



I, JUDAS

THE 5TH GOSPEL

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COMING MARCH 2012: AN EXCERPT FROM

I, Judas

The 5th Gospel

By Bob Mayer

CHAPTER 1: 33 A.D.

Jerusalem

“In very truth I tell you, one of you is going to betray me.” Jesus looked about the room at the twelve disciples gathered round the table. His eyes did not pause on any one person and he ignored the cries of protest from several.

Jesus stood at one end of the narrow table, six of his followers on either side, all staring at him, almost all surprised by his pronouncement. All but one. The man who sat to Jesus’ right was silent, face impassive.

It was early evening, the last rays of the sun cutting across the room through the high windows set in the brick wall. The room where they had just dined was built along the side of an inn at the base of the Mount of Olives. The smell of the recently consumed meal permeated the air. The sounds of the family that ran the inn echoed into the room, mixing with the noise of passersby’s in the street outside heading home for their own late meals. It was Passover and there were many more people in Jerusalem than normal.

Jesus leaned forward, the slight movement causing all to fall silent. It was his presence, the thing that had drawn most of the Apostles to him from the very

beginning. None had ever been around a man who commanded such implicit attention. His skin was dark from both birth and sun, his short beard prematurely tinged with gray. His hair was also cut short, tight to his skull. His eyes were dark and those who felt their gaze sensed that he could see into their very essence.

Jesus' voice was low but easily carried over the background noise. "Until now I have been using figures of speech; there will be a time, the Second Coming, when I will return and shall no longer use figures, but tell you of the Father in plain words."

Frowns creased the brows of most in the room; except, once more for the man to Jesus' right. He nodded ever so slightly, as if he perfectly understood the cryptic statement. He was similar in appearance to Jesus, with short black hair, dark skin, and a trimmed beard. He had a gnarled scar above his right eye from a cut that had mended poorly years ago.

As if he had made all totally clear, Jesus promptly sat down. He ignored the questions that came his way, focusing on finishing the remainder of his meal. The Apostles were used to this—the way their master would just withdraw at times, as if he had expended his energy and needed to build it back up. The world, and those in it, would cease to exist for him. He had been doing it more and more lately.

Several began bickering, arguing over the meaning of their master's words, another thing that was growing more and more common as Jesus said less and less. As he picked up the last morsel of food, Jesus glanced to his right. "Eat, Judas. You will need your strength."

Judas leaned close so that only Jesus could hear. "We should talk."

“We’ve talked.” Jesus raised a single finger, silencing the other. “And there is no choice. It is as *our* Father has decreed.”

To forestall any more argument, Jesus stood once more, a cup of wine in his hand. The room fell silent. Jesus held the cup up in toast, to what the others could only guess, as he said nothing, and then placed it to his lips and quickly drained it. He put it down on the table, a little too forcefully, the echo of metal on wood reverberating through the room.

“Who will betray you, master?” It was Peter who asked the question that was on the minds of almost all of the Apostles. “Tell us and we will guard you.”

“You can not guard me from yourselves. There are many types of betrayal. The worst of all is when you betray yourself.” Jesus picked up his cloak from the back of his chair and walked to the door. “I’m going to the garden.” And then he was gone into the darkening evening.

The startled twelve gathered their own possessions and followed him. They walked through the narrow stone streets, Jesus silent and in the lead, the twelve following, arguing among themselves, all save Judas who was last in the column of disciples. He moved slowly, shoulders slumped as if bearing a great weight. He didn’t talk with any of the others, which was not unusual. He had always been a bit distant from the rest of the followers, yet, surprisingly, he was the one whom Jesus confided in the most. And he had been at Jesus’ side before any of the others, the first Apostle.

Jesus passed through an opening in a wall of loose stone and then between two rows of hedges, into the Garden of Gethsemane. The garden was on the western

slope of the Mount of Olives, a quiet oasis among the bustle of the city on the eve of Passover. It was a place they had been to numerous times before as it was Jesus' wont to go there to get away from the crowds that besieged him during the day. In concert with the fewer words spoken, he was going to the garden more and more lately, seeking time alone.

They wound their way to a small clearing where several large stones were scattered. Upon which several of the weary Apostles promptly sat. It had been a very long day that did not look like it was going to end any time soon. Besides Jesus' cryptic words, there was a feeling in the pungent air of the city of something pending. Rumors were rampant about the Romans, the Pharisees, the High Priests and the many other groups that made up the city's human mass. Rumors were common in Jerusalem but lately there were more than any living could remember. And most of the rumors had something to do with Jesus.

There were those who wanted to use him as a figurehead for a revolt against the Romans, a course of action which those close to Jesus knew he would never be part of, although some still urged. Those in power saw him as a threat to the established order of things. Many saw him as a false prophet and others believed he was the long-promised Messiah. Passions were brewing and there was a sense that something was going to come to a head in the next few days.

Judas did not sit, but stood on the opposite side of the clearing from Jesus. Beyond the clearing was a small stone grotto where Jesus liked to go alone and meditate. They expected him to leave them, but as he reached the entrance to the grotto, Jesus turned to face the twelve.

“You will desert me this night. Like sheep you will scatter. But you will come together again after my resurrection.”

Peter sprang to his feet in protest. “Even though all doubt you and fail you, Lord, I will never fail you.”

A slight smile crept across Jesus’ face as he realized that Peter, like the rest, had focused on the first sentence of what he had said and not the last, which was of much more importance. “Before the cock crows with the rising sun, you will deny knowing me,” Jesus told Peter. “I am going to pray,” he added as he turned to the grotto.

As soon as Jesus was gone, intense debate raged among the disciples. Unnoticed, Judas slipped through the others and followed Jesus. He found the master standing underneath an olive tree, looking up through the leaves and branches at the stars overhead. In one hand, Jesus held a small black stone, which he was tumbling through his fingers from pinkie to thumb and back again. He had had the stone as long as Judas had known him. The surface was worn smooth from years of being tumbled through his fingers. Judas had noted that it only appeared when Jesus was worried and he never brought it out in public.

“You should do it soon,” Jesus said.

“There is no other way?”

Jesus took a deep breath and slowly let it out. “I wish there was, my brother. But we knew it would not be easy. Words are not enough. There must be action. Action that people will remember. Otherwise the words will fade from memory.”

“They *will* remember if we do this,” Judas said bitterly. “And it is I who will have to bear the pressures of those memories long beyond what anyone should have to.”

“Would you switch places with me?”

Judas looked up sharply, and then shook his head. “That can not be.”

Jesus nodded. “I know. It is as it was to be.”

“You go to a better place.”

“My suffering will be deep but brief,” Jesus said. “Yours will be shallow but long.” He tossed the stone to Judas. “As our Father has foretold, it will be for you to bear witness for my Second Coming.”

“How long will that be?” Judas asked, not expecting an answer. He looked at the black stone in his palm. “Will the world ever really be ready for that?”

“That is why we are going to do this. That is the entire purpose of everything we have given our lives to.” Jesus took another deep breath. He walked to Judas and wrapped his arms around him. “You have my love.”

“And you mine,” Judas replied.

“Until we meet again,” Jesus said.

“Until we meet again.”

“Go now, my brother.”

CHAPTER 2: THE PRESENT

The Mato Grasso Region of the Amazon

“I, Judas, bear true witness to many of the events that have been recorded in the New Testament for I saw and heard much of it with my own eyes and ears.” The man who uttered these words looked up from the barrel of the gun pointed at him. Judas smiled at the person who held the weapon. “Would you like to know more? For I have walked this planet for over two thousand years. Surely that is a story worth putting off killing me over? At least until after we share a meal? Even just a desert?”

The man known in history as the Great Betrayer sat on a bench at a long table of finely worked wood. It was set in the center of a large clearing two hundred meters long by one hundred wide, cut out of the triple canopy jungle long ago. A stream of clear water ran close by. Over the tops of the surrounding towering trees, white-capped mountains could be seen to the west. Set along the tree line in that direction were twenty huts on stilts, but there was no sign of those who inhabited the buildings. Even the jungle that surrounded them was quiet as if all the creatures that normally made a steady din had gone silent to listen to what Judas had to say.

Across the table from Judas sat a man and a woman. Their clothes were dirty and tattered. Their skin bore the scrapes and bruises of a hard journey. The woman's left arm had a stained bandage wrapped around her forearm. The barrel of the pistol the man held shook, his muscles exhausted from his recent ordeal. The stunning words Judas had just uttered seemed to have little effect on him or the woman. Whether that was because of what they had just been through or they expected this, it was impossible to tell.

Judas spread his hands flat on the top of the table. "We both have stories of journeys. Mine has been millennia in the making. The two of you-- a normal lifetime, but for the last week. There were six who started out and now it appears only two have made it this far. So you have your own tale to tell."

Before either could answer, figures clad in loincloths appeared like wraiths along the edge of the jungle. Dozens of natives, the men with bows in their hands, arrows at the ready, the women and children behind them. The man kept the gun pointed at Jesus as his gaze swept over the tribe. None of them made a threatening move, but the number of notched arrows was much greater than the bullets in the gun's magazine.

Judas indicated the newcomers. "These are some of the very last on the planet not to hear the word of God—those whom your Brotherhood is seeking to reach." He looked at the woman. "The Great Commission according to Matthew, correct? Or at least how some have interpreted what Matthew wrote. Or to be even more precise how some have interpreted the translations of what Matthew wrote. He was actually a rather boring fellow."

The woman gently placed a hand on the man's forearm. It didn't take much pressure to get him to lower the gun to the wood, the hand letting go of it as if dropping a great weight that had been carried too long.

Judas nodded and the corners of his mouth twitched upward. His face was creased and it was evident he smiled often, which seemed to disconcert the man and woman even more than his words.

"We have some time before the Intruder as the Illuminati call it—or Wormwood as your Brotherhood call it--arrives." The smile on Judas' face deepened as if he were privy to something that two had no clue of. "Or, as many believe, the Second Coming begins, about which, I also know the truth." He looked up at the sky. A great burning orb, almost as large as the sun could be seen even in the bright daytime sky.

"As I said, there is still time before what many fear and many other hope for arrives. I will tell you my story if you give me a little bit of that time and you can also tell me your story. I assure you my story is worth listening to. Would you like to know the truth of what Jesus taught? For I was there. And I learned much more about what went on before Jesus's time, things that are recorded in the Old Testament. The truth is not exactly as you believe, but it is also not exactly as your opponents believe. Truth lies in the great middle, where it almost always does."

Judas spread his hands over the table. "Won't you join me for supper?"

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