



Beggar Boy runs into the granary storeroom where Brutaes is hurriedly making a flask of vinegar wine.

“Brutaes, Jesus is in Jerusalem,” the boy excitedly tells the storekeeper. “He was teaching in the Temple and will be in Bethany.”

“Uhm, there is a hurriedly arranged crucifixion today for three people. They are already on the hill by now,” Brutaes mentions with a sorrowful expression. Grabbing the flask, javelin, and a clean towel, he hands them to the boy.

“Oh! Okay. Three is a lot. But I know a shortcut to Calvary through the alleyways.”

With a sense of pain in his eyes, Brutaes responds, “Boy, I should tell you that one of the men to be crucified...” Beggar Boy interrupts, “Brutaes, I must go to Bethany tomorrow, I must. Darius is taking me to see Jesus.”

The boy runs out of the granary. Brutaes is motionless for a moment and then turns over a table. He sits in a chair and puts his hands over his face.

Beggar Boy runs through the alleyways of his familiar past. He looks to the sky and notices dark clouds starting to roll into Jerusalem. He passes Amos working on a basket. “Hey! It’s you boy. And you’ve been eating – look at you,” the man exclaims.

“Gotta run, Amos, there’s a crucifixion going on at Calvary,” the boy replies.

As he says this, the wind picks up and thunder starts rolling.

Amos looks up at the sky. “Yeah, I know. Strange thing about it too. And the weather – these clouds have never been so dark before. Strange day indeed.”

“Yeah, you’re right – and so dark in the middle of the day. The sun was just out all over the place,” the boy responds.

Briskly, he continues to run down the alleyway.

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Baa-Foo starts to shiver as the wind picks up dramatically. Scooter scoots to her and places a torn sack over her shoulders. The young girl uses it as a blanket. The three beggars watch the crucifixion from the hill. Rebekah stands and squints her eyes, attempting to see the events on Calvary more clearly.

Scooter scoots to her side and looks down. “There’s three being crucified, yeah – three.”

“I can’t tell,” Rebekah confesses.

“Threeeee,” Baa-Foo mentions slowly.

“I hope it doesn’t hurt too much,” Scooter says.

“Don’t kid yourself! It hurts so bad! Really bad! You can’t breathe and when you try to go up on the nails to breathe, it hurts even worse, so you go back down,” Rebekah responds.

“Sooo, much hate,” Baa-Foo observes sadly.

“That’s because it is very easy to hate,” Rebekah comments.

“Yeah,” Scooter says with a sigh. “Got that right.”

Deep, rolling thunder from the thickening dark clouds once again shake the area.

**SG4** The three men hang on their respective crosses. Jesus in the center, Caleb on the right, and the other criminal on his left. There is a lot of confusion all around Calvary. Many of the followers of Jesus are weeping. Mary

(Jesus' mother), John and Mary Magdalene are nearby the cross. Some from the crucifixion crowd are hurling abuses at Jesus and the criminals. Religious leaders, including Levi, Reuben, and Ezra are there watching closely.

Leonidas and Darius are keeping everyone separated and at bay. Nearby, on the large rock, a group of soldiers are casting lots for the clothing and robe of Jesus.

Suddenly, Jesus speaks. "Father, forgive them. They do not know what they do." Caleb, struggling to breathe on his own cross, turns when he hears this and looks at Jesus. Momentarily, the soldiers at the rock stop and briefly look, then go back to their game. Bystanders mock Jesus for saying this.

Holding his hands upward toward heaven, Levi said, "If He saved others then why doesn't He save Himself and come down off the cross!"

"Ha! You who were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days; save yourself and come down," Ezra adds.

Sarcastically, Reuben comments, "Yes! Come down so that we may see that You are the Christ – and then we will believe in You!"

Many in the crowd (and some of the soldiers) sneer at these comments and make fun of Jesus. The criminal on Jesus' left turns towards the Lord and mentions, "If You are really from God, then save Yourself and us as well."

Upon hearing this, Caleb quickly responds earnestly to the other criminal. "Even now you have no dignity! We deserve our penalty, but this Man has done nothing worthy of death." Caleb looks at Jesus and says, "Jesus – remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

**SG2** Jesus, who was looking down to the ground, looks toward Caleb and says, "You will be in paradise this day with Me."

Darius stares at Jesus, and Leonidas turns away upon hearing this.

Beggar Boy comes running through the Eastern Gate. Calvary is only about fifty yards away. Another great and mighty rolling thunderclap occurs as the wind picks up again. This causes a lot of dust to blow around. Momentarily, the boy stops running and wipes his eyes. As he does so, he notices a young man standing on the side of the road.

The man is staring at Calvary and says, “He opened my eyes to see. I’m not blind anymore...how could this be happening?” Beggar Boy looks at him for a few seconds then proceeds to walk toward Calvary.

As the boy makes his way closer, Scooter sees him. “Look Rebekah! Look! It’s the boy. He’s taking the vinegar wine to the cross.”

Rebekah, who is sitting on the ground next to Baa-Foo, looks up. She spots the boy but does not say anything.

Beggar Boy approaches the crucifixion. He notices a lot of things that are different this time and looks around in a confused manner. The rolling thunder, dark clouds, high winds, and the large group of people. The boy begins weaving his way through the crucifixion crowd.

Standing in front of Jesus is John, His mother, and Mary Magdalene. Jesus is looking down at His mother, “Woman, behold your son.” And to John He says, “Behold! Your mother.”

Beggar Boy breaks out of the crowd. The first person he sees is Leonidas. Leonidas looks at the boy then turns his back on him. Beggar Boy is uncertain as to why. He notices Mary Magdalene weeping with Mary and John. The boy’s pace slows. Suddenly, Beggar Boy stops and looks at the Man on the center cross. Jesus is bruised, bloodied, and wearing the ‘crown of thorns’. The “KING OF

THE JEWS” banner is nailed above His head on the cross. Beggar Boy realizes that this Man is Jesus of Nazareth and is deeply shaken.

Dropping the javelin, the boy screams, “Noooooooooo!!” he runs toward Leonidas. “Why Leonidas? Why!?! What has He done?”

Beggar Boy breaks down in a stream of tears. “What has He done?” The boy starts beating the armor on Leonidas’ chest as the tribune attempts to subdue him.

“He’s the Healer Man!!”

At that moment Jesus opens His mouth and speaks. “I thirst.”

Leonidas shakes the boy. “Boy! Boy!” Beggar Boy continues to beat the armor of Leonidas. “Boy! Listen to me! You wanted Him to help you. But now He needs you to help Him. The myrrh and the wine. Give Him the myrrh and the wine.”

Wiping his eyes, the boy runs over and picks up the javelin and the flask. His hands are shaking. Tears continue to flow down his face. The boy awkwardly pours the vinegar wine on the towel. He lifts the javelin, but Jesus only takes a quick taste from the towel, then turns away.

Beggar Boy drops the javelin on the ground and falls to his knees and weeps. Mary Magdalene comes over to him and puts her arm around the boy. Darius also walks up and kneels beside him.

“Go, go back to the garrison,” Darius urges him, “one of my men will take you back. You don’t have to stay.”

Weeping, Beggar Boy pushes both Darius and Mary Magdalene away. “He’s not a criminal! He’s not!”

Neither Darius or Mary Magdalene respond.

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**SG6** Standing at the Altar of Sacrifice, (right in front of the Holy Place), the High Priest and a few other religious

leaders are preparing to sacrifice the Paschal Lamb. The lamb is being held by Caiaphas. A second priest is reading a portion of scripture. "Then Moses called for all of the elders of Israel, and said to them, 'Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families and slay the Passover Lamb.'"

Caiaphas responds to the reading, "The Lord is good and greatly to be praised."

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As the priests prepare to slay the innocent lamb as payment for the sins of the nation, Barabbas leaves through the Gate Beautiful. He notices that the sky is getting very dark. The clouds look ominous and there is a great deal of thunder. As the winds whip by, he covers himself in his cloak and continues walking out of the city. Abruptly, Barabbas stops, turns around and starts walking in the opposite direction.

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**SG3** At the myrrh tree in the Roman garrison, Mishea picks up the 'Yahweh Rapha' sign from off the ground and holds it in her hands. Weeping, she places it back on the tree and steps back looking at the sign.

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On the hillside overlooking the city, Baa-Foo shivers, and Rebekah tries to keep the 'sack blanket' tucked around her. Turning to Scooter, Rebekah says, "Can you see anything?"

"Only shapes. There are sure a lot of dark clouds now. I think He is dying. Do you think Figs is watching from heaven?"

"I don't think even God wants to watch this," she replies.

"Thhaaaat'ss wwwhy clouldssss soooooo dark," Baa-Foo mentions slowly.

Upon hearing this, Rebekah and Scooter turn toward her, but do not respond. They try to process that statement in their thoughts.

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On the dusty road leading away from Jerusalem, Aditya is sitting in the wagon as the oxen travel down the road. There is not much traffic since the caravan is moving away from the city and Passover. Several other personnel are also in the wagon. The Roman businessman is on horseback nearby.

Aditya notices that the clouds are ominously dark, and the wind is getting fierce. Her right hand is chained to the wagon but with her left hand she attempts to cover herself with a blanket. She looks to the sky and starts singing.

*Jesus, mend our hearts, set us free,  
Jesus, shine Your light, help us to see,*

*No dark clouds can bind You,  
No dark clouds unconquered,  
No dark clouds can keep us from You.*

“How much longer are you going to sing those types of songs?” the Roman businessman asks.

Revealing a small smile, Aditya replies, “All the way to Rome – all the way to Rome.”

The Roman businessman utters a groaning sound as he realizes it will be more than six weeks before they arrive in Rome.

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On Calvary, the sky is as dark as night, with the crucifixion crowd watching Jesus on the cross. Mary Magdalene is comforting Jesus’ mother, with John standing nearby. Favian and Cleopas walk up to join the

bystanders. Leonidas, Darius, and Beggar Boy notice they have arrived.

Rallying all of His strength, Jesus speaks out in a loud voice, “It...is...finished. Father! Into Thy hands I commit...My spirit!”

Jesus lowers His head and dies as great rolling thunderclaps roar through the sky. The clouds are immense and swirl angrily. The wind becomes extremely fierce. Many of the bystanders in the crowd begin to run away and seek cover.

There is an earthquake-type rumble. A noticeable fissure in the earth starts at the cross of Jesus and quickly makes its way toward the city of Jerusalem. As the fissure comes upon the large rock (where the group of soldiers were casting lots for His garments), it cracks completely in two as a knife would cut butter. This sends several of the soldiers falling to the ground. Darius observes this. He looks toward Favian, then back to Jesus on the cross.

“Surely, this Man was the Son of God,” Darius proclaims.

Upon hearing this, Mary (mourning for her Son), looks at Darius. Beggar Boy slowly raises his head also, looking at the dead Jesus limp on the cross. Leonidas stands silently.

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In his quarters, Pilate sits alone at a table. On the table is a full cup of wine. The floor begins to shake, and the silver cup shakes its way to the edge of the table and falls off. Wine spills all over the floor. He stares motionless at the cup and spilt wine. Then, in horror, he quickly rises out of the chair. Looking at his hands, the Governor begins to rub them feverishly.

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**SG6** The High Priest had just sprinkled the blood (from the Paschal Lamb that was slaughtered) on the Altar of

Sacrifice and is entering the Holy Place. Precisely at that moment, the ground begins to shake violently. The fissure cracks the marble floor and approaches the Holy of Holies. Suddenly, the massive Holy Veil (separating the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies) rips apart from the top to the bottom, exposing the Holy of Holies and the golden Mercy Seat. Caiaphas stands there stunned and in disbelief.

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When the earth beneath them starts trembling, Rebekah and Baa-Foo stand up and look toward the three crosses. The clouds have never been so dark, but the wind suddenly becomes very still. Scooter turns to them and says, "It's over. He is gone, I think."

"Yeah, Scooter, I think you're right," Rebekah sadly adds.

They hear a donkey coming up the hill from behind them. The three beggars turn and see Amos with his donkey arriving.

Surprised, Scooter exclaims, "Amos! You're here."

"Yeah, and I don't want three children turning ill on such an ill day," he replies. Amos helps Baa-Foo get on the donkey as Scooter scoots to the reed mat.

"Mr. Amos, sir, the boy is down there," Rebekah replies. "I want to go there." Amos looks at Rebekah and reluctantly nods with approval.

"The Healer Man that gave Baa-Foo her ears back, and the baby straight legs and arms, is dead Amos. But He was not a bad Man," Scooter affirms.

Amos looks toward Calvary for a moment and then he looks at Baa-Foo. "I know. He was a very good Man. And we will always be able to say how good He was. For many years to come Baa-Foo will talk about her good ears and the baby will grow up with strong arms and legs for all to see."

He directs the donkey to start going back down the hill. Baa-Foo riding and Scooter on the mat behind. Rebekah watches them descend the hill, then turns and begins walking toward Calvary.

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Eight Pharisees, including Reuben, Levi, and Ezra, are standing near the cross of Jesus. Darius approaches Leonidas, “Tribune, the leaders of the Sanhedrin want to make sure that He is truly dead.”

Building rage, Leonidas yells, “What! What did you say!”

Leonidas grabs a spear from one of the soldiers. He walks over to Jesus and thrusts the spear into His side. Water and blood stream out. Turning to the priests, Leonidas yells, “Dead! Dead you say!! Satisfied?”

The people standing around watch dumbfounded. Jesus does not move.

Reuben looks at Jesus and then at Leonidas. “Satisfied, yes, satisfied indeed.”

Leonidas breaks the spear over his knee and throws the two pieces on the ground. They roll toward Beggar Boy and stop at his feet.

Looking at Reuben, Leonidas says, “You have no king but Caesar – right!”

The tribune turns and notices Beggar Boy staring at him expressionless. Impulsively, the boy quickly picks up the pointed shaft end of the broken spear and starts to run toward Leonidas in anger. John restrains the boy.

Throwing the spear at Leonidas, the boy shouts, “Because of you, Jesus now has scars like me!! I hate you!! I hate you!!”

He breaks free from John, passes Darius and Mary Magdalene, then runs down the hill toward Jerusalem.

\* \* \*

Upon leaving his quarters, Pilate goes immediately to his office. With a servant assisting, he nervously washes his hands continuously in a basin. “I can’t seem to get the blood off. It’s not washing off. It’s not washing off.”

Watching, the servant sees no blood on the Governor’s hands but does not say anything. He gives Pilate a cloth and the Roman keeps rubbing his hands in the cloth.

“It’s not coming off! It’s still there!”

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The group of soldiers take Jesus down from the cross. They allow His mother, Mary Magdalene, and John to mourn over Him.

Proteus brings Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to Leonidas. Behind Nicodemus are two laborers carrying a heavy vase.

**SG4** “Tribune, the body of Jesus is to be turned over to Joseph of Arimathea, one of the Jewish leaders,” Proteus tells Leonidas. He hands the Tribune the legal document. “It is signed by the Governor himself.”

“I will place the Rabbi in my own personal tomb. It is not far from here near the Eastern Gate,” Joseph tells Leonidas.

Leonidas looks at Mary, John, and Mary Magdalene before responding. “And what about them? Will they approve?”

“They are close friends of mine. It will be an honor to place the Master in my tomb – and it is very secure,” he responds to Leonidas.

Ezra, standing nearby, listens to the conversation. “I always suspected the two of you as being secret disciples of this blasphemer,” he says to Nicodemus and Joseph.

“Master Ezra, everyone is entitled to a proper burial. We have here graveclothes, a shroud, and the myrrh aloe,” Nicodemus responds.

“It is the least we can do. I fear the wrath of God on our nation now,” Joseph adds.

“Is that so, Master Joseph,” Reuben mentions. “As we speak, Caiaphas is sacrificing the sacrificial lamb on the Altar. The Scripture states that ‘without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.’ Just as the blood of the lamb spared our forefathers in Egypt, the blood of the Passover lamb today will spare us now. That, my dear friend, is how to appease the wrath of God.”

An expression of hope comes across the face of Nicodemus. “Yes, Master Reuben. We must sacrifice the lamb. You have stated it correctly.”

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In the granary storeroom, Brutaes and Tiberius sit at the large wooden table when Beggar Boy runs in.

“Ah! Boy. We saved you some supper. Thought you might be hungry,” Tiberius offers.

“Your favorite stew – fixed it special,” Brutaes adds.

Beggar Boy stands in the doorway looking at them. Tiberius motions to Brutaes to say something.

“Hey – boy. Look – I’m really sorry about the Nazarene. I really am. He probably was a great Man,” the store clerk says.

Beggar Boy looks at them for a moment, then turns away and leaves the storeroom.

“Boy! Boy! Where are you going?” asks Tiberius.

Inspired by the author's two-year observation of the struggles and disabilities of India's beggar children, No Dark Clouds is a unique Christian fiction intertwining the lives of seven beggar children in Biblical Jerusalem with historical figures of the time, including Jesus.

The novel brings forth the raw emotions of what a personal encounter with Jesus might have been like for a youth living in Biblical Israel at the time of Christ. The story also gives the reader a possible glimpse of the lives of those who found themselves caught up in the Passion Week, trial, and crucifixion: people such as a slave, a Roman soldier, a Pharisee, Barabbas and King Herod. This fictional account takes the reader to Jerusalem on Resurrection Sunday, where he or she experiences the life-changing effects of that day in the lives of Pilate, his wife Claudia, the Disciples, Cleopas, and even the High Priest Caiaphas.

Beggar Boy and his companions all bear a form of disability. For him, five scars inflicted by a cruel man are etched across his face, rendering him an outcast. He has no home and no guardians to take care of him. At ten years of age, he has to beg and steal to survive. His friends are controlled by Taskmaster whose income is derived from the children's begging. Aditya, the oldest at fourteen years of age, is also one of the shortest beggars. Her disability (similar to that of dwarfism), forces her to sing in the marketplaces in order to survive.

The beggar friends grow up in a tumultuous Israel. The Zealots (led by Barabbas) threaten rebellion while the Romans (led by Pilate) are focused on squashing any type of revolt. In the midst of all of this, Jesus continues with his ministry and carrying out miraculous healings, even in the midst of constant rejection and persecution from the Pharisees and Sadducees. In particular, one of the stories that appears is that of the centurion (Darius) who pleads with Jesus to heal his servant (Favian). Another miracle is that of the blind man who is healed by Jesus smearing mud in the blind man's eyes.

By saving the life of a centurion (Leonidas) during an ambush by Barabbas, Beggar Boy is 'rewarded' by being allowed to live and work within the Roman Fortress Antonia. This also provides a way for him to steal food from the granary and distribute it to his beggar friends. A major task for the boy is the carrying and administering of vinegar wine to criminals being crucified on a cross.

When Beggar Boy learns (then verifies) that a 'Healer-Man' has healed two of his beggar friends (one from deafness, the other from deformity in the arms and legs), he sets out by leaving Jerusalem to find this man (Jesus) in the hopes of being healed of his knife-scarred face. However, Jesus is in the Holy City for the Last Supper, Gethsemane, His trial, and crucifixion.

Beggar Boy returns to the Roman fortress only to find out that a crucifixion for three criminals will take place soon at Golgotha. Grabbing his javelin and vinegar wine, he hurriedly departs to Golgotha to administer vinegar wine to the criminals. A climactic encounter unfolds when Beggar Boy arrives at Calvary only to realize that it is the 'Healer-Man' who is being crucified. The boy had wanted Jesus to heal his scarred face, but Jesus needed the boy to give Him vinegar wine instead. The boy experiences 'spirit-crushing' disappointment and betrayal by his own Roman caretakers.

The uniqueness of No Dark Clouds is that it includes Biblical study material embedded within the storyline as experienced by the characters. It truly is an educational venture into the 'realm of the heart.' The topics include: The ministry of angels; Heaven, what is it really like; the 'names' of God in Scripture; Messianic prophecies; the miracles of Jesus; the Tabernacle of Moses; the 'I am' statements of Jesus; and the 'Beatitudes' of Jesus. Though many novels and motion pictures<sup>203</sup> end at the crucifixion, No Dark Clouds follows the lives of the characters from the crucifixion, to the Resurrection, to the Ascension, and beyond. The 'empty tomb' profoundly impacts not only the beggar children, but the Jewish religious leaders, the Romans, and Jesus' disciples and followers.

A key fictional character is Mishea, a twenty-year-old Ethiopian slave who is the royal tutor for the Roman children in Jerusalem. She becomes the 'mother figure' for the beggar children, and is the first to understand Messianic Scriptures from the book of Isaiah.

'Life-trait' themes of the characters abound within the novel including: God made you unique, reputation matters, judge someone from within, true love can conquer darkness, and everyone has God-given gifts. No Dark Clouds offers readers a unique blend of Biblical history, geography, Bible references, and Christian doctrine, all wrapped around the profound story of a beggar boy and his search for and encounter with Jesus.