

Mishiael (Former Priest)

My name is Mishiael. For all of my life, I was a priest of the temple of the LORD, but no longer. Now you could call me a believer or a follower or a part of The Way. Ahh, I can see that I am confusing you. Please forgive me for starting in the middle of my story. Allow me to try again.

I had the privilege of being born into the line of the Levites. Born to serve God, I took to his work with a vengeance. I studied with the greatest Rabbis and learned well. I became a Jew of Jews—a Hebrew of Hebrews. I considered it an honor to serve my God. Most of all, I wanted to serve him in the temple.

As is usually the case, my first jobs in the temple of the LORD were simple ones—you might even say that they were busy-work. Still, I liked sweeping the floors and cleaning, because I often got to “be” in the majesty of the temple all by myself. The temple was my refuge. No matter what was happening in my life, I could always find quiet and solitude somewhere in God’s house.

One reason I stayed in the temple so much was the Romans. Every time I went into the streets and saw the soldiers, I got angry. My teachers said that the Messiah would come and set us free from bondage—but it couldn’t come soon enough for me! I prayed for him to come quickly. I sometimes closed my eyes and imagined what that glorious day would be like. I even had dreams about it. Still, even in my wildest dreams I never imagined that at that very moment he was alive and—of all things—living in Nazareth.

Please let me make one thing clear. Many of us were searching the skies for the coming King. We longed for him to come and to set us free. We prayed for him to save us from the Romans.

The problem was that our tradition told us how it would happen and what it would look like—and—Jesus the Nazarene was ANYTHING BUT the Warrior-King we expected.

I know that many of you see ALL of us religious leaders as not only legalistic—but evil too. That is NOT true! Sure, we did care about the law—that was our job. Most of us, though, obeyed the Law because we wanted to please the LORD and because we loved him. Not just me, but many others were constantly searching the skies for the Messiah and praying for his advent.

I first heard of Jesus just a couple of years ago, back when my mother was dying. As her only son, I was in Bethlehem at her side. He came to Jerusalem while I was gone.

When I returned, I heard the stories about how he had healed a cripple on the Sabbath. You may remember the cripple—the one who always seemed to be begging at the Beautiful Gate. Anyway, they were all upset because he healed the man on the Sabbath—but I was more interested in this man who had the power to heal one who was crippled from birth. Because it is written that he will be a healer, my mind immediately went to the Messiah. I had many questions, but when I would ask one, the other priests would shush me. It seemed that the High Priest was very angry—because he broke the Sabbath and because of the sharp words that were exchanged. Caiaphas forbade us to even speak the name of Jesus.

Later, I heard that he was traveling all over Judea, teaching and preaching. Though he was not a Rabbi, he even gathered disciples. The strangest part was that he gathered commoners as his followers. There were fishermen, zealots, and (you won’t believe this one) a TAX COLLECTOR!

There were rumors about him in the temple every day. It was said that he had not only healed the cripple—but he had healed hundreds more. There were SO many reports that it HAD to be true, he HAD to be doing these things. I was delighted to hear news of him from those who came to the temple.

I even heard that he had raised a little boy from the dead!. Though he did not fit my expectations very well, I dared to begin thinking that he might REALLY be the Messiah!

When I finally saw him for myself, I KNEW it must be true. I wish you could have been there! Even though he looked average, there was SOMETHING about him. He had strength and obvious authority—but I could really tell from his eyes.

I first saw him less than year ago. I was cleaning up and Ananias came running up, all out of breath and he said that HE was here again—here in the temple! I ran to the outer courtyard as fast as I could. A crowd had gathered around him. Because I was a priest, the crowd parted and allowed me to move closer. He was talking with some Pharisees. The Pharisees were angrily spewing words, but he was very calm—so calm that it angered them further. Old Mariath was so red-faced and short of breath that I thought that he was going to die! I don't even remember what the argument was over, but I recognized at the time that Jesus was simply saying that which was true.

They began to ask him questions and you could see their glee as they expected to make a fool of him—instead, though, he made fools of them. Uneducated Nazarene or not, he knew the law—but more, he was wise in the ways of the law and even more than that, he was wise in the ways of God. He not only knew the letter of the law, he understood its spirit better than anyone I ever heard. The Pharisees began to bite the air in anger and to look for stones to throw at him. I worried about his safety, but there was no need. I cannot explain it, especially since we were packed around him so tightly, but just before they could attack him—he simply disappeared. He sort-of walked THROUGH the crowd—with an emphasis on THROUGH.

When he was gone, the one thing I couldn't get over is the love I saw in his eyes—even for those who wanted to kill him. It was definitely love I saw—but it was a sad love.

After what happened that day, I expected him to leave. I expected him to run back to Galilee and hide, but he didn't. He stayed around several days, healing and teaching in the open. No one confronted him until he healed a blind man on the Sabbath—another obvious violation of law. Still when he explained it, it made the most sense—at least to me. Something happened that day—something that spelled trouble. Caiaphas and the Pharisees, believe it or not, agreed on something—the fact that Jesus of Nazareth must die! If they only would have REALLY listened to him, they would never have plotted his death—but they wouldn't—or COULDN'T.

Those days, he was mobbed by crowds where ever he went. Though it was forbidden, I often sought to hear him when I could. Since Caiaphas had spies watching him, I was careful to keep back in the crowds.

Before long, he crossed over the Jordan and was simply too far away for me to go and listen to him. After a longer absence, it seemed that most in Jerusalem had forgotten him. There was little news, but I still thought of him.

Some time later, I went to Perea on business and I heard that he was nearby—so I went to see him several times. One thing I noticed was that he had begun to tell the crowds that they would pay a great price if they followed him. After that, I saw that the crowds thinned quite a bit.

It seemed that he was constantly grating on the powers that be and he was soon in trouble for healing on the Sabbath again. When questioned, he claimed to be the LORD OF THE SABBATH! They claimed that he was a blasphemer—but I was beginning to think he might really BE the Lord of the Sabbath.

When my business was done, I followed him around for several days, listening to what he had to say. Once, while he was teaching, he turned and he looked at me—right at me—with those eyes of his. Oh, how I wanted to run and hide! I was as if he could see inside me—in my soul. I was terrified! I knew that if he saw the real me, he would condemn me—he would reject me. Frozen with fear (except for my knees knocking), I waited for the disgust to appear in his eyes. Instead, just before he turned and continued teaching, he smiled and nodded slightly.

One day, as he was teaching, a messenger ran up—dirty and heaving. Jesus' friend Lazarus was sick—sick unto death. Instead of leaving right away, he taught for two more days and then set off for Bethany. When he did go, a crowd followed and I was in it.

When we arrived, we were too late. Lazarus was already dead. His sister Martha met us on the road and brought the news. She was SO upset. She shouted and ranted—saying that if the Master had come right away, her brother would still be alive.

When we arrived at the house, Jesus went to the tomb to mourn. I knew many of the family and friends, so I stayed at the house. Suddenly there was a shout—in fact it was more of a scream! We all scrambled out of the house and there were people running up, saying that Lazarus was alive. I ran to the tomb as fast as I could and I saw him myself—still wrapped up, but definitely alive and well! Jesus had done a lot of Messiah-like things, but this time he raised a man four-days-dead! Any doubts I had melted away—surely he was the Christ!

Funny how a great act of mercy and love can be the foundation for so much trouble and pain. Not only I, but others began to think—and to say—that he must be the Christ. Instead of reacting with joy, the religious authorities began to threaten his life—even the life of Lazarus. In a way, the raising of his friend was the beginning of the end.

After this miracle of miracles, Jesus slipped quietly away. I didn't know at the time, but now I know that he was giving private, final instructions to his disciples. As for me, I went back to the temple and did my job—hey, it's what I do, it's who I am!

Just before this last Passover, he came back to Jerusalem again. Boy did he come back! First, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey colt—just like the prophet said that the Messiah would do. "Tell the daughter of Zion, behold your king comes to you meekly, riding on the colt of an ass..." Suddenly, and at the same time, every soul in Jerusalem seemed to know that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah—the chosen one. They laid palm branches and even their cloaks on the road—so that the feet of the donkey didn't even touch the dirt. They shouted "Hosannah! Glory to God! Praise the LORD!"

When the religious leaders saw this, they were afraid of what the Romans might do. They were also afraid of change—especially if it meant losing their power.

On the second day of that week, he came back, but this time he wasn't riding meekly on the colt of an ass. He stalked straight to the temple and threw out the money changers and those who sold animals for sacrifice. He didn't politely ask them to leave—HE TOSSED THEM OUT ON THEIR EARS. He scattered their wares and tables all over the steps. Lambs and doves and coins were everywhere. He shouted that instead of a house of worship, his Father's house had become a den of thieves!

Caiaphas couldn't allow that. This time it was personal. The High Priest had allowed the merchants to set up—for a fee, of course. It WAS a service to the pilgrims. After all, you couldn't expect to travel across the land with an unblemished sacrifice—and if you did, it would probably have a blemish when you arrived. Those from foreign lands needed the proper coins. Still, those who sold also cheated man and God by selling unworthy sacrifices.

Caiaphas was now angry for two reasons—it was financial and it was about power. No one crossed the High Priest and got away with it. Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God—so along with everything else, he was a blasphemer.

All week he came and went. As he taught, he was challenged. He responded by calling us leaders hypocrites—in front of the common people, no less! The scribes and Pharisees were outraged—but I knew that it was true. They DID tithe to the nth degree and yet steal from widows and orphans—failing to keep the spirit of the law.

One of his followers came to see Caiaphas the next day. The Zealot named Judas agreed to help get Jesus arrested without making a scene and thus angering the Romans.

The next day still blurs in my mind. When it was happening, it tore out my heart. Late in the night, Jesus was arrested and tried. He was found not guilty, but sentenced to die anyway!

A crowd had gathered and they had the chance to set Jesus free, but their hearts and purses belonged to Caiaphas—and they shouted, “crucify him, away with the traitor.” I know that some of these were the same ones who shouted, “hosanna!” a few days before. Now they said, “let his blood be on us!”

The next morning, the other priests went to see the spectacle—to see him get what he deserved. I was heart-sick and stayed behind at the temple. I sat on the floor near the Holy of Holies and I prayed to God to spare him.

I was so sure that he was the Messiah—I hoped and prayed that God would send angels to save him and set him on the throne.

About noon, the sun almost seemed to go out. It was SO dark. I was afraid and I went deeper into the temple—thinking I would be safe there. The floors and walls began to quake and rock and it almost looked like the temple would fall. Suddenly, the veil which covered the entrance to the Holy of Holies ripped into two pieces—from the top to the bottom! It fell away and I could see inside. Only God could do such a thing!

I hoped that it was a sign—that the angels had come and that God had saved his Servant. Almost as soon as I wished it, another priest came in and said that Jesus was dead! Ohhhh—woe! Now I understood! This HAD been the Messiah and we had killed him—surely God sent the earthquake and split the veil in his anger at us. Ohhhh woe! He WAS the Messiah, but WE had killed him! I wondered what good is a dead Messiah?

As my mind raced, there were only questions and no answers. One thing I DID know was that I wanted no part of the temple and no part of what Caiaphas had done. I walked away and never went back.

The next day I lay in bed all day, begging for forgiveness and seeking answers.

The day after, I got up and wandered—in a daze—toward the tomb where they had buried him. A woman—one of his followers—ran past me, shouting and crying. “They have stolen the Master!” “They have taken his body!”

I continued on, but was almost run over by two men who were running back toward the tomb. Then there were soldiers and others. There were whispers at first—that he had raised himself up. Then there were more than whispers. They said that he was alive!

It seemed impossible—but I saw what he did for Lazarus. The soldiers said that the disciples stole the body, but I know better. A few days later, I saw him! I know that it was him—because he looked at me and you could never mistake those eyes. God's eyes! He's alive! He's ALIVE!