

*There was one witness at the cross that the Bible never talks about.
An alternative look at the Passion of the Christ.*

Chains

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The crowd was chanting and screaming, clawing at the early morning air. Their sandaled feet stamped the dusty street like cattle preparing for a mindless stampede. Earthy brown tunics flapped the humid clouds of dust like beating flags.

Lucifer, his dark wings wide, hovered several feet above the ground and looked on the crowd with glory and contempt, relishing in its frenzy. For thousands of years he had awaited this day with euphoric anticipation. All his scheming, tempting, and twisting the truth was about to pay off.

The Man, beaten and bloodied from the brutal flogging, appeared through a squad of soldiers, a heavy wooden beam tied to his shredded shoulders. Matted with blood, his hair hung like a tattered curtain from the band of two-inch thorns crushed onto his head. At the sight of him, the crowd exploded in a roar of fury.

Through clumps of blood-soaked hair and bruised and swollen eyes, the Man's gaze pierced through the crowd, the dust, and the cacophony of the physical realm and locked on his ancient adversary. Then through cracked and bleeding lips, he whispered—

"It's time."

Lucifer frowned. Then he felt a weight pull on his forearms. Perplexed, he glanced down at a pair of thick shackles that clung to his wrists, snug as gloves, then his eyes widened in astonishment.

Someone in the crowd laughed a vain, raucous crowing.

Lucifer smacked viciously at the cuffs. Above the roaring crowd, he heard a clinking of chains and he watched as link after link grew from his shackles tracing dual lines across the ground. They slithered like snakes across the space between the dark angel and the Man, through and around the feet stomping the dusty earth.

Lucifer's gaze flew up to watch the last link of the chains fasten to twin manacles on the wrists of the condemned Man.

The Man's gaze never wavered. "It's time," he whispered again.

Lucifer felt a tremor rise in his throat. With a cry of rage and a flash of wings, he yanked violently against his bonds, pulling for the air.

The Man staggered, the wooden beam on his back tipping him like a ship at sea. He stopped to get his balance but a soldier impatiently shoved him forward. Painfully, the Man settled the beam on his marred shoulders, turned resolutely toward his destination, and began to walk.

The limp chains between the two warriors grew taut and yanked the dark angel around, slamming his feet to the parched ground. Lucifer stumbled then defiantly planted his feet and yanked back. But there was more driving the Man toward his goal now than mere physical strength.

Lucifer took an involuntary step forward.

Then another.

And another.

The realization of what was happening hit him and he roared. His cries joined the crowd as he struggled and strained against the destination of this chaotic company. His feet slid futilely across the dirt path. His hands reached for purchase but slipped uselessly through the mob. He smelled the greed, anger, and hatred of the crowd like a succulent dish. He'd fed off it for centuries, but now it brought him nothing--no power, no strength, no sway over the manacles the Man had summoned.

With another cry of rage, he changed tack and leaped before the Man, the chains almost tripping him. He grabbed a handful of his rival's sweaty, matted hair, and yanked his head up. "Listen to them!" he screamed. "They hate you! All they want is to kill you! You left heaven for them, became a dog like them, listened to their simpering whining and pleadings, healed their vile diseases, and this is how they thank you!"

The Man paused then trudged on, walking right through the dark angel.

Lucifer leaped before him again. "You are God! Your angels are all around just waiting for a single word from you. Can't you feel them? Go on, call them! These people don't care about your father or what he's done for them, what you've both endured for them!"

The Man fell to his knees before Lucifer, the wooden beam tipping him forward.

The crowd roared.

The dark angel bent to whisper. "Do you hear them? *They despise you!*"

The Man closed his eyes. "But I love them."

Lucifer barred his teeth as the Man stumbled to his feet. "Love?" the dark angel taunted as the Man began to walk again. "Is this what your Father calls love? What father would let his son die at the hands of a worthless, ungrateful race of brute-beasts. Your father doesn't love you! He isn't even here. Can't you feel it? He's gone. *He's abandoned you!*"

The Man faltered this time sprawling full-face onto the rocky path.

One of the soldiers cursed.

Then the wooden beam was yanked from his shoulders. Everyone watched as the soldiers jerked a terrified observer from the crowd and thrust the wooden beam on his back.

With tears cleaning streaks down his dirty, bloody face, the Man gritted his teeth, pulled himself to his feet, and looked the dark angel straight in the eye.

"Your reign has ended," he said. "Come."

A soldier shoved him forward right through the dark angel. Lucifer's wail reached the caverns of hell—and was cut short as he was yanked around and dragged forward.

He stared at the chains in bewilderment.

They had shortened. During his tirade with the condemned, the chains had shortened. He glanced at the Man's shackles. With each step the Man took, a single link from the chain disappeared drawing he and Lucifer closer and closer. The dark angel bellowed in indignation, but his straining had no more affect. Every step they took toward the mountainside, the Man grew stronger. Every step, Lucifer felt his strength ebbing.

The crowd raged.

The sun was up and blinding, but dark clouds were circling the horizon preparing to cut off the light with speed.

The crowd crested the hill of Golgotha and Lucifer spied the beams shooting out of ground like accusing fingers. All sanity fled as he was dragged across the ground toward the hill.

His ravings rattled both angel and demon in heaven and hell. He would not lose.

He could not lose!

Casting the relieved bystander aside, the soldiers threw his burden to the ground.

Lucifer was so close to the Man now that he could smell the salty repugnancy of his blood and sweat, but he was still surprised when he was whipped around with the Man by a gloved hand and shoved backward. The dark angel heard the last clink of the chain as he tottered and fell back—through eternity—upon the cross.

The other prisoners brought in behind them were screaming and straining against their bonds and captors.

Helplessly Lucifer watched the Man lift his arms almost one with his own and lay them across the beam. The soldier, hammer and nails in hand, eyed the Man strangely. Then with uncanny familiarity, he found the place at the wrist and pounded the iron spike through the Man's hand--through Lucifer's hand--driving their shackles together at last.

The Man cried. Lucifer shrieked.

The sky cracked with thunder.

The soldier stepped around and repeated a nail into the other arm.

The Man sobbed. Lucifer wailed.

The sky ripped with anguish.

The soldiers lifted them, hanging by spikes in their wrists, and placed the cross beam atop the grounded stake. They crossed the Man's feet--the dark angel fighting in vain--and drove the nail through his arch and into the wood.

Lucifer heard the cartilage crack. He closed his eyes against the pain, against the nightmare that had been his victory. The world was his. All of them had rejected the Maker. Yet the Maker had made a way.

The Man.

Thwarting him, defying every obstacle he—He! Lucifer!—had thrown at him, the Man had become *The Way*.

With fully awakened horror, the dark angel opened his eyes and stared out on the crowd he had incensed, now taunting the dying victims in abandon, laughing at their deaths in ribald mockery.

From the pit of their souls, Lucifer and the Man cried out with one voice toward the blackened sky--

--one with a curse, the other a plea--

--and let the darkness fall.

The Battle was over.

The Fight was finished.

The War was won.