMAN'S VERDICT

Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. ... Now the centurion, and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake, and the things that were done, feared exceedingly, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God."

MATTHEW 27:51-52, 54 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE SPEAR, AND THE WATER

But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ... For these things happened, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, "A bone of him will not be broken." Again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they pierced."

JOHN 19:34, 36-37

WHERE YOU STAND

Walk the Via Dolorosa early, before the shops open, when you can hear your own steps. Then go into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and see how crowded and loud and unbeautiful it is, and let me say something honest about that: so was the actual day. The most important hours in history happened in a crowd, beside a road, with soldiers arguing over clothing. If the church feels chaotic, it is being faithful to the event.

THE HEBREW WORD

תָּמַם · **Tam** — complete, finished, whole and without blemish. The Greek word on His lips, tetelestai, was a marketplace term stamped on a settled account: **paid in full**. It is not the sound of a man giving up. It is a receipt.

WE PRAY

Lord, at the place of the skull You said the word we could never say: finished. Let us stop paying a settled debt. And let us live the rest of our days as people whose account reads paid in full. Amen.

The Burial and the Silence

a garden tomb, and the whole Sabbath · Friday evening, and Saturday

Two members of the very council that condemned Him come out of hiding to bury Him, which tells you something about how many people in that story were quietly on the fence.

And then, for one whole day, nothing. The Sabbath. The women who wanted to work could not work, because the commandment said rest, and they kept it. I have always found that day the hardest to preach and the easiest to recognise: the day when the worst has happened, God is silent, and the faithful thing to do is to keep the rhythm you were taught.

THE BURIAL

After these things, Joseph of Arimathaea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews, asked of Pilate that he might take away Jesus' body. Pilate gave him permission. He came therefore and took away his body. Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred Roman pounds. So they took Jesus' body, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden. In the garden was a new tomb in which no man had ever yet been laid. Then because of the Jews' Preparation Day (for the tomb was near at hand) they laid Jesus there.

JOHN 19:38-42

THE WOMEN WATCHING, AND THE COMMANDMENT KEPT

The women, who had come with him out of Galilee, followed after, and saw the tomb, and how his body was laid. They returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

LUKE 23:55-56

AND THE STONE, AND THE GUARD

Now on the next day, which was the day after the Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees were gathered together to Pilate, saying, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was still alive: 'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest perhaps his disciples come at night and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He is risen from the dead;'" and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard. Go, make it as secure as you can." So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone.

MATTHEW 27:62-66

WHERE YOU STAND

Stand in a rock-cut tomb, at the Garden Tomb or anywhere in this land where you can get into one, and be quiet for a minute. Then think about Saturday. Everybody who loved Him spent an entire day believing it was over, and they were wrong. Most of us are living somewhere in a Saturday.

THE HEBREW WORD

שַׁבָּת · **Shabbat** — to cease. On the most unbearable day in their lives they stopped, because it was commanded. Sometimes obedience is not heroic, it is only keeping the rhythm when you cannot feel anything.

WE PRAY

Lord, on the Saturday nothing happened and Your friends kept the commandment anyway. When we are in a Saturday, hold us to the rhythm. And remind us how that one ended. Amen.

He Is Not Here

the garden tomb, the Emmaus road, a locked room · Sunday, the first day of the week

It begins in the dark, with a woman walking to a grave, and the first thing anybody notices is a practical detail: the stone has moved.

Then a footrace, and inside the tomb the quietest and most convincing detail in the whole Gospel. John says it is what made him believe, before anybody explained anything: the cloth that had been around His head was **rolled up in a place by itself**. Grave robbers do not fold laundry. Whatever happened in there happened calmly.

THE STONE, THE RACE, THE FOLDED CLOTH

Now on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went early, while it was still dark, to the tomb, and saw the stone taken away from the tomb. Therefore she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have laid him!" Therefore Peter and the other disciple went out, and they went toward the tomb. They both ran together. The other disciple outran Peter, and came to the tomb first. Stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths lying, yet he didn't enter in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and entered into the tomb. He saw the linen cloths lying, and the cloth that had been on his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. So then the other disciple who came first to the tomb also entered in, and he saw and believed.

JOHN 20:1-8

HE CALLS HER BY HER NAME

But Mary was standing outside at the tomb weeping. ... Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?" She, supposing him to be the gardener, said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned and said to him, "Rabboni!" which is to say, "Teacher!"

JOHN 20:11, 15-16 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE ANGEL, AND THE MESSAGE TO RUN WITH

The angel answered the women, "Don't be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. Go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.'"

MATTHEW 28:5-7

THE ROAD TO EMMAUS, AND THE BIBLE STUDY NOBODY WROTE DOWN

Behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was sixty stadia from Jerusalem. They talked with each other about all of these things which had happened. While they talked and questioned together, Jesus himself came near, and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ... Beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he explained to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

LUKE 24:13-16, 27 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

KNOWN IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD

They came near to the village, where they were going, and he acted like he would go further. They urged him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is almost evening, and the day is almost over." He went in to stay with them. When he had sat down at the table with them, he took the bread and gave thanks. Breaking it, he gave it to them. Their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he vanished out of their sight. They said to one another, "Weren't our hearts burning within us, while he spoke to us along the way, and while he opened the Scriptures to us?"

LUKE 24:28-32

THAT EVENING, IN A LOCKED ROOM

When therefore it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were locked where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the middle, and said to them, "Peace be to you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, "Peace be to you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit!"

JOHN 20:19-22

AND A WEEK LATER, FOR THE ONE WHO NEEDED TO TOUCH IT

Then he said to Thomas, "Reach here your finger, and see my hands. Reach here your hand, and put it into my side. Don't be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and have believed."

JOHN 20:27-29

WHERE YOU STAND

At the Garden Tomb there is a wooden door with four words on it that outrank every argument about which site is the right one: HE IS NOT HERE. At the Holy Sepulchre you will stand in a two thousand year queue of every nation on earth shuffling toward a small empty room. Either way the evidence your own eyes verify is the same evidence John saw. The emptiness. It is the only shrine on earth venerated for what is not in it.

THE HEBREW WORD

קָם · **Kam** — risen, arisen. The shortest great word in the language. Believers in this land still trade the greeting at Passover: **Hu kam**. He is risen. Two letters in Hebrew carry the whole of Easter.

WE PRAY

Lord, You left the tomb the way You do everything, unhurried, with the cloth folded. Meet us in the garden while it is still dark. Call us by name. And send us running. Amen.

Forty Days, and a Cloud

Galilee, then the Mount of Olives · the forty days, and the ascension

He does not leave immediately. Luke, who is careful with numbers, says forty days, and He spends them doing the most ordinary and the most astonishing things: cooking breakfast on a beach, letting people touch Him, explaining the Scriptures, and appearing to more than five hundred people at once.

The most important conversation of those forty days happens on the shore of the lake where the whole thing began, and it is a repair job. Three denials by a fire, three questions by a fire. And then a job, three times over.

And at the end He takes them out along the Bethany road, up the Mount of Olives, blesses them with His hands up, and is taken from their sight. They are left standing on a ridge, staring at a cloud, being asked a gentle question by two men in white.

FORTY DAYS

To these he also showed himself alive after he suffered, by many proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and speaking about God's Kingdom.

ACTS 1:3

BREAKFAST ON THE SHORE, AND PETER GIVEN HIS WORK BACK

So when they came to the land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. ... Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast!" ... So when they had eaten their breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter; "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I have affection for you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you have affection for me?" Peter was grieved because he asked him the third time, "Do you have affection for me?" He said to him, "Lord, you know everything. You know that I have affection for you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

JOHN 21:9, 12, 15-17 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE COMMISSION, ON A MOUNTAIN IN GALILEE

Jesus came to them and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you. Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

MATTHEW 28:18-20

MORE THAN FIVE HUNDRED WITNESSES

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now; but some have also fallen asleep.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-6

THE LAST INSTRUCTION: WAIT

"Behold, I send out the promise of my Father on you. But wait in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." He led them out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. It happened, while he blessed them, that he withdrew from them, and was carried up into heaven. They worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

LUKE 24:49-52

THE ASCENSION, AND THE PROMISE OF THE RETURN

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you. You will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth." When he had said these things, as they were looking, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight. While they were looking steadfastly into the sky as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, "You men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky, will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky." Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mountain called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

ACTS 1:8-12

WHERE YOU STAND

Stand at the top of the Mount of Olives, on the ridge, and read Acts 1:11 out loud looking west at the city. Zechariah says that on that day His feet will stand on this mountain. It is the only place on earth where you can stand on the ground of both the leaving and the promised returning at the same time.

THE HEBREW WORD

ענן · **Anan** — a cloud. The cloud that led Israel through the desert, that filled the Tabernacle, that rested on Sinai, that overshadowed the mountain of transfiguration. When a cloud receives Him, Luke is not describing weather. He is using the oldest sign of the Presence in the Bible.

WE PRAY

Lord, You went up from this ridge with Your hands raised in blessing, and You promised to come back to it. Keep us from standing about staring at the sky. Make us witnesses, from here to the ends of the earth. Amen.

Fire on the Steps

Jerusalem, at the Temple, most likely the southern steps · fifty days after the Passover, the feast of Shavuot

Ten days of waiting, a room full of about a hundred and twenty people praying, and then the feast.

Read Pentecost in its Jewish frame and it opens like a gate. Pentecost is **Shavuot**, the harvest feast, counted seven weeks and a day from Passover, when Jerusalem filled with pilgrims from every nation under heaven. It is also the feast that remembers the giving of the Torah at Sinai, where tradition says the Word went out in fire and in every language, and three thousand fell. At Shavuot in Jerusalem the Spirit fell in fire and every language, and three thousand **rose** out of the water. The church was not born at a new festival. It was born at the oldest one, exactly on schedule.

And now the practical question, which is the one you asked and it deserves a careful answer: **where?** The text says they were in a house, and it says that afterwards they were continually in the temple. What we know for certain is that three thousand people were immersed that day, and that requires an enormous quantity of water under Jewish law, running or living water in proper ritual baths. There is exactly one place in Jerusalem that could do that in an afternoon: the south side of the Temple Mount, where dozens of mikvaot were cut into the rock to handle festival crowds, at the foot of the great monumental stairway. So the southern steps are the most likely place in the world for the first sermon and the first baptisms, and I teach it that way, while telling you honestly that Acts does not name it.

THE TEN DAYS OF WAITING

When they had come in, they went up into the upper room where they were staying ... All of these with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer and supplication, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. In these days, Peter stood up in the middle of the disciples (and the number of names was about one hundred twenty).

ACTS 1:13-15 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE WIND, THE FIRE, AND THE LANGUAGES

Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all with one accord in one place. Suddenly there came from the sky a sound like the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Tongues like fire appeared and were distributed to them, and one sat on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other languages, as the Spirit gave them the ability to speak. Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under the sky. When this sound was heard, the multitude came together, and were bewildered, because everyone heard them speaking in his own language. They were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, "Behold, aren't all these who speak Galileans? How do we hear, everyone in our own native language?"

ACTS 2:1-8

PETER, FIFTY DAYS AFTER THE ROOSTER, STANDS UP

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and spoke out to them, "You men of Judea, and all you who dwell at Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to my words. For these aren't drunken, as you suppose, seeing it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what has been spoken through the prophet Joel: 'It will be in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your young men will see visions. Your old men will dream dreams.'"

ACTS 2:14-17

THE HEART OF THE SERMON

"Men of Israel, hear these words! Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved by God to you by mighty works and wonders and signs which God did by him among you, even as you yourselves know, him, being delivered up by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by the hand of lawless men, crucified and killed; whom God raised up, having freed him from the agony of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it. ... Let all the house of Israel therefore know certainly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."

ACTS 2:22-24, 36 (ABRIDGED FOR READING)

THE QUESTION, THE ANSWER, AND THREE THOUSAND

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself." With many other words he testified, and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!" Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. There were added that day about three thousand souls.

ACTS 2:37-41

AND WHAT THE FIRST CHURCH ACTUALLY DID

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer. Fear came on every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together, and had all things in common. They sold their possessions and goods, and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need. Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, they took their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. The Lord added to the assembly day by day those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:42-47

WHERE YOU STAND

Sit your group down on the Southern Steps themselves. These stones are original, the stairway pilgrims climbed to enter the temple, where rabbis taught and where Yeshua walked in and out of His Father's house. Then walk them past the row of excavated mikvaot at the foot of the steps, still open to the sky. Of all the places in this land where you can say it happened right here, very few say it louder than these stairs.

THE HEBREW WORD

שבועות · **Shavuot** — weeks. The feast of the counted weeks, seven sevens from Passover to harvest. God had the church's birthday written in Leviticus centuries before there was a church. Nothing in the Book is improvised.

WE PRAY

Lord, You kept the appointment You set in Leviticus and birthed Your church on the harvest feast, on those stairs. Fall on us the same way. Fill our mouths with words every listener can understand. And bring the harvest up out of the water gladly, three thousand at a time. Amen.

An Honest Note on the Chronology

where the Gospels differ, and what I have done about it

Now the honest note, and please read it, because if you teach this story you will meet somebody who asks about it.

The Gospels do not line up perfectly on the order of this week, and the differences are real rather than imaginary. Here are the four that matter, and exactly what I have done with each.

One. The day of the Passover. Matthew, Mark and Luke present the Last Supper as the Passover meal, eaten Thursday evening. John repeatedly calls Friday the Preparation Day of the Passover, which would put the crucifixion at the hour the lambs were being killed in the temple. Scholars have proposed several solutions: two calendars in use at once, a Galilean reckoning against a Judean one, or John writing theologically to make the point that Yeshua is the Lamb. I have followed the synoptic order because it is the plainest reading of three accounts, and I have not pretended that John says the same thing. If somebody asks, tell them the truth: it is unresolved, and it does not touch anything that matters about who He is.

Two. The cleansing of the temple. John puts a temple cleansing at the very beginning of the ministry, in chapter two. The other three put one in this final week. Either it happened twice, at the start and at the end, which is entirely possible for a prophetic act, or one of the writers has placed it where it does the most theological work. Matthew reads as though it happened on the day of the entry; Mark says clearly that He looked around, went home to Bethany, and came back the next morning. I have followed Mark, because he is the one giving us the timetable.

Three. The blind man at Jericho. Mark names one man, Bartimaeus, as they were leaving Jericho. Luke has one man as they approached it. Matthew has two men, leaving. I have printed Mark, and I am telling you the rest. Ancient Jericho and Roman Jericho were two adjacent sites, which may quietly answer the entering and leaving problem, and eyewitness memory of crowds is exactly the kind of thing that varies. Notice that nobody adjusted the details to make the accounts match, which is itself a small argument for their honesty.

Four. The days of the week. The Gospels only name a few days directly: the Preparation, the Sabbath, and the first day of the week. Sunday for the entry, Monday for the tables, Tuesday for the teaching, Wednesday for the betrayal deal, Thursday for the supper, Friday for the cross: that framework is built mostly out of Mark's sequence of next days, and it is a reconstruction rather than a quotation. It is a good one, it is the one the whole church has used for centuries, and it is still a reconstruction. Hold it firmly and lightly at the same time.

One more thing, about Pentecost and the southern steps. Acts says a house, and then says they were daily in the temple. The steps are the best candidate for the sermon and the immersion of three thousand people, for the reasons I gave, and it is where I take groups and teach it. But the text does not name the place, and I would rather you heard that from me than from somebody trying to embarrass you.

None of these uncertainties touch the load-bearing walls. He went up to Jerusalem on purpose. He was betrayed, tried, crucified and buried. The tomb was empty on the first day of the week. He was seen by many. He was taken up from the Mount of Olives. And fifty days later, in the middle of a Jewish harvest festival, the Spirit fell and the church was born in the same city that had killed Him seven weeks earlier. **That** is the story, and it stands.

He Went In Front

Eight days, one road, and a fire fifty days later on a set of stone steps. He walked it in front of them, and He walks it in front of us.

*“This Jesus, who was received up from you into the sky,
will come back in the same way as you saw him going into the sky.”*

ACTS 1:11

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