The Narrative of Joseph

New Testament apocrypha (2nd–7th century)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

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Authorship. These books were written in the names of apostles and others long after their time. They are not scripture, and what they tell is legend, not history. They are kept here as ancient writings that show what some early Christians read and believed.

Chapter 1

The Narrative of Joseph. Narrative of Joseph of Arimathæa, That Begged the Lord's Body; In Which Also He Brings In the Cases of the Two Robbers. Chapter 1. I am Joseph of Arimathæa, who begged from Pilate the body of the Lord Jesus for burial, and who for this cause was kept close in prison by the murderous and God-fighting Jews, who also, keeping to the law, have by Moses himself become partakers in tribulation and having provoked their Lawgiver to anger, and not knowing that He was God, crucified Him and made Him manifest to those that knew God. In those days in which they condemned the Son of God to be crucified, seven days before Christ suffered, two condemned robbers were sent from Jericho to the procurator Pilate; and their case was as follows:— The first, his name Gestas, put travellers to death, murdering them with the sword, and others he exposed naked. And he hung up women by the heels, head down, and cut off their breasts, and drank the blood of infants limbs, never having known God, not obeying the laws, being violent from the beginning, and doing such deeds.

And the case of the other was as follows: He was called Demas, and was by birth a Galilæan, and kept an inn. He made attacks upon the rich, but was good to the poor—a thief like Tobit, for he buried the bodies of the poor. And he set his hand to robbing the multitude of the Jews, and stole the law itself in Jerusalem, and stripped naked the daughter of Caiaphas, who was priestess of the sanctuary, and took away from its place the mysterious deposit itself placed there by Solomon. Such were his doings. And Jesus also was taken on the third day before the passover, in the evening. And to Caiaphas and the multitude of the Jews it was not a passover, but it was a great mourning to them, on account of the plundering of the sanctuary by the robber. And they summoned Judas Iscariot, and spoke to him, for he was son of the brother of Caiaphas the priest. He was not a disciple before the face of Jesus; but all the multitude of the Jews craftily supported him, that he might follow Jesus, not that he might be obedient to the miracles done by Him, nor that he might confess Him, but that he might betray Him to them, wishing to catch up some lying word of Him, giving him gifts for such brave, honest conduct to the amount of a half shekel of gold each day. And he did this for two years with Jesus, as says one of His disciples called John.

And on the third day, before Jesus was laid hold of, Judas says to the Jews: Come, let us hold a council; for perhaps it was not the robber that stole the law, but Jesus himself, and I

accuse him. And when these words had been spoken, Nicodemus, who kept the keys of the sanctuary, came in to us, and said to all: Do not do such a deed. For Nicodemus was true, more than all the multitude of the Jews. And the daughter of Caiaphas, Sarah by name, cried out, and said: He himself said before all against this holy place, I am able to destroy this temple, and in three days to raise it. The Jews say to her: Thou hast credit with all of us. For they regarded her as a prophetess. And assuredly, after the council had been held, Jesus was laid hold of.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2. And on the following day, the fourth day of the week, they brought Him at the ninth hour into the hall of Caiaphas. And Annas and Caiaphas say to Him: Tell us, why hast thou stolen our law, and renounced the ordinances of Moses and the prophets? And Jesus answered nothing. And again a second time, the multitude also being present, they say to Him: The sanctuary which Solomon built in forty and six years, why dost thou wish to destroy in one moment? And to these things Jesus answered nothing. For the sanctuary of the synagogue had been plundered by the robber. And the evening of the fourth day being ended, all the multitude sought to burn the daughter of Caiaphas, on account of the loss of the law; for they did not know how they were to keep the passover. And she said to them: Wait, my children, and let us destroy this Jesus, and the law will be found, and the holy feast will be fully accomplished. And secretly Annas and Caiaphas gave considerable money to Judas Iscariot, saying: Say as thou saidst to us before, I know that the law has been stolen by Jesus, that the accusation may be turned against him, and not against this maiden, who is free from blame. And Judas having received this command, said to them: Let not all the multitude know that I have been instructed by you to do this against Jesus; but release Jesus, and I persuade the multitude that it is so. And craftily they released Jesus.

And Judas, going into the sanctuary at the dawn of the fifth day, says to all the people: What will you give me, and I will give up to you the overthrower of the law, and the plunderer of the prophets? The Jews say to him: If thou wilt give him up to us, we will give thee thirty pieces of gold. And the people did not know that Judas was speaking about Jesus, for many of them confessed that he was the Son of God. And Judas received the thirty pieces of gold. And going out at the fourth hour, and at the fifth, he finds Jesus walking in the street. And as evening was coming on, Judas says to the Jews: Give me the aid of soldiers with swords and staves, and I will give him up to you. They therefore gave him officers for the purpose of seizing Him. And as they were going along, Judas says to them: Lay hold of the man whom I shall kiss, for he has stolen the law and the prophets. Going up to Jesus, therefore, he kissed Him, saying: Hail, Rabbi! it being the evening of the fifth day. And having laid hold of Him, they gave Him up to Caiaphas and the chief priests, Judas saying: This is he who stole the law and the prophets. And the Jews gave Jesus an unjust trial, saying: Why hast thou done these things? And he answered nothing.

And Nicodemus and I Joseph, seeing the seat of the plagues, stood off from them, not wishing to perish along with the counsel of the ungodly.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3. Having therefore done many and dreadful things against Jesus that night, they gave Him up to Pilate the procurator at the dawn of the preparation, that he might crucify Him; and for this purpose they all came together. After a trial, therefore, Pilate the procurator ordered Him to be nailed to the cross, along with the two robbers. And they were nailed up along with Jesus, Gestas on the left, and Demas on the right. And he that was on the left began to cry out, saying to Jesus: See how many evil deeds I have done in the earth; and if I had known that thou wast the king, I should have cut off thee also. And why dost thou call thyself Son of God, and canst not help thyself in necessity? how canst thou afford it to another one praying for help? If thou art the Christ, come down from the cross, that I may believe in thee. But now I see thee perishing along with me, not like a man, but like a wild beast. And many other things he began to say against Jesus, blaspheming and gnashing his teeth upon Him. For the robber was taken alive in the snare of the devil.

But the robber on the right hand, whose name was Demas, seeing the Godlike grace of Jesus, thus cried out: I know Thee, Jesus Christ, that Thou art the Son of God. I see Thee, Christ, adored by myriads of myriads of angels. Pardon me my sins which I have done. Do not in my trial make the stars come against me, or the moon, when Thou shalt judge all the world; because in the night I have accomplished my wicked purposes. Do not urge the sun, which is now darkened on account of Thee, to tell the evils of my heart, for no gift can I give Thee for the remission of my sins. Already death is coming upon me because of my sins; but Thine is the propitiation. Deliver me, O Lord of all, from Thy fearful judgment. Do not give the enemy power to swallow me up, and to become heir of my soul, as of that of him who is hanging on the left; for I see how the devil joyfully takes his soul, and his body disappears. Do not even order me to go away into the portion of the Jews; for I see Moses and the patriarchs in great weeping, and the devil rejoicing over them. Before, then, O Lord, my spirit departs, order my sins to be washed away, and remember me the sinner in Thy kingdom, when upon the great most lofty throne thou shalt judge the twelve tribes of Israel. For Thou hast prepared great punishment for Thy world on account of Thyself.

And the robber having thus spoken, Jesus says to him: Amen, amen; I say to thee, Demas, that to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise. And the sons of the kingdom, the children of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, shall be cast out into outer darkness; there

shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And thou alone shalt dwell in paradise until my second appearing, when I am to judge those who do not confess my name. And He said to the robber: Go away, and tell the cherubim and the powers, that turn the flaming sword, that guard paradise from the time that Adam, the first created, was in paradise, and sinned, and kept not my commandments, and I cast him out thence. And none of the first shall see paradise until I am to come the second time to judge living and dead. And He wrote thus: Jesus Christ the Son of God, who have come down from the heights of the heavens, who have come forth out of the bosom of the invisible Father without being separated from Him, and who have come down into the world to be made flesh, and to be nailed to a cross, in order that I might save Adam, whom I fashioned,—to my archangelic powers, the gatekeepers of paradise, to the officers of my Father: I will and order that he who has been crucified along with me should go in, should receive remission of sins through me; and that he, having put on an incorruptible body, should go in to paradise, and dwell where no one has ever been able to dwell.

And, behold, after He had said this, Jesus gave up the ghost, on the day of the preparation, at the ninth hour. And there was darkness over all the earth; and from a great earthquake that happened, the sanctuary fell down, and the wing of the temple.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4. And I Joseph begged the body of Jesus, and put it in a new tomb, where no one had been put. And of the robber on the right the body was not found; but of him on the left, as the form of a dragon, so was his body. And after I had begged the body of Jesus to bury, the Jews, carried away by hatred and rage, shut me up in prison, where evil-doers were kept under restraint. And this happened to me on the evening of the Sabbath, whereby our nation transgressed the law. And, behold, that same nation of ours endured fearful tribulations on the Sabbath. And now, on the evening of the first of the week, at the fifth hour of the night, Jesus comes to me in the prison, along with the robber who had been crucified with Him on the right, whom He sent into paradise. And there was a great light in the building. And the house was hung up by the four corners, and the place was opened, and I came out. Then I first recognised Jesus, and again the robber, bringing a letter to Jesus. And as we were going into Galilee, there shone a great light, which the creation did not produce. And there was also with the robber a great fragrance out of paradise.

And Jesus, having sat down in a certain place, thus read: We, the cherubim and the six-winged, who have been ordered by Thy Godhead to watch the garden of paradise, make the following statement through the robber who was crucified along with Thee, by Thy arrangement: When we saw the print of the nails of the robber crucified along with Thee, and the shining light of the letter of Thy Godhead, the fire indeed was extinguished, not being able to bear the splendour of the print; and we crouched down, being in great fear. For we heard that the Maker of heaven and earth, and of the whole creation, had come down from on high to dwell in the lower parts of the earth, on account of Adam, the first created. And when we beheld the undefiled cross shining like lightning from the robber, gleaming with sevenfold the light of the sun, trembling fell upon us. We felt a violent shaking of the world below; and with a loud voice, the ministers of Hades said, along with us: Holy, holy, holy is He who in the beginning was in the highest. And the powers sent up a cry: O Lord, Thou hast been made manifest in heaven and in earth, bringing joy to the world; and, a greater gift than this, Thou hast freed Thine own image from death by the invisible purpose of the ages.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5. After I had beheld these things, as I was going into Galilee with Jesus and the robber, Jesus was transfigured, and was not as formerly, before He was crucified, but was altogether light; and angels always ministered to Him, and Jesus spoke with them. And I remained with Him three days. And no one of His disciples was with Him, except the robber alone. And in the middle of the feast of unleavened bread, His disciple John comes, and we no longer beheld the robber as to what took place. And John asked Jesus: Who is this, that Thou hast not made me to be seen by him? But Jesus answered him nothing. And falling down before Him, he said: Lord, I know that Thou hast loved me from the beginning, and why dost Thou not reveal to me that man? Jesus says to him: Why dost thou seek what is hidden? Art thou still without understanding? Dost thou not perceive the fragrance of paradise filling the place? Dost thou not know who it is? The robber on the cross has become heir of paradise. Amen, amen; I say to thee, that it shall belong to him alone until that the great day shall come. And John said: Make me worthy to behold him.

And while John was yet speaking, the robber suddenly appeared; and John, struck with astonishment, fell to the earth. And the robber was not in his first form, as before John came; but he was like a king in great power, having on him the cross. And the voice of a great multitude was sent forth: Thou hast come to the place prepared for thee in paradise. We have been commanded by Him that has sent thee, to serve thee until the great day. And after this voice, both the robber and I Joseph vanished, and I was found in my own house; and I no longer saw Jesus. And I, having seen these things, have written them down, in order that all may believe in the crucified Jesus Christ our Lord, and may no longer obey the law of Moses, but may believe in the signs and wonders that have happened through Him, and in order that we who have believed may inherit eternal life, and be found in the kingdom of the heavens. For to Him are due glory, strength, praise, and majesty for ever and ever. Amen.

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Footnotes are left out. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it, and no modern English version has been made.

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