

The Second Crucifixion

We all know the story of the first crucifixion. Jesus, a young Jew of thirty-three, born in the city of Nazareth (were he alive today, he would no doubt be in his third or fourth round in Gaza), bleeding on the cross atop Golgotha hill, outside the walls of Jerusalem.

Who crucified Jesus? Soldiers of the Roman legion under the orders of Pontius Pilate, the supreme Roman governor of the province of Judea. And who demanded his execution? The high priest in Jerusalem and the Jewish council of sages (the Sanhedrin). These were the men the people of the Jewish state regarded as their leaders, their defenders against foreign rule, their guardians of welfare and peace. Yet, astonishingly, the last thing that concerned Jerusalem's priests was the people's suffering. The last thing that troubled the Sanhedrin (or "the Knesset" of Jerusalem) was the unity of the nation. Their entire preoccupation was to preserve their power and status before Rome.

When Jesus, the young man from Nazareth, appeared with a new, more humane and tolerant path, they did not see him as the people's spokesman. On the contrary, they saw him as a dangerous, unexpected rival, a challenger. As they watched him grow in influence, gathering supporters and followers, they rushed to demand his removal—his immediate elimination.

This may sound familiar today, I know. But wait—there is more.

The larger world beyond Jerusalem's walls knew nothing of all this. The world did not hear of another punishment, another crucifixion, in the small, marginal province called Judea (later Palestine). The Roman Empire crucified hundreds and thousands before and after Jesus.

So why call this one "the first"? Because unlike all others, this crucifixion shook the world. Three hundred and fifty years later, the teachings of the man from Nazareth became the official religion of the Roman Empire. And not long afterward, in historical terms, Christianity became the dominant faith of the world.

Therefore, at least for our purposes, this was the first crucifixion.

Now to the man himself on the cross, lips clenched in pain, thirsting desperately for water, bleeding from four wounds in his body: two in his wrists, two above his feet—the points where iron nails pierced flesh. This slow bleeding would eventually bring death. But something unexpected occurred, hastening the end. Anyone who has visited the small country churches of Europe has seen the colorful depictions of the crucified. In those terrifying paintings (that haunted Europe's

children for centuries), the man bleeds from a fifth wound, the deepest and harshest of all.

According to the New Testament, it was a Roman soldier who departed from protocol. Perhaps out of boredom. Perhaps from a desire to end the whole affair—the humiliation, the agony. Whatever the reason, the soldier took his spear and thrust it into the crucified body (on the right side, according to tradition). This soldier was not one of the Jews but Rome's representative. This, if you will, was the world's contribution to Jesus' death. And so we shall return to this spear later.

But here is the essence: what did we, the Jewish people, gain from this barbaric event? We gained Cain's mark, imprinted on our foreheads forever. Since the fifth century, for more than 1,500 years, every child in Europe has known: the Jews killed Jesus, the son of God. And it happened in their capital city, Jerusalem.

This mark of Cain would haunt us in exile, through all history. Wherever we went, as strangers, outcasts, eternal scapegoats. We would pay dearly for that crucifixion, in much blood and tears.

In the second crucifixion (unlike the first), the whole world is watching. And it too takes place in Jerusalem. But unlike the first, this one is still ongoing. In an event without precedent, an entire nation mounts the cross. To be precise: an entire nation crucifies itself, with full awareness, in sound mind, and has not stopped bleeding since—not for a moment.

Let us return to that black Saturday when it all began. The day everything collapsed before our eyes. No need to look far. A visit to Nir Oz reveals the scale of the horror, the disgrace of abandonment. On that Saturday, Nir Oz's residents awoke to find themselves elsewhere—in a small Jewish shtetl in Ukraine or Galicia, centuries earlier. Three hundred and seventy-five years ago, to be exact, when Khmelnytsky's Cossack horsemen stormed quiet Jewish homes, killing, raping, pillaging. In the words of that time: carrying out a pogrom.

The Jews of Ukraine and Galicia had no state, no army. Just like Nir Oz's members discovered, to their shock, that morning. They were completely alone. No state to help, no army to defend. The strongest army in the Middle East was absent from Nir Oz as its people were slaughtered, their homes looted and burned, their children, women, and elderly dragged across the border into Gaza. The army came only after the ruin, when all was over. The murderers and looters were gone. Only the wounded remained, traumatized survivors—the remnants of the pogrom. This is the depth of the rupture, the face of the horror.

Israel lost the war on its very first day, October 7, 2023. Everything since has been only a necessary attempt to repair the collapse, to atone somewhat for an unfathomable failure that paralyzed the entire system. A failure that proved Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah's words true: a spider's web. That was the state that Saturday. That was the defense of the IDF: a torn, crumbling spider's web.

The "Black Sabbath War," October 7, should have ended three months later. Three months in which Israel struck Hamas as never before—thousands of its fighters and commanders killed, dozens of outposts and headquarters destroyed above and below ground, a vast arsenal of rockets and weapons demolished. At that point, fire should have ceased. The fighting should have ended. For there is no way to defeat a murderous jihadist group holding hundreds of our people—innocent civilians—hostage, hidden in underground tunnels, threatening to kill them at any attempt at rescue. The hostages' return was the true, supreme goal of going to war. A state that abandoned its citizens to their fate owes them this above all—even before victory over Hamas. A state that betrayed its people owes this to itself.

Any human, responsible leadership would have understood this. Any true leader would have stopped then, calling Arab states (yes, even the Palestinian Authority) to take control of Gaza, to complete Hamas's removal, and begin reconstruction and settlement. But first, and above all: to return all the hostages, living and dead.

Yet here lies the problem. Today, Israel has no leadership. Certainly none humane or responsible. For thirty years, since Rabin's assassination, Israel has had no leader. The one sitting today in Jerusalem, in the Prime Minister's residence, has never been a leader—not for a single day. (At best, he is an administrator, an event manager at worst—before even mentioning corruption, absence of morality, conscience, or regard for his people.)

But let us admit the truth: this disastrous, fanatical government, its head, and its band of yes-men in the Knesset—this is our leadership. Even as it leads us all to ruin, it is still ours. This is how it looks, how it acts. And a nation that knew how to build a modern, thriving state from nothing, that knew how to repel enemy invasions twice, that knew how to raise a great democratic protest movement in the streets—this nation, which is all of us, cannot halt the collapse. The rolling disaster continues. We still allow this malicious, divisive leadership to drag us into a harmful, unnecessary war. We continue rushing headlong into the abyss. And so, unwillingly (even if hard to admit), we become accomplices, sharing the blame. Today we all march together on our Via Dolorosa, climbing the cross each day.

Thus, from January 2024, the fourth month of the war, the second crucifixion begins.

From then on (regardless of Hezbollah or Iran), the war against Hamas lost its purpose, its direction, its justification. Yet it continued. Streets kept collapsing in Gaza, Khan Yunis, Rafah. Hundreds and thousands of homes turned to dust. Children fought over scraps of bread, some starving. Dozens died in bombings daily—women, children, the elderly, all innocent. And we, the people of Zion, watch (in what little we are allowed to see) and do nothing. This is the second crucifixion: an entire nation crucifying itself, day after day. Nailing its hands and feet to wood, bleeding from four wounds. And Cain's mark, once only the Jews' burden, now brands us Israelis as well. Those born and living here, in the Jewish state. The mark is clearer, more visible today. It brands us everywhere—at home, abroad. In some cities and countries, we are already pursued for it, just as in Europe of the 1930s.

And now the spear returns. The Roman soldier's spear on Golgotha, thrust into the Jewish youth's side. In this later story, our story, the legionary is the great world. The world sitting in its living room, watching the endless dance of death and destruction. A war dragging on for months, a year and a half at least, with no clear direction, no logical aim, no foreseeable end.

For the world, this is enough. It will not remain a passive observer. From now, it will condemn us, boycott us, exclude us from economic, cultural, and academic partnerships. In the end, it will make us lepers, untouchables. This is the spear driven into us, never withdrawn. This is the fifth wound, the deepest and most bleeding of all. And the bleeding only intensifies...

The New Testament says God descended to save the man on the cross, raising his beloved son from the dead. But in our story, two thousand years later, there is no God. So who will take us down from this cursed cross? Who will stop the bleeding? Who will save us from ourselves? The answer, whether we believe it or not, is one and only: we will.

We alone, for no one will do it for us. And it seems the time has come.

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