

"There is a great reckoning in the divide *Between the Lightning and the Thunder*, and Pastor B. F. Randall is here to illuminate it. He is both fascinating and factual in his ability to convey the brilliance of the gospel in a dramatic way. He brings us right into Jerusalem as history plays out before our eyes. An inspired retelling from the perspective of Jesus' younger brother, James, this book immerses readers in the uncertainty, the panic, and the relief that comes along in finding the truth: Jesus is Lord. Readers are enlightened as James discovers just who his big brother *really* is."

—Laura Lynn Hughes
speaker, advocate, best-selling author of *Choose Zoe*

"Put yourself in the shoes of James, the younger brother of Jesus. Imagine growing up with Jesus—the perfect son, sinless brother, model citizen . . . and then He is arrested. Imagine the conflicting feelings James struggles with as he travels to Jerusalem to see for himself what has transpired. In *Between the Lightning and the Thunder*, B. F. Randall beautifully captures James's struggles with the past, the present, and the future. This book is a must-read for everyone who has already fallen in love with James. Join him on his unforgettable journey."

—Carol Fitchhorn
author of *Wisps of Wisdom: A Devotional Journal*

"*Between the Lightning and the Thunder* caused me to reflect on the writings of C. S. Lewis, which were greatly influenced by his faith and desire to present biblical truth through the telling of his stories. They caused you to dig below the surface, to think and ponder the deeper truths revealed in the pages. I also found this to be true with B. F.'s work. I have often thought of this younger brother of the Lord but had never fully contemplated what a challenge and struggle it must have been for him to even consider that this man Jesus, his brother, might possibly be the promised Messiah. Ben skillfully moves us through the pages to engage on a divine journey with a doubting brother who comes to recognize Jesus not only as his brother but also as his Lord. Fiction you say, I'm not so sure. Perhaps my friend and Pastor B. F. Randall is closer to the truth than we know. Great story, my friend. *Between the Lightning and the Thunder* is a great read."

—Leo C. Price
Leo Calvin Price Ministries, author of *The Sixth Dragon* and
Taking the IF Out of Life

"In this engaging novel, B. F. Randall has tapped into the transformative journey of a little brother, a skeptic, and one who followed at a distance to a leading apostle who would lay down his life for his savior. The connections and parallels to the doubts and struggles of faith that we all face draw us into the narrative and speak straight to the heart. I believe the pages of this book will give you a fresh glimpse of the Messiah and call you to a deeper love and commitment to Jesus."

—Dave Patterson
pastor, The Father's House, Vacaville, CA

"B. F. Randall is a trusted voice, a man of integrity and creativity. He has a passion to help people understand the stories of the Bible. I love how this fictional book describes the transformation of James, the younger brother of Jesus, from his doubts to his understanding of his destiny. Once you begin reading this unfolding story, you will certainly find it difficult to put it down. The story is written brilliantly and is creatively authentic. Check this book out."

—Terry Mahan
The Father's House Church, Leesburg, FL

"Go ahead! Dive in! Take this heart journey with James as he recalls his brother's life and death, constantly revealing just one more reason his brother was, and is, truly the Lord! Yes, Jesus. As each event is unveiled, you'll find that author B. F. Randall has settled into his own unique way of making Jesus real and alive. Get ready for mind-stimulating thoughts and emotions! The book is written exquisitely yet simply, and I was captured by Randall's powerful yet relaxing style as if the thunder and lightning were gently shouting to my own heart! Thank you, B. F.!"

—Paula Stefanovich Price
songwriter, solo artist, and speaker

"B. F. Randall has masterfully written about the experience of Jesus' brother, James. It is a riveting story detailing the human emotions James must have experienced at the foot of the cross and in the days that followed. B. F. writes this story in such color that we feel it is our experience. After all, it is, isn't it? We've all doubted our faith at one time or another. However, *Between the Lightning and the Thunder* is sure to make each of us feel our humanity and recognize that we're not so abnormal after all."

—Kevin Goff
speaker, pastor, The Rock Church, Goodyear, AZ

BETWEEN THE
LIGHTNING
AND THE
THUNDER

B. F. RANDALL



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Roberta, my wife, my lover, my best friend.
Always at my side, encouraging, supporting, and assisting.
My spell-checker, grammar corrector, and in-house editor. I
don't know what I'd do without you.
I love you to the moon and beyond.
(She even corrected this ~~dedacation~~ dedication!)



CHAPTER ONE

Ambushed by Regret

Thirty years in his shadow. Watching, learning, following his lead. He was my friend, my mentor, my brother. We played together, worked, laughed, and cried together.

But now it was over.

We would never talk again. No more plans. No more dreams. I would never again be able to say I love you. Or I'm sorry.

Sitting against the rough surface of an old, twisted olive tree, I stared into the darkness. My mind reeled. What went wrong? What should I have done? What could I do?

Tears ran down my cheeks, as my heart cried out in despair, stop—please—please stop. Desperate to escape the horror of my brother's crucifixion, I gazed into the heavens and asked the question whose answer would bring no relief. Why? Why did he have to die? Why did he have to suffer so?

What had been a brisk cool day with clear blue skies turned dark. Foreboding. The temperature rose sharply. Black, ominous clouds flashed overhead with a language all their own. With a deep sigh, I traced over the day's events—scenes I desperately wanted to avoid but could not.

I shifted my weight to blend into the misshapen trunk of the tree and pulled my legs in tight. Reflection refreshed the pain in my heart and brought new tears to my inflamed eyes.

What now? What was I supposed to do now?

The heavens answered with an explosion of bright streaks of light that formed a distorted hand pointing toward the hill called Golgotha, which meant “the place of the skull.” With my attention drawn to the repulsive mound of death, the day replayed in my mind.



The journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem was long and miserable. The roads—if you want to call them roads—had been obliterated by the hooves of horses and donkeys and the wheels of carts and chariots. The countless herds and flocks driven to their demise for our culinary enjoyment helped turn the roads into mere dusty paths overladen with jagged stones, deep pot-holes, and layer upon layer of animal dung. Every step became an excursion of misery.

With each step I took, the same questions arose: Why had we ventured out on that unpleasant journey? Was there some long past religious obligation we needed to fulfill? Were we drawn by a divine unction to bring our offerings and to worship at God’s altar in humble adoration?

No. We were on a mission with a different objective: to retrieve a wayward son and sibling—my brother Jesus. This wasn’t a unique undertaking but a repeated effort to again rescue our family’s eldest son from the consequences of his foolishness. This time was different, though, because his recklessness was perceived as rebellion.

After a man died, the firstborn son was expected to assume the responsibility for the family and to carry on his father’s work. This was true for every family—but ours. My elder brother had much loftier goals. At least that is what he often said.

After our father died, Jesus assumed his obligations with earnest—for a while. Until one day he announced the time had come for him to leave, to commence what became an absurd obsession.

I am the second born, so the family's care became my responsibility, and my life became one perpetual trek along rocky roads and dust-covered trails in pursuit of a brother whose antics showed little concern for any of his kin. I lost count of the cities, villages, and hamlets we went through to find him. When we did, we spent endless hours trying to persuade him to return home where he belonged.

On one such occasion, my brothers and I accompanied Mama to a home where a large crowd had gathered. We couldn't push our way through, so one of his followers, who recognized Mama, went in and told him we were outside. I heard him say that we were not his family, that his family were those who followed him. Although I knew he meant no harm, statements like that broke Mama's heart and angered me to my core.

Few doubted that he had lost his mind. Our brother Simon thought Jesus had slipped away from reality long before he left home. Although our other brothers, Joses and Judas, held out hope that he would come to his senses, they, too, saw how unstable he had become. Even Mariam—loving, committed, and tolerant as she was—no longer excused him.

One holdout remained. Mama. She seemed to see something in him that no one else could. But this time was different. He had pushed beyond Mama's ability to overlook his recklessness. It had become a potentially dangerous problem.

I stepped beside Mama, placed my arm around her shoulder, and pulled her close to me. "Stay close. We're almost there."

Extending my other hand behind me, I waved slightly, then felt Mariam's hand slip into mine. "You stay close too, sister."

We maneuvered through the crowd, past squealing children, around traders and hawkers, and through the arch into Jerusalem. The streets teemed with merchants and Passover pilgrims. Excitement hung heavy over the city. Ahead, the towers of the Fortress of Antonia at the northwest corner of the temple rose before us.

There we would find my wayward brother, who, no doubt, waited for us to retrieve him from the stench of Roman incarceration.

We ambled through a mass of vendors promoting their wares, hagglers wringing out every ounce of a bargain, and a sea of first-time pilgrims mesmerized by the noise and excitement. I felt better about our trip, confident that the next time we came to Jerusalem, we would be a part of the festivities.

Unfortunately, not this time.

My big brother had carried his declarations and assertions too far, and we had come to rescue not celebrate.

He had never been arrested before. His public demonstrations often caught the attention of the Sanhedrin and the Temple Guard but never to the point of being arrested. I'm sure the time he spent in the bowels of the Roman prison or Herod's dungeon would have shaken some common sense into him.

At the Praetorium, I looked for a place for Mama and Mariam to rest. Two large men, talking and eating fruit, perched on the only stone bench within eyesight of the entrance to Pilate's Stone Pavement. They looked up at me apathetically when we approached, until their gaze turned to Mama. When their eyes met hers, their expressions changed, as if they were looking into their own mother's eyes. Both men grabbed their knapsacks, stood, and smiled. "Please sit here," one of them said, and both stepped away.

I placed my bag on the ground and gently guided Mama to the bench. She sat and leaned against the wall with a slight groan of relief. I doubled my cloak, placed it behind her back, and tenderly positioned her against the wall. Shaded from the sun, she and Mariam could rest while I rescued Jesus. I took a couple of steps toward the crowd and searched for any sign of him.

"Can you see him?" Mama said in a tone filled with concern. Her gentle voice is the only true motive I had for continuing these efforts to salvage my brother from his foolishness.

“No, Mama,” I called over my shoulder. “They haven’t brought him out yet.”

Most Passover pilgrims, it seemed, came here to get a look at where judgment would be dispensed: the Pavement. They wanted to witness the Procurator of Emperor Tiberius perform his parody of justice.

Bounded by a prominent stone barrier, a huge throne sat center stage with its massive golden eagle overhead—all devised to impress spectators and to demonstrate the authority of Rome. It accomplished its purpose, to validate Caesar’s contempt for the inhabitants of Judaea.

The stone barrier erected to separate Jerusalem from the sovereign soil of Rome was shorter than the average man, and it extended from Pilate’s palace to the Jaffa Gate. The entrance onto the enormous limestone pavement was wide and unobstructed. No sentry stood guard at the entrance because no self-respecting Jew would defile himself by stepping foot onto gentile land when the Passover was at hand. Such defilement would make him unclean and unable to enter the temple courts. The Romans did not need to keep us out; our sanctimonious dogma did that.

“Pilate has not arrived. It will be a while yet,” I shouted to Mama.

Pilate, no doubt, waited for just the right moment to make his grand entrance. For a Roman, the only thing better than power was recognition and reverence. He would strut in like a pompous peacock and take his place of dominance over the masses of Hebrew grubs. There he would play god over the lives of a people who would say and do nothing but wait for some divine intervention to save them. Since the time of Abraham, we had faced oppression and conflict, and each time we withdrew like a turtle in its shell to await God’s involvement.

All my life I had heard the ancient stories. I listened to Papa speak of the great victories over our enemies, God’s miraculous

intervention, and the leaders of renowned wisdom and bravery. I did not know when it happened, but the miraculous and the brave had disappeared. Enraged bullies who called themselves patriots were all that was left in a nation of meek, frightened people.

I should not leave out God's ultimate answer to our national predicament. The Messiah. The most repeated story echoed in the ears of the hopeless was that of a Messiah. He would be a king whose power would eradicate our Roman tormentors and set us free.

Well, I hoped he'd come soon. For now, my mind wasn't on the hope of a Messiah saving us from Rome's tyranny. My concern rested on my family and a brother who had lost all sense of reason. A brother who dashed any of my youthful dreams by failing to shoulder his responsibility.

My mind swam with what could have been until a high-pitched trumpet blast disrupted my daydream. A well-fed centurion, bulging from around his armored breastplate like a melon stuffed into a wineskin, bellowed, "Silence. Let there be order and silence. The envoy of Rome, the voice of Tiberius Caesar, Prefect of all Judea, your Governor, Pontius Pilate!"

He stepped aside and a pale, bald man stepped out from the shade of the porch canopy. He wore the robes and sash of Roman authority, but in the company of the virile centurions, this frail little man seemed out of place.

This was the governor of all Judea—the ruthless, cunning Pontius Pilate whom I had heard much about?

He mounted the block steps, then deposited his slumped frame onto the great judgment seat. I was filled with a unique sense of relief and a twinge of superiority. Seated in the massive stone chair adorned with images of lions, serpents, and eagles, he looked more like a child to be pitied than a nemesis to be feared.

I looked back at Mama and reassured her with a smile and a wave. Soon she would be on her way back to Nazareth with her strong-willed and, no doubt, humbled son.

Because of Passover, most of those held for minor offenses were often released by midday. They were only required to humble themselves and cower when they passed Pilate's judgment seat. He'd give them a disdainful look, then dismiss their offenses to show his kindness and Rome's leniency. Send them on their way with a warning and a few pokes from the butt of a centurion's lance.

Pilate waved a flaccid hand in the direction of one of the centurion guards and leaned on an ornately carved armrest. The guard grasped a large iron loop on the door below the portico and pulled with a grunt to expose a cavernous black hole that led down to prison cells below.

"Out," he shouted into the darkness.

Silence fell over the horde of observers.

"All of you. Out."

After a long soundless moment, a dirty, disheveled, bearded figure stepped from the cavern. He raised his hand to block the sun but still strained to see his next step through the glare. Behind him followed several more unkempt men, all clothed in grimy, torn rags. They, too, hadn't been exposed to the light of the sun in some time. Before the guard slammed the heavy wooden door shut, I counted five in all, neither chained nor bound. Jesus was not among them.

With a sneer, Pilate waved a limp wrist toward the portly centurion.

From the sash around his waist, the centurion removed a parchment and read the charges. "Disruption of the peace and tranquility of the jurisdiction of Rome," he shouted, while two other centurions pushed the men in front of Pilate's throne.

With heads bowed, eyes to the ground, the five stood stooped over and shook like dogs about to be beaten.

"Five lashes each, then release them," Pilate said, without so much as a glance in their direction. After he rendered the verdict, they were escorted through the archway and into the darkness to await their punishment and discharge.

In more serious matters, a fine might be levied or compulsory labor required. For the most grievous violations, flogging or even death could be imposed. Of course, that was of no concern. The most heinous crime Jesus could have committed would have been the disruption of the peace with his opinionated discourses. Confident the day's most serious offenders were judged and sentenced, I worked my way back through the crowd to Mama.

"He will be out soon, then we can be on our way," I said with my hand on her frail shoulder. Her eyes did not display any hope of a quick departure; instead they seemed to reflect a knowledge of something far more sinister. "I'm sure we'll be together soon," I said. "A night in there can only make him more aware of his foolishness."

From the thoroughfare that led from the temple, the shouts of a boisterous mob could be heard drawing near. I rose and looked toward the commotion. The elaborate headdresses and garments of the priests and members of the Sanhedrin were unmistakable. Their small but decorative parade made its way along the access between the buildings. People parted like the sea before Moses whenever an assemblage of religious leaders passed. Caiaphas, the high priest, stopped at a low point in the wall, turned and raised his hand, silencing the rowdy horde that followed him. Caiaphas caught Pilate's eye.

The governor stood and looked at the heavy centurion. "Bring out the Nazarene."

The guard nodded. He pulled open the second wooden door and revealed another cavernous, dismal hole. This time the guard

did not bark orders. Instead, he stepped down into the darkness and reappeared moments later with a figure that scarcely resembled a human. Hunched forward, bound hand and foot, the figure labored to take each step.

The man's vestments, face, and hair were matted with mud. A purple robe was thrown loosely over his shoulders, and what resembled a Civic Crown of twisted thorns pierced his head. Some in the crowd snickered. Others laughed while he shuffled onto the Pavement. Weak and unsteady, he appeared close to collapse. He stopped and stood in front of Pilate's throne with his back to me.

Pilate raised a hand. The crowd went silent.

In a loud voice, the governor said, "Are you a king?"

The man spoke softly as he swayed like a stalk of wheat in the wind. Pilate leaned in to hear the answer. He sat back and stared for a long moment, then said, loud enough for all to hear, "What is truth?"

This brought an uproarious response from the mob; however, when Pilate stood, silence again filled the court.

"Look," he said to the crowd, "I have brought him out to you to let you know I find no basis for a charge against him."

With a nod to the guard, the man was turned to face us. The purple robe fell from his shoulders, revealing that his undergarment had been pulled down below his waist. Nearly every part of his body was covered in blood and open wounds. He lifted his head slightly and looked at his accusers through blackened eyes nearly swollen shut.

A hush fell over the crowd. Some grimaced. Some turned away. Others stood stunned by the evidence of Roman cruelty before them.

"Here is the man," shouted Pilate.

My legs felt like they were about to give way beneath me. I stumbled back. I recognized the fabric of the man's garment,

woven on my sister's loom and sewn together by my mother's hands.

Here before us like an abused animal, though barely recognizable, was Jesus. My brother.

This was no criminal, no rebellious decadent, but a simple carpenter. A man who has never committed a crime in his life.

My heart ached. I looked back. Mama and Mariam were still seated. The crowd blocked their view. I prayed that God would continue to blind their eyes and silence their ears. I began to feel sick to my stomach and in a futile attempt to bring some rationale to this horrid situation, I prayed that one day we would see this as a lesson learned. A hideous, repulsive one to be sure.

I pressed forward to hear what admonishment Pilate would give.

The governor turned toward the mob and focused his attention on Caiaphas and the priests. "You brought me this man as an instigator of rebellion among the people. I sent him to Herod who returned him without charge. You were present when I questioned him. I found your accusations baseless." After a dramatic pause, he continued, "I have punished him, but I have no more reason to hold him."

Caiaphas turned to the crowd and shouted, "He wants to release this blasphemer. This must not be allowed. This must not be allowed!"

The mob erupted with such emotion my first thought was for Mama's safety. Obscenities and accusations filled the air, but one word stood out above the clamor. A word that shook me to my core: "Crucify!"

Crucify?

My brother was not a blasphemer, or a king, but a humble misguided man from a small village who was supposed to be released and sent home. Why crucify him?

An elegantly dressed woman appeared from behind the back of the judgment seat, leaned over the arm, spoke into Pilate's ear, and retreated as quickly as she came.

Pilate stood and the throng quieted. "In honor of your pious observance, I will release one man to you. I will release the Nazarene."

The words no sooner came out of his mouth than the cries resumed. "Crucify. Crucify."

From the far side of the court a name was shouted, and within moments everyone was shouting, "Barabbas. Barabbas. Release Barabbas."

Pilate looked over at the woman who stood in the shadow of the judgment seat. With a perplexed expression, Pilate motioned to a servant, who rushed to his side and placed a bronze basin on the chair's arm. He lifted a large porcelain pitcher and poured water into the basin with an attentiveness that said spillage could be fatal.

With his hands in the water, Pilate looked over his shoulder with disdain. "So be it. You will have your way. Crucify him."

The mob roared its approval, and I sank to my knees. How could this happen? I sobbed. I stood and wiped away the tears. I frantically waved my hands and stretched upward shouting, "No. No. Wait. Please. No!"

But my words were lost in the chaos while the crowd moved around me. Oh, Mama. I glanced over my shoulder. Forcing my way through the horde like a madman, I pushed my way to the bench. The moment Mama and Mariam came into view, I knew they had heard it all.

Mariam buried her head in Mama's chest and wept. Mama, with tears streaming down her cheeks, stared off toward the Praetorium. Her eyes expressed something more, something I couldn't understand. Curiously, the day's events did not appear to take her by surprise—as if she had walked this dark path before.

I knelt, put my arms around them both, and embraced them. Together we wept.

The crowd quieted when a voice shouted in the distance. "They're coming out. They're coming out." Every head turned toward the voice, and each person shuffled away.

Soon Mama, Mariam, and I sat alone in an open corridor across from the entrance to the Stone Pavement where the fanatical expression of injustice had played out. I felt helpless, exhausted of any reason or answer, emptied of any remnant of hope.

With Mama's face in my hands, I looked deep into her eyes. They reflected a combination of anguish and resolution. A heart-break I would never experience, and a comprehension I couldn't fathom.

"Stay here," I said. "I will get us water."

I took a small jug from my rucksack and went to find a cistern. A short distance away, angry voices shouted vulgarities. It was clear who their loathing was fixed upon.

Why did they hate him? He simply proclaimed a view with which the religious leaders and others disagreed. Was that worthy of death? What had he done to justify such anger and hatred?

I'd heard stories, unbelievable stories, of miraculous wonders he had performed. Those closest to him told me he fed multitudes of hungry people with next to nothing. Some said he healed the sick and the lame, and even raised some from the dead. Stories, only stories, I was sure. Even if there was some element of truth, why must he die? Pilate himself had found no reason to put my brother to death.

When I returned with water, Mama and Mariam were standing together at the opening of the wall that led onto Pilate's Stone Pavement. They looked smaller, a little more delicate.

"We must go to where they have taken him," Mama said.

With a weak plea, I said, "Mama, you shouldn't be there."

"We must go. I must be with my son."

A painful, familiar twinge ran through my heart but quickly faded. I was also her son. But, I scolded myself, she was about to lose her firstborn. I put my arm around her trembling frame, took Mariam's hand, and began our passage toward Golgotha.

We stood quietly at the end of a stone path that led to the mound's summit. A crowd had formed blocking our view, but I made no effort to get any closer. I knew what was taking place, and there was no need for Mama or Mariam to witness it. A scream pierced my heart, as the sound of a hammer's blow resonated in the air. I knew that cry.

Shouts of approval and the sounds of weeping erupted as a cross was raised above the crowd. Mama pulled her hand away and disappeared into the throng, followed closely by Mariam. I began to move and was quickly stopped by the bodies that enfolded them. After several minutes of fighting my way through the mass of bodies I stood looking up into the face of unimaginable pain.

In a moment of agony, he slowly lifted his head and looked at Mama. "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother."

His words humbled me. To know that in such anguish he brought comfort to our mother and to me. I looked up. But his gaze was not fixed upon me, nor were his words intended for me. He'd focused on one of his followers, and upon him Jesus bequeathed the care and responsibility of our mother.

My mind shifted from reason to rage. I am her son, not that beleaguered fisherman. What right does he have to pass on the care of our mother to someone else? I became responsible for her three years ago due to his unwarranted departure. Despite the horror that rose before me, anger resonated within my heart.

Suddenly the ground under me moved. Disoriented, I grasped the bottom of the cross to steady myself and a warm sensation passed over my hand—my brother's blood. I looked up as his body wrenched in agony, and my anger faded into guilt and shame.

He raised his eyes to heaven and cried out, "It is finished," Then he closed his eyes and dropped his head. Within a heartbeat I heard the rasp of his final breath leave his body.

Finished? What was finished?

For an inexpressible, inexcusable moment I disregarded his suffering and my mother's torment. I thought only of myself and did the only thing left for me to do. I ran. Like a wounded animal desperate for asylum, I ran. I abandoned my obligation as a son, my bond as a brother, and my responsibility as a man.

I left Mama and Mariam there, at the foot of his cross.

At the worst possible moment.

I fell a short distance away glancing back just in time to see a centurion step forward and drive a spear into Jesus's side.



Thunder, deep and commanding, drew me back to the tree where I sat. My heart felt as twisted and misshapen as its trunk.

Several of those who had come to see the spectacle of Rome's justice fulfilled began to leave the gruesome scene, walking through my olive treed sanctuary. Their comments about how each of the three thieves received what was due them rang in my ears.

Jumping to my feet I screamed, "You don't know him!" Then I turned and ran, seeking a new, unpopulated harbor in which to hide.

My brother was dead, and I had abandoned him.

"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"

Pilate asked.

They all answered, "Crucify him!"

Matthew 27:22