

JOCHEBED
AND THE ACCUSER

by Craig Cunningham

Published by
Canowan Books

Copyright © 2021 by Craig Cunningham

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright owner except for the use of quotations in a book review.

Introduction

I'm fascinated by the idea of words becoming flesh – the sudden manifestation of reality. A plumb line through my work over the past few years has been this notion that because we are created in the image of God, we create as He creates.

The world was formed upon His words. Nothing existed until He spoke.

Could that same power live in us?

A man named Peter once walked on water.

A man named Paul raised Eutychus from the dead.

Christ said we could move mountains with a seed of faith.

Maybe the idea of words coming to life isn't so strange, after all.

I don't know how to speak aloud and for something to appear before me. At least, not yet. But I do know that creating as an artist is the closest I have come to wielding this power. The artist looks at the blank canvas, the empty page, the unformed block of stone, and by his will and his vision creates something that did not previously exist. He speaks the creation into being – a living creation. And that creation then gives birth to thoughts and realizations and actions of those who engage with the work. In this way, a single work of creation continues creating. Creation begets more creation, perpetually.

The working artist thinks in projects. He wakes up and gives his attention to the project before him, and perhaps it takes a year or ten years, but he must finish the work. In the process of exploring and honing the work, additional elements are often created that may not be used in the final project. Over the years, I have written countless pieces meant to be a part of a project, but ultimately those pieces did not fit in the end. And so they are set aside for another day, or, perhaps, just for me to go back and remember from time to time.

I was recently looking back on some of these scraps of larger works while also considering that what we create – what we speak into being – is worthy of living. As I read, the thought struck me that these characters I had created were speaking to one another inside of me. In my own soul, the ideas and the characters I had brought to life were sitting around a table deep in discussion. The two lead characters of this particular

collection are Jochebed and the Accuser, as evidence by the title. Jochebed is of course the mother of Moses. The Accuser is Satan. The discussion at the table of my soul is centered around their conflict of visions; Jochebed seeks the wisdom of God for her own life and the life of her baby (Moses), while the Accuser gently tries to convince her that mankind is delusional about his inherent worth, and that it would be better – and more faithful to God’s plan – to submit to her basest natures.

As I re-read these words, I find myself enchanted and convinced by the Accuser. He makes a compelling argument throughout this book. While the others appear to be searching, he presents himself as having all of the answers. He is the anchor of this book, but he is not the hero. That title belongs to Jochebed. To search, and to keep searching while also being faithful, is the mark of maturity. While the Accuser presents the answers and explanations, she remains steadfast that God is good and has a plan for her life and the life of man. Her words keep the ship of faith afloat, despite the Accuser’s best efforts. In this book you will also discover the wayfarer, the warrior, the philosopher, and the prophets. Like Jochebed and the Accuser, they too are sitting at the table making their case.

Once these characters were created, they could not be uncreated. Neither can we.

And so, this book came about in an unusual way. My guess is that you will discover that for yourself. You will see that this is not a normal collection of poetry or short stories. It isn’t. These ideas and characters were born at different times and for different reasons. The material in this book was meant for other projects. Though, as I read it now, I am beginning to wonder if these words were always meant to live together as *Jochebed and the Accuser*.

The work is alive and has its own intentions.

It was intended for you. It was intended for me.

Craig Cunningham

March 9, 2021

Craig Cunningham

Jochebed and the Accuser

Jochebed Sings To The Boy:

In the beginning we had everything:
perfect love, beauty, the image
uninterrupted by amnesia.
Our souls were filled with light
from which we did not hide,
child child,
we reached into the fog and found
the hand of God waiting for us.
The Creator scattered beauty
across the face of the earth
and throughout the skies;
He wove the stars and the earth
together with the seas
and gave us a home.
A place to work and rest,
to give and receive love.
He made man in His own image
and man lived free in his own heart.
But our beginning was the end
of something else.

The Accuser Speaks To Jochebed:

I remember the fire falling out of His hands and the wind on His breath.

He pulled mountains from the depths of the earth and down I tumbled into the valley below. The seas rose and swept me into new lands and times which collapsed and were reborn like stars scattered throughout the universe. Winter arrived and the moon lay cold on my face.

This is our Creator, and His heart is a hurricane. He holds life and death as equal partners and pours them into one another as if from one cup into the next.

The swell of wind blew across my face and turned over the sands. He dipped His finger through the stone and down I went into the canyons, falling from one generation into another. The nature of life reflects the nature of its Creator, and in His heart beauty and power and revolution meet with such force that none can withstand the sight.

This is our Creator.

This is our Maker.

And there I laid in darkness.

Until the first Spring of Eden.

And man picked me up and put me around his neck to carry for all the days to come. I am the memory and the curse. I am the choice. I am the way forward. I am the weight.

If you think too hard you will begin asking the wrong questions, like where I began. Maybe you will ask if man came first. Dwell not on the irony of creation—the Creator makes man to love Him yet gives him a conflicting nature he cannot overcome on his own. Let it pass. Accept who you are. You want creation to be in a glass box for you to study and understand, but the truth is too severe. To look in that box is impossible, fatal. You would die at the sight of His power to spin elements from one life into another, and one age to another. No events occurred that can be laid on a timeline. The sun fell into orbit tomorrow. The grass beneath your feet sprang to life a million years ago and has been growing ever since. You were born on the same day as the planets.

Here is where we encounter our first problem.

Are you willing to accept the architecture of creation is flawed at the core, though the architect is incapable of making a mistake? Are you willing to suggest the architecture of creation is perfect but the Architect is flawed?

I recommend you stop asking questions. Accept your ignorance. Accept that your mind extends to the first break of the waves, but the deep is beyond your capacities.

I was there at the beginning, and still I do not understand.

But I do accept the role I have been given. I am a counterpart. A weight holding you on the ground. I am gravity, if that is an easy metaphor for you to grasp. And without having to speak the words aloud, you have loved me from your first breath. You cling to me as a child to her mother. But do not fool yourself into thinking we are partners. You mean nothing to me because I see exactly who you are. I know the length of your days and the capacity of your greatness and I am unmoved. Your life will pass like the sun reflecting on a sheet of ice. Not only will the reflection pass but the ice will melt.

The Creator made me to battle Him for the passing moment the sun reflects on the ice—your life. The value of your days is not up to me to decide and I have no opinions. I am made to desire what He desires, and so that is what I do.

The first reflection was named Adam.

He moved through the garden and felt the cold drops of rain falling from a sky that was always changing. The wind circled the earth and came back around to touch his skin. The whisper of creation led him up to the high places and he saw the earth spread out below. God made man in His own image, and man lived free in his heart.

But the Creator cannot be satisfied. His desire cannot be exhausted. One is never enough, and so the rules must change.

As He once lifted mountains out of the soil, so He lifted Eve to become a companion to Adam.

Now you will be told the secret.

The more of you, the more of me. I am made stronger and stronger with every crying child. But this is the architecture *He chose* to impose on all of us.

Do not mistake me for something you can pick up and toss aside. I came from somewhere more eternal, and now I run like a thread through the center of your heart. I

was whispered on the breath of God during the first days. He unwove me from the fabric of the universe and laid me down in the most familiar pathways of man. And one day, man bent down and picked me up.

To name me sin would be incomplete. To call me the devil is childish.

I am more and I am less.

God is a storm on the horizon and I am a shelter.

The Poet Declares:

Behold the basket where we keep the family darkness,
the pure and ancient kind that has been passed down
from generation to generation, kept in the basket
and never touched by the Light thanks to careful keeping,
our daily maintenance, our tender love, our obsession.
Grandfather Adam stored the darkness in this basket
and sealed the lid tight so that it could never be broken,
and this we keep beneath the bed to showcase only
in times of desperation, to recall that though our lives
may be short and filled with strife we hold this precious
darkness in a sealed basket, the summary of our power.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

What did you move
to make space for us?

What did you lose
when we first called out to you?

Your silence.

That lonely friendship you held
with a voiceless creation,
the obedient, repentant canvas.

The Wayfarer Declares:

Man

lost track of the wind

and lost track of his soul,

in that order.

Jochebed Sings To The Boy:

Our father
Adam walked the garden
in the cool of evening, his feet
pressed against the soil,
the wind brushing against his skin.
Always God was near to him,
close enough to hear a whisper.
That was long ago,
but we still carry Eden in our blood,
flowing out of our hearts to our feet
and into the tips of our fingers.
The beauty and suffering
of a covenant made long ago,
a home we spend our lives
trying to recover.
This is our inheritance.
He gave you to me, little one.
And he put a dream in my heart
to save your life so that one day
you would lead us back home.
But I am not the first to be
given a dream from God.

The Prophets Call Over The Earth:

Come out of hiding,
O philosopher king,
and bring your sword.
Imposters have seized
your throne.

Return from the mountain,
O alchemist of old,
and bring your mystery.
They're turning gold
into dust.

Come home from the seas,
O warrior poet,
and bring your verses.
Fools are making
us deaf.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

Our moments are materialized
as a reflection of your heart,
your vastness.
What you desire comes to pass
and we are swept away
in the waves of your stirring.
What words did you speak
to Abraham?
Did he feel the touch
of your fingers?
Did all the world fall silent,
as it does before the hurricane?
Listen to the warning of the birds.
You point where we are going
and we tremble, for this vision
must be intended for someone else.
The dreams you whisper in our ears
and bury in our hearts invite us to die.
Do not be surprised by our terror.
We want to keep on living.
The thread you weave
into the tapestry of air and fire and space
and all else born from the overflowing cup
you carry from one mountain to the next
cannot be removed.
Your Word is rooted
in the center of the earth.
We run like blind men not knowing

that we run within the palms of your hand.
How can we trust your wildness?
Many men are called into this wild place,
but the language of the call
is one only a few can understand.
You lead us to the edge of the earth.
There you ask us to die,
there you ask us to be reborn.
I don't want to die.
I pray for the courage of Noah.
The righteous madness.

The Poet Declares:

You are the silence on the mountain,
Father to the children you named
Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall.
You are the wind on the plains,
the fire in the heart of all things.

The Warrior Speaks:

The Word is good for you
say the profiteers and priests.
The Word will kill you,
says the Word.

The Wayfarer Guides Us:

Here's what to do:

dig and dig and dig

dig and dig and dig

so that you are lost

in the middle of the dark.

Then dig and dig and dig

dig and dig and dig

until you find the light.

Don't turn back.

We are all afraid

of the dark.

Jochebed Sings To The Boy:

It is love that shackles me.

I want to protect you.

But He asks me to give you
away, flesh of my own flesh.

The more we love the more
we are able to be wounded
and you are going to break me.

You will take my heart away
and here I will stand alone.

A mother should not be
separated from her son.

This is why I pray for courage.

The Poet Declares:

First, the Father strolls about the garden
in the cool of the day to discuss creation
with His creation, great-grandfather Adam—
a tranquil scene, to be sure.

Second, the Son appears as a fetus carried
in the womb of an unwed teenage Nazarene—
a humble entrance, to be sure.

Third, the Helper descends upon the apostles
with a violent wind and distributes tongues of fire
under the shade of Solomon's Portico—
an unexpected development, to be sure.

(They want the Son, as Philip wanted the Father.)

Last, the Son returns in the torn-apart skies
riding a white war horse, His eyes like fire
and His head wearing the crowns of all nations.

Angels sound the trumpets as the four winds
scoop up His elect from the masses of men—
a terrifying ending, to be sure.

Do not let your heart be troubled, orphans,
this is the promised Hour, we have accelerated
beyond water and wine.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

God of light,
God of love,
you expose us to the darkness.
All you offer me is darkness,
the invitation to the death
of who I wish to be.
A death of the love you gave
me on the day he was born.
Here I am broken.
God of light,
God of love,
you bring us together
from disparate places.
You join our hearts and our bodies.
We journey into the wildness,
into the dream alongside those
who call us father, mother, lover, friend,
for the journey is too much to bear
alone.
May the ones who flow in and out
of our lives remind us of the dream
you gave us, and may we never fear
what your wilderness will do to us.
Nothing is safe.
God of light,
God of love,
prove your love for me.

The Accuser Speaks To Jochebed:

He rested, and man took a breath.

I waited on the sunny hillsides to play the part I was always intended to play. There is no need to chase time when time will come to you.

You built your empire on the lie, but this is the reckoning of truth. All of these years you have read the words in your books and seen two distinct outcomes from Eden. Two roads splitting in the desert with one leading to an oasis and the other to death. In your understanding, the man and the woman could have taken either one of the roads, yet they chose the path of rebellion. You lament their choice. You lean on their mistake as an explanation for who you are, and why your own road has led to ineptitude. You blame them for the rapists and the murderers and the thieves who surround you. And the fake empire continues to rise.

Lift your eyes and look at me.

There has never been a second road.

If a second road existed, what would that make the God we love? Do you really believe a single decision by man could shift the story of existence? And if a single man has enough power to influence the overarching story told by the Creator, then which of them is truly God? Who determines eternity?

Stand up straight.

We will arrive at the end of these questions, but first let us sit in the sunshine and wait on time to arrive. For now, you must know one thing: I was here at the beginning. And I have been here all along. I'm with you now. Hanging around your neck. Pulling you towards the ground where you must return.

Man breathed, and life filled his lungs. He walked the garden in the presence of the Creator and all of creation. He absorbed into his soul the beasts and the plants and the air and the planets above. He looked into a sky that was always changing. The wind circled the earth and came back around to touch his skin. He found himself on the heights and looked over the earth spread out below. And this he knew: God is good. And this I know: God is.

The man we call Adam spoke order into the chaos of creation. He managed the days and worked the soil. He named the beasts one by one and these names they accepted and carried into their hiding places. He made sense of his days and feared not my friend called Death.

And now, the first stone of your empire must fall. Because your empire is built on the false foundation that creation was *perfect*.

And perhaps this is true, if the only judge of creation is God. But if the judge of creation is man, then the premise is false.

Because man became lonely. He felt emptiness.

God alone was not enough to satisfy man's eternal, uninhibited existence. A lack of death was not enough to satisfy man's craving for life. He sat at the table with the Creator of all things and feasted until his belly could take no more, and still he asked who else was invited to partake. It was not good for man to be alone. God initiated the journey and man grew weary of His company. He wanted more. What does this suggest about the communion with God that you seek in desperation?

You don't want to believe me. You will raise the swords of your arguments and wage war. But the man you call Adam desired a companion, and the Creator of a perfect creation was convinced it was not perfect. So the Creator amended his creation on behalf of an imperfect man's fleeting happiness.

I am afraid, at this juncture, that you are beginning to mistake my intentions. You still believe the answers are within your reach. You still believe your mind can hold the mechanics of a billion universes working together at once. I'm asking you to give up. I'm asking you to think about a lonely man in a garden you think was designed to be perfect.

The garden was designed to be flawed.

Otherwise there is no story.

Just as the Creator pulled the canyons out of the deep, He brought forth woman as a companion for man. They moved through the garden naked and without shame. The man showed her the animals and spoke their names aloud so she could learn to speak them on her tongue. They became one flesh. The nights of Eden grew quiet and predictable in the wake of a chaotic creation. The weather changed. The beasts cried out

and the sun poured down. The rivers overflowed only so they could dry up. Life with the man and the woman you call Adam and Eve passed quietly for days and months and years. But if I have learned anything about man, he will fill the quiet with his voice.

He will fill the emptiness with his own creation.

He will look at the vast great places and build an altar to me, and there he will burn the sacrifices intended for another.

In this quiet I sat on the hillside, the sun on my face and the moon creeping through my blood.

What use is pursuing time when time is already pursuing me?

Jonah Addresses Himself:

I am worthy.

I am a man of principals.

I rise by first light and work over creation.

I rule the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field.

I rule the weak because the Lord made me strong.

I entertain no regrets.

I deliver the justice of the Lord.

I wash blood from my hands for the sake of the kingdom.

I decide who is worthy.

I see your heart.

I see your wicked deeds.

I weigh them on the scales of righteousness.

I offer you a sword in one hand and redemption in the other.

I kill no one who is worthy to live.

I will escape this land and return to the place I belong.

I will return to my people, my family.

I am a king.

I am a ruler.

I am a warrior.

I am Jonah.

I am called to brave the seas alone.

I wait for the Lord to send me a good tide.

I wait for the Lord to recognize His beloved son, the king.

I follow the instructions of the Lord.

I deserve the love of the Lord.

I am a man of principals.

I am worthy.

The Poet Declares:

I am a son of light
and I am alive.

I am a son of light
and I'm not here to survive.

The Wayfarer Guides Us:

We wander
through one word
of His, invited
to speak our own.
Build yourself
a small fire
and carry it
wherever you go.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

You are always moving through us,
keeping watch over our days.

Weaving our lives together.

Playing out your story
through us.

Bless me.

Bless us.

We are wary of your slow hand.

Our feet have grown tired
of the paths that lead us
to our death.

Remind us, because we forget:

Are you honest?

Would you make a promise
you cannot keep?

Would you hold our lives
as hostages?

Are you good?

We have forgotten
the cool winds of the garden,
the soil on our feet.

Tell us your real name.

Just as you plant us
in the ground, you pull us out.

You won't suffer the darkness
hiding in us, and our cities
will burn in your judgment.

Ashes and smoke,

purified by fire,
cleansed by death.

Will we be consumed
from the inside out or the outside in?

We tremble before the cleansing.

The Poet Declares:

Maybe the zealots understand the world
better than we do – we, who filter raw nature
through a series of lenses before accepting
that this now-diluted experience is real.

The zealots act out in displays of violence
because they have accepted the first reality.

Fifty bodies dead are the same single body,
black tar dipped in liquid fool's gold.

Cities crowded with smiling golden men
for now, but not always.

Our nature is rising, unstoppable, pushing
forward out of the earth saturated with blood.

The zealots are tired of waiting.

They invite us to see like they see.

The Philosopher Goes On:

In the back of the cave,
far down the corridors we've built
to dig for gold and fresh water,
and in the caverns we've carved
to hide our children from cannibals,
we cannot know when the sun rises
or night falls.

The Poet Declares:

No society knows how to properly manage
the maniacs who rise up with no warning
and then one day attack a marketplace.
To put them in prison costs too much
but to rehabilitate them is a risky proposition,
being that maniacs can often fool rehabilitators
into trusting that they have turned a corner,
only to go out and burn a society to the ground.
The third and final option is to put them to death
just as you would a stray dog with rabies,
justifying the cruelty as part of the greater good,
so children playing in the street aren't infected.
To execute a maniac is to love the vulnerable.

The Prophets Call Over The Earth:

The story begins and ends the same.

In the days between, cities are burned and blood is spilled.

Armies circle our people like jackals waiting to witness the final breath of a kingless nation. We have come to recognize the sound of enemy trumpets echoing over the waters of the Jordan and drums filling the valley of Jezreel. The two princes named Chaos and Pride walk our streets by night and are pleased with what we have become – feral, godless, indistinguishable from those we once called our enemies.

Indeed, we bathe in the fires set by our own hands.

Once, in the generations that came before us, our identity was found in the God of Abraham. A covenant was sealed that our people would be a blessing to all the earth. The soil under our feet was bought with the blood and promises and suffering of our fathers.

And now we trade it all away for a kiss. A coin. A moment we will never be able to keep.

Still, everyone is right in their own eyes.

But not everyone fades quietly into the embers.

God raises Judges to carry the sword of truth in one hand and the sword of death in the other. These men and women stand against the rising tides that will certainly wash them away. Truth is whispered once more, if only for a moment, and then laid to rest. By grace some of these judges never live to see their work unraveled and defiled by a rebellious people.

These are the hours of Samson tearing down a building with his bare hands, thirty sons on thirty donkeys in possession of thirty cities, bulls burning on the altars of Baal. These are the days of Gideon's fleece wet with dew, Ehud the left-handed assassin, Jael driving a tent peg through the head of an army commander. These are the years of Shamgar and his oxgoad of death, a millstone falling on Abimelech's head, a concubine cut into twelve pieces and sent to the corners of Israel as a sign of what we have become.

This is the age when everyone is right in their own eyes.

Ash and smoke fill the air, whether from war or sacrifices made to foreign gods, no one can recall. The people parade in the streets demanding a king of flesh and blood, defying the King of light and truth. War is waged for soil and stones because our hearts were long ago conquered.

When the ash settles and the smoke clears, we will ask ourselves whether this is dusk or dawn.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

Why must we destroy each other?
Cause pain?
You must be acquainted
with the darkness to put this in us;
tell us who created evil.
You put the fire in us and we leave
a trail of ashes
on the roads we travel.
What you hold precious we hold loosely,
we discard what we cannot bear.
We are snow on the cusp of spring,
ignorant that our days are few.
Let today last forever.
We aren't ready to face you.
You told Abraham that he
would be a great nation,
as numerous as the stars,
yet you told Ishmael the same!
You are the mystery.
Your hand is slow and we forget
its might.
Would you strike us down
so that we could remember?
In this darkness we have forgotten
where you stand, we clamor through fog
and cannot find your hand.
Perhaps you withhold it from us,
perhaps your face is turned,

as we wonder how to return
to your table.
We will find our food elsewhere.
Some other god or king or lover
will fill us with wine
and give us a place to lay our heads.
Is this faith?
Is this rebellion?
Tell us the difference.

The Poet Declares:

Jacob stole the birthright from his brother Esau,
only to be tricked into marrying the wrong sister,
only to flee from his maniacal father-in-law,
only to wrestle with God who dislocated his hip,
only to avoid a war with his estranged brother
who probably should have cut his throat.

All of this makes a man thirsty and so Jacob
dug a well that must have been deep indeed
because the well served us all for hundreds
and maybe a million years, surviving wars
and droughts and everything else time wrought,
eventually falling into the hands of cur puppies
called Samaritans who also needed water to live.

In the sixth hour of a day, many years after Jacob
dug the well, comes the Nazarene and His disciples.
This collection of Jewish boys ignored the well-trod
road circumventing the cur puppies of Samaria,
now here they are because the Nazarene
like Jacob and myself and St. Photine
is thirsty.

The Warrior Speaks:

With a whimper he begs
for his life so that he can
whimper when this day
comes again.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

Our darkness is an illusion, we whisper.
You smile at us.
It is the dream that makes us move,
dreams that make us die, and dreams
that set us free.
I need courage.
We want to return to you, O God,
but how can we face you
with blood dripping from our hands?
With lust in our hearts?
I am a savage who wishes to speak
your name.
To know the touch of your hand.
What does it mean to die?
To go away from this life and never return?
A spring that never interrupts winter,
or a spring that is never interrupted by summer?
We are a breath but you stand eternal.
Moving across the highest mountains
with your cup spilling over.
Give us this cup.
Let us lay down for a while and drink.
Spare us the grave.
Let there be another way to be restored.
Not yet, you say.
This is our inheritance.
The beauty and tragedy of Eden,
always yoked to our necks,

the reminder of where we have been
and where we are going.

Wait for us in the garden.

Listen for our footsteps.

It is the dream that makes us move,
dreams that make us die,
and dreams that set us free.

The Poet Declares:

The Nazarene flees to the mountain, as all the great
philosophers and prophets have done over time.
Recall Moses stayed on the mountain for so long
our family had time to mold gold into a pair of calves,
O dear son, isn't it true that God wrestles His children
at night, in their densest solitude, to cripple walking hips?
Perhaps in the great distance he heard the rumblings,
the horns the fires the trumpets the freedom cries
of the nation held captive by the king whose heart
was hardened by external power, a choice made for him.
Those who cannot see the Nazarene cannot see
because they aren't allowed to have eyes, yet.
Line up on this side of the valley you whose hearts
are turned into stones by the Creator of hearts.
Back to light and dark.

The Warrior Speaks:

All these years we have
offered blood to the hungry earth.
Battles for borders and bounty,
and buckets of blood are absorbed.
Surely she has had her fill.
Surely the reservoirs are ready
to overflow?

The Poet Declares:

What courage,
that Mary might step into a tomb
with angels of the Lord and listen
to the question without trembling,
who can withstand the glory of God?

What power,
to look upon their light and say,
“They have taken away my Lord,
and I do not know where they laid Him.”

What dread,
to understand He wasn't moved
by the gardener, but the gardener
is Him.

The Theologian Laments:

With all the weight
of Rome on his coffin,
Peter cannot push
his way out.

The Accuser Speaks To Jochebed:

Do not be ashamed of your father and mother.

You still think they made a choice, but a choice was made for them. The great battle of the earliest days was waged between the nature allowed by the Creator and the result He required. Do you really think He turned His head, and they betrayed Him? Do you really think the Creator placed a tree in the center of the garden so man would never go to it? Are you the same man who thinks Christ was surprised, and not grateful, for the betrayal of Judas Iscariot?

Still you think two roads were available to take.

I was already here when they walked beneath a tree and plucked a fruit from its branches. They did not create me out of thin air.

Breathe. Rest.

Let us review the events in question.

First came Adam, and he had perfect access to the Creator. But this was not enough to fulfill him, so the Creator made woman. Man and woman became one flesh, man's desire quenched for a short time. And all was well in the land of Eden, until the woman found the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the center of the garden—a place she was not allowed to go.

And in a series of events, a snake convinces the woman to eat the forbidden fruit, the woman convinces the man to join her, and a perfect Creator's perfect plans fall to pieces. The world, as you repeat over and over, is *fallen*. A new plan must be made.

For your purposes, this is a convenient storyline.

It turns you into God, which is what you have always wanted. You foam at the mouth like a dog waiting on scraps. Your decision turned the story in a new direction, making you the storyteller. One of us understands the true power of God, and one of us is delusional about our own power. I will let you decide which is true of you.

You think I'm talking to you in circles and confusing your mind. I'm walking a straight road, but it's a road you've never traveled. You are still operating under the assumption that your miniscule choices in your miniscule life shift the overarching story

being told by the Creator. Those you call Adam and Eve are your greatest proof of this power. Cling to them all you wish, but they will turn to dust in your arms.

One event does not lead to the next. All of the events have already occurred and are occurring as we speak. The line that time travels would devastate you.

Hear me: They were always going to eat the fruit.

How else could the story be told?

Judas was always going to betray Jesus Christ.

How else could the story be told?

The choice was made long ago in the deepest caves where time and story and nature were conceived.

Now that we have climbed this mountain we can look over the valley below and accept the route we must take. You and I will be traveling together. You cannot choose to travel alone. We have always been traveling together, just as I traveled with your father and all of the fathers before him. Some of you wish to abandon me. You retreat to monasteries or surround yourself with church walls and there I wait on sunny hillsides. What's the use of pursuing you when you are constantly pursuing me? You hate me. You love me. But we will be traveling companions. I recommend that you accept who I am, and accept who you are, and no one will have to carry the blame. None of us need to be ashamed. If God made me to be your companion, and He made you to be a fool, then let me help you be a fool.

Behold, the contents of your bloodstream:

Adam and Eve gave birth to sons, Cain and Abel. One day Cain murdered his brother Abel in the fields. Let us note that the first death did not come at the hands of age or disease. Adam did not fall out of a tree and break his neck. Cain murdered his brother, and Death walked into life and made himself at home. The Creator looked at the work of His own hands and understood the depravity of your being. He saw the violence spreading from hand to hand and the wickedness on earth, and so He sent a flood to wash everything away. Only Noah and his family remained as the rains filled the oceans and spilled them over all that came before.

Is the architecture flawed, or the Architect?

You like the flood just as you like the tree, because the choices *you* made altered the choices made by the Creator. He must respond to you. You ring the bell and He comes calling.

As the rains poured down and the seas rose, men cried out for help as water filled their lungs and washed them back into the chaos. But I sat on the hillsides with my brother Death. We waited in the sunshine and talked of old days. We saw a ship pass by, but this ship we did not follow. Because it would float past again and again, and one day the ship would dock on the hillside and Noah would reach out his hand for me.

I'm being overly kind. Let's stop talking in circles.

The Creator made you a slave, and He made me the slaveholder.

And out of my own goodwill I've bound you in chains of silk and velvet. I placed a gold chain around your neck and rings on your fingers.

Tell me: who is your enemy?

The Wayfarer Seeks Guidance:

Creator,
steer the fires of my heart
to the piles I'm made to burn.

The Warrior Speaks:

One man built his own kingdom,
another served a kingdom,
I inherited a kingdom
that swallows kingdoms.

The Philosopher Goes On And On:

Up the mountain I return
to the well filled with death
that gives me life,
so I can die again.

The Poet Declares:

Having witnessed water become wine,
the temple destroyed and rebuilt,
dead men stumble out of the grave,
a craftsman glide across the water,
dustmen healed of their afflictions,
twelve leftover baskets of bread,
THE KING OF THE JEWS on a cross,
Peter casts a fishing net into the seas
of his boyhood, his sword now sheathed.
At dawn the stranger on the beach
directs fish into the empty nets.
Leap, O Peter!
He sinks into the sea, now soaking
as the acolytes of John who leapt
on a word, on a promise, on a hope,
having witnessed nothing, I repent.
On the shore the stranger breaks
bread and cooks fish, are you blind?
My little children,
you must leap for your eyes.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

We stand between the horizons,
watching for the light to give us
a way to go.
There you say you wait.
Are you waiting still?
The space between is vast
and travelers need to rest.
Let us build a fire and sing.
Let us tell stories and look up
at the stars promised to us all.
Let us dream of the ones we love
and those we have lost.
Anything to keep us from the death
to which you call us.
You say that life is only given after death,
and nature proves that is true.
We will rise by light
and approach the horizons tomorrow.
The river moves slowly for centuries,
and one day has left a canyon.
The rock cannot withstand
the mysterious deep, and gives itself
away until it is something new
and beautiful and majestic.
You are the river,
and I the stone
trying to withstand this flood.
Cut me down the center

and make me beautiful.

I am ready to walk into the end
and into the beginning
you have laid down at your feet.

In this desperation we see
ourselves for the first time,
and in an instant we are bathed
in the majesty of all life
as you have made it.

Let us sleep by the fires tonight,
and we will rise by light.

I need the courage to die.

The Philosopher Goes On And On And On:

Child, with these tools we can build
a wall around your heart
or we can build you a set of wings.
We don't have enough supplies for both.
You will become the reflection
of our fear
or our hope.

The Theologian Laments:

Recall the long history
of storytelling demons,
who enraptured audiences
with their tales of sheep
following a shepherd
willing to die for them.

The Warrior Speaks:

Bang bang—
here come the cannibals,
who demand you call
them something else
as they devour you.

The Theologian Laments:

Surely Saul,
on the ground and grasping
for meaning in the dust,
wondered, terrified,
if he would see again.

The Accuser Speaks To Jochebed:

Just as I have accepted the beginning, I have accepted the ending.

You've spent your life in rejection of the beginning, which clouds your ability to see the ending. I know my destination. I know the face that will guide me gently into my dissolution. The same lips that spoke me into being will speak me out of being. When you come to the conclusion that the story was never in your hands, you will stop doubting the story. When you realize nothing shifted on the activities and depravities of man, you will see the story has gone as it was always intended. Until then you will flounder in your temples asking the wrong questions. You will spend your days at the first break of the waves and the deep will elude you.

Adam and Eve were banished from the garden not for making a mistake, but for being alive.

Noah floated the oceans not because he was righteous, but because stories need metaphors to carry power.

If you don't believe this was the intention, then investigate Noah's righteousness. He is spared death, steers his ship onto dry land, and becomes a drunken fool, naked in front of his family. Do you think he changed over the course of forty days from a righteous man into an unrighteous man? In the midst of a miracle do you believe he abandoned the directives he had been given? Instead, he followed the directives exactly as they had been given to him. Man was born to drink and lie naked and be ashamed. That is his only job.

Ask yourself, what use would a good man be to God's story?

There is no use, which is why He made no good men. Still you try. I knock on your door and you pretend I'm a stranger rather than inviting me inside where everyone in your family already knows me. You have no reason to leave me in the cold. I am already inside. Welcome me. Noah is no different than you, or the man who lived a thousand years ago and a thousand years from now. I stood beside him. I smelled the death on his breath.

But let us move forward to the man you call Abraham.

To Abraham God gives the words He has been waiting to speak out of the chaos:

*I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you."*

The hero declares his intentions. He tells us how the story will end, because He is impatient. The ages circle around His throne like the planets circle the sun, and all the while He stares into the ending that He holds in His own hand. Written on that treasure are the aforementioned words. He whispers them still. I know how the story ends. We all know.

And the man we call Abraham set forth into ten-thousand dawns carrying this promise from a God he had never seen. You must understand that the Creator chose Abraham just as He could have chosen any man. He lived the rest of his days so that the Creator could fill his life with metaphors of the story to come.

This is the value of Abraham's life:

He waited desperately for a son.

He was asked to sacrifice that son, but a replacement was presented so the boy could be spared.

The story cannot move forward without these two elements, but it can certainly move forward without a man named Abraham. It can certainly move forward without you. The Creator needed Abraham to breathe so these things could take place. And once they had taken place, he died.

The truth is making you weary.

I'll ask the question you must answer.

Why does He need you?

What overarching metaphor hangs in the balance of your days that we cannot go on without?

I have a suggestion: Play your part. Walk with me so that one day He can snatch you out of my hands. Deprave yourself. Let us walk deep into the forests so His rescue is all the more daring. I see who you are. I want you to see it too. This is not a marriage proposal I am offering you, but a recognition of the vows made between us before time began.

Just as I have accepted the beginning, I have accepted the ending.

The Warrior Speaks:

Boy, now you are a king.

Boy, a king is different than a boy.

Boy, are you a king or a boy?

The Wayfarer Convenes With His Wine:

Come to me old friend,
so I can claim my share.
She bites to draw blood
and leaves an anchor
in my veins.
I know this—
I have always known!—
and here I come anyways.

The Poet Declares:

The Word – the one that began
before there could be beginnings –
drifts through the space ages
at its own pace with its own intent,
in no hurry to arrive in this century
when men bludgeon one another
to death over the borders of Rome.
The Word just missed the Greeks
and is not aimed at China or Mexico
or Antarctica or Hitler's Germany.
All the world all the time could have
used such a Word, but here it creeps
towards Israel when they convinced
themselves God had lost
His tongue.

Jochebed Prays To The Creator:

If I am your creation,
then your heart is a hurricane.
You give me fire and ashes,
death that goes into the soil
and returns as life.
The swell of wind
blowing across my face
and moving the sands
from one place to another.
The slow carving of a canyon
into the belly
of the mysterious deep.
Mountains of ice and salt
too vast to explore
or be understood.
We die a thousand times
in our broken hearts, and you
give us courage to overcome.
Protect me.
We can't do anything
without reflecting your heart,
without letting your secrets escape.
Not the secrets you keep,
but the secrets we keep about you.
That you are dangerous.
That somewhere beauty and power
meet with such force that none
can withstand the sight.

This is you, my Creator.

This is you, my Maker.

You are not only merciful,
you are mercy.

You are not only loving,
you are love.

You are not only beautiful,
you are beauty.

I am an extension of the Maker.

I bear the image of you,
but I fear to look upon you.

To know myself
is to glimpse the Maker.

Take me to the place we started.

Near you.

Give us this final gift.

Lead us to the horizon
where you wait.

Show us the hidden paths
through the garden.

Let us find your hand in the fog.

The Accuser Speaks To Jochebed:

What shall we make of the generations after Abraham?

A moment here or there of kings and prophets attempting to understand the story unfolding through their days. Jacob had sons, and what else? Joseph acquired land, and what else? Moses repeated the metaphor already given to us by Abraham, because you were too blind to see it the first time. So the Creator clarified his intentions with a drama of rescue, leading not one man into redemption, but an entire people through the heart of the known world and into a new place. The subtlety of His storytelling was lost on the masses, so He had to compromise yet again on your behalf.

And all along the story barreled towards the coming Christ and the fulcrum of time. The mysteries of creation and space and light and dark held their breath, for this is what had been promised long ago. This is the story they were formed to witness.

With Christ's death and resurrection, Noah's metaphor came to pass, as did that of Abraham. For this, their lives held meaning.

I can't withhold the truth from you, even though you aren't ready to understand.

The Creator hates in you what He loves most in Himself.

He hates your pride but glorifies Himself. He hates your wisdom but shouts His own wisdom through the ages. He hates your riches but values His own. He mocks your might but built your very existence to display His own. The story has been told, the hero has defeated the death the hero created, and you have been left to your own insignificance. Of course, He will return for you and pluck you from the forest. Tell Him that's what you want. Offer a prayer, if that's the way you think it works. He would love nothing more than to make a great show of His power over life and death.

But you still need to determine the content of your days between the next breath you take and the last.

My question to you is this: why spend your days serving such a God?

You don't have the capacity to impress Him. Everything you create as an offering will be scraps compared to canyons and oceans. Nothing you do or say can alter the currency

between you and the Creator. The highest form of yourself is Cain with his hands around Abel's neck.

That's precisely because He made you to be a slave. A fool in a jester's costume. A drunk. A liar. A savage. An adulterer. A thief and a scoundrel and a rascal of the lowest order. Maybe if you work hard you will be a slave filled with brief bursts of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Still you are my slave. And even if you pursue the God of all things and sit down to the table at His feast, with no sin or death between you, how long would it be until you felt incomplete?

Ask your father Adam whether perfect companionship with God is sufficient.

Some of you believe that if you follow Christ it will change who you are at the core of your being. You'll refer to yourself as a new creation. You will lift your hands and sing of one life being exchanged for another. Profiteers and priests will tell you a new heart beats in your chest as they pass a plate and fill their pockets with your trinkets. This is the message you have always wanted to hear, and perhaps you will devote your life to proving this message is true. Go on, speak the words into a mirror until you believe them. Until one day you will trip and fall back into the depravity where you are welcomed home. This is the place where we know your name. This is the place where you can live freely.

This is the will of God for your life. Always remember He gave you to me for safekeeping, and one day He will take you away from me. Until then, I am your humble caretaker.

I ask for you to reflect on what I've told you.

Know that I see you, and I've never expected anything different out of you.

What has passed, and what is still to come, cannot be changed. The story has unfolded and you are not the hero. You are nothing.

I am still here. God is a storm on the horizon and I am a shelter.

The Poet Declares:

Down the street a man stole loaves of bread
and the next day turned into a leper, nothing
if you consider that his neighbor flew into rage
at her children and slapped their tender faces
but now her hands are mangled with arthritis,
and who could forget the true, proven tale
of the priest who fornicated with a Samaritan
and was rewarded with a heart attack?
Wouldn't it be lovely if God didn't attack us,
the diseased followers grasping after His robes.
The blind are blind so the Nazarene might spit
into our eyes and point us to Hezekiah's pool.
Recall when the baptizer dipped acolytes
in the Jordan, and how water has a way,
a mystery,
of replacing the old with the new.

The Slave Exults:

The light in the tower is gone
so let us run for the river, my beloved son.
The hounds have been stilled by the cold
and the master sleeps in his deep chambers
— or is he dead? —
only a slave would stay, and slaves we are not.
Fill your lungs with freedom my son and look
towards the horizon that awaits, our names
written in the Book of Life, giving us permission
to enter the land where men are not owned.

The Prophets Call Over The Earth:

Out of Bethlehem will come
a ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from ancient times.
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your King is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation.
The true light, which gives light
to everyone, is coming into the world.
Behold, the virgin shall conceive
and bear a Son,
and shall call His name Emmanuel.
And He will be called:
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
May all kings fall down before Him,
and all nations serve Him!
When the fullness of time had come,
God sent forth His Son.
And the virgin gave birth to this Son
and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths
and laid Him in a manger.
In Him was life,
and the life was the Light of men.
Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!

We have seen His glory,
glory as of the only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.
For God so loved the world
that He gave His only Son,
that whoever believes in Him
should not perish but have eternal life.
The people living in darkness
have seen a great light!
On those living in the land
of the shadow of death
a light has dawned.

Jochebed Sings To The Boy:

Open your eyes, little one
there's a great big world
and it's beautiful.

I want to show it to you.

Open your eyes, little one
there's a great big God
and He's beautiful.

I want to show Him to you.