

# The Cave {A Passover Story}

by Bram Floria



Yeshua introduced himself to the blacksmith and asked permission to look around a bit. Upon hearing the boy's name, the old metalworker considered what the word meant.

“‘God Saves,’ huh? Well, He can save us from the Prefect then. Please - Go right ahead. Look around all you want. You won't find much after Rufus' goons made off with everything. And I'll be gone all day working off this tax bill.”

The grizzled man pulled a few Tiberius coins from a pouch behind his belt, spalled and speckled with burns from countless hours behind the anvil. Before he handed them over to the deliveryman, he faked a sneeze. Yeshua clearly saw him spit on the image of the Emperor. The teen handed over the reins to the rented cart and mule; even helped to load some of the beastly heavy boxes into the bed. The load of spikes, nails and shoes clanged loudly as they landed, as much from the anger of the blacksmith as the shifting bed of the cart. The mule began to protest.

Yeshua inspected the contents of the boxes – Roman iron shaped into Roman spikes, Roman nails, shoes for Roman horses. He imagined the sparks flying up from the cobbles of Jerusalem as those chargers flew through the streets imposing Roman authority. He knew what the spikes were for. “Those Roman slaves never know how to get up a proper fire,” said the blacksmith as he mounted the cart. “It'll probably take me twice as long to get the shoes shaped. I'll be lucky to get back tomorrow sometime. Make sure the bar is set tight and leave by the back door that goes through the Inn's kitchen. Are you staying there this week?”

“No, sir. We arrived a bit early for the Passover, so we’re just visiting old friends here, and in Bethany tomorrow before our rooms are ready in town.”

“Well, good luck to YOU, then. If the soldiers come back for anything, play dumb.”  
The blacksmith sent the mule into motion with an angry flick of his powerful wrist.

Yeshua spent a few minutes studying the tools in the shop – heavy hammers, some flat-faced, others tapered or rounded. Long-handled tongs and pliers to lift or hold red-hot metal while it was pounded. Hooks to hang cooling objects. 3 different anvils of various sizes – all far heavier than the boy could imagine lifting. He saw one spike driven into a scrap section of beam. The lopsided, rounded head stood about a flat hand’s distance from the rough wood. He laid his hand on the cool metal. He slid his hand under the edge of the spike imagining what the condemned prisoners went through once the spike was set. What was it like knowing your hand would never leave that beam alive? How had this blacksmith ended up having to provide these tools of death to the Romans? He knew they weren’t used for anything else anymore. The specifications were exact. Painful, political death was now a science for these occupiers. He remembered how spies would leave one of these very spikes at the doorstep of agitators to warn them; how the blood would run out of their faces; how their families would run out of town in the middle of the night. Some made it out alive. Others didn’t. The boy felt the invisible ice work up his spine. He stepped away from the spike and turned away. He wasn’t here for spooky stories.

Yeshua locked the barn doors, stepped through the kitchen entrance of the Inn and out the side door back into the bright Spring sunshine. He walked around the mound where the shop sat to the cave in the boulder below, facing to the East. The pen around the entrance his mother had told him about was broken down now. His eyes adjusted to the dim of the cave and he looked around for the dry spot in the left corner. To his right was the damp seep that collected in a stone bowl in the rock. It trickled from there into a rivulet that left the cave for a pile of rocks and a patch of lush grass farther down the slope. Even now a ewe and her lambs munched at the grass. They were unkempt and dirty. He couldn’t imagine David letting his own lambs degrade into such a condition. He wondered if he should groom them. He wasn’t too concerned about being thought a thief if he tried, but he let it pass for the moment. A kind of sorrow was tumbling around in his heart over the sight of them. “There are so many like them,” he said out loud.

Yeshua stepped over to the place where the manger would have stood. He had to stoop a little for his recent growth spurt. He imagined his parents cramped into this space trying to keep warm. Trying to keep *him* warm. He found a crate with the unmistakable import stamp of Annius Rufus. That harsh Prefect had standardized crucifixion. He lifted the loose lid. Sure enough, it was filled with iron blanks for those Roman spikes. Yeshua sank to the cold stone and buried his head between his knees.

How could his place of birth become such a storehouse of death? He sobbed.

Slowly, the sounds of other deaths, ghosts from the past, began to fill his ears. Roman swords flashing, stabbing – little boys dying. Every window in Bethlehem pouring forth the wails of

inconsolable mothers. And then it suddenly snapped together in his mind. They were after **him**. He understood the reason for the sudden move to Egypt. The many years when Bethlehem was never mentioned. The non-answers to his questions about his early years. The strange outburst of tears and laughter last month from both his parents when they learned that old friends **and their son** were still alive and living in Bethlehem. The new plans to visit them before Passover if they could get on the road from Nazareth soon enough.

It was too much.

“Please, Father. If you can take away this sorrow, please do.” Then he remembered what his other Father, and his mother, had always reminded him. “But do what you want, not what I want.” Even as he remained buried in his own tunic, he felt the scene shift. He felt the ghost of another sitting next to him, tense; alert; athletic. The murmuring sounds of a large herd suddenly changed to panic as a snarl came from the darkness. The ghost beside him sprung into action. Yeshua could see and **feel** him shoot like an arrow at the beast as it snatched a lamb. The covering was upon him as he gouged its eyes and throttled the lion with his bare hands. Confused, the cat rolled over and over as the protector crushed its throat. Bloodied and exhausted, the shepherd carried the lamb up to the cave and laid it carefully on the floor.

Yeshua raised his head in amazement as this David inspected the wounds of the lamb, ignoring his own. Pierced on all four legs it struggled to rise. David whispered comfort. The lamb sank back down, softly bleated back and breathed its last.

Yeshua was frozen in the horrid awe of the scene. Blood trickled down the lamb’s brow from where the teeth had pierced its scalp. And the ghost of David wept. His prayers begged God to take him, not this lamb.

Yeshua wept. Again.

The scene evaporated in the warming breeze of the noon hour. Yeshua rose from his spot and left the cave for the last time.

“I must protect my lambs.”

He walked down the hill to the ewe and lambs he saw earlier and called to them. They seemed to know him and came over without hesitation. He spent the afternoon grooming them then went to look for their owner. Once he knew they were safe he rejoined his parents and their hosts at their humble home for supper. Tomorrow would be a busy day with his cousins in Bethany. He looked forward to exploring with Lazarus and his sisters.