BEN HUR

Written
by

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Three same aged men meet at the crossroads of history: one chooses power and betrayal, one chooses blind revenge, one is a peacemaker. Only one will survive.

Adapted from Lew Wallace's best selling classic, "Ben Hur."

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Ben Hur: **Draft - July 4th 2012.**

FADE IN: SUBTITLE:

JUDEA: 19 years after the birth of Jesus, the Christ child.

EXT. SMALL DESERT VILLAGE - DAWN

Essence of tranquility as sun rises over a sleepy little village of mud huts, huddled in between desert hills, a small stream runs at its edge along with a small grove of olive trees and dense brush. Farm animals; goats, sheep and donkeys occasionally break the silence. An OLD JEWISH MAN exits a hut, yawns and breathes in the fresh morning air... He hears something... A RUMBLE...

OLD MAN
ROMANS! ROMANS!

TWO HUNDRED ROMAN CAVALRY appear over a small hill. They trot in an intimidatingly perfect formation, EIGHT to a row and are impressive in their armor, armed with both shields and swords.

CAPTAIN
Swords! Open formation!

Still in a perfect trot, they go from eight in a row to TWENTY in a row...

The VILLAGERS panic, scream, scatter from their huts with their CHILDREN in their arms or drag them along sleepily. They rush across the stream, *away* from the advancing ROMAN HORSEMEN and towards the protection of the grove...

Village MEN grab swords, bow/arrows, farm tools that function as weapons and rush to defend their homestead against...

THE CAVALRY:

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
ADVANCE!

The Cavalry kicks into a canter and remain in a controlled formation, swords drawn and they *attack...*

FROM THE GROVE: A sky-full of arrows darken the sun and undiscriminatingly *strike* the fleeing *VILLAGERS...* Screams turn from fear to anguished, bloody pain.

ROMAN ARCHERS appear from the GROVE and *unleash* direct and targeted death: MEN, WOMAN, CHILDREN stagger, stumble and die in gory agony.

THE CAVALRY *slice* thru the unorganized and weak front-line of the defending VILLAGERS... It is a quick and gruesome slaughter as the ROMAN cavalry and foot soldiers/archers surround and hack at the villagers... The CAPTAIN dismounts, confronts the OLD JEWISH MAN, now praying on his knees.

OLD MAN
Why?

CAPTAIN
Judea is Rome's. This rebellion will be crushed.

Captain hollers to several of his FOOT soldiers who are killing anything that walks...

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
Keep a few alive to bear witness to others.

A SOLDIER has a young screaming WOMAN in his grip, he nods to the Captain and *looks* at a hut. Captain smiles and nods back. Soldier takes the WOMAN into the hut... Screams of rape echo... Other SOLDIERS grab WOMEN for themselves and ravage them where they stand...

EXT. RUGGED DESERT CLIFF TOP - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun is low in the sky. On the high cliff top: TWO MEN, each 19 yrs old, bare-chested, are *fighting.* JUDAH BEN HUR, a *JEW,* is spitting blood from his mouth. SEVERUS MESALLA, a *ROMAN,* has a bloody gash above his eye.

MESALLA
Jew!

JUDAH BEN HUR
Roman!

Judah throws a punch, Mesalla deflects it, grabs him around his neck and starts to *choke* Judah... Judah drops to his knees, gasping for air - suddenly rises, bends over, flips Mesalla over his head, crunching him hard on his back... Mesalla jumps up - Judah rushes at him - Mesalla steps aside, *trips* and *shoves* Judah - over and *off the cliff.*

Judah's falling *scream* echoes...

MESALLA
Up *Mars!* Down Jew!

Mesalla looks over the cliff... he sees Judah about to land ... into an inviting clear water *river* below... Judah sinks under water... moments later he surfaces, gasps for air...

JUDAH BEN HUR
(laughs)
Down Mars!

Mesalla steps back from the cliff's edge, runs and *dives,* Olympian style, into the river below. He hits the water like a spear, disappears and then rises, giving a triumphant *yell!*

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
That was magnificent. Mesalla.

MESALLA
If I had time, I would teach you how *easily* it's done.

They both swim to the shore where their clothes are.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
We need to get back before dark.

They dry off and begin to dress. Nearby is their hunting equipment; bow, arrows, knives and water pouches.

EXT. DESERT - LATER - SUN IS NEAR TO SETTING

Judah and Mesalla walk thru scrub brush and olives trees. Judah wears a long linen kaftan with a cloth wrapped around his head, held on by a cord. Mesalla is in a Roman tunic to his knees, with a belt pulled around his waist. Both have their weapons slung over their shoulders.

JUDAH BEN HUR
-But does it have to be Rome?

MESALLA
--It is the *center* of civilization. It is where Caesar reigns. There, I will get what you already have, *Prince* Judah Ben Hur. Wealth. Respect. And decadence *rules* there!

JUDAH BEN HUR
Money is *not* everything-

MESALLA
Only someone as rich as you would say that. I am just a lowly tax collectors son, with no future here. Yes, I'm smart but in Rome everyone is *brilliant*. Becoming a soldier is the quickest and surest way to restore my family's name and wealth.

JUDAH BEN HUR
You become a Roman soldier and me, I'm a Jew. Will we remain friends? How, when our people continue to kill each other?

MESALLA
We will do it because our father's taught us to see beyond this hate.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I fear Rome will change you-

MESALLA
-I pray to the Gods it *does!* May Mars be my guide, and Eros be my companion. If I ever come back to this god forsaken place, I will be a man of importance and no longer will a Jew like you show me disdain for being Roman-

JUDAH BEN HUR
(reacts)
-I have always treated you as-

Mesalla grabs him around the neck,

MESALLA
Easy, Judah. You're losing your sense of humor.

He lets go of Judah, who straightens his head scarf,

JUDAH BEN HUR
I lost it when you said you were going to Rome-

Mesalla *hushes* Judah, points to something in the bushes... It's a massive, *ugly* looking, HYENA. Both grab for their bow and arrows.

MESALLA
No, this is mine. It will be the last time I kill anything in this place. Besides, only a *Roman* could catch such a trophy.
(eyes hyena)
I think its only a little *uglier* than you, Judah!

Mesalla stalks the unsuspecting Hyena as Judah readies his own bow.

Mesalla kneels quietly - releases the arrow, a startled bird alerts the hyena - Mesalla's arrow strikes the hyena in its *shoulder* - not a clean kill... the *wounded* hyena viciously attacks the stunned Mesalla - Mesalla's screams and the hyenas wounded barking are a horrific cacophony of pain and anguish - Judah aims his bow at the hyena - no clear shot - hyena is tearing at Mesalla, shakes him like a rag doll - Judah drops his bow, pulls out his knife and leaps *on* top of the hyena, knocking it off of Mesalla - Judah drops his knife - hyena is on its feet - Judah scrambles for his knife - hyena springs at him, ragged teeth snarling - Judah plunges knife into the hyena's head - silence - the hyena drops dead on top of him... Judah is momentarily stunned - recovers - pushes off the carcass and gets to an unconscious and blooded Mesalla. Judah pours water from his pouch on him, Mesalla snaps awake - looks at Judah then at the dead hyena with the knife still buried in its head...

JUDAH BEN HUR
You won't be able to travel tomorrow.

MESALLA
Nothing will stop me from leaving for Rome.

Mesalla draws out his own knife and slices a long gash into his own right palm. Judah is stunned - Mesalla offers him his knife -

MESALLA (CONT'D)
I owe you my life.

Judah understands - *BLOOD BROTHERS* - Judah slices a gash into his own palm, winces, then clasps Mesalla's blooded hand - they lock hands and squeeze till their knuckles turn white - an unbreakable bond -

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Roman.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Jew.

BOTH
Brother.

The sun sets - a blood red sky - suddenly the awful baying of a nearby PACK of *HYENAS* - Judah helps up Mesalla, grabs their weapons and they quickly move on...

EXT. GATES OF JERUSALEM - MORNING

A CROWD gathers amidst a commotion and dissension,

CROWD VOICES
Blasphemer! Let him speak! He hears the voice of God. Heretic! Get him out of here!

JESUS, *19 YEARS OLD,* is at the center of the crowd, peacefully *discussing* scripture, while being jostled and protected.

Nearby, JUDAH stands next to a *bruised and battered* MESALLA, who sits astride a horse. Judah's *mother*, NAOMI and his beautiful *sister*, 14 yr old TIRZAH, stand behind Judah. They hear the disturbance.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(to Mesalla)
What is it?

Mesalla looks over the crowd and sees JESUS.

MESALLA
It is that young Rabbi, again.

TIRZAH
Jesus, from Nazareth. They say he talks of a changing world.

MESALLA
(scorn)
Some say he's a *Zealot* and talks of rebellion.

JUDAH BEN HUR
He is harmless. He seems to want to *unite* people not divide them.

MESALLA
You always think the best of people Judah but mark my words, men like him are why Rome needs soldiers like me, to keep the peace.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(laughs)
-You look as if you just came *from* a war not heading to it!

MESALLA
(to Tirzah)
I'm sorry to have to leave you with your brother's bad humor.

Tirzah is enamored with Mesalla.

TIRZAH
I would gladly have you stay and unburden me of it.

Naomi reacts to Tirzah's youthful flirtation as does Judah and Mesalla. Tirzah blushes.

MESALLA
Tirzah. If I am ever forced to return here, I will make the Procurator enforce a law to ban his wit.

TIRZAH
(hurt)
You don't wish to come back to see-
(all look at her)
-To see - see - *Judah.*

MESALLA
(sweetly)
If Mars deems that I return - *here* -
(looks around disdainfully)
-Only your smile would bring happiness to a weary warrior.

Tirzah blushes more.

NAOMI
I didn't realize you were so unhappy here, Mesalla?

MESALLA
I was forced here because of my family's position.
(sincere)
But your family has made me welcome and that I will *truly* miss. Maybe one day you will all visit me in Rome.

TIRZAH
Could we, Mother!?

NAOMI
It is a journey of a great distance, Tirzah.

MESALLA
Yes, and one I must start.

He nods to Naomi and Tirzah. Ben grasps Mesalla's right hand, they shake hard.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Roman!

MESALLA
(quietly so as not to offend Naomi and Tirzah)
Jew!

It is as if both realize this is the *moment* Mesalla is actually leaving.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(subdued)
Eros down. Mars up.

MESALLA
(equally downcast)
Eros down. Mars up.

He kicks his horse and trots thru the gates. They watch him go... Mesalla stops, turns and hollers...

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Mars up!

He turns and gallops off, lost in dust...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. JUDEA - DESERT - NOON

SUBTITLES - **JUDEA. SEVEN YEARS LATER.**

SMALL ROMAN ENCAMPMENT hidden in the heavy brush: SIX TENTS - THIRTY ROMAN SOLDIERS sit around and eat. A SOLDIER tears a piece of meat from a carcass cooking over a small fire, he puts it on his plate, sits, looks at it and spoons the meat into his mouth - an ARROW RIPS *THRU HIS CHEEK* as he *bites down!* He turns in shock - another arrow *pierces* his eye... He drops dead. More arrows *whoosh* in, expertly killing the confounded Roman soldiers. Silence. Judean ZEALOTS (Jewish rebels) quietly enter the camp making sure every Roman is dead. They gather the Roman weapons and leave.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF JERUSALEM - DAY

In what looks like an invasion, A COHORT of EIGHT HUNDRED ROMAN SOLDIERS, in all their military discipline and splendor; blood red flowing capes, impressive body armor, short swords, bow/arrows and spears, are marching towards Jerusalem. LOCALS look on in fear. Leading them on a magnificent black horse is, TRIBUNE *MESALLA,* Commander of all troops in Judea. MESALLA, 26, *is a proud, muscular warrior, his ornate silver breastplate is blinding in the noon sun.*

EXT. THE PRETORIUM (GARRISON INSIDE JERUSALEM) - AFTERNOON

An imposing Roman garrison swarming with Roman SOLDIERS.

INT. THE TRIBUNE'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

MESALLA enters with his Second-in Command, CAPTAIN DRUSUS and several other OFFICERS. Mesalla is greeted by Tribune DECIMUS, a weary looking General. DECIMUS' OFFICERS snap to attention in a formal exchange.

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
Welcome Tribune Mesalla.

They grasp each others' forearms in a military gesture of respect.

MESALLA
Tribune Decimus.

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
You must be tired after such a long journey from Rome. When does Procurator, Valerius Gratus, arrive?

MESALLA
He enters Jerusalem at noon, the day after tomorrow. He has set up camp outside of Bethlehem with his two legions-

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
Two Legions!?

MESALLA
Yes, *two*. Caesar Tiberius demands that what is Rome's should be given to Rome. He no longer will tolerate discord or lawlessness.

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
Two Legions seems excessive-

MESALLA
-You *dare* question Caesar!?

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
No. Of course not- but the situation is surely not that dire?

MESALLA
If you, who have commanded this region for four years, and *failed* to put down this *Jewish* rebellion, do not
(MORE)

MESALLA (CONT'D)
know how 'dire' the situation is, then Caesar's decision has not come a moment to soon-

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
What I meant-

MESALLA
You can explain yourself to Caesar when you get back to Rome.

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
Surely Caesar understands I am only Second in Command to Procurator Flavius-

MESALLA
-Who himself has already felt the wrath of Caesar by being recalled to Rome and replaced by Gratus. You are the military Commander and therefore it is or *was* your responsibility to quell these *Zealots.*

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
I hear you have had success on the battlefields. I too know how to fight an enemy that stands before me. Here, you don't have such an enemy. They are like ghosts. This, you will soon learn.

MESALLA
If an enemy lives and breathes it can be destroyed, Decimus. You have been away from the battlefield too long.

TRIBUNE DECIMUS
(dismissive)
If you wish to inspect the garrison, Ciaus will escort you.

MESALLA
I will inspect the garrison, I need it to be safe from an *invisible* foe.

Mesalla exits with his Officers and Ciaus.

EXT. HUR PALACE JERUSALEM - MORNING

On a main street thru the city, is the HUR *PALACE.*

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

It is huge palace-like home with a large courtyard, pool, fish pond, waterfalls and hanging vines. Several SERVANTS are working.

INT. JUDAH'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A large, well appointed room with a desk, several chairs and sofas. JUDAH, 26, still has his youthful looks, is surrounded by several local JEWISH and ARAB LEADERS: Rabbi MELANCHI, DAVID SOLOMON, a merchant and SHEIK KHALIL.

DAVID
- I have the weapons from the raid on the Roman encampment-

SHEIK KHALIL
-The parade is the perfect time to attack-

DAVID
-To let Rome know we are not afraid, no matter how many legions they send-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-*No!* I won't listen of such things in my home. I will not be a part of any violence. We must find common ground with the Romans.

DAVID
It's always compromise-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-Why draw more blood when it's not necessary!?

RABBI MELANCHI
-Because for a hundred years, that is what the Romans have done to us.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will talk to the new Procurator, VALERIUS GRATUS-

SHEIK KHALIL
-Who is *ruthless!*

JUDAH BEN HUR
None-the-less, I will meet with him.

A SERVANT enters, nudged aside by *MESALLA*. Mesalla points at Judah,

MESALLA
Jew!

The GUESTS react at the *accusatory* tone.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Roman!

Guests are taken aback at *Judah*'s confrontational tone...

Judah and Mesalla laugh and embrace each other warmly. The GUESTS are confused at this enthusiastic welcome.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Nobody told me you were back-

Rabbi Melanchi heads to exit-

MESALLA
Do not run away because of me-
(stern)
Have I walked in on a cabal of *Zealots* and conspirators!? Maybe the leaders of yesterday's attack?

Judah and his guests fearfully eye each other.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
(calls outside)
Captain Drusus.

Captain Drusus, enters,

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Bring in the guards. I want *everyone* of these men *arrested-*

The GUESTS are *stunned!*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mesalla, these men are-

MESALLA
-Are *what!?*

Mesalla looks at each of them *grimly* - and then *laughs,*

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Judah- I am *joking.*
(pointedly to the guests)
Citizens of *Rome,* I am *joking.*
Captain Drusus, you can leave.
(MORE)

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Citizens, what kind of *Roman* would I be if I was to break up a gathering of-?

JUDAH BEN HUR
-Friends.

MESALLA
Introduce me, *Prince* Judah Ben Hur, to your - *friends*.

Mesalla gets intimidatingly close to each of them as they are introduced.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Rabbi Melanchi. David Solomon. Sheik Khalil.

Melanchi becomes uncomfortable. Judah sees this,

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
This is my life long friend, Mesalla-

MESALLA
(authoritatively)
Tribune Mesalla.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Tribune Mesalla - was raised here in Jerusalem.

MESALLA
I know Judea all to well. I knew its politics then and I know it now.

SHEIK KHALIL
We welcome you back *Tribune* Mesalla. Judah, I must be leaving.

MESALLA
We will no doubt meet again.
(to Judah)
Judah, this is auspicious that I meet Jerusalem's leaders. This can only be good for all *law abiding* citizens of Rome.

The Guests say their farewells to Judah and Mesalla.

RABBI MELANCHI
(quietly to Mesalla and Judah)
Is this the Mesalla who's life you *saved*, Judah?

MESALLA
(defensively)
And how do you know of that?

RABBI MELANCHI
I was in the house that day when he brought you home. You were effusive in your gratitude that he risked his life to save yours.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I was honored to have the opportunity.

RABBI MELANCHI
(to Mesalla)
A brave act, to be well *remembered.*

Rabbi exits. Judah and Mesalla are alone.

MESALLA
I now remember the Rabbi. His wisdom has *not* grown with his age.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(laughs)
You never had time for anyone who believed in only one God-

MESALLA
(laughs)
Why one, when you can have a dozen!

He embraces Judah.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
It is good to be here with you my friend.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I have long waited for this day. Why didn't you let me know you were returning?

MESALLA
Military life is very different from your life of *Princely* -
(looks around the room)
-Pleasure... Secrecy may keep one alive in an hostile environment.

JUDAH BEN HUR
And who have you offended so much that your life is at risk.

MESALLA
I am Rome. When she is attacked, it is an *assault* upon my soul.

Judah is taken aback...

JUDAH BEN HUR
There is an idea that war is the most noble occupation of men, and that the most exalted greatness is the growth of battle-fields. Because the world has adopted this idea, do not be deceived by it Mesalla.

MESALLA
You sound like the young carpenter - Rabbi, JESUS, whatever he is, who's stirring up trouble in these provinces.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Far from a trouble maker, he talks of peace, *"-Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's..."*

MESALLA
But what *is* Rome's to you Judeans? That is where the battle line is drawn.

He eyes Judah, knows he has unsettled him, *enjoys* it.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
(grins)
Down Eros! Up Mars!

JUDAH BEN HUR
I did not wait seven years to fight with you, my-

Judah holds out his scarred palm from their blood brother oath.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
-Brother!

Mesalla softens, holds out his scarred palm.

MESALLA
Brother!

They shake heartily and Judah stands back to admire his uniform...

JUDAH BEN HUR
You left to be a soldier and look at you, a *Tribune.*

MESALLA
And wealthy! I was once poor and as *you* know, rich is *much* better. It is like fine wine against sour milk.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Let us drink a toast to your return and good fortune, with good wine!

Judah calls for a servant to bring wine.

MESALLA
How is your family? I often think of your father. He was a good man. *Wise.*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Not like his son, a fool, right!?

MESALLA
A fool is someone who *refuses* to understand the world he lives in-

This point is not lost on Judah.

SERVANT enters with wine and glasses. He serves them. Tirzah and Judah's mother, Naomi, are about to enter,

NAOMI (O.S.)
Judah, we heard that the new Tribune had come to see you. Is there trouble-

Mesalla turns to face them both...

TIRZAH
My god! Is it *Mesalla?*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Formality please, Tirzah. It is *Tribune* Mesalla.

Naomi and Tirzah are elated to see him... Tirzah has blossomed into a *beautiful* young woman.

MESALLA
Tirzah, you have - become - a *woman*.

TIRZAH
(full of confidence)
Why thank you for noticing, *Tribune* Mesalla. And you have become -a-a-

NAOMI
-A returning *hero*, we hope. Welcome home, Mesalla. Or should I call you by your title?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mother, Mesalla is *family.*

TIRZAH
Yes, mother. He never called me *Princess* Tirzah. Or Judah, *Prince.* Right, Mesalla.

MESALLA
Who am I to argue with someone so beautiful.

Judah and his mother eye each other.

TIRZAH
See Mother. Oh, Mesalla, tell us all about your adventures. How long are you here for? Are you married?

NAOMI
Tirzah!

TIRZAH
What? We know nothing of his last seven years. He might have a family.

Tirzah eyes Mesalla.

MESALLA
I am married-

Tirzah is clearly deflated,

MESALLA (CONT'D)
-To my *military career.* I have not had time to think of taking a wife.

Tirzah barely covers her joy.

NAOMI
I am sure your father would be proud of your accomplishment.

MESALLA
He would be *proud* to know that the name of Mesalla is once again respected in Rome.

NAOMI
I know that was important to you, as it should be. I commend your success.

MESALLA
Thank you.
(he looks at Judah)
It is nothing less than Judah would do if the name Hur was disgraced.

Judah nods in agreement.

TIRZAH
Will you dine with us, tonight?

MESALLA
I wish I could but I have duties to attend to. I expect to be here for some time and it would be my hope to spend many nights together.

Naomi and Judah are unsure what he means. Mesalla sees this.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
As a *family.* All of us. I want to know everything that has happened since I have been away.

TIRZAH
And you *will* share of your adventures!

MESALLA
I am not sure stories of war would be a topic that should taint your innocence, Tirzah.

NAOMI
Well said, Mesalla. Come Tirzah, I am sure these friends have much to discuss. Come visit any time Mesalla. You are always welcome.

Tirzah smiles flirtatiously as she exits with Naomi.

MESALLA
Tirzah is quite a woman.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes, and she still has a crush on you.

MESALLA
I'm sure a childish memory of days long gone.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Have those days long gone?

MESALLA
Let you and I not play games, Judah. Gratus has been sent here by Tiberius himself, to put down this ongoing rebellion and at any cost.

JUDAH BEN HUR
His *brutal* reputation is well known-

MESALLA
And very well deserved. As his Tribune, it will be my duty, my *sworn* duty, to follow his orders.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Even if they are wrong and misguided?

MESALLA
Gratus has the trust of Tiberius. His word will be as if Caesar himself speaks. I come to you before Gratus arrives. You are the richest and most influential man in all of Judea. I want to protect you.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Am I in danger?

MESALLA
No. I mean that if you could use your influence to put a stop to this rebellion it would favor you with Gratus-

JUDAH BEN HUR
The people rise up only to be heard, to seek help, understanding, fairness. Taxation is bleeding us to death. The treasury is pillaged and used for far away wars. Innocents are thrown into dungeons without trial. Crucifixions used as warnings. Then the Temple icons that are melted for their gold-

MESALLA
As you said, *'Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's...'*

JUDAH BEN HUR
There is little left to give.

MESALLA
What remains will be *taken* and *anyone* that stands in Rome's way will be *crushed.*

JUDAH BEN HUR
You would kill women and children?

MESALLA
This is a battlefield and everyone an enemy.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Even me? I am your enemy?

Mesalla is *stung,* as if this idea of Judah as an *enemy* could ever enter his mind.

MESALLA
Never!

Captain Drusus enters,

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Tribune. You are needed at the Garrison.

MESALLA
(angrily)
I'll be with you in a moment. Dismiss.

Drusus exits. Judah and Mesalla stare at each other. No words. Mesalla reaches out his scarred palm, open and entreating. Judah reciprocates. It is the *strong handshake of a bond, a friendship.* Mesalla exits.

EXT. HUR PALACE - NOON

A man, SIMONIDES, 50 yrs old, and his beautiful young daughter, ESTER, 22, enter thru the large palatial doors.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

At the pool is Judah, clearly pensive, the meeting with Mesalla lingers. Naomi and Tirzah sit nearby.

SIMONIDES bows and greets them. Naomi rises. Judah brightens on seeing Simonides and *particularly* Ester.

NAOMI
Simonides!

Their embrace is warm. Tirzah rises to greet a shy Ester.

TIRZAH
Oh, Ester, this is wonderful. I have someone to share my news with! Judah's friend, Mesalla, arrived from Rome today-

They embrace. Ester cannot take her eyes off of Judah.

TIRZAH (CONT'D)
Mother, can I take her?

NAOMI
Not before your brother greets Ester.

Ester is nervous as she bows before Judah, who has now risen. He clearly is smitten with her.

ESTER
Prince Judah Ben Hur.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Ester, we have no formalities. You are like family to us. Right, Simonides?

Simonides nods. Naomi indicates Tirzah and Ester can leave. Simonides and Naomi enjoying watching Judah; he cannot take his eyes off of Ester as she exits with Tirzah.

NAOMI
I will leave you two to discuss business affairs. You will dine with us tonight, I hope.

SIMONIDES
It would be my honor.

Judah leads Simonides to his office.

INT. OFFICE - LATER

Judah sits at a desk with Simonides across from him, looking at maps and scrolls. Judah stretches from hours of studying the information before him.

JUDAH BEN HUR
- Your records and receipts, as always, are very thorough. Our business continues to prosper. My father trusted you and I hope you know you have my trust.

SIMONIDES
Thank you.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Come, let's eat.

Both rise - Simonides hesitates,

SIMONIDES
Prince Judah Ben Hur-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Judah.

SIMONIDES
Judah. I wanted to ask you a delicate question.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Anything.

SIMONIDES
Your father *owned* me. I was his *slave.* You inherited me- as a *slave*-

Judah raises his hand to stop him-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-My father told me of the conversation you had with him, he offered you your freedom but you-

SIMONIDES
- Foolishly chose not make it legal. Your father told me he saw me as a friend - an equal, is what he called me. I professed to him that that was all that was important to me-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-And you don't believe this anymore?

SIMONIDES
On the contrary, our family ties have only deepened, but I was shortsighted. To make certain personal decisions, Ester, for example. If she marries, she would, legally, have to ask *your* permission, as *her* master, to release her.

Judah reacts to *'Ester and marriage*'.

SIMONIDES (CONT'D)
As a father, I would like that decision to be mine.

JUDAH BEN HUR
If this has caused you sleepless nights, I am sorry. I was honoring your wishes.

They walk to the door.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Have you found a - *match* for Ester?

SIMONIDES
No. No. She has had many suitors-

JUDAH BEN HUR
She would be the jewel in any father's eyes.

SIMONIDES
She is beautiful and *wise.* I fear that might not be the best combination for a marriage!

JUDAH BEN HUR
I am sure a perfect match can be found.

SIMONIDES
From your lips to God's ears!

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will have the papers drawn up immediately, my friend.

They exit.

INT. JUDAH'S DINING ROOM - LATER

Naomi, Tirzah, Ester, Judah and Simonides have finished eating. SERVANTS clear away the plates. Judah and Ester excuse themselves, rise and walk into another room overlooking the pool. Naomi gives a *'hopeful'* look to Simonides as the couple disappear.

ESTER
Tirzah, I think, is in love with your friend, Mesalla.

JUDAH BEN HUR
She may be in love with the 'old' Mesalla. I am not sure she knows the Mesalla that greeted her today.

ESTER
Do you still know him?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I believe so, but he has changed. Mesalla has probably shed much of his own blood to reestablish his family name.

ESTER
Why reestablish?

JUDAH BEN HUR
It was dishonored when his grandfather was involved in the assassination of Julius Caesar. It has haunted him for as long as I've known him.

ESTER
It must be difficult to leave the battlefield behind.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I'm sure, but maybe love and family can help a man, if not bury that past, at least soothe the memories of it. There is something good in Mesalla, that I'm convinced the past seven years could never take away.

ESTER
Then maybe he will be good match for Tirzah?

JUDAH BEN HUR
If God's will be done.

They sit. Her beauty is illuminated under the lit lanterns.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Your father tells me you leave tomorrow for your home in Antioch. I will be sad to see you go.

ESTER
Not sadder than I, I think.

They look into each others eyes.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Would I be a fool to ask if my feelings for you these last two years, are so obvious?

ESTER
I have long dreamt that they may be.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Then I am also *not* a fool to think you feel the same for me?

ESTER
I have only disguised them out of protocol.

He pulls her to him and kisses her...

JUDAH BEN HUR
Will you be my wife?

A dream is fulfilled, her happiness rises into soft tears.

ESTER
Yes. A thousand times, yes.

They embrace...

JUDAH BEN HUR
I need to ask your father's permission.

ESTER
(puzzled)
You are my *master,* only you can give permission for me to marry.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I know and I give it! But believe me, it's important that I ask your father. He can explain later.

They rise, he holds her hands and they rush to find Naomi and Simonides... They are seated on sofas, along with Tirzah, near the fish pond in the courtyard... Judah and a tear stained Ester rush to them,

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Simonides! Mother!

Simonides, Naomi and Tirzah look up.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Simonides. Would you give-

SIMONIDES
-Yes! Yes! Yes!

Tirzah screams with delight. Naomi is thrilled.

JUDAH BEN HUR
This is the happiest day of my life-

A celebration begins...

EXT. HILLSIDE OUTSIDE OF BETHLEHEM - EARLY MORNING

The *might* of Rome is on display; TWO magnificent LEGIONS of armor wearing ROMAN SOLDIERS (2000 men) are marching on foot and horseback towards Jerusalem. There are ARCHERS AND SPEAR THROWERS. They are led by PROCURATOR/GOVERNOR GRATUS, a silver haired brute of a warrior sitting astride a white stallion. His head is bare but for a single laurel vine that indicates his rank as GOVERNOR/PROCURATOR. He is in full body sculptured armor and sits on a purple cloth instead of a saddle. The bridle is of gold and the reins of yellow silk fringe. It is an audacious and ostentatious display of power and wealth.

A HUNDRED Roman SOLDIERS on horseback canter towards him, led by Mesalla. They stop and greet Gratus.

GRATUS
And how welcoming is Jerusalem, today?

MESALLA
It is as you expected. There is *no* welcome. The streets in the city will be lined with our own men to prevent a disorderly mob. Jerusalem will today see and feel the might that is Rome.

GRATUS
You would think the massacre at Masada would be a constant reminder of our power but maybe Judeans' have short memories.

MESALLA
With respect Valerius Gratus, if Masada shows us anything, it is that the Jews are willing to commit suicide rather than being ruled.

GRATUS
You sound sympathetic to them...

MESALLA
(defensive)
No. I grew up amongst them. I try to give understanding to who our enemy is.

GRATUS
You met with your Jew friend, Prince Judah Ben Hur, yesterday.

Mesalla is visibly taken aback not knowing Gratus knew.

MESALLA
Yes.

GRATUS
Understand this, I make it my duty to know *everything* that occurs around me. Why did you meet him?

MESALLA
He is the most influential man in Judea. I thought it possible he would give favor to you and help stop the uprising.

GRATUS
Friendship with any Judean - Jew or Arab - is *not* possible. They are desert rats to be treated as such. There is only one loyalty and that is to Rome.
(menacing)
Don't allow me even to *begin* to doubt your loyalty, Mesalla. Do not seek anything from them or *him.* A gift is a debt waiting to be repaid.

MESALLA
Yes, Gratus.

They continue to ride.

EXT. HUR PALACE - MORNING

The street outside of Judah's home is on the route of Gratus' ceremonial parade thru Jerusalem and is LINED WITH ROMAN SOLDIERS. Trumpets herald the entrance of GRATUS.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Judah is crossing the forecourt, reacts to the trumpets. Tirzah appears from a room.

TIRZAH
I want to see if Mesalla is in the parade?

Judah joins her - they hurry upstairs to the rooftop deck.

ROOF TOP DECK: It overlooks city and street below. A low parapet, with tile on it, is being rebuilt; tools, scaffolding, tiles and cement are stored. Judah and Tirzah carefully walk thru the construction equipment.

They look over the wall to see down into the street: the ROMAN TRUMPETERS are leading the parade. Tirzah crosses to a corner, struggles to see below and leans on a tile that becomes loose and falls back onto the deck. He checks to see that the tiles on the parapet, near him, are secure. They seem to be.

Judah gazes at OTHER ROOF TOPS where other JUDEANS are also watching the parade below. He *sees* DAVID and SHEIK KHALIL on different roofs. All three acknowledge each other.

JUDAH BEN HUR
We get a better view over here.

Tirzah joins him and they see below: GRATUS comes into view and is very close to their home.

TIRZAH
(naively impressed)
He rides as if he is a *heavenly* conqueror-

JUDAH BEN HUR
His message is clear. Jerusalem - Judea, belongs to Rome.

Resentful, he turns to leave.

TIRZAH
There's Mesalla!

Judah stops, looks again, as she instinctively tries to get Mesalla's attention.

TIRZAH (CONT'D)
Mesalla!

SUDDENLY, half a dozen parapet tiles come *loose* from under Judah's hands - crash down and *strike* GRATUS! His startled horse throws him hard to the ground and then *steps* on him... Gratus is bloodied and *lifeless...* Soldiers surround and protect Gratus.

DAVID and SHEIK KHALIL see what Judah has done... Shocked but pleased, they signal OTHERS on different rooftops... JUDEANS start *SLINGING* tiles and rocks at the ROMANS below, cussing and spitting on them...

Judah HOLLERS and WAVES to the RIOTERS on the *rooftops* to *STOP!* Tirzah panics and cries.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I can explain. Mesalla will understand.

The RIOTERS *rain down* more tiles and rocks on the soldiers below. It is a full and bloody *RIOT.* SOLDIERS use their shields for protection... MESALLA takes charge, looks at the rooftops and *recognizes* DAVID as he hurls down rocks.

MESALLA
ARCHERS!

The ROMAN ARCHERS rush forward in unison. Mesalla points to the roofs.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Release!

The ARCHERS release a hail of arrows... they *strike* their targets... DAVID, SEVERAL others are wounded and plunge from their rooftops to the street below. The RIOTERS retreat.

A soldier *points* MESALLA to where JUDAH stands, small pieces of tile and cement continues to fall. Mesalla is *stunned!* He and Judah stare at each other.

Mesalla orders SOLDIERS to Judah's home and to *all* the different homes involved...

INTERIOR OF JUDAH'S COURTYARD.

Judah, with Tirzah, dashes down the steps to the courtyard. He hears the battering at his gate and to a SERVANT,

JUDAH BEN HUR
Take Tirzah to her mother.

Judah rushes to the gate, unlocks it only to be over-run by SOLDIERS, several grab him as a Roman CAPTAIN orders,

CAPTAIN
Arrest them *all!*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Stop. Stop. It's me you want. It was an accident. Is Gratus dead?

Soldiers beat and grab the SERVANTS.

CAPTAIN
That would please you - but Mars has spared him from your attack-

JUDAH BEN HUR
I did *not* attack-

Mesalla and Captain Drusus enter.

MESALLA
-You lied to me?

JUDAH BEN HUR
It was an *accident!*

MESALLA
I saw your *friend* David, attacking us-

JUDAH BEN HUR
You *know* me, Mesalla.

MESALLA
Do I?

JUDAH BEN HUR
You have to believe me. The tile came loose in my hands-

CAPTAIN
He admits to throwing the tiles-

JUDAH BEN HUR
No. No. I leaned on it and it slipped-

CAPTAIN
-He confesses to trying to kill Gratus, Tribune.

Mesalla is in an impossible position: to defend Judah would be seen defending a *friend* and worse - a *Jew!*

MESALLA
Take him.

Mesalla walks away.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
(quietly to Drusus)
Check the roof.

Drusus heads upstairs.

CAPTAIN
And his family?

Tirzah and Naomi are being *manhandled* by soldiers.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Let them go! I *demand* you let them go. They have *nothing* to do with this-

The Captain smashes Judah in the face with the handle of his sword, buckling Judah's knees.

CAPTAIN
You don't demand anything, *Jew!*

Judah is dragged away.

MESALLA
(forcibly)
Treat his family with respect.

Mesalla nods for them to be taken away too.

TIRZAH
Mesalla!? What are you doing?

NAOMI
Mesalla, please. Judah is innocent. You know this-

Mesalla turns away.

MESALLA
I want this place emptied and sealed. It is now the *property* of Rome.

Tirzah and Naomi are led away, screaming for understanding from Mesalla. He ignores their pleas.

AT THE GATE: a distraught ESTER and SIMONIDES watch helplessly as Judah, Tirzah and Naomi are taken away.

Drusus is with Mesalla.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
The roof is being repaired. The tiles where he stood are loose.

Mesalla, expressionless, nods...

EXT. ROMAN GARRISON - NIGHT

Roman garrison bustling with tension of captured RIOTERS being roughed up by SOLDIERS.

RABBI MELANCHI, (seen earlier at Judah's home) badly beaten and barely alive, is dragged by two SOLDIERS into a cell...

INT. MESALLA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Office is empty. Mesalla is on the balcony outside staring out at Jerusalem.

Two SOLDIERS bring in a hooded PRISONER, his hands are bound tight behind his back. He is placed before Mesalla and they remove his hood: it is *JUDAH*, bruised and bloodied. The guards exit leaving Judah and Mesalla alone.

Mesalla subconsciously rubs his scarred, *'blood brother'* palm.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mesalla. Let me explain-

Mesalla cuts him off.

MESALLA
Your fate is sealed, Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR
How? Why?

MESALLA
RABBI MELANCHI already confessed to what took place in your house yesterday-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Then you *know* I am innocent. You could help.

MESALLA
How Judah? How? Gratus was badly hurt. Roman soldiers were killed - caused by your own hands.

Judah understands his fate *is* sealed.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Tirzah, my Mother, let them go -

MESALLA
I can't-

JUDAH BEN HUR
I am enough...

MESALLA
You will be martyred, they, the name Hur, will become symbols of resistance.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Help them escape. They will never come back here, I swear.

MESALLA
And what of me, Judah? Gratus would know-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-Go with them! Tirzah *loves* you. We have enough wealth to take care of everyone-

MESALLA
-And live the rest of my life, *running?* I was on the run before, remember, from my family's disgrace? No. Now my name is restored, I will *never* have to run again.

JUDAH BEN HUR
What is to become of my family?

MESALLA
The name, Hur, no longer exists-

JUDAH BEN HUR
You would *kill* Tirzah? My mother?

MESALLA
Not I, Judah. *You* have condemned them. Your actions today have already made you a rebel hero in Judea. I cut off the head of the snake-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-And the name Mesalla will triumphantly resonate all the way to Rome-

Mesalla nods. Judah, hands still bound, lunges at Mesalla and *head butts* him in the face... Mesalla, nose gushing, stumbles to the floor... Judah, *stamps* on and *kicks* him,

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I should have let that dog rip you a part-

Mesalla roles away, rises and lands a *bone crunching* punch to Judah's face... Judah momentarily crumbles, regains his footing and rushes Mesalla, pushing him hard against a wall... He head butts Mesalla in the chest... Mesalla, cringing in pain, tries to get this raging bull off of him... Guards rush in, *beat* and grab Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
My family, Mesalla. I beg you. Spare them.

Judah shows his scarred hand to Mesalla.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
What of this?

MESALLA
A childish moment. Take him.

They drag Judah away,

JUDAH BEN HUR
I swear before God, I will avenge what you have done here...

MESALLA
Your god has abandoned you to the galleys.

JUDAH BEN HUR
The name Hur *pumps* thru you, Mesalla. Every time you bleed, you bleed *Jew.* You can never be rid of me...

Mesalla grabs a cloth, soaks it in water and places it over his bloodied nose.

EXT. DESERT NEAR NAZARETH - AFTERNOON

On the desert outskirts of NAZARETH. In smoldering heat, EIGHTY half naked, shoeless PRISONERS, faces blistered, swollen from dehydration with bloodied feet, each one bound to the man next to him, struggle to keep up with the pace of their GUARDS on horses- ROMAN SOLDIERS/CAVALRY. The DECURION (Commander) sees a WELL, orders everyone to it.

VILLAGERS watch as the almost lifeless *PRISONERS,* drop to their knees to rest. The SOLDIERS dismount and refresh themselves with water from the well.

Each prisoner is given a meager cup of water.

One prisoner, tied directly behind a horse, slumps to the floor. It is *JUDAH;* battered, burnt and blistered. An OLD WOMAN, sympathetic to him, offers him a small clay cup of water... The burly DECURION slaps the cup out of her hand. She reels back in fear.

DECURION
Not *him!*

Decurion looks at the intimidated VILLAGERS.

DECURION (CONT'D)
This is the one who caused the riot in Jerusalem. Remember him well, for he is to the galleys, where anyone who defies Caesar, will go to die.

VILLAGER
He'll be dead before he sees a galley.

DECURION
(laughs)
If that is his fate, then be it on *your* God's head!

Behind the villagers there is a commotion and they start to make way for someone... It is JESUS. The Decurion and the other SOLDIERS look at him, curious by the reverence paid to him. Jesus sees Judah, looks at the other prisoners having their thirsts quenched. Jesus picks up a cup, fills it with water and walks towards Judah. The Decurion stands in Jesus' way. Jesus looks unflinchingly, yet gently, into the eyes of the Decurion.

DECURION (CONT'D)
No water for him.

Jesus stands firm but not aggressive, he exudes a quiet serenity. The Decurion is unnerved by this calmness.

JESUS
Do unto others as you would have done unto yourself. Would you not want water if you were thirsty?

Judah raises his head and his eyes blink open to see JESUS.

DECURION
I would not deserve it if I was a criminal. And if to, *'do unto others,'* then this man would already be dead.

JESUS
None are without sin. Therefore if all are criminals, then is it to be that we all die of thirst, when water abounds and can refresh and renew?

Decurion sees the VILLAGERS and Judah react to Jesus' wisdom.

DECURION
(laughs to his soldiers and points to Judah)
Where he's headed water *will* abound and it will *not* refresh and renew!

His soldiers laugh. Jesus unperturbed.

JESUS
God honors the warrior who is just.

DECURION
The spoils go to the *victor.*

JESUS
The victor has the power, the strength, the position, to be *compassionate*, to offer compromise to the defeated, the weak, who have no room for compromise.

Decurion looks at his troops, *"-this could go on all day!"*

DECURION
Give him his damned water.
(orders his troops)
Let's move on.

His soldiers start poking and prodding the prisoners to stand. Jesus gives Judah water.

Decurion pulls on Judah's binds for him to rise and stand up. Jesus helps up a confounded Judah.

Decurion is on his horse and tugs at Judah. His horse lurches forward and Judah begins to walk again with the other prisoners. He looks back at Jesus and Judah becomes energized.

EXT. OCEAN - DAY

SUBTITLES: **THREE YEARS LATER.**

OFF THE PORT CITY OF MISENUM - a few miles southwest of Naples. An imposing fleet of ONE HUNDRED Roman TRIREME galleys/warships wield the might of the Empire's navy. (A trireme has three rows of oars on each side and several sails.)

EXT. ASTROEA GALLEY - CONTINUOUS

A small vessel docks next to a magnificent galley, the ASTROEA, that sits low in the water, designed for speed and quick maneuvering. Its figurehead is the God, TRITON, blowing shells. Below Triton is a menacing battering ram made of solid wood and steel.

The decks are lined with orderly ranks of ROMAN SOLDIERS and SEVERAL HUNDRED SLAVES/OARSMEN.

On the deck stands an impressive array of weapons; CATAPULT machines, bows, arrows, axes, swords, shields, javelins and tar pots, ready to be heated and dipped in to, to send fiery arrows on to an enemy's ship.

The weary and beaten looking OARSMEN, naked, except a rag covering their loins, cheer the arrival of its new COMMANDER of the Fleet, CONSORT QUINTUS ARRIUS, fifty, wearing a white short toga, with red shawl and a crown of *laurel* that reveals his status. Trumpets sound as he boards the galley. The *VEXILLUM PURPUREUM,* the *pennant* of a COMMANDER OF A FLEET, is raised to more cheers.

QUINTUS strides to the bridge and surveys all that he commands. Several OFFICERS await his orders. He opens a scroll and asks the HORTATOR, (CHIEF of the ROWERS).

QUINTUS
What oarsmen do you have?

HORTATOR
Two hundred and fifty two.

QUINTUS
How many reliefs?

HORTATOR
Eighty four.

QUINTUS
And their rotation?

HORTATOR
The oarsmen are two hours on, two hours rest.

QUINTUS
Twenty four hours a day?

HORTATOR
If the winds are not with us, yes.

QUINTUS
Normally, this would be too much, but for now it must stay as you have it. The oars will not rest day or night until we meet the enemy.

QUINTUS turns to the SAIL-MASTER.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
The wind is fair, let the sails help the oars.

He turns to the RECTOR (CHIEF PILOT).

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
You know the stars that govern the Ionian Sea?

RECTOR
I know them well.

QUINTUS
Then set our course for the Bay of Antemona. Triton willing, we will not stop till we meet and destroy these murdering, Greek pirates. Caesar himself has declared no mercy is to be shown for their villainy.

Quintus waves his hand to the Hortator to get the OARSMEN back below decks.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Get them ready, ours is urgent business.

Hortator orders the oarsmen below. Quintus looks to the other OFFICERS: The COMMANDER of the MARINES, the STORE KEEPER and the KITCHEN OVERSEER.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Let the inspection begin.

He nods to the Marine Commander and follows him to his squadron of Soldiers...

EXT. THE ASTROEA GALLEY - NIGHT

The ASTROEA is skimming along the sea with the rest of the fleet, full sails and oars rowing.

On the fore deck, QUINTUS, alone, kneels at a small altar, sprinkling it with salt and barley, offering solemn prayers to Neptune and all the Oceanic Gods. He pours wine and burns incense.

INT. ASTROEA OARSMEN DECK - DAY

The top cabin where the top row of OARSMAN sit/row. There are THREE OARSMAN TO A OAR. A SLOW STEADY DRUM BEAT is heard.

Quintus enters down the steps from the deck above, looking every inch a warrior, with a sword tight on his hip. He sits on a velvet throne-like chair. It has a table next to it with an abundance of grapes, bread, wine and water. He observes the silent OARSMEN; their eyes seem dead. Each oarsman has an iron anklet with a ring on it for a nearby chain to be placed thru it.

A TIMEKEEPER *pounds* a drum to set the rhythm of the rowing.

The Hortator walks up and down the center aisle of the OARSMEN, a whip in hand, looking for anyone not rowing hard enough. A slave keels over, *exhausted* - the Hortator sees him and lashes him across his back... The oarsman barely whimpers, sits upright and pulls on his oar - but it's futile, he has no strength left - he flops forward.

HORTATOR
Relief!

Hortator continues whipping the limp body as a SOLDIER opens an hatch and signals for a replacement oarsman. The limp oarsman is dragged from his bench.

HORTATOR (CONT'D)
No food and he starts on the next relief.

SLAVE
No. No. Let me carry on-

HORTATOR
You had your chance.

The oarsman is dropped in to the hatch as a *replacement* is pulled out...

A relaxed Quintus observes as he chews on grapes...

LATER - EVENING

Hortator strolls the aisle. Quintus joins him.

QUINTUS
Who are your best oarsmen?

HORTATOR
Of this group?

He points to several men spread randomly thru out the benches.

QUINTUS
Are they the newest slaves?

HORTATOR
Yes. Except that one.
(points to)
Number sixty.

Quintus observes NUMBER SIXTY. It is *JUDAH BEN HUR.* Three years in galley hell have robbed him of his youthful looks. Unlike most of the oarsmen though, his back is straight, his body muscular and his eyes are fiery.

QUINTUS
How long has he been at the oars?

HORTATOR
Three years.

QUINTUS
Three years! My God, most last only a year.

Quintus walks towards Judah, whose eyes stare straight ahead.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Is he trouble?

HORTATOR
No.

QUINTUS
Does he speak? Say anything?

HORTATOR
He only asked if he could switch from right oar to left oar on each relief.

QUINTUS
For what reason?

HORTATOR
He said he observed that if a oarsman stays on one side at all times, he becomes disfigured and weak. He said he wants to remain strong.

QUINTUS
And you have allowed this?

HORTATOR
(unsure if he has done something wrong)
Yes, but only if he causes no trouble.

Quintus observes Judah...

QUINTUS
I want all your best oarsmen spread evenly on the center aisle from now on. They row strong, the other weaker ones work harder so as not to be seen faltering by you.

Quintus walks back to his velvet chair and scrutinizes Judah.

INT. QUINTUS' PRIVATE QUARTERS - NIGHT

A gilded room of ornate and elegant furnishings consisting of velvet drapes and couch, a table, a washstand and a cushioned bed. A wine decanter is on the table with a goblet nearby. Judah's anklets clink as he is brought in by a guard.

GUARD
Stand here.

A wary Judah looks around the cabin. Quintus arises from a chair behind a curtain.

QUINTUS
I am told that you have been at the oar for three years. Is this true?

Judah nods, 'yes.'

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
I grant you permission to speak. What crime did you commit?

Judah ponders and with clarity and sincerity.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I committed no crime.

QUINTUS
Do not play the games of the foolish when you address me. I will not think twice about ending your life.

Judah holds the stare of Quintus.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Death, I feel, is not for you, at least not yet. Something burns in you.

Judah's jaw stiffens.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Yes. You hate Romans. But there is more to it. So what is your crime?

JUDAH BEN HUR
(firm but not defiant)
I am not guilty of a crime.

QUINTUS
You are not a stupid man, I sense that. But I am not a patient man. Go.

Judah turns to leave.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
You're a Jew, right?

Judah, uneasy, nods, 'yes.'

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
(dismissive)
Go.

INT. OARS MAN CABIN - DAY

A OARSMEN shift is changing. The slaves come up from the hatch, they are about to go to their *regular* benches but the Hortator stops them and makes them go to the other bench on the *opposite* side of the boat. There are groans and confusion. Judah sees this, smiles to himself as he sits on his bench and grabs for his oar.

EXT. PRIVATE TOP DECK OF QUINTUS - NIGHT

It is a full moon. The Astroea glides thru the water with only the splash of oars breaking the night silence. Quintus' private deck has a canopy covering a table with chairs and a couch. Quintus enjoys a sumptuous meal. A guard brings Judah to him. Quintus indicates for Judah to sit.

QUINTUS
I never quite understood why you Jews were content to have just one god.
(points to the moon)
Luna, the Goddess of love and passion.

JUDAH BEN HUR
She is also beloved by your mathematicians for her ability to calculate time.

QUINTUS
You have studied our gods!?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I once had a *Roman* friend who loved nothing better than to boast of your many Gods to my one.

QUINTUS
And where is this 'Roman' friend now?

JUDAH BEN HUR
(restrained)
Jerusalem.

QUINTUS
(smiles)
So even your 'Roman' *friend* could not save you from this crime you did *not* commit.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Stature was more valuable than truth.

QUINTUS
Were you worth such a betrayal?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I had property.

QUINTUS
As I thought, an educated man. A dangerous weapon in a place like Judea, where ideas can be mightier than the sword. What was this *guiltless* incident that has turned your life into a modern day Job?

JUDAH BEN HUR
You have studied *our* God.

Quintus enjoys his quick humor.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
On the day of Procurator GRATUS' welcoming parade, I was watching him from my roof top. Tiles came loose and struck Gratus. It was an accident.

QUINTUS
I know of this incident you speak of. So it was *you* who threw the first stone?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Is no Roman innocent of even an accident?

QUINTUS
The judgment of innocence is the currency of the victor.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Truth is its own currency, owned neither by the powerful or the weak.

Quintus enjoys this exchange.

QUINTUS
Prosperous, and yet your family could not help you-

JUDAH BEN HUR
(trembles in anger)
They too were made examples of-

Quintus is moved by his raw emotion.

QUINTUS
So *this* is what keeps you alive; hate and revenge. A perilous combination that only a blind fool embraces.

The COMMANDER of the MARINES enters,

MARINE COMMANDER
Commander. The enemy is sighted-

Quintus raises his hand to stop him talking.

QUINTUS
Guard.

The guard who escorted Judah, enters.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Take him back.

Judah rises and exits with the guard.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
(to Marine Commander)
How far and how many?

MARINE COMMANDER
(hesitant)
We engage tomorrow and initial estimates are that we are outnumbered.

QUINTUS
By how many?

MARINE COMMANDER
Two to one.

QUINTUS
(laughs)
One Roman is worth at least *four* Greeks. Up Mars!

Marine Commander is relieved by Quintus' confidence.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Start preparations tonight. The other ships' Commanders know the plan.

Marine Commander nods, exits. Quintus walks to the bow of the ship and looks across the sea under the full moon. He smiles, crosses towards the alter and prays.

EXT. OCEAN - DAWN

As far as the eye can see: it appears the ocean is a sea of ships. The Greek ships, (similar to the Romans) have *multicolored SAILS and* clearly outnumber the Roman fleet (with white sails.)

The two fleets are about half a mile apart, facing each other. All oars on both fleets are out of the water.

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

QUINTUS' in ornate breastplate and armor, stands on a platform overlooking his soldiers in their ranks and gives word for them to put on their armor. Their spears, javelins, and arrows, in great sheaves are brought and laid upon the floor, together with jars/buckets of flammable oil and baskets of cotton balls wound loose. Large CATAPULT machines are wheeled both fore, aft and on each side of the ship, for FIREBALLS to be lit and released when ordered.

Quintus descends the steps to the OARSMEN'S cabin.

INT. OARS MAN CABIN - CONTINUOUS

Quintus enters and addresses the resting OARSMEN.

QUINTUS
You may believe you have little to gain in this battle, that nothing would please you more than to see a Roman defeat. But I tell you this, that if any one of you does not give his all, then when we have won this battle, and win it we will, I will tie you to the foremast and let the seagulls feast on you. Row well, *your* lives depend on it.

Judah sits a few feet from Quintus, he looks straight ahead never looking at Quintus.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Chain them.

A heavy chain is passed thru every oarsmen's anklet and a SOLDIER locks *EACH ROW* with a key. Quintus sees Judah staring ahead. He admires the fact Judah does not acknowledge him or asks for special favor. Quintus leans to the Hortator,

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Unchain number sixty. He does better without chains I think.

Quintus exits as Judah's chain is unlocked and taken off. Judah is taken aback and other oarsmen are confounded.

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

At the CENTRAL STAIRS, the oil-tanks and CATAPULTS/FIRE-BALLS are set ready for use. Additional lanterns are lit and buckets are filled with water. Nearby stand several TRUMPETERS. Quintus signals to the Captain of the Marines.

Captain nods to an ARCHER who dips his cotton tipped arrow into the oil, lights it from a burning lantern, draws his bow back and sends it high into the air. From other Roman ships appears the same signal.

QUINTUS
(hollers)
OARS!

A blast from the *TRUMPETS* echoes.

INT. OARS MAN CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The TRUMPETS resonate as Hortator signals to the TIMEKEEPER.

HORTATOR
OARS!

The TIMEKEEPER beats the drum; the *ROWERS* reach forward full length, deepen the dip of their oars, pull suddenly with all their united force. The ship lurches forward.

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

Quintus, wearing his helmet, his shield nearby, observes his fleet: it is one unit in tight formation... The Greek ships are *ragged* and *undisciplined.*

The Roman fleet moves swiftly thru the water heading directly into the *center of the Greek fleet.* SUDDENLY, *HALF OF THE ROMAN FLEET* veers into the sun, leaving Quintus to face the entire *200 Greek armada with only 50 ships.*

Quintus does not flinch... The beating of the Timekeeper's drum below pounds faster, like the excited pumping of adrenaline racing thru each warriors' heart...

INT. OARS MAN CABIN - CONTINUOUS

The OARSMEN use every ounce of strength to row, their muscles flex, sweat drains from every pore, a soldier whips a sagging rower,

HORTATOR
Put a relief in! Mark his number for death.

The sagging rower is quickly unchained, thrown mercilessly thru the hatch and is replaced with a new oarsman...

Judah is unemotional and focused.

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

Stirring sounds of the trumpets blast across all of the remaining Roman fleet. Quintus orders another signal - his ARCHER sends a flaming arrow into the air... Instantly *every* Roman ship within yards of the pirates' lets forth a *hailstorm of fireballs* onto the Greek ships... it is both horrifying and awe inspiring.

IT IS A BLOODY AND BRUTAL BATTLE.

Screams emit from the Greek pirates, fire sears their skin, they jump into the water to escape the fierce flames. The Roman ships *ram* the Greek boats... Greek ships are ablaze, sails disintegrate to ashes, they quickly succumb to the conflagration and sink. Smoke billows across the watery battlefield.

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

Quintus stands tall, his eyes filled with excitement, breathes in the fiery aroma of combat. His soldiers hold their ranks as a Greek ship, its *ragged* group of hungry RAIDERS, without discipline or formation, get ready to leap aboard his ship...

QUINTUS
(to his Captain)
Hold steady!

Captain nods in the affirmative.

Quintus turns and out of the smoke *appears* a *Greek ship* speeding towards his exposed port side... it *RAMS* his vessel- Quintus is thrown off his platform to the deck below.

INT. OARSMEN CABIN - CONTINUOUS

OARSMEN see thru the small oar slats as the bow of the Greek ship *RAMS* them... They try to escape from their benches... Their *chains anchor* them firmly as the Greek bow rips easily thru the side of the ship, *CRUSHING* them - nauseating screams and ripped body parts abound.

Judah is thrown across several benches. Slaves beg him to help... Water gushes in - panic and chaos overwhelms everyone - smoke from the battle rushes in, choking the entombed slaves... The SOLDIER with the *keys* to the chain becomes hysterical and leaves his post... Judah leaps on him, brutally pummels him in to unconsciousness, grabs the keys and starts undoing the locks on the chains as the oarsmen pull at their anklet's, ripping their skin to the bone in futile attempts to remove them...

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

The Captain rushes to a dazed Quintus who instantly rises...

QUINTUS
(to the Captain)
Stand your position, man!

Captain rushes back in front of his straight backed soldiers.

CAPTAIN
Archers ready!

The ARCHERS dip their cotton tipped arrows into the oil and light them from the lanterns... Quintus climbs back to his platform as the Greek pirates, shrieking out primal battle cries, waiting to board his ship.

QUINTUS
Archers, release!

The archers aim *directly* at the Greek raiders who wield swords, shields and spears... The arrows tear and burn their flesh... Screams of agony peal across the hulls of battle. The pirates leap on to Quintus' deck.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Romans, stand your position!

The Roman soldiers hold formation and in an orderly manner spread out, holding their shields as barriers that repel the pirates surge. With their swords, the Roman formation strike blows, while pushing the raiders overboard...

Another Greek ship *RAMS* Quintus' boat from the aft... lifting it ten feet out of the water and making the fore deck dip

below the waves... More RAIDERS *swarm* onto his boat, the pirates numbers are *overwhelming*...

INT. OARSMEN CABIN - MORNING

The bow of the second Greek ship has ripped a huge hole into the aft. OARSMEN struggle to unlock their chains with the keys... The cacophony of agonized bloody horror is nightmarish amongst carcasses that were once men. The ship lists on its side, more water rushes in... the boat is *sinking.* .. Judah is helping OARSMEN up the steps to the upper deck...

EXT. ASTROEA DECK - CONTINUOUS

Quintus wields his sword, heroically fighting off barbarians as they swarm his men...

The OARSMEN rush from below like fleeing cockroaches, leaping blindly from the battle into the water below - that is ablaze! Fallen lanterns have set alight the spilled oil, that pours into the ocean and catches fire...

Judah grabs a sword, quickly fighting off wild eyed raiders... He sees Quintus battling like a true warrior; calm, honest and unflinching, giving orders as his men *fall* one by one... Judah sees a Greek draw back a spear aimed at Quintus - he leaps over a railing and *Judah decapitates* the Greek. Quintus sees Judah do this. A burning mast crumbles... Quintus is about to be crushed - Judah vaults over thrashing enemies and shoves Quintus out of the way. Quintus sustains a fierce sword wound to his side from a pirate - he collapses into the fiery water below - Judah plunges in after him.

UNDERWATER: Quintus is unconscious, sucking in water and sinking... Judah grabs him, rips off Quintus' heavy armor that weighs him down. Judah's lungs are bursting as he drags Quintus upwards - only to see the *flaming surface!* He struggles to find clear water... he does, breaks the surface and gasps for air... Debris, bodies and misery are everywhere. Judah grabs onto a large chunk of the remains of a wooden platform. He wrestles to climb onto it and pulls the lifeless Quintus aboard. Quintus is *dead...* Judah pounds on Quintus' chest, turns him on his stomach and presses on his back to expunge water as the raft/platform floats away from the raging battle... Quintus sputters, chokes and vomits water, gasps for breath... Judah watches the Astroea quickly sink...

The Roman fleet is being *routed* by the Greeks. Smoke obscures the battle. Judah and Quintus gasp for clean air as they float away...

EXT. OCEAN - NIGHT

JUDAH'S RAFT: On the faraway horizon, Judah glimpses flickering fire... Quintus lies on his back, stirs and weakly

tries to look across the water into the darkness. He winces in pain from his bloody wound...

QUINTUS
My fleet?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Destroyed.

QUINTUS
I too am destroyed.

Quintus turns over to roll off the platform, into the sea.

JUDAH BEN HUR
What are you doing?

Judah grabs him.

QUINTUS
I dishonor my rank, my ancestors. The name Quintus Arrius will live in ridicule after such a defeat.

Quintus struggles to get away from Judah's strong grip.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I once knew another Roman who put his name above everything. *No.*

QUINTUS
If you have any mercy left, let me die on this battlefield...

Quintus, in agony, pushes against him... Judah, himself weak, unleashes a fist into Quintus' face, knocking him out cold. He starts to undo a sash around Quintus' waist...

EXT. OCEAN - MORNING

JUDAH'S RAFT: Quintus is bound by his own sash. He wakes, struggles to move, a *festering* wound and the sash hold him down...

JUDAH BEN HUR
A ship is in the distance. Which of us will it bring freedom too?

QUINTUS
Let me perish, damn you. If it is Greek, I will die soon enough. If Roman, shame will do me in.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Our fates are in the hand of God.

QUINTUS
My fate is sealed.

Quintus fights to break his bonds.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I won't let a man who showed me mercy, kill himself.

QUINTUS
I did nothing-

JUDAH BEN HUR
You *unchained* me.
(he points to Quintus' wound)
That'll kill you soon enough, anyway.

QUINTUS
You Jews are a strange people. I am your enemy yet-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-Can you see the ship? Is it Roman or pirate?

Quintus squints...

QUINTUS
I see nothing. Does it have a flag?

The galley's oars pull her swiftly towards the raft...

JUDAH BEN HUR
No.

QUINTUS
(defeated)
Then she is a pirate. A victorious Roman ship would have many flags.

The galley slows...

JUDAH BEN HUR
May God show mercy.

QUINTUS
Does it have white sails?

Judah strains to look... His heads slumps.

JUDAH BEN HUR
God seems to want to play a cruel joke on both of us. It is *Roman.*

A small boat is lowered from the galley. It rows over to the platform... Quintus and Judah clamber on to it and in silence are transported to the galley...

EXT. ROMAN GALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Quintus, his head bowed in disgrace, is met by the COMMANDER of the ship. Two soldiers grab Judah. SOLDIERS and TRUMPETERS look on.

COMMANDER
Is it possible? *QUINTUS ARRIUS!?*

Quintus keeps his eyes down.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Mars be praised! Quintus Arrius *lives!* The *hero* of Rome lives!

QUINTUS
Do you mock me?

COMMANDER
(apologetic)
No, Consort. Your victory over the Greeks has already become legend-

QUINTUS
We were *victorious?*

COMMANDER
We vanquished their *entire* fleet. Their vast stolen treasures were saved. And now not a single ship survives. Your strategy worked. The Greeks became frenzied, ignored the other half of our fleet, who then attacked them with the sun at their back. The blinded pirates did not realize until it was too late.

QUINTUS
(stunned)
And what of our casualties?

He sees Quintus' festering wound.

COMMANDER
You are hurt?

He calls for a MEDIC.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)
Fifteen galleys lie with Neptune.

Quintus is renewed, his body straightens, his pain seems to disappear.

QUINTUS
Give praise to Caesar, Neptune and those who gave their lives for Rome!

Trumpets blast, SOLDIERS *cheer!*

SOLDIERS
Hail, Quintus Arrius!

Quintus acknowledges the cheers and is helped by a MEDIC to the Commander's platform. Judah is still held by two guards. Quintus stops, turns and waves for Judah to join him.

QUINTUS
(to the Commander)
Treat this man well.

He gives Judah a bear hug,

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
(quietly to Judah)
When word gets out that a *Jew* saved the life of the *Commander* of the Roman Fleet, you may want to have died out there!

Quintus walks with his arm around Judah's shoulders.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
(quietly)
Advice my friend, do not let anyone know who you are. Gratus has many friends in Rome. If word gets back to him that you live, it may cause him embarrassment and you already know he has no value for your life. For me, I have forgotten your story. It is better for us both to forget.

Judah understands and grabs Quintus' wrist in the traditional handshake of a bond and an agreement.

EXT. GLADIATOR ARENA - DAY

SUBTITLES: **SIX MONTHS LATER...**

A small arena: SPECTATORS are watching as a brutal fight is underway between TWO masked/helmeted GLADIATORS. Other GLADIATORS watch with excitement... One Gladiator uses a TRIDENT and a NET, the other wields a CLUB and a SHIELD - both wear swords.

This is bloody hand to hand combat - they are well matched, with impressive combat skills... blood is easily drawn - pain is hidden... The Trident gladiator has Club gladiator at his mercy - he *throws away* his weapons and draws his sword. Club gladiator understands - draws his own sword... They battle - blow to blow - each slices into the other one... Trident gladiator thrusts forward with unrelenting power and knocks away the sword of Club gladiator. Trident places his sword at the throat of Club, draws blood - stops - throws his sword to the ground and walks away. Cheers ring out for him. He does not acknowledge the crowd. He lifts his helmet. It is *JUDAH.*

EXT. QUINTUS' PALACE ROME - NIGHT

A clear night: in a massive and fabulous courtyard, a LARGE and extravagant party is underway filled with WEALTHY and beautiful Romans. Exotic and scantily clad PERFORMERS dance and do circus type acrobatics. A long line of GUESTS wait to greet and pay homage to a spirited QUINTUS, who looks thinner and unwell, as he lies on a couch, like a presiding king. Judah, looking every bit a Roman in a toga, has the physique of a powerful ADONIS: athletic, muscular and handsome. The cuts and bruises are evident from his gladiator duel earlier. His presence causes looks of sexual delight from WOMEN and even some male GUESTS. Judah, unpretentious, crosses to and warmly embraces Quintus.

JUDAH BEN HUR
This excitement must be too much for you.

Judah indicates Quintus' side where he sustained the wound.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
You should rest.

Quintus addresses the waiting line of ADMIRERS,

QUINTUS
Friends. I have to speak with Judah. I thank you for your kind tributes.

The crowd applauds and disperses. Judah sits next to him and it is obvious that he has great affection for Quintus.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(smiles)
It is over six months since your Greek victory, yet they still pay homage. Romans love their heroes.

QUINTUS
You continue to celebrate the Maccabees after how many years!? No,
(he indicates his guests)
-They know I am about to die and therefore they will not be able to boast of their meeting a real Roman hero.

Quintus winces in pain and holds his side. He looks at Judah's new wounds and bruises.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Gladiator training is not necessary. And your insistence on fighting *only* Romans in the arena, is causing concern in some circles. You would be wise to temper your hatred for your hosts.

JUDAH BEN HUR
You once told me there are good and bad Romans just like there are good and bad Jews. I fight only *bad* Romans.

QUINTUS
You fight *any* Roman you can. Be careful... My news is not good. It is what we have heard from other sources; it seems that your mother and sister perished in the dungeons in Jerusalem. I am sorry.

Judah's reaction is muted, it confirms what he has heard before.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
I know you are restless. You want revenge on those that destroyed everything you love but know this, killing in battle can be a noble cause, justifiable and something a soldier can live with, killing for revenge, cold blooded murder, will change a good man for ever.
(eye to eye)
And you are a good man, Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Goodness was ripped from me.

QUINTUS
I have no walls to keep you. You can run away but if you are recognized, it will be back to the oars or most likely crucifixion. Then what will your efforts to survive gotten you? Nothing.

He takes Judah's hands.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
I cannot condone what you may do, especially because it is against fellow Romans but I have a solution that will allow you to travel freely.

He has Judah's attention.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
It is obvious to all that you are like a son to me. Become my son, my heir, and a citizen of Rome. Wealth and freedom, to wander *anywhere* in the empire, will be yours.

Quintus takes a large gold ring/seal from his finger and hands it to Judah.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Accept this Seal of Arrius. It will be recorded and identify you as my son... But I ask only one thing in return; that you do not leave until I pass on to the next life...

JUDAH BEN HUR
Nothing would give me greater honor, but do not ask me for something that I cannot deliver.

QUINTUS
Judah, we both know I do not live long for this world.

JUDAH BEN HUR
May it not be soon but when it comes, paradise awaits you, in the *Elysian Fields,* where all Roman heroes reside.

QUINTUS
You study our Gods. I think you are becoming more Roman that I. Then do you accept?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I wish not to pray for your early death.

QUINTUS
I feel Apollo's breath on me even as we speak.

Judah embraces him and nods, *"Yes."*

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
In hope, prayer and what my doctors told me *yesterday,* I had the papers drawn up and signed today!

Judah can only smile at his confidence.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Help me stand.

Judah helps the injured Quintus to his feet. Quintus claps and asks for quiet... Silence ripples across the courtyard.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Good friends, I have news that warms a father's heart... In as much as my own son, Remus, who gave his life for Rome in Britain, can *never* be replaced, I have been blessed these last months with another young man, who has become like a son to me.

He indicates Judah who stands next to him. The crowd applauds and acknowledges them both.

QUINTUS (CONT'D)
Today, he became my *legal* son and heir. He shall now carry the name Octavius Quintus Arrius. I pray you all love him, as you love me.

Cheers ring out as Judah and Quintus acknowledge the enthusiastic reception of the news.

EXT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS ARENA - DAY

CROWDS pass vendors as they enter the renowned arena.

INT. CIRCUS MAXIMUS ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The CAPACITY CROWD noise is deafening as they cheer a CHARIOT RACE... In the center structure that the track surrounds, SEVEN SPEARS are shown on several sides; these indicate the amount of laps in the race. Five spears point down, indicating *TWO LAPS REMAIN...*

TRACK: FIVE *helmeted* CHARIOTEERS REMAIN IN THE RACE. Each Chariot is pulled by four magnificent horses. Several chariots are strewn around the track, smashed and crumpled, their frightened horses wildly pulling the wrecked remains. Chariot drivers are being hauled off on stretchers by USHERS, while HORSEMEN/WRANGLERS chase the loose horse teams, trying to prevent them from colliding with the remaining CHARIOTEERS. One team of frantic horses crash into a wall and disorientated, turn and gallop directly INTO the oncoming racing Charioteers... the crash is horrific, TWO DRIVERS are catapulted into the wall and are *crushed* under neighing screeches of injured horses... Another driver flips his chariot over the carcass of a horse.

A CHARIOTEER, dressed in white, with A *BLACK ARM BAND PROMINENT ON HIS SLEEVE*, deftly pulls his chariot around the carnage and is now in second place in the race...

The crowd is going crazy, it is now a *neck and neck TWO CHARIOT RACE* as they pass the SPEAR SIGN indicating its the *FINAL LAP!*

Heroically avoiding loose horses, dead and injured drivers, the two charioteers turn the final bend towards the finishing line... One driver pulls his chariot *across* the path of the DRIVER IN WHITE...

Their wheels collide - the driver in WHITE suddenly yanks his team *away* and *pulls off* the wheel of the other chariot! The driver in white passes the winning flag to *victory.* The other chariot spins out of control and comes to a humiliating stop yards from the finishing line...

The crowd goes wild and pours from the stands onto the track.

The winner drives his chariot in front of an ostentatious platform, with shading drapes, marble columns, sofas, tables, where SLAVES attend the DIGNITARIES. Tribune PONTIUS PILATE is the HONORED GUEST and welcomes the victor. The winner removes his helmet, it is *JUDAH!*

PONTIUS PILATE
It is becoming a habit for me to lose a wager when you race, Octavius. Six wins in a row is unprecedented. Congratulations.

The crowd cheers. Judah faces the throng.

JUDAH BEN HUR
My win today was to give honor to my deceased father, QUINTUS ARRIUS.

The crowd begins chanting; *"QUINTUS! QUINTUS! QUINTUS!"* Judah is moved by their affection. Pontius holds up a sword.

PONTIUS PILATE
The Elysian Fields!

Other DIGNITARIES, COMMANDERS and SOLDIERS rise and raise their swords.

DIGNITARIES
Elysian Fields! Elysian Fields! Elysian Fields!

The crowd joins in to honor QUINTUS ARRIUS.

CROWD
Elysian Fields! Quintus! Elysian Fields! Quintus! Elysian Fields!

Judah, emotional, raises the hand that bears the *RING OF QUINTUS*, to acknowledge them all...

EXT. PORT OF TYRE - SUNSET

SUBTITLES: **PORT OF TYRE - NORTH JUDEA**

A busy Middle Eastern port - ships arrive and depart. Cargo is loaded and unloaded while deals are being made dockside. One ship is tying up at a dock.

EXT. MERCHANT SHIP - CONTINUOUS

The ship is packed with *cargo* and ETHNICALLY DIVERSE PASSENGERS. On an upper open deck, the *WEALTHY* guests mingle - the lower open deck are the *POOR*.

JUDAH is on the lower deck, wearing the clothes of a rich Roman and walks easily amongst the poor. He crosses back to the upper deck and engages ARRON, a Jewish MERCHANT.

JUDAH BEN HUR
It is a while since I have been to these shores. I once knew a merchant of the name, Simonides. Are you acquainted with him?

ARRON
To do any business in this province one must know Simonides.

JUDAH BEN HUR
And his residence?

ARRON
Antioch. But I know he travels like a man possessed.
(MORE)

ARRON (CONT'D)
(off of Judah's confounded look)
Nobody that wealthy should work that hard, yet he does.

The passengers begin to disembark.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Thank you.

ARRON
(nods towards the group of Romans nearby)
I overheard you are Octavius, the son of Quintus Arrius.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes. Did you know him?

ARRON
I met him several times. An honest man.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes.

ARRON
Maybe, when I am in Rome next, I can call upon you.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will not be returning to Rome.

An older ROMAN DIGNITARY, ROMULUS, touches Judah on the shoulder.

ROMULUS
Octavius. Remember, I am to be your first guest in your new home in Jerusalem.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Of course, Romulus. But it will be a *small, quiet* affair and I am not sure that will be to your liking.

ROMULUS
One needs to rest occasionally!

Both laugh.

ARRON
So you are going to Jerusalem.
(MORE)

ARRON (CONT'D)
Simonides keeps a small home there when he's trading. It is near the-

Judah listens intently as he and Arron are swept up by the exiting passengers.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE PORT OF TYRE - NOON

On a hilltop road, A DOZEN LOCALS are fixated on a single CHARIOTEER racing his chariot around a quickly erected dirt track. The team of four horses are truly magnificent, the DRIVER is *not* and almost flips the chariot over.

JUDAH sits on his horse, watching this spectacle as the chariot's owner, SHEIK ILDERIM, 50's, hollers in despair. The driver roughly pulls the team of four horses to a stop.

SHEIK ILDERIM
You fool. You imbecile! Get off of my chariot. Get away from horses - my *children.* Curse you liar, who you said could drive them.

The Sheik chases after the DRIVER, who ducks and avoids him as the LOCALS laugh... The driver runs away.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Yes, run you infidel. May Abraham curse you for your lies!

Ilderim's team of horses suddenly take off and head towards a *rock* strewn area.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Stop them before they destroy themselves!

Judah chases the team, safely wrangles them and brings them back to the Sheik,

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
I am forever in your debt. Name your reward and it shall be yours!

Judah dismounts. He pets the team of horses and eyes the emotional Sheik.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I would say that this is as fine a team of horses as I ever seen outside of the Circus Maximus. I think a reward of a *thousand* gold coins would be sufficient-

SHEIK ILDERIM
-A *THOUSAND* gold coins!? That is a - quite a - reward - I was thinking of a little less-

JUDAH BEN HUR
How do you value love? It is obvious these are not merely animals-

SHEIK ILDERIM
Children, they are my *children!* Just do not let my real children know this-

JUDAH BEN HUR
(laughs)
I seek no reward, Sheik-

SHEIK ILDERIM
Sheik *ILDERIM.* I see you toy with me. Your humor is as quick as your courage.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Not courage, just an appreciation for a quality horse. And you have four fine ones here. Reward me only with a promise-

SHEIK ILDERIM
I hesitate, for you have a *sizable* imagination.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Find a driver of equal quality. They deserve the best.

SHEIK ILDERIM
This, I can promise.

Judah pets the horses one more time and mounts his own horse,

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
You leave so soon? Surely I can show you the hospitality of a fellow son of Abraham...

Judah reacts,

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
You may dress like a Roman, you wear a Roman ring that says your family is of stature... but I see we are both sons of Abraham.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Your eye is good. But I am Octavius Quintus Arrius.

They clasps wrists.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I have urgent business in Jerusalem.

SHEIK ILDERIM
I too will be in Jerusalem, for the chariot races.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I hear that in recent years they have become a popular pastime.

SHEIK ILDERIM
Yes. With many of the best drivers and teams, *outside* of the Circus Maximus, of course. You said you had visited Circus Maximus. That must be quite a spectacle. One day I hope to compete there.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Your horses would do well there.

SHEIK ILDERIM
Come see them race in Jerusalem.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will not have time for sport.

SHEIK ILDERIM
But surely you will be there to welcome the new Procurator of Judea, *PONTIUS PILATE?*

Judah is taken aback at this news.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
The games are to celebrate his arrival.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Pontius Pilate is the new Governor? What happened to Valerius Gratus?

SHEIK ILDERIM
He is a day south of here, on his way back to Rome. If history knows justice, this will not end well for the corrupt and cruel Gratus.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I bid you well, Sheik.

Judah rides off with a sense of urgency. Ilderim embraces his horses.

EXT. DESERT - NIGHT

A ROMAN encampment of 300 SOLDIERS. Small tents surround a LARGER TENT, where a small party is underway.

INT. TENT - CONTINUOUS

VALERIUS GRATUS, tired looking, is surrounded by Roman DIGNITARIES enjoying fine food and wine. Two GUESTS, CYRUS and GAIUS share a discreet exchange, indicating Gratus,

CYRUS
How the mighty have fallen-

GAIUS
Let us hope that no one remembers we were here tonight, for we might stumble along with him.

GRATUS walks by,

GAIUS (CONT'D)
Valerius. We were just saying that you must be excited to be going back to Rome after living in the cultural desert known as Jerusalem.

GRATUS
I am sure you were discussing how unfortunate you are to be seen in my company at this time. Lying was never your strong suit, Gaius.

GAIUS
And diplomacy never yours.

Gratus walks on and to his SERVANT.

GRATUS
I will rest a while.

Gratus exits to a side room/tent.

INT. GRATUS ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Gratus, alone, enters into an ornate room with a bed and couch. He drops onto the couch and closes his eyes. A noise in the shadows startles him...

GRATUS
Who's there?

JUDAH steps from a drape near the entrance.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Valerius Gratus. I did not mean to startle you.

Gratus stands and eyes Judah.

GRATUS
I do not know you.

Judah steps forward and shows him his 'ring' of Quintus.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Octavius Quintus Arrius, son of Quintus Arrius. I just arrived. I know it is late but wanted to pay my respects to you before you leave in the morning.

Gratus shakes his hand.

GRATUS
I welcome you. Quintus was a true hero to Caesar and Rome. You have business in Judea?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes. I bought a palace in Jerusalem-
(laughs)
-But now am told it might be cursed.

GRATUS
Everything in Jerusalem is cursed.

JUDAH BEN HUR
That is what I am learning.

GRATUS
The name of this palace. Maybe I know of it.

JUDAH BEN HUR
The Palace of Hur.

GRATUS
Indeed this place is cursed. You do not know its history?

JUDAH BEN HUR
No.
(MORE)

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I was only told it was once one of the finest homes in all of Jerusalem and was seized by Rome as treasure. I bought it at a very good price.

GRATUS
You paid too much for it whatever it cost. I should have had it torn down and used it as a pig farm.

JUDAH BEN HUR
What horrors took place there?

GRATUS
On my arrival in Jerusalem, an attack upon my life came directly from that home and its family.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Apollo be hailed that he protected you. What happened to the offenders?

GRATUS
The son did not live long in the galleys.

JUDAH BEN HUR
And the rest of the family of Hur.

GRATUS
A mother and daughter rotted in the dungeons.

JUDAH BEN HUR
So justice was done.

GRATUS
Yes.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Thank you.

Judah steps forward to shake Gratus' hand. Gratus smiles and receives him. Judah pulls him toward him. Gratus winces as Judah places his hand over Gratus' mouth-

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I am that son. I am Judah Ben *HUR*.

Judah steps back, his sword is in Gratus' gut... Judah slowly twists his sword in deeper... Gratus stares at him.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Now, justice is done.

Gratus collapses, dead. Judah stares at his blooded sword. He is in shock and is suddenly breathing hard. A noise from outside the tent stirs him from his daze. He quickly drags Gratus behind a couch and covers him with a blanket... Judah exits and disappears into the night.

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF JERUSALEM - MORNING

Jerusalem is in the far distance. At the side of a gentle stream, ROMAN SOLDIERS are arresting SEVERAL JUDEANS from a large CROWD. JESUS and his DISCIPLES look on. JESUS calls for calm. Judah rides up on his horse, he shows a SOLDIER his 'ring'.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Octavius Quintus Arrius. What is happening?

SOLDIER
Procurator Gratus was murdered. We are arresting rebels.

Judah reacts to *'Gratus murdered.'* A WIFE of one of the 'rebels', pleads to Judah,

WIFE
My husband is not a *rebel*. He just came to hear the Rabbi, Jesus, speak.

Judah looks around and sees JESUS. He quickly dismounts and pushes his way to Jesus. He comes face to face with him and Judah suddenly falters, he is uncomfortable facing a 'holy' man and turns away. Jesus touches Judah on the shoulder, Judah turns to face him. Jesus looks him in the eye which Judah avoids.

JESUS
You have sinned.

Judah tenses up.

JESUS (CONT'D)
None of us are perfect. Ask God for forgiveness-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Rabbi. I just stopped to thank you. Several years ago you showed me a kindness.

He looks into the eyes of Judah.

JESUS
You have become what you detest.

Judah is taken aback by the explicit insight.

JUDAH BEN HUR
An eye for an eye...

JESUS
There is a new dawn rising. Turn the other cheek. Forgive and you shall be forgiven.

JUDAH BEN HUR
That is not easy.

JESUS
God asks not what is easy but what is right. We are our brothers keeper, let go of the past that afflicts you.

JUDAH BEN HUR
But what of my enemy?

JESUS
Your enemy will face God on his own. *You* live for what is right today, and tomorrow will be yours.

An OLD WOMAN grabs Jesus' hand and weeps. Jesus reassures her. Judah turns away, mounts his horse and rides off...

EXT. JERUSALEM BAZAAR - AFTERNOON

A bazaar crowded with MERCHANTS and PEOPLE. It is festive, noisy and full of life...

There are POSTERS everywhere of the upcoming GAMES at the local CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA: boxing, wrestling, running, jumping and the *CHARIOT RACE.*

Sheik Iderim is shaking his head in despair at one of the POSTERS. He is surrounded by an ENTOURAGE of SEVERAL WIVES. CHILDREN and SERVANTS. Ilderim tastes foods from different VENDORS, when he's pleased he indicates for a SERVANT to buy it. MERCHANTS follow him, offering him carpets, fabrics, trinkets etc. Something catches his eye...

SHEIK ILDERIM
(hollers)
Octavius! Octavius!

Ilderim pushes his way thru the crowd to the side of a road.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Octavius! Octavius!

On the other side of the road is JUDAH. He is talking to a MAN who points towards a small house in an alley. Judah stares at it.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Octavius! Octavius!

Judah turns, sees Ilderim, hesitates, is going to turn away but crosses and greets him.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Octavius. It pleases my eyes to see you again.

Judah is clearly burdened.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
You are well?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes. And you?

SHEIK ILDERIM
Yes. When did you arrive?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Today.

SHEIK ILDERIM
Today? You were in such a rush to get here. You must have had other business on your way.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes.

Judah changes the subject, points to a POSTER of the Games.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
How is your team?

SHEIK ILDERIM
My 'children' are most excellent.

Ilderim's WIVES AND CHILDREN suddenly surround him and he acknowledges them to Judah.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
These are my *other* children.

Over the din of the CROWD is heard the clatter of horses and PEOPLE *fleeing* noisily out of the way... Both Judah and Ilderim turn to see that a CHARIOT, pulled by TWO horses, is *racing* along the busy road.

The helmeted ROMAN DRIVER enjoys seeing the people scatter out of his way... The chariot is almost on them - Ilderim's youngest SON *falls* onto the road, *screaming...* Judah instantly and heroically *snatches* him from *under* the hooves of the passing horses... Judah catches a glimpse of the arrogant and smiling driver, it is *MESALLA!*

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
(at Mesalla)
Infidel. May God's revenge be swift!

Mesalla rides on without looking back. A grateful Ilderim embraces his son that Judah saved.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
(to Judah)
It is the *second* time you have saved a child of mine. It is providence. God has brought us together. He has a task for us.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I think not Sheik Ilderim. God has already set His plan for me.

SHEIK ILDERIM
God's will be done... but not until it is! Did you see the driver? It was Tribune Mesalla.

JUDAH BEN HUR
You know him?

SHEIK ILDERIM
From the arena only. He is the finest driver in all of Judea. He beats me every time. But now I would like to beat him, and *not* in a race!

He gives his child to one of his wives.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Where are you staying?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I have a home nearby.

SHEIK ILDERIM
I am encamped outside the East Gate.

Ilderim senses Judah's burden.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
You must visit me.
(MORE)

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
I want to thank you with a grand hospitality. There is now no excuse that you are rushing off to Jerusalem, for we are already here.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I have business to attend to, if time allows, I will dine with you. Now I must go.

Judah disappears into the crowd. Ilderim is concerned.

EXT. HUR PALACE - LATER

Judah stands outside the gates of what was once his family's elegant palace. A dirty and dusty sign on the gate is clear: PROPERTY OF ROME. Judah rips it down. He pushes and bangs on the gates; they are sealed, solid and firm. He crosses to a small doorway, pushes against it - its solid - he pounds on it - his anguish spews forth - he strikes it until he's exhausted and slumps in front of it...

LATER: C/U on door lock... someone is *dismantling* it...

Judah stands with a LOCKSMITH who pushes the door open. Judah pays him. Locksmith exits. Judah stands at the open door... he is hesitant. He touches his fingers to his mouth and then touches the Mezuzah on the door frame and enters.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Judah looks at what was once a fabulous courtyard, that dripped with life, flowers and vines but now, everything is dead...

He wanders thru the rooms - all stripped bare of any anything of value... It is the essence of his life... it holds *nothing...* He climbs to the roof deck - the construction materials scattered around... he looks over the parapet - in a cruel twist of fate, a tile slips from under his hand, crashing to the empty dark street below. He picks up a tile and smashes it against a wall.

EXT. HUR PALACE - MORNING

Outside the gate, LOCALS point to the PROPERTY OF ROME sign that lies torn on the ground and the small open door. The LOCKSMITH works on the locks of the big gate. Questions and answers fly as to who the new owner is... *"I hear he's a wealthy Roman." "No, he's an Egyptian." "He's a Samarian merchant."*

On OLD MAN, bent over, pushes his way thru and enters.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

COURTYARD. The OLD MAN looks at the littered yard, picks up a shard of a broken vase, it breaks in his hand and clatters loudly as it shatters on the ground...

JUDAH BEN HUR
Who's there?

On the floor of an upper open deck, rises a sleepy Judah with a blanket around him. He looks down at the OLD MAN, who cannot see Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
What do you want?

OLD MAN
Forgive me. I seek the owner of this home.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I won't be buying anything today.

A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN enters the courtyard.

WOMAN
Father! What are you doing here?

OLD MAN
I heard that it had a new owner. I had to come and see.

Woman comforts her father. Judah is now at the top of the stairs, in shadow and still unable to be seen.

WOMAN
(to father)
Let us not stay in this place that is touched by the devil's hand.

Judah hears her as she leads her father away.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Devil's hand you say?

WOMAN
I did not mean offense.
(to father)
We should leave.

He is still hidden but now sees *them;* It is SIMONIDES and ESTER! He is stunned - steps back to make sure he will *NOT* be seen... He is conflicted... but then -

JUDAH BEN HUR
Go. Leave this place. Never return.

Ester and her father turn to leave. Judah quickly crosses to get a better view of them thru railings without revealing himself. They are quickly gone. Heartbroken, he drops to the floor.

EXT. THE PRETORIUM (ROMAN GARRISON JERUSALEM) - MORNING

SOLDIERS push *bound* "Rebel' SUSPECTS in to the garrison.

INT. MESALLA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

MESALLA, looking splendid and powerful in his uniform, is barking out orders to SEVERAL OFFICERS.

MESALLA
-With the assassination of Gratus, it is too risky to have a parade thru the city tomorrow for Pilate. He has decided he wants the Games on Sunday to be his introduction to Jerusalem. We will have *every* available soldier for that day to make sure there is *only* a welcome. Do you understand?

OFFICERS
Yes, Tribune.

He dismisses them all except his Second-in-Command, CAPTAIN DRUSUS.

MESALLA
Guilty or not, we will crucify several prisoners as his assassins. It will calm Rome and send a message locally. Choose the prisoners-

A knock on the door is heard.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Enter.

A SOLDIER enters and hands Mesalla a small, rolled scroll. Mesalla dismisses him. Reads it. C/U on NOTE:

Greetings, Tribune Mesalla. I am Octavius Quintus Arrius, the son of Consul Quintus Arrius. My father spoke highly and often of your military exploits in Samaria and Macedonia. I have just arrived in Jerusalem and invite you to dine with me. Octavius Quintus Arrius.

Mesalla hands the note to Captain Drusus to read it and does.

MESALLA
Octavius Quintus Arrius? I don't know him.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
I know Quintus Arrius had a son, but I thought he died in a battle in Britain?

MESALLA
Consort Quintus Arrius, is a true hero of Rome. I once heard him speak and swore that if he asked me to crawl over hot stones for him, I would. The name of Arrius is very powerful in Rome. This son, Octavius, could be valuable to me when I return there. Accept his invitation.

Drusus, nods, exits.

EXT. HUR PALACE - NIGHT

The streets outside of Judah's home are empty and quiet... The clattering of wheels and horses hooves are heard as a chariot races to and stops in front of JUDAH'S PALACE. Mesalla, in uniform and wearing his sword, is driving the chariot as a SOLDIER stands next to him. Mesalla instantly recognizes where he is.

MESALLA
This is the wrong place. It is sealed by the authority of Caesar.

Mesalla is hesitant. He hands the reins to the soldier, gets off the chariot and walks to the gate... *There is no, 'PROPERTY OF ROME' sign.* He takes in this place and its memories. He subconsciously rubs the palm of his *'blood brother' scar.*

He notices there are *new lock*s on the gates and is confounded. He looks to the small doorway, the door is *ajar.* He sees it has a new lock and the MEZUZAH is clean. Unsure, he slowly pushes the door aside and cautiously enters.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

It is dark, lit only by a half moon. The courtyard is littered as when Judah first saw it - nothing has been cleaned. Mesalla walks to the center of the courtyard and takes in the decay.

JUDAH BEN HUR (O.S.)
I was convinced you wouldn't have the courage to step back inside here, Mesalla.

Judah cannot be seen near the door. He slowly closes it, the lock clicks loud enough for Mesalla to twist around and face it. Mesalla draws his sword.

MESALLA
I am afraid of no man.

JUDAH BEN HUR
But are you afraid of ghosts?

MESALLA
Who are you?

JUDAH BEN HUR (O.S.)
Judah. Judah Ben Hur.

MESALLA
Judah? Judah *Ben Hur?*
(laughs)
Whoever you are, this is a strange game that you play? Let me see you.

Judah, still hidden, throws a pebble behind Mesalla, who spins around in a defensive pose, to where the pebble hit... Judah screeches like a *HYENA...*

JUDAH BEN HUR
I saved your life when a desert dog was taking it-

MESALLA
-So you know a little of my history but Judah Ben Hur you are *not*.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Why so certain?

Judah tosses another pebble behind Mesalla who again turns towards the sound... Mesalla stands alert.

MESALLA
He died on the galley's for crimes against Caesar and Rome.

JUDAH BEN HUR (O.S.)
I was never tried, only condemned by you Mesalla, my own sworn *'blood brother'*.

Mesalla reacts to the *'blood brother'* remark.

MESALLA
How ever much Judah paid you to play this childish game, it was not enough. You will pay dearly, I promise.

JUDAH BEN HUR (O.S.)
I begged you not to have blood on your hands, Mesalla. Remember? *Tirzah.* My *mother...*

Mesalla stands straight and proud-

MESALLA
Show yourself, if you dare.

Judah steps from the shadows, his sword is drawn... Mesalla cannot make out who it is but sees his drawn sword and holds his own weapon in anticipation... Judah comes to full view.

Mesalla buckles backwards, shocked,

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Apollo bear me the truth if this is an avenging demon.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Neither Apollo, nor Mars will offer their hand to save you.

Judah attacks him... Mesalla is bewildered and barely fends him off... Judah slashes Mesalla across his face, blood spurts.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Look Mesalla, you bleed *Jew...*

The blood and pain suddenly awakes Mesalla. He stands tall and the two battle: Judah's hatred spews forth with every strike, Mesalla fights for his life...

They cross the courtyard, one attacks - the other repels... their blades rip into each others flesh... Mesalla makes unrelenting thrusts that have Judah on one knee, buckling... Judah draws on his hatred to find strength that becomes overwhelming... his ferocity visibly frightens Mesalla... Judah slashes at him, flinging Mesalla's sword away... Mesalla is on his back, *defenseless...* Judah looms large over him, a wild, avenging angel, loathing drips from his every pore...

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Elysian Fields will not beckon you for what you did to my Mother and Tirzah-

He raises his sword to strike Mesalla's heart...

MESALLA
They are *alive* Judah! They are *alive!*

Judah falters...

MESALLA (CONT'D)
In the dungeons- I moved them-

Judah presses his sword against Mesalla's chest, draws blood.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Gratus told me they were dead.

MESALLA
Gratus!?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Just before I killed him.

MESALLA
It was *you!?*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes.

MESALLA
I swear, Judah. I could - would not kill them. I moved them. I told Gratus they were dead... Kill me and you will *never* find them...

JUDAH BEN HUR
You *lie!*

MESALLA
I changed their names. To protect them. Only I know who and where they are. Give me twenty four hours and I will bring them to you. I *swear.*

Judah is bewildered - can he believe him? Does he have a choice? Judah wavers - shows Mesalla the ring of Quintus, and with animalistic conviction,

JUDAH BEN HUR
On the name of Hur and this ring of Arrius, if you are lying, I will find you. This, I know you believe.

Judah stands, backs away, he is quickly lost in the shadows - the little gate opens and Judah's silhouette appears and disappears...

INT. MESALLA'S OFFICE - LATER

Mesalla is having his wounds taken care of by an ELDERLY PHYSICIAN. Captain Drusus enters and is stunned to see Mesalla beaten up.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Tribune- What has happen-

MESALLA
(eyes the Physician)
-I was ambushed by *five* rebels...
(to Physician)
Get out! Go!

Physician hurries out... Mesalla and Drusus are alone.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Octavius was a hoax. Judah Ben Hur is *alive.*

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Octavius is *Judah Ben Hur*? How?

MESALLA
He survived the galleys. Somehow Quintus Arrius adopted him!? I don't know. I need him dead or everything I have worked for will be lost.

He subconsciously rubs his 'blood brother' palm.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
How? To kill the son of Arrius? Caesar himself would demand to know who and why? And with Pontius Pilate arriving-

MESALLA
Arrius fought many battles and had many enemies. Killing his son would be appropriate revenge for many.

EXT. ILDERIM'S CARAVAN - DAWN

A grumpy Ilderim is following TWO concerned looking SERVANTS. They point to inside the temporary horse corral where his four cherished ARABIAN STALLIONS rest. Camels and other animals are tied up.

SHEIK ILDERIM
What is this? They look fine.

One servant points to beside the corral on the stacked hay. A leg sticks out...

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Fetch my sword... And two of the guards...

Servants scurry off. Ilderim cautiously crosses to the hay. His sword is given to him and his TWO GUARDS go behind the hay. Ilderim pokes the leg with his sword and a sword appears from the hay and *barely misses Ilderim's hea*d! It is *Judah*. Both men are stunned.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Forgive me Sheik - I - I

Judah is wearing a humble kaftan, hiding his Roman clothes. Ilderim sees his wounds.

SHEIK ILDERIM
It seems now I can repay you. Come.

Ilderim takes Judah's arm and they walk to his tent...

INT. SHEIK ILDERIM'S TENT - LATER

The Sheik relaxes and Judah, bandaged and patched up, paces in this lavishly appointed tent filled with cushions, lamps and plants.

JUDAH BEN HUR
-The less you know the safer you are. No one knows we know each other, this is the best protection for you and your family.

SHEIK ILDERIM
I have survived the venom of deadly scorpions, the rage of blinding sands and the wrath of six wives! I fear nothing. I owe you a debt yet you insult me by refusing my help.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I hide in your home, secure from those who seek to do me harm-

SHEIK ILDERIM
Let me at least give you my guards.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will draw more attention to myself surrounded by an *army!* I have to do this alone.

SHEIK ILDERIM
I have camels less stubborn than you!

EXT. HUR PALACE - DUSK

The streets outside Judah's home are quiet with only a few LOCALS meandering around...

In a doorway a distance away, a FIGURE hides in the shadows... A small brigade of ROMAN SOLDIERS appear and march towards Judah's home.

The shadowy figure steps back into the doorway - it is JUDAH, still dressed in his ragged beggar's kaftan. He has a good view of his own palace gates. He watches closely as the SOLDIERS march to.... *and past* his house. TWO MEN, their kaftan hoods over their heads, walk past Judah... He watches them alertly. One looks at him, nods. Judah shakes his head, smiles back.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(to himself)
Ilderim. Stubborn as a camel!

The TWO men disappear down an alley. Judah's eyes search the streets and rooftops for any sign of a trap... He moves across to an alleyway for a better view in the other direction of his house. It is quiet... Judah is *grabbed* from behind, he turns, it is ONE of the MEN he thought was Ilderim's. Judah pulls out his sword, the other man tosses him down into the alley... Their swords are drawn, they attack Judah. He fends them off... Judah is being pushed back, trips over a small bench, he is struck by one of their swords. With lightening speed, Judah grabs the bench and using it as a shield, rises and fearlessly attacks the men... He kneels and rips the leg of one of them, who wails in agony and stumbles, losing his sword. Judah swiftly slices the other attacker in the neck, slaying him... The wounded one is defenseless, has no sword. Judah is astride him, ready to finish him off...

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Mesalla sent you.

Attacker nods...

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
What are your orders?

Attacker winces in pain, reaches for his sliced leg...

ATTACKER
To kill you, deliver your 'ring' of Quintus Arrius as proof of your death and disappear from Judea.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Your reward?

ATTACKER
Freedom. Home - to Athens. Please, I have a family-

The attacker pulls a knife from inside of his sandal strap and swipes at Judah--- Judah evades it and plunges his sword into chest.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Home- to *Hades.*

A noise makes Judah twist around - he faces a MAN with his sword drawn... Judah is defenseless, his sword embedded in the other attackers chest...

EXT. THE PRETORIUM (ROMAN GARRISON JERUSALEM) - LATER

INT. MESALLA'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Mesalla, pensive, is at a window looking out over Jerusalem. He rubs his *"blood brother'* palm. Drusus enters, hands Mesalla a small leather pouch..

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Delivered at the gate.

Mesalla quickly opens it and takes out a *bloody finger* with the 'ring' of Quintus Arrius on it. Drusus smiles. Mesalla beams.

MESALLA
Hail Caesar. Hail Apollo. What of our *'friends'*?

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
Fled the city I am sure.
(smiles)
They would not return here.

MESALLA
Wise. Track them down, dispose of them.

Mesalla returns to the window, his body relaxed and he assuredly breathes in the air of the city he owns once more.

EXT. ILDERIM'S CARAVAN - NIGHT

There are a DOZEN GUARDS alertly patrolling the caravan compound.

INT. SHEIK'S TENT - CONTINUOUS

Judah and Ilderim are both pacing. Judah is still in his Roman clothes, his kaftan nearby.

The *THIRD MAN* from the alley stands nearby, he is a guard of Ilderim's.

SHEIK ILDERIM
-Death is too good for such a devil! My friend, I know hope rose in you, but now that it is dashed. What do you intend to do?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Wait for the right moment. If he believes me to be dead, his guard will be down...

SHEIK ILDERIM
As long as he lives you will *never* be able to.

He looks at Judah's.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
You must first discard this look of a Roman. It scares my children and not just the ones with *two* legs. You must become a son of Abraham again, but a less wealthy one.

He claps his hands, a servant rushes in.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Bring some clothes. Those of a cheap bazaar seller.

Servant exits.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Mesalla races in the games on Sunday. The arena will be filled to capacity.

JUDAH BEN HUR
And with soldiers. They will not want any disturbances for Pilate's introduction to Jerusalem. It will have to be another day.

Judah stops pacing.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
You said, *"Death is too good for such a devil."*

SHEIK ILDERIM
I've said a lot - was that a wise thing?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Yes. Death would only martyr him and his name. The name of Mesalla would live on *forever.* But disgrace - bankruptcy, to destroy the one thing he holds dearer than life; the *name* of Mesalla, would be like a thousand small cuts to his soul.

SHEIK ILDERIM
Roman law dictates the debtor become the *slave* of the creditor until all debts are repaid... But how could such a plan work?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I would happily give my entire fortune to make it happen...

Judah is energized in a way we have not seen in years.

EXT. GOVERNOR'S PALACE JERUSALEM - DAY

The Roman Governor's residence is a magnificent palace: ostentatious in a Roman design with large columns of white marble, palatial rooms and gardens. This is PONTIUS PILATE'S new residence.

INT. GOVERNOR'S PALACE JERUSALEM - CONTINUOUS

A SALON AND SPA: It is exclusive to the Roman elite; DIGNITARIES, VISITORS AND RESIDENTS, TOP MILITARY COMMANDERS etc. It is a place to relax, be pampered, play cards and chess etc but mostly to be seen. The salon is packed and the conversation is about the GAMES. WAGERS are exchanged on every contest; running, wrestling and boxing. It is evident there are *NO WAGERS* on the CHARIOT-RACE.

ROMAN 1
-Who would be foolish enough to bet against Mesalla!

ROMAN 2
(sincere inquiry)
As he ever lost?

ROMAN 1
If you were not my visiting brother-in-law I would not think twice of taking advantage.

MESALLA is nearby, surrounded by ADMIRERS and is the center of attention. He is relaxed and enjoys the constant on-going accolades heaped on him. Captain Drusus, by proximity, enjoys reflected glory.

An ELDERLY ROMAN SENATOR enters, a little winded but excited and causing a stir.

SENATOR
-I was almost accosted. But how could I resist? It is the easiest money I will make this year.

ROMAN 1
Senator. What causes your excitement?

SENATOR
At the entrance is that fool, *SHEIK ILDERIM.* Most beautiful horses but not an ounce of knowledge of how to win a race! He wagers *against* Mesalla.

ROMAN 1
Is he drunk?

SENATOR
I dared not ask, the odds were too good!

Mesalla overhears this.

MESALLA
If Ilderim is willing to gamble away his vast fortune, we as Romans should help him! Drusus, bring him in here.

There is excited rumblings amongst the crowd as Drusus exits. Mesalla is amused by this and sits on a couch to wait.

Ilderim enters, he is in his finest clothes and is taken to Mesalla as if he was having an audience with Caesar himself. Ilderim seems a little unsure of himself in these surroundings.

SHEIK ILDERIM
(to Mesalla)
Forgive me, Tribune, I did not intend to disturb you.

SENATOR
(to Ilderim)
Tell them the wager?

MESALLA
Sheik Ilderim. I hear you wish to enrich some of my friends!?

SHEIK ILDERIM
I merely wish to show confidence in my children -*stallions.*

MESALLA
Your horses are without doubt fleet of foot but have you not dismissed your last *five* drivers in recent weeks!? And, if I am allowed a small amount of humility, history proves it is the *prowess of the driver* who must bring the team across the winning line first!

Crowd cheers Mesalla.

SHEIK ILDERIM
You are right. You have beaten my four beauties every time I have raced against you. But I have found a young driver who seems to understand my horses.

Mesalla engages his audience in his fun-

MESALLA
He *understands* your horses!? It seems like the beginning of a wonderful *relationship*, for a *stable* boy, but not a winner of races!

Crowd laughs.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
So who is this *understanding* driver that you have found?

SHEIK ILDERIM
Just a local boy. A *Jew.* He handles my horses well...

MESALLA
Yes, you said, he *understands* them. Sheik Ilderim, it is only fair that we know that you are not drunk before we take your money - *wager.*

SHEIK ILDERIM
I am only drunk on hope! Let us discuss odds before amount. What odds do you give me.

SENATOR
He gave me two to one!

SEVERAL SHOUTS, *"I'll take those odds."*

SHEIK ILDERIM
No disrespect Senator but I did not inform you that my driver was a *Jew.*

Ilderim stands and slowly looks around the crowd.

MULTIPLE VOICES
Three to one!

SHEIK ILDERIM
Only *three?* And yours is a *Roman.* A Tribune no less, and a *champion!* Mine is but an *'understanding'* Jew.

The crowd laughs at Ilderim's joke.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Who would give me four?

MULTIPLE VOICES
Four it is!

SHEIK ILDERIM
I see the true courage of Rome rises, who would give me *five?*

The crowd falls silent, looks at each other; *who will go to five?*

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Is five too much for the *honor* of Rome?

SEVERAL VOICES
Five it is!

More cheers ring out. Ilderim looks about the room; *'is there more to be had?'* PONTIUS PLATE enters, unseen by Ilderim.

SHEIK ILDERIM
If Caesar himself were here, he alone would give me six!

Silence falls again. Everyone sees PILATE, greets him with the bow of an head as he crosses to Ilderim - who now sees PILATE and bows.

SHEIK ILDERIM (CONT'D)
Governor Pilate. I speak of Caesar and you appear. Indeed Rome is powerful.

PONTIUS PILATE
Keep your desert charms to yourself. Romans are not so easily seduced. Six to one you ask for?

Pilate looks around the room to see if anyone will take those odds... Pilate *glowers* that no one is stepping forward.

MESALLA
Six to one. The difference between a Roman and a Jew! I will take that wager.

Cheers break out and Pilate beams at the bold Mesalla. Ilderim writes quickly the names of those wagering.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Now give me the amount so we can keep the air in here, *pure* Roman.

Ilderim ignores the insult. He writes a number and hands it to Mesalla. Mesalla browses it and is clearly *stunned.* The crowd awaits.

MULTIPLE VOICES
Read it, Tribune! What fortune awaits you!?

Mesalla is uneasy.

PONTIUS PILATE
Mesalla. You keep *me* in too much suspense.

Mesalla reads the scroll:

MESALLA
Concerning the Chariot Race to take place in the Circus Tiberius, Jerusalem. Tribune Mesalla of Rome, in wager with Sheik Ilderim of Antioch, says he will defeat the driver of Ilderim, a Jew. Amount of wager, ten talents. Odds to Ilderim, six to one.

There are shocked gasps from the crowd.

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Witnesses: Sheik Ilderim - Mesalla - Procurator Pontius Pilate.

SENATOR
TEN TALENTS! It is a fortune only few men have.

ROMAN 1
With odds of six to one. No one could pay such a debt.

There is sudden resentment to Ilderim.

ROMAN 2
(to Ilderim)
Have *you* ten talents to lose, Sheik?

SHEIK ILDERIM
Of course.

PONTIUS PILATE
Who could vouch for you?

SHEIK ILDERIM
I believe that Tribune Mesalla knows of my fortune which far exceeds *twenty* talents.

Mesalla is still shaken... The crowd can see this.

MESALLA
Yes. I know the Sheik and those he has dealings with. Many are trusted Romans.

PONTIUS PILATE
Mesalla has spoken. The contract is good. What say you, Tribune? Will you take the wager?

All eyes are on Mesalla.

ROMAN 1
(quietly but loud enough to be heard)
He cannot. Mesalla does not have the estate to cover such a loss.

Mesalla looks at Pilate, stands tall.

MESALLA
Would not a Roman face death for the honor of Caesar!

Crowd cheers "Yes!"

MESALLA (CONT'D)
Then I would do no less. Rome bows to no desert dog or lowly Jew.

Chants ring out: *Mesalla! Mesalla!*

Mesalla regains his arrogance. He takes the contract, brashly signs it, hands it to Pilate, who hesitates, and quietly to Mesalla and within earshot of Drusus,

PONTIUS PILATE
If this Jew were the adopted son of Quintus Arrius, *Octavius,* I would have grave concern...

Mesalla looks at Drusus, they share a confident smirk.

MESALLA
I have news of Octavius- and you should have no fear about signing this.

Pilate gives him a questioning look...

PONTIUS PILATE
I don't. It is not *my* life that depends upon this race.

Pilate signs the contract. Ilderim signs it too and without waiting for the ink to dry, he beams and exits,

SHEIK ILDERIM
My colors will be *white.* I'll see you at the Games.

Chants from the crowd ring out, *"Mesalla! Mesalla!"* He breathes in the adulation.

INT. PONTIUS PILATE'S OFFICE - LATER

Opulent, with a SERVANT fanning Pilate, who sits at a large desk. Pilate examines Octavius' dismembered finger and Quintus Arrius' ring.

MESALLA
-It was delivered to me yesterday. I did not want to disrupt your welcome with such news and was going to wait till after the games to inform you. Two assassins were tracked down and killed but not before they confessed. They were Greeks.

Pilate takes the ring off the finger and discards the finger.

PONTIUS PILATE
This is not how I intended to start my regime here. Make a full report and I will send it directly to Caesar himself. This will be news not well received.

Mesalla nods and turns to exit.

PONTIUS PILATE (CONT'D)
Make sure you win your race, Mesalla.
(he holds up the ring)
It may temper this news to Caesar.

Mesalla nods, exits.

EXT. ILDERIM'S ENCAMPMENT - DAY

A small temporary arena: a small cheering CROWD, all wearing WHITE or waving white flags, watch Ilderim's chariot and horses training... The DRIVER inexplicably loses control on a bend and the observing Ilderim screams in frustration... He rushes over to and chastises the YOUNG JEWISH driver.

SHEIK ILDERIM
Fool! Don't you realize what is at stake for me in this race!? Again.

He waves the young DRIVER to take the reins, he does and slowly rides the chariot around the track...

Scrutinizing from a distance is an amused *CAPTAIN DRUSUS.* He has seen enough and leaves.

Judah, is lost in the crowd, disguised and unrecognizable under a kaftan. He watches Drusus leave. Next to him, an ARAB and a JEW are talking...

ARAB
-All of Jerusalem is talking about how Ilderim has wagered his entire fortune on his chariot to win-

JEW
-God help Ilderim if his wealth depends on *that* driver.

ARAB
We should pray he succeeds. Any win against Rome is a good day for all Judeans.

The Jew starts to walk away.

JEW
From your lips to God's ears.

ARAB
Where are you going?

JEW
To change my wager.

ARAB
This is a good sign of faith.

JEW
No. I am changing it *back*. I am betting Mesalla wins!

Judah steps in front of the Jew, a stranger to him.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Have faith, the driver is good.

JEW
With *your* money, I'll have faith!

Arab and Jew walk off together.

EXT. STREETS OF JERUSALEM - DAY

Drusus rides thru Jerusalem... The city is alive with anticipation for the following day's GAMES... in the air is celebration, banners, posters and a mixture of colors of each of the different teams competing : WHITE - BLUE - GREEN - BLACK - SCARLET/GOLD - YELLOW...

EXT. CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA - MORNING

DAY OF GAMES

It is a festive day at the CIRCUS TIBERIUS, a grand marble stadium built by Roman architects to honor Rome... *Roars* emanate from inside as THOUSANDS of CITIZENS meander in and out of the stadium.

INT. CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA - CONTINUOUS

ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND PEOPLE pack the fabulous stadium with excitement and cheers... In the center of the arena is an island that is encircled by the race track that lies at the bottom of a forty foot wall, better for everyone to see over the island...

At each end of the island are intimidating symbols of Roman power: at one end, a giant statue of JUPITER: RULER OF ALL ROMAN GODS - thrusting a *lightening bolt* into the sky. At the other end is MARS: GOD OF WAR - standing tall with sword in one hand and shield in the other.

Team colors are worn and/or waved by SUPPORTERS of the different teams; WHITE is the predominate color *all* around the stadium. The majority root for ILDERIM'S LOCAL DRIVER.

At various locations on the track different competitions are taking place: RUNNING, the LONG JUMP, WRESTLING and BOXING. The atmosphere is electric.

A BAND OF TRUMPETERS blast several notes: It is the signal that this part of the games is coming to an end and preparations are underway for the big event: *THE CHARIOT RACE...*

In the center of the stands, with the best view of the track, is an area of great luxury where all the WEALTHY, THE ELITE, DIGNITARIES, VIP'S, ROMAN MILITARY AND DIPLOMATS GATHER... GOVERNOR PONTIUS PILATE, looking regal, holds center stage.

Within the forty foot wall that encloses the entire track are entrances to different locations. Inside one massive entryway are the stables and rooms for the CHARIOTEERS, their HORSES, GROOMS and AIDES.

INT. CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA STABLES - CONTINUOUS

The CHARIOTS are being prepared and the horses are being hitched to them. The OWNERS talk to their DRIVERS...

MESALLA is nowhere to be seen as his chariot, which is opulent: scarlet with bold and bright gold carvings, is being prepared. The other chariots are less ornate and adorned with the colors of each team: WHITE - BLUE - GREEN - BLACK - YELLOW...

Sheik Ilderim is with his *horses*, talking and encouraging each one of them. His YOUNG JEWISH DRIVER, wearing WHITE, stands nearby him, looking very nervous.

MESALLA enters, full of bravado, wearing a tunic of SCARLET/GOLD; the colors of Rome. He acknowledges the cheers from his scarlet/gold wearing Roman entourage. He sees Ilderim with his YOUNG DRIVER. Mesalla stares at the young driver, trying to intimidate him - it works, the YOUNG DRIVER shyly turns away. Mesalla laughs.

SHEIK ILDERIM
(to young driver and loud enough for others to hear)
Remember, be first to the wall. He who gets the wall, the *inside* track, will have the best chance to win.

Mesalla overhears and hollers to Ilderim,

MESALLA
If he does not *'understand'* even that simple tactic, maybe he should be *cleaning* the horses and not *driving* them!

Everyone nearby laughs. Mesalla's boards his chariot.

The other CHARIOT *DRIVERS* board their chariots, make a few more adjustments and ride them out onto the track. EXCEPT for Ilderim's YOUNG DRIVER: he is having trouble controlling his horses.

EXT. CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA - CONTINUOUS

An excited roar greets the CHARIOTEERS.

IN THE CROWD: ***ESTER and SIMONIDES.*** They rise with the crowd on seeing the CHARIOTEERS. They are surrounded by a sea of WHITE fabric- clothes, flags etc... There are concerned rumblings from the crowd: *"Where is Ilderim's chariot?" "Has he withdrawn?" "Maybe he knew he would lose."*

ON THE TRACK: The Charioteers are trying to control their excited horses... The DRIVER in Blue hollers to GREEN DRIVER,

BLUE DRIVER
Where is Ilderim's driver?

GREEN DRIVER
He holds up the race.

Mesalla overhears,

MESALLA
I don't think he knows where the track is!

Blue and Green DRIVERS laugh. YELLOW DRIVER and BLACK DRIVER are waving to their few supporters.

Above the chalk line hangs SEVEN large metal DOLPHINS leaping sky-wards. Each indicates a lap and when a DOLPHIN faces down, *a lap is over.*

Ilderim's CHARIOTEER finally enters the arena causing a *deafening ROAR of approval!* A smattering of BOOS echo from the ROMAN fans.

Mesalla shakes his head in bemusement - *until* he sees Ilderim's driver: **It is *JUDAH!***

Mesalla is *STUNNED* - loses control of his reins, his horses gallop off *across* the track and over the white chalk starting line. He regains control but not without looking foolish.

JUDAH eyes MESALLA, raises his right hand and bends his *'ring'* finger to indicate he still has his finger! Mesalla is unnerved, knows this has all been planned...

The drivers are a couple hundred feet from the chalk starting line: YELLOW DRIVER has hustled his way to the *DESIRED INSIDE WALL* as the horses walk *towards* the starting line...

Mesalla, rejoining the other chariots in the *opposite direction, coming from the starting line*, suddenly and deliberately charges *head on at* the Yellow Driver... Yellow Driver *panics* and pulls his team away. Mesalla's plan works as he whips his chariot around and gains the *wall* position.

All DRIVERS are at the starting line- their handlers barely able to calm the excited frenzied horses - while waiting for the signal to start.

ESTER and SIMONIDES *recognize* JUDAH! Both are bewildered.

PILATE is in the stands directly at the starting line - a trumpet sounds - the arena falls silent... Pilate raises a handkerchief - drops it - TRUMPETER *blasts* a long note...

THE RACE BEGINS...

(This will be a brutal, bloody and deadly race for DRIVERS, HORSES, WRANGLERS, MEDICS and USHERS... There are no rules in chariot racing... You can do ANYTHING_to win... You can drive other chariots into the wall or into each other. You do not need to avoid other DRIVERS or loose horses if they are in your way, you can run them down. This is a fight to the death, a Gladiator battle but with a CHARIOT and FOUR HORSES!)

MESALLA, FIGHTING FOR HIS LIFE - WHIPS HIS HORSES FROM THE START AND KEEPS THE INSIDE WALL POSITION...

JUDAH DOES NOT INITIALLY WHIP HIS HORSES. He uses his skills to avoid causing death and mayhem.

THE FIRST *FIVE LAPS* ARE RUTHLESS, CHAOTIC AND DEADLY...

YELLOW DRIVER'S horses trip and crumble on each other... the crowd gasps in horror as YELLOW DRIVER is *tossed* into the mayhem of panicked horses and is *crushed...*

WRANGLERS and USHERS/MEDICS rush on the track to get the horses and YELLOW DRIVER off the track...

The other chariots turn the corner - the Ushers are in the *middle of the track...* There is a *pile up* and carnage as BLUE DRIVER is sent head first *into* the wall, killed instantly, his horses panic and run wild *around* and *across* the track...

MESALLA will hold the lead with Judah trailing him...

Mesalla is ruthless and cuts right *across* two chariots, BLACK has his wheels *ride up* the inside wall and miraculously it does *not* flip...

The crowd cheer wildly. Blood lust is in the air. Wagers are on going.

LAP SIX:

MESALLA and JUDAH are *neck and neck* - Mesalla whips at Judah, who gets sliced and bloodied. Judah is *focused*, the same look as when he was at the oars...

JUDAH on the straight, drops *behind* GREEN... JUDAH suddenly unfurls his whip and cracks it *above* his horses, they go faster... His speed pushes GREEN'S horses faster...

GREEN catches up with Mesalla as they go around the second corner of LAP SIX. Mesalla holds off GREEN. BLACK is a close fourth behind Judah.

FINAL LAP.

JUDAH pulls a little wide and *snaps* his whip, his horses respond, he has held off pushing his team until this last lap...

Judah overtakes GREEN, catches up and is now *neck and neck* again with Mesalla - Judah won't look at him - he's focused only on his team...

Mesalla *whip*s Judah *around* his neck - Judah does not flinch, does not waver - focuses on his team and pulls off Mesalla's whip...

Mesalla's whip gets *tangled* on Judah's chariot, Mesalla tries pulling it loose, he can't, he unintentionally *pulls* on his own reins, his horses *react* - they veer up *onto* Judah's chariot... Mesalla is *thrown,* his chariot *splinters* and *breaks* apart - he is dragged by his horses - GREEN'S horse*s trample over* Mesalla - he horrifically bounces *under* GREEN'S chariot - Mesalla's reins break and he slides to a stop... BLACK'S horses run *over* Mesalla...

Judah does not look back... He cracks his whip, he has the lead turning into the final bend...

JUDAH WINS! The crowd, a sea of white, goes wild!

The USHERS/MEDICS, Drusus and other soldiers gently lift Mesalla onto a stretcher and carry him off... Mesalla is lifeless.

JUDAH drives his chariot in front of Pilate's platform and is swarmed by the CROWDS who have left the stands to rush across the track to greet him. He is held high above a sea of white...

PILATE'S PLATFORM: Judah walks up the steps and is met by Sheik Ilderim, they embrace.

SHEIK ILDERIM
We have accomplished something important today, you and I.
(smiles)
But think what you have done for me. In every black tent down to the Akaba and to the ocean, and across to the Euphrates, and beyond to the sea of the Scythians, my horses will be talked of. They will sing songs of them and this day!

Judah sees a dumbfounded ESTER and SIMONIDES. He hugs her as tears flow from her. He embraces a disbelieving Simonides.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Wait for me...

She nods, '*yes*' as Judah is swept by the surging crowd towards an awaiting Pilate. The Roman elites *hiss* at Judah.

PONTIUS PILATE
(consummate politician)
Fellow Romans why do you not cheer... Yes, the victor is a Jew! But he is also the adopted son of Consul, QUINTUS ARRIUS, a hero to Rome and friend to Caesar!
(he introduces Judah)
I give you, Octavius, Quintus Arrius!

Suddenly the Romans embrace *'their'* winner and cheer along with the rest of the stadium.

PONTIUS PILATE (CONT'D)
(quietly to Judah)
When I saw you were Ilderim's Jew, I changed my wager. I learned my lesson not to bet against you from your days at Circus Maximus.

They shake hands... A SOLDIER crosses to Pilate and hands him a small leather pouch. Pilate opens it.

PONTIUS PILATE (CONT'D)
Once I knew you were here, I sent for this... It seems you have a habit of rising from the dead!

From the pouch, he takes out Judah's *'Quintus'* ring and gives it to him. Judah places it back on his finger.

PONTIUS PILATE (CONT'D)
This belongs to you. I do not know how Mesalla got it and am not sure I want to know or even if it matters now. I am pleased not to have to send this to Caesar.

Pilate is given a velvet cushion with a *'victors'* laurel leaf headband on it. He places the laurel band on Judah's head... The crowd roars!

INT. CIRCUS TIBERIUS ARENA MEDICAL ROOM - LATER

The GAME'S ATHLETES are being attended to for different injuries including several of the CHARIOTEERS.

A bloodied MESALLA is surrounded by a somber DRUSUS and other SOLDIERS.

DOCTOR
(to Mesalla)
-Your legs are crushed. You will *never* walk again.

JUDAH *enters.* Soldiers react - Drusus quells tells. Judah has *no sympathy* on seeing Mesalla's shattered legs and body. Mesalla does not flinch from Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR
You obligation to Ilderim was always *mine.* You are indebted to *me.* Until you pay back everything, I *own* your life, Mesalla. You destroyed everyone that I held dear, now all that is important to you is gone too.

Judah turns to leave.

MESALLA
You once told me I would never be rid of you. It seems the Gods would have it so. You think you have beaten me, Judah. But you haven't and you *never* will. I, and I alone, know where your mother and Tirzah are. They are *alive!*

Judah, jolted, turns, leaps on Mesalla and *chokes* him...

JUDAH BEN HUR
You *taunt* me. Hades is not depraved enough for a demon like you!

Soldiers react and try to pull Judah away.

MESALLA
(gasping)
For as long as you live, you will *never* see them again.

Judah suddenly *releases* Mesalla.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I will not give you the easy way out of this life. Yours is the death of living...

Judah turns and exits...

MESALLA
And so to yours, Judah! So to yours!

EXT. HUR PALACE - NIGHT

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

The courtyard has been cleaned up but it is still empty of any semblance of life.

DINING ROOM: barely furnished. A SERVANT is clearing plates from the sparse table. SIMONIDES and ILDERIM are in a somber mood.

ROOFTOP DECK: JUDAH and ESTER sit on cushions. She holds his hands.

ESTER
-What is to become of us? You and I?

JUDAH BEN HUR
I am not the man you knew.

ESTER
But you love me?

JUDAH BEN HUR
Without doubt, but-

ESTER
-Then we start from there-

JUDAH BEN HUR
-If only I could. I have done things-

ESTER
-To survive-

JUDAH BEN HUR
No! I made decisions. Quintus warned me- I cannot justify them away because of what befell me-

Her hopes are *crushed.* Simonides makes a noise to let them know he is coming... She quickly gathers herself, wipes away obvious tears and rushes past her father. There is no pretense between Judah and Simonides.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I am sorry, Simonides. It was not *love* that kept me alive.

SIMONIDES
I know, Judah. But maybe it could now... There is someone to see you.

COURTYARD: CAPTAIN DRUSUS is *alone*. Judah joins him.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Captain Drusus. Has Mesalla sent you?

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
No. I came to tell you that I leave for Rome tomorrow. My close association with Tribune Mesalla has raised certain questions that Rome insists on my answering.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I hope you will do the honorable thing.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
As a soldier, it is easy to say that I was just obeying orders, and there is a truth in that...

Drusus won't look Judah in the eye.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS (CONT'D)
We are trained that our lives depend on the orders we are given, even though sometimes, you question them-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Do you have something to say, Captain?

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
I didn't think I had until your encounter with Mesalla in the medical station on Sunday. You know of the Rabbi, Jesus?

Judah nods.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS (CONT'D)
I was sent to observe him. There is concern he may be instigating a rebellion.

JUDAH BEN HUR
He speaks only of peace.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
He has upset some of your Jewish leaders. They say he is a blasphemer - with claims of being the new Messiah; the *'Son of God.'* He is said to have performed miracles, to have raised a man named, *'Lazarus,'* from the dead. I don't know of such things in your religion. This Rabbi, he had a strange calmness that I've never seen or felt before.
(is in awe as he remembers)
He looked me in the eye and gently talked of, *"-all those that live by the sword, die by the sword..."* It seemed an obvious thing to say to a soldier but then he talked of forgiving and *forgiveness.* His words have stayed with me. And they arose in me again when Mesalla said what he said to you that day.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mesalla said many things.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
I *know* where you mother and sister are.

Drusus takes a deep breath as if a weight has been lifted.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS (CONT'D)
Other than Mesalla, I am the only one who knows.

Judah's legs almost buckle, he recovers and he begins to *choke* him. Drusus offers *no* resistance.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Where? I will not spare you like I spared Mesalla!

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
I am here to tell you.

Judah loosens his grip.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS (CONT'D)
I ask only one thing- that you *forgive* me for what has been done to you.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Anything! My fortune if you ask for it. Where are they?

CAPTAIN DRUSUS
I must warn you. I do not know that they are alive. But this I can promise, this is the final place where they were kept. If they are dead, they died there. Whatever you discover, you will never have to question what happened to them ever again.

Drusus hands him a scroll.

CAPTAIN DRUSUS (CONT'D)
This gives you the authority to search. These are the new names they were given.

Drusus, filled with shame, cannot look at Judah.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(indifferent)
If this proves to be true, yes - yes, you are forgiven.

Drusus turns and exits. Judah, *hands shaking,* opens the scroll. He reads it,

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
(to himself)
God have mercy that I may have found them.
(hollers)
Ester! Simonides!

EXT. THE TOWER OF ANTONIA - JERUSALEM - NIGHT

A formidable and intimidating *CASTLE* built by the Macedonians. Roman SOLDIERS guard the entrance to this garrison and prison.

INT. THE TOWER OF ANTONIA - CONTINUOUS

PRISON: Narrow steps lead down to the hellish dungeons far below ground, lit only by the lanterns they carry or the occasional ventilation opening that looks like a porthole on a ship.

A very anxious Judah is led by several SOLDIERS, a prison guard, GESIUS and a bedraggled MUTE PRISONER. Judah wears a blanket/shawl over his shoulder and feels the chill of this wretched place.

GESIUS
(deflecting responsibility)
-Tribune Mesalla gave me *strict* instructions *never* to talk to them. He said their devil tongues would fill my head with magic and soon I would be betraying Rome as they had done. '*If they die,*' he said, '*the cell shall be their tomb. They are put here to be forgotten.*' Only this MUTE was allowed near them. That's if it is who you are looking for?

SOLDIER
(to Gesius)
You got plenty of empty cells down here?

GESIUS
Yes. Why?

SOLDIER
We just seized that Rabbi, Jesus. I'm sure there will be riots and arrests...

JUDAH BEN HUR
Arrested Jesus? Why?

SOLDIER
He upset the Sanhedrin and its High Priest, CAIAPHAS. One of Jesus' own disciples, JUDAS ISCARIOT, betrayed him for silver.

The word '*betrayed*' stings Judah.

They come to a row of cell doors. Each has a small hole in the wall on the floor, to slide food and water thru... The MUTE points to a cell door. Judah is afraid of what might be on the other side of the door. GESIUS takes a key off his ring of keys, places it into the lock and struggles to open the rusty lock.

GESIUS
This hasn't been opened in years...

Finally the key turns - he pushes on the door - its stuck. He tries again. Nothing.

Judah pushes him out of the way and batters at it with his shoulder - it gives way - Judah falls into the cell...

CELL: Judah stumbles onto his knees, a ventilation shaft throws a little light into the squalid small cell... Judah adjusts his eyes as he searches the cell... Gesius comes in with a lantern and lights the room up... In the corner are *TWO RAGGED FIGURES*, no more than skin and bones - holding onto each other... Judah reacts, falls backwards...

GESIUS (CONT'D)
LEPERS!

Gesius steps back... Judah stares at his badly scarred, welt covered, MOTHER and sister, TIRZAH.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mother? Tirzah?

The two women are feeble and afraid...

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
It's me, *Judah.*

Mother looks at him, confused.

MOTHER
This is a trick. A cruel game. Why do you torment so?

JUDAH BEN HUR
No, mother. It is really me, *Judah.*

TIRZAH
Judah! Don't come any closer. U*nclean! Unclean!*

The two women turn away and hide under the rags.

MOTHER
Unclean.

Tirzah peaks out from her rags, she stares hard at Judah.

TIRZAH
It's *Judah!* Thank you, Lord. Thank you...

MOTHER
(unable to take it in)
Judah!?

GESIUS
They're *lepers*. They need to be put outside the city straight away.

Both women begin to cry. Judah's natural instinct is to embrace them. Gesius stops him,

GESIUS (CONT'D)
Don't be a *fool.* You'll die a cruel death too.

Judah is torn between love and logic. He stands back but hands them his blanket/shawl.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(heartbroken)
Forgive me...

GESIUS
Get them out and burn this place.

Mother and Tirzah rise... Their faces are covered but their crooked, disfigured hands reveal the ghastly scars of broken, flaking flesh.

CELL HALLWAY: The Soldiers, Gesius and Judah stand away from the two women as they exit their cell. The two women stumble, Judah steps forward to help them, Gesius again *stops* him... The men go ahead and are followed by the two women, who struggle to climb the steep steps...

GESIUS (CONT'D)
Take them to the back gate.

JUDAH BEN HUR
(quietly to a Soldier)
Tell the people I came with to meet me at the back gate.

Soldier *happily* rushes ahead of everyone.

EXT. THE TOWER OF ANTONIA - LATER

BACK GATE: A wide road leads from the back gate into the heart of Jerusalem.

Judah stands near his mother and sister outside the gate. Gesius is closing the gate,

GESIUS
-You have to have them out of the city by morning. Take them to the Catacomb of San Calixto.

ESTER and SIMONIDES drive a small horse driven cart to the gate. They stop and Ester rushes towards Judah's mother and Tirzah. Judah stands in her way and shakes his head, *'NO.'* Ester and Simonides see their condition and turn away in horror and sadness.

Judah collects blankets from the cart and lays them on the ground in front of the two women. They wrap themselves.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mother, Tirzah. Climb in the cart.

MOTHER
No, Judah. Let us go our own way, now. We are of no use to anybody.

JUDAH BEN HUR
No. I will *never* leave you. *We* will find a new home somewhere. I promise.

The two women shuffle over to the cart and climb in the back. Judah grabs the reins and with Ester and Simonides, all three walk alongside the horse...

EXT. HUR PALACE - DAWN

The sun rises as PEOPLE are scurrying back and forth. Something is stirring in the city.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

COURTYARD: In the corner of the courtyard, comfortable beds of hay and blankets have been made. Mother and Tirzah rest on them. Food and water are nearby.

Ester huddles up close to Judah as they watch over his family from a distance.

JUDAH BEN HUR
-God abandoned my prayers a long time ago...

ESTER
But he may not have abandoned theirs. They are now free-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Free? Free to do what? Live in a different cell, underground, in the *Catacombs* of San Calixto? What humor does God have to do this?

ESTER
We may never know the way of God but what is faith if we run away when we are tested? Maybe if we can see the Rabbi, Jesus. He has performed miracles.

JUDAH BEN HUR
Nobody knows where he is since his arrest. We will leave here when they awake. I will take them to a small home we have on the Dead Sea. I have heard the salt water may ease their pain... They are not your burden. As my mother took care of me, so I will do whatever I have to do to make their lives tolerable...

She kisses him,

ESTER
I have no life without you Judah. I have always known that. Your mother has been like a mother to me since my own mother died. Tirzah is the sister I never had. As you would never abandon your family, I will abandon you or them...

JUDAH BEN HUR
What of your father?

ESTER
He wants to do whatever needs to be done.

Judah is deeply moved...

EXT. JERUSALEM - NOON

Streets are unusually *empty.* Judah rides a horse drawn cart with a cover over it, to *hide* and shade his mother and Tirzah, who rest in the back. Ester and Simonides are in a second horse drawn cart, filled with food, clothes and furnishings. A distraught YOUNG GIRL, runs along the street,

YOUNG GIRL
(hollering)
Jesus is to die! Jesus is to die!

Judah reaches out to the girl,

JUDAH BEN HUR
What are you saying?

YOUNG GIRL
Pilate said Jesus was innocent but the crowd wants him *crucified*. He is carrying his own cross-
(points)
On the street.

The girl runs off,

YOUNG GIRL (CONT'D)
Jesus is being crucified!

Ester joins Judah.

ESTER
What is it?

JUDAH BEN HUR
The Rabbi, Jesus. He's to be *crucified!*

He pulls his cart over to the side of the road and tells Simonides to do the same.

MOTHER
Judah, what's happening?

Judah goes to the back of the cart.

JUDAH BEN HUR
I don't know.

He instinctively reaches for his mother - she reels back - he stops himself - his eyes fill with heartbreak... He reaches for her and *embraces* her... She recoils but he will *not* let go. She falls into his arms... He reaches for Tirzah, she's afraid and then joins them.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
We need to go...

Both get out of the back of the cart. They are weak but seem strengthened by Judah's surety.

Ester looks on, confused... Judah has accepted his fate.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

She smiles in acceptance; his fate is hers.

TIRZAH
We have to hide ourselves.

Mother and Tirzah wrap themselves in an extra cloak to hide any sign of their leprosy. Judah holds on to his sister and his mother and all five of them head towards the street where Jesus is.

The street is CROWDED. Roman SOLDIERS line either side of the street to separate the rival factions:

The SUPPORTERS of HIGH PRIEST CAIAPHAS/THE SANHEDRIN who ridicule and chant for Jesus' death...

AND - The PROTESTERS *supporting* Jesus.

The Roman Soldiers *enjoy* the spectacle as JESUS comes into view, a CROWN of THORNS is buried into his head as blood oozes and covers his face. A sign hangs around his neck: *King of the Jews...* He struggles to carry his own cross. Behind him are TWO other condemned MEN, also destined to be *crucified.* A VOICE from the crowd asks,

VOICE 1
Who are those two?

VOICE 2
A thief and a murderer.

VOICE 1
Jesus is treated like a common criminal? May God have mercy on us all.

Behind the TWO THIEVES are the High Priest, CAIAPHAS and members of the SANHEDRIN Council.

Judah pushes his way thru the crowd, along with his mother, sister, Ester and Simonides. They watch as Jesus stumbles and the crowd reacts both with *jeers* and *cheers...*

Judah tries to get closer, it's too crowded. He sees a ROMAN CAPTAIN, pushes his way to him and shows him his 'QUINTUS' ring. The Captain recognizes Judah and the ring, he gets his SOLDIERS to make a way thru the crowd, right next to the road that Jesus is struggling to walk on...

Jesus stumbles again... His lips are parched. Judah grabs a cup of water from a nearby fountain... A ROMAN SOLDIER stops him, Judah flashes his Quintus 'ring', soldier understands what it is and let's Judah go to Jesus. He gives a drink to Jesus, who barely can look up thru exhaustion and pain... Their eyes meet...

JUDAH BEN HUR
What can I do?

Jesus shakes his head as if to say *'nothing'.* Jesus looks *directly* at Judah's *mother and Tirzah* - their eyes meet... Tirzah and her mother react... SOLDIERS push Jesus to keep moving... Judah rejoins his family,

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I will take you back to our home. I must go to Golgotha.

MOTHER
That is where they will crucify him.

Judah *nods* and pushes his way back thru the crowd. Cheers and taunts for Jesus echo behind them.

EXT. GOLGOTHA (CALVARY) - EARLY EVENING

The hill of GOLGOTHA (CALVARY): THOUSANDS of BELIEVERS are gathered - JESUS, barely alive, hangs from his cross, a spear wound in his side... The other TWO CONDEMNED MEN crucified alongside him, are already dead.

The BELIEVERS pray in silence. Roman SOLDIERS chat, look bored and are indifferent.

Judah is alone and near Jesus. Jesus slowly raises his head, sees the uncaring soldiers.

JESUS
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Jesus' head drops...

JUDAH BEN HUR
(to himself)
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.
(puzzled)
Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

He sits there for a long moment. *Suddenly*, his whole demeanor changes...

EXT. HUR PALACE - NIGHT

The streets of Jerusalem are quiet. Judah is at his small gate.

INT. HUR PALACE - CONTINUOUS

Judah enters...

JUDAH BEN HUR
Mother! Ester! Tirzah!

Ester comes running down the steps from the upstairs terrace, she throws herself into his arms...

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
I went and saw Mesalla.

ESTER
Mesalla? You saw *Mesalla?*

JUDAH BEN HUR
Ester. I have my *life* back. *We* have a life, now. I didn't think it was possible. It's a miracle.

He hugs her.

ESTER
I don't understand-

JUDAH BEN HUR
Before Jesus died, he said, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."* I couldn't conceive how he could say such a thing - and then, it was like a *gift*. I *understood*.

ESTER
Understood what?

JUDAH BEN HUR
After being *betrayed* and crucified, all Jesus could think about was forgiving those who had *wronged* him. I went and *forgave* Mesalla. And suddenly, I am *free.* I no longer carry the affliction of hate.

WOMANLY *screams* are heard from the upstairs terrace.

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Mother!? Tirzah!?

He and Ester dash across the courtyard... The screams turn to *hysterical crying...* His MOTHER, TIRZAH and Simonides appear at the top of the steps. Judah bounds up the steps... The hysteria changes to weeping of *laughter and joy...*

JUDAH BEN HUR (CONT'D)
Mother?

His mother and Tirzah are weeping with uncontrollable joy. He sees his MOTHER'S face... *all the scarring and welts are GONE!* She and Tirzah's leprosy is *GONE!* Both are *HEALED.*

TIRZAH
It happened a *moment* ago. It's a *miracle.*

Tirzah and Mother check that their leprosy has gone. Ester is *breathless* with disbelief and joy.

There is not a blemish on their skins... Simonides drops to his knees in prayer... Judah hugs his mother and sister and pulls Ester into the embrace...

JUDAH BEN HUR
A new dawn is rising...

Fade out....