

PERSUADED

the Story of Nicodemus

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a novel

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Persuaded

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*Dedicated to Dr. Emily Weinacker, my wife
who believes & supports me in a so many ways*

PREFACE

The Bible is a historical record, a spiritual guide, and a road map to the future. We may discover the Bible in several ways. We study it either as a body of works or the individual words and their meanings. Another method is to read the scriptures according to a plan, or accomplishing a goal of reading the entire Bible in one year. *Persuaded: The Story of Nicodemus* takes a different approach—by using the words from the Bible and bringing the text and characters to life in a realistic story.

Although *Persuaded* is historical fiction, I base the events and timetables within the pages upon the *Passion Translation* version of the Bible. For two years, material about the Hebrew language, locations in the Holy Land, Roman history in Israel, maps, customs, and even the burial practices of Hebrews became part of the research. The goal of this book is one of historical and spiritual accuracy, and to provide information for the reader. When this project began, I didn't understand the number of research hours required to keep the story true.

Nearly every week, archeological discoveries in the Holy Land shed new light and confirm the truthfulness of the Bible. Scholars, intellectuals, historians, and religious leaders will endlessly debate the validity of the Bible, but the overwhelming historical evidence supports its truthfulness. Two historians of antiquity, a Roman by the

name of Tacitus and a Jewish Priest and historian by the name of Josephus, recorded supporting statements about Jesus, his crucifixion, and miracles. In addition, Hebrew records show Jesus existed and was a man of illegitimate birth. Therefore, *Persuaded* accepts the fact that Jesus is who he says, and that he died and came back to life three days later. Every person who identifies as a follower of Jesus (a Christian) looks to the day when we will see Jesus return and to set up his kingdom on earth for eternity. For us, we believe the words in the Bible as fact and base our belief on the miracles we see and the powerful changes in people.

In the Bible, the Gospel of John mentions Nicodemus only three times. We find the first account during his visit with Jesus (Y'shua) at night. At length, he and Jesus discuss spiritual rebirth and the intimate knowledge of God (YaHoWaH). The second incident occurs on the streets of Jerusalem. The members of the Sanhedrin and Pharisees discuss killing Jesus. Nicodemus asks whether the Jewish Law permits them to condemn a man without a trial and without the chance to face his accusers. Publically humiliated, they chastise Nicodemus in front of his colleagues, and accuse him of being a follower of Jesus. This public admonishment shows Nicodemus is young and not accepted as a full-fledged Pharisee. Had he been an accepted member of the Pharisees, they would talk with him privately. The Gospel of John records the details of this incident. The last record of Nicodemus comes near the end of John's Gospel and during Jesus' crucifixion. Nicodemus, and his friend Joseph of Aramethia, approach Pontius Pilate and request the body of Jesus following his death.

Please note several important facts regarding the actions of these two men. One, they both were members of the Sanhedrin and their

actions were in direct violation to the wishes of the Chief Priests and the Sanhedrin Council. Two, the Passover is the most sacred and holy holiday for Hebrews. This celebration remembers the day the Hebrews achieved their freedom from slavery in Egypt. Every Hebrew looks forward with anticipation to the Passover. When Nicodemus and Joseph performed the Tahara (burial rites) for Jesus, they gave up any chance of celebrating in the Passover. Since they touched a corpse (Jesus' body), Mosaic Law required a period of cleansing. Their actions disqualified them from the opportunity to join in Passover functions. It further required them to perform a three day cleansing ritual and then offer a sacrifice in the Temple before they could rejoin their fellow Hebrews. Number three, their choice to honor Jesus at the Tahara, meant they would incur the ire of the Sanhedrin and Pharisees. They could have easily become the same target of the Council's rage against Jesus and his followers. And finally, number four, their livelihood and incomes were no longer supported by the Council. The Sanhedrin comprised men who had power, money, and control. For their infractions, Nicodemus and Joseph could no longer enjoy these comforts. For their actions, the leaders would have considered them as outcasts.

Based upon oral and written historical records, Joseph of Aramethia operated a metals business with strong ties to the Roman Government. It's probably the main reason he felt comfortable approaching Pontius Pilate and asking for the body of Jesus after the crucifixion. It's a miracle Pilate released Jesus because in normal circumstances, the Romans wanted to set an example with public deaths and prolong their agony—as a warning to other citizens. Instead, Pilate allowed the speedy end to the execution. Pilate's action speaks

volumes about the relationship between him and Joseph and why he released Jesus' body to two Hebrew men, when the relationship between Romans and Hebrews was fragile.

Historically, *Persuaded* maintains accuracy through written words of the Bible, and extra Biblical writings. A pastor friend who advised and aided me during the development of this book provided the following foreword:

"This book is a documentary approach as to how Nicodemus came to know the Apostle John and Jesus. Their history and friendship development was intertwined well in the book. Also, Nicodemus' interaction with all the disciples is well conceived. This is one of those personal involvements that leads them to their faith and actions after the cross and burial of Jesus. The theory in the book covers the possible ways the transmittal of the gospel may have occurred."

—Pastor Robert Koch

CHAPTER ONE

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

THROUGHOUT THE ANCIENT CITY OF Jerusalem, anarchy gripped the city. Roman soldiers laid siege while resistance Hebrew groups inflamed the situation further. The Roman war machine displayed its full might as they sought to eradicate what it considered to be an uncivilized and ungrateful population. Caught between two warring factions were the average citizens, the people just trying to eke out a living and survive.

Central to the town, and clustered among many similar-looking stone structures, sat the simple home of Nicodemus. A descendant of the dominant ruling class of Pharisees, and a member of the religious council known as the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus was destined to rise as a leader. Yet, all of his aspirations were quickly being erased.

In this living anguish, tomorrow was an eternity.

“YaHoWaH, hear my prayers, for I am frightened for my life. Our town, the city of David, is being torn apart. Please provide a miracle and find a way for me to escape. For You are—”

Interrupted, Nicodemus swiveled his head and stared. With their fist, someone pounded on the front door. He stopped breathing, and his eyes narrowed in fright.

The banging repeated.

A voice on the other side of the door shouted, "Nicodemus, open the door!"

Cautious, he arose from his kneeling position of prayer. His knees covered in dust from the dirt, Nicodemus crept slowly and quietly to the door. He peered through the cracks between the boards and spotted two imposing Roman soldiers along with another non-military man.

Terrified, Nicodemus panted and leaned his back against the door.

Think, Nicodemus, think.

The knocking continued, and Nicodemus could feel the vibrations of the door throughout his body.

"Nicodemus, can you hear me? I am a friend of Joseph of Arimathea. Please open this door at once!"

The name Joseph of Arimathea was welcome news. Against all instincts, Nicodemus turned and lifted the weighty beam away from the door. He opened it a mere inch. He saw a physically fit, younger man, in his early twenties with his fist poised to pound on the door once more. The man's blue eyes were filled with trepidation.

His voice hoarse, he whispered. "Nicodemus, you must come with us right now. Joseph says it's not safe for you here in Jerusalem. The Romans have surrounded the city and are destroying everything in their sight. The city will fall by tonight!"

Nicodemus' eyes darted between the two Roman soldiers standing on either side of the man. One a centurion, the other a regular soldier. Muscular, they wore expressions of determination. Their presence seemed ominous. Nicodemus' knees felt weak. The young man followed Nicodemus' gaze and tried to reassure him.

"I am Leontis. Your friend, Joseph of Arimathea, says you must come with these two soldiers and me. They will escort us from the dangers occurring in the city. You must hurry, for there is very little time left. Joseph awaits us in a cart by the Gate of the Essenes. Now, please!"

While Nicodemus contemplated the man's demands, several Roman soldiers ran down the passageway between houses, chasing a woman and small child. Everyone watched in horror as the soldiers seized the fleeing individuals and butchered them instantly in the street. Blood splattered the walls of nearby buildings as one soldier with his sword sliced open both the woman and child in one swoop.

The two escort soldiers with Leontis burst their way into Nicodemus' house. They pulled Leontis inside as they entered and slammed the door shut. One Roman kept watch, his foot bracing the door closed.

He shouted. "In a few moments, it will be too late!"

Screams of terror and the sound of swords terrorizing humanity filled the outside air.

Leontis grabbed Nicodemus by the shoulders. "Do you wish to bring anything important? We have to leave now, or you will die."

Nicodemus hastily seized a large satchel, set it on his table. He stuffed his scrolls and research papers into the bag. As he reached out for ink jars and stylus pens, the Centurion knocked them out of Nicodemus' hand, causing them to spill on the floor.

Stunned by the abruptness, Nicodemus stared with an open mouth.

"Citizen, enough! You can replace them later. We must go now." He roughly grabbed Nicodemus and shoved him toward the door.

The heavy satchel slipped off Nicodemus' shoulder, so he bent over to retrieve it. The Roman centurion snapped the bag off the floor and pushed the group outside.

Everywhere they looked, crazed Romans killed innocent people in bloodlust. The Roman soldiers escorting Leontis and Nicodemus grabbed an arm of each man and marched them between two buildings.

As the four worked their way through the city, complete pandemonium erupted throughout the streets. Every time Nicodemus looked around he saw nothing but blood and dead bodies. Recognizing a few of the individuals as friends or neighbors, Nicodemus felt sick to his stomach.

The two Roman escorts urgently pulled Nicodemus and Leontis along as they moved closer to the southern wall of the city. When Nicodemus looked over his shoulder in the direction of the temple, he saw thick black smoke rising. Nicodemus lost his footing and stumbled, but Leontis took hold of his other arm. Running, the soldier and Leontis nearly dragged Nicodemus the last hundred feet by his arms.

Nearing the Gate of the Essenes, Nicodemus recognized Joseph hunched over, waiting. When Joseph heard the four men approaching, he looked up and smiled. Leontis pulled back a heavy cloth covering the rear of the cart. Multiple small crates, sacks of grain, and hay littered the floor of the wagon.

One Roman soldier hefted Nicodemus into the back. He then rearranged the cargo and pointed. "You, hide up there below the seat of your friends. Make yourself tight, into a ball and don't make a sound!"

Without hesitation, Nicodemus did as instructed and pulled his satchel in tight to his body. These notes represented his life's work.

The soldiers and Leontis arranged the cargo and moved the extra hay around Nicodemus. They then pulled the tarp back over the rear area.

The Centurion leaned in close to where he suspected Nicodemus lay concealed. "Not a sound or you will die. No matter what happens, the other soldiers cannot know you're back here. Do you understand me?" he demanded.

"Yes," came Nicodemus' clipped reply.

The soldier slapped the donkey's backside, and the cart jerked forward. As the wagon plodded along with Joseph and Leontis driving, the two soldiers walked on either side of the wagon as a protective detail.

As they cleared the gate, a cluster of Roman soldiers nailed a man to a crucifix. He screamed as they drove nails into his wrists. The detail of soldiers stopped their work and watched their two fellow soldiers with the cart. A sizeable menacing man approached the four intruders as they departed the city.

"Halt, who goes there?"

The escort Centurion stepped forward. "Step aside, Decanus. We are on official business per the legatus, Pontius Pilate."

The lower ranking Decanus saluted by striking his fist to his breastplate and then extending his arm forward. "Yes sir, Centurion," but he was suspicious. "What, if I may ask, is in the cart, sir?"

Irritated, the Centurion chastised the soldier, "Supplies for our unit bringing up the rear of this campaign."

The others associated with the cart, watched in shock as the Centurion pulled the heavy cloth partially aside revealing the boxed contents. Nicodemus froze, praying no one could see him. After a long pause, the Centurion pulled the fabric back over the rear.

With an icy edge in his voice, he barked at the Decanus. "Satisfied?"

The Roman nodded, "Yes sir."

The centurion slapped the donkey's backside again, forcing their journey forward. Leontis started to look back but was abruptly stopped.

"Eyes forward, Leontis. Please," mumbled Joseph.

After about thirty minutes elapsed, the four individuals began to relax when they rounded a small hill and encountered a full Roman detachment blocking the road. Two Roman sentries halted their progress.

Before the sentries could ask, the Centurion of the escort group quickly explained to minimize curiosity. "We are conducting official business per the legatus, Pontius Pilate."

"What's in the back?" demanded one the sentries.

"Supplies for our unit bringing up the rear of this campaign," said the Centurion.

Joseph pulled out a roll of parchment with a red seal and held it out. The Centurion escort took it and showed it to the sentry.

The sentry inspected the parchment roll and saw the official red wax seal, but then refused to touch it.

An officer appeared and dismounted his horse. "Legionnaire, what's going on?" The officer handed the reins to the nearest soldier.

The soldier snapped to attention. "Travelers with supplies to a rear detachment, sir."

The Tribuni looked at the escort Centurion, "Tell me, to what unit are you assigned?"

The Centurion saluted, "The Legio VI Ferrata, sir." He held out the roll of parchment, and the Tribuni never hesitated but opened the wax seal.

After reading the contents, the Tribuni handed the document back. "Check the back of their wagon, Legionnaire."

The sentry took his sword and slashed through the cloth cover, letting tip strike wood. Moving around, he stabbed several times. He lifted the tarp and saw crates, small barrels, sacks of grain and scattered hay. Satisfied, he nodded to the Tribuni.

Curled tight and barely breathing, Nicodemus watched with horror as the sharp Roman blade pierced the cloth striking the area all around his hidden position. On the last plunge of the sword, the tip nicked Nicodemus' calf, slicing a deep gash into the flesh. Nicodemus squeezed his eyes shut and bit hard into his tongue. He stifled a scream. The searing pain was excruciating.

Joseph kept his face down the entire time and instantly spotted red droplets falling from beneath the cart. Worried, he saw the crimson liquid forming into a small pool. Joseph held his breath.

The Tribuni used his riding crop handle and lifted the face of Joseph. "Name?"

"Joseph of Arimathea." He smiled up at the Roman officer.

The Tribuni looked at the athletic young man seated alongside Joseph. "What's his story? He looks fit enough to fight for the Romans."

Joseph snatched the left arm of Leontis and thrust it toward the Tribuni. When he performed this maneuver, an iron bracelet affixed

to the man's wrist revealed in Latin and Greek letters, the man was a slave. "His name is Leontis and my servant."

The Tribuni gazed into the eyes of the two men seated in the cart, as if gauging whether they were telling the truth. After a brief pause, he remounted his horse.

"Let them pass," commanded the Tribuni.

The high-spirited horse, anxious and ready to run, acted like a racehorse ready at the gate. The Tribuni pulled on the reins to maintain eye contact with the Centurion of the escort. "Give my regards to your Praefectus Castrorum. Perhaps we can be finished with these savages soon enough and return home to our wives."

"Yes sir, and thank you," replied the Centurion as he saluted.

The Roman encampment contained several thousand men, so the four-person escort gradually navigated the horde as soldiers surrounding their position watched them pass through. When the group neared the edge of the camp, Joseph saw captured Israeli zealots in a holding area.

Without regard for their ghastly screams, the Romans began hacking off the limbs of the Zealots. Once the prisoner was devoid of his arms and legs, the soldiers then decapitated their wailing heads. Other Roman soldiers tossed the severed body parts onto a colossal burning pyre. The stench was retching and the sight even more grotesque.

As the cart with the four individuals detoured around the ghoulish spectacle, Leontis glared at the Roman soldiers.

Joseph raised his eyes just slightly toward his slave and muttered, "Don't watch, Leontis."

"Why on earth are they doing this?" Leontis barely whispered.

Joseph tightly gripped Leontis' wrist.

The two Roman soldiers and their escorts traveled several more miles, and then the Centurion stopped their progress. They were now out of sight and far away from the Roman detachment.

"As requested, we've completed our task, per orders of the legatus, Pontius Pilate. Don't think I'm not repulsed by our performance, for I have just lied to a Tribuni and several brothers back there. And for what—to save a wealthy citizen, his slave, and this Jew?" the Centurion shook his fist at them.

Leontis doubled his hands and tightened his body. Joseph patted Leontis' leg, and then reached under his seat and pulled out a small chest. After unlocking it, he retrieved two purple cloth bags with gold drawstrings. Each bag was the size of two men's fists. He handed them to Leontis.

"Please pay the soldiers."

Leontis vehemently hissed, "Master, one bag equals the wages of a man's lifetime."

Joseph smiled, "Centurion, here is your payment for your services. There are one hundred gold shekels for each of you. May YaHoWaH bless you for what you have done for my friends and me."

The mood instantly shifted as the Centurion and soldier hefted the weight of the bags in their hands. Like gleeful school boys who escaped punishment for their misdeeds, the two soldiers smiled with pleasure. They grinned at one another. One soldier opened his bag and pulled a gold piece out and laughed.

"Yes, this made our deception worth it. I suggest you never come back this way again," the Centurion threatened. "The outcome may not be so favorable."

Both soldiers turned and walked back in the direction of Jerusalem. While they walked, they endlessly congratulated themselves for their new fortunes. Leontis and Joseph watched them disappear over a small rise in the road.

“Master, why so much money. They will just spend it on prostitutes and beer!” objected Leontis.

Joseph half smiled. “And I was prepared to spend even more to save my friend’s life.”

Joseph reached down and patted their stowaway under the cloth. “Nicodemus, it is safe, you may come out. We are now far from the city and any danger.”

Nicodemus didn’t move.

Leontis jumped from the cart and pulled back the heavy cloth. He sucked air between his teeth when he saw the vast pool of dried blood. Nicodemus was curled into a tight ball, his eyes jammed closed. Leontis shook the man.

“We’re out of danger, Nicodemus, can you get up? Are you hurt?” asked Leontis.

Slowly at first, Nicodemus opened one eye then the other. He paused and surveyed their surroundings. He was soaked with sweat.

“Quickly, Leontis, give him some water,” commanded Joseph as he handed the clay watering jar to his slave.

The servant helped Nicodemus sit up and let him sip some water. “Let me look at your wound.”

Ripping several long narrow strips of cloth from his outer robe, Leontis bandaged Nicodemus’ leg. He smiled up at Joseph. “It is a surface cut; not too deep.”

Nicodemus winced, “Surface cut? It’s not your leg!”

Both Joseph and his servant chuckled.

“You’re alive Nicodemus, and you’ll probably have a nasty reminder once it heals, but you’re alive and away from the city,” said Joseph.

Nicodemus felt relief. “Thank you, Joseph.” He looked at Leontis. “Thank you both for saving my life. You are the answer to my prayers.”

When the three men looked back in the direction of Jerusalem, they could see nothing but dark billowing smoke rising to the clouds.

Joseph shuddered and mourned over the destruction. “My friends, we are observing the end of an era for Israel. Our history is forever changed by what we have witnessed here, and I doubt we will recover for several thousand years.”

An intersectional mixing of text from the following book was borrowed with permission from:

- 1 Harder, E. Ruth. *Hannah Weaver of Life*. Russian Hill Press, 2015, pp. 294-295
- 2 Harder, E. Ruth. *Hannah Weaver of Life*. Russian Hill Press, 2015, pp. 294-295
- 3 Harder, E. Ruth. *Hannah Weaver of Life*. Russian Hill Press, 2015, pp. 294-295
- 4 Harder, E. Ruth. *Hannah Weaver of Life*. Russian Hill Press, 2015, pp. 294-295
- 5 Harder, E. Ruth. *Hannah Weaver of Life*. Russian Hill Press, 2015, pp. 294-295

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