

[A sweep of strings building to plodding drums and minor-key riffs... The Almelem theme music plays. We hear the faint sound of a crowd: talking, carts moving, tools and livestock.]

ADLAI (Sean Williams): (laughing) I couldn't believe this man! He shows up with ten pigs and they were—Gestas—these were the skinniest pigs you've ever seen.

GESTAS (Nat Cassidy): (chortling) Oh no, I'm sure. I know Samuel's pigs.

ADLAI: (interrupting) They—they looked like large rats. I'm telling you. It looked like he found the largest rats he could find and *shaved* them.

GESTAS: Ugh!

ALMELEM (Dani Martinek): Nevertheless—

ADLAI: But—and here's my mistake—I gave him the money first.

GESTAS: No!

ADLAI: Yes, I gave him the money first, and—

ALMELEM: Nevertheless—

ADLAI: And so now I'm carrying these rat-pigs—

GESTAS: Sure.

ADLAI: I bought chickens! (laughing)

GESTAS: Ugh! (laughing)

ADLAI: And he brought me pigs! He brought me rat-pigs!

GESTAS: Hilarious.

ADLAI: So, obviously, I'm going to have to wait until they grow and then find a Roman to buy them off of me.

ALMELEM: Nevertheless, Adlai.

ADLAI: And—(quietly) you know how they are, Gestas.

GESTAS: Yes. (laughing uneasily)

ADLAI: You know how they are. They will give me coin, maybe. *Maybe*. More likely, they will beat my sons in front of me and take the pigs anyway.

GESTAS: Well they will give you coin, but yes.

ADLAI: Look, I can't get mad at Samuel. He's simple, and he's family.

GESTAS: Of course.

ADLAI: (laughing) He just—I don't even know if he knew these were chickens or pigs.

GESTAS: Or rats! (big laugh)

ADLAI: (big laugh) I'm telling you, if you saw these pigs. They are absurd.

GESTAS: Ugh!

ADLAI: So, I'm out the money, which bends me all the way around in an uncomfortable way.

ALMELEM: But your dealmaking with a simple man shouldn't put *us* in a position where—

GESTAS: Hang on, Almelem, just hang on for a second.

ADLAI: (Interrupting) Gestas! You let this kid talk to me like this?

GESTAS: All right, all right, calm down Adlai. I'm not letting anyone do anything, Almelem knows what they want and they're asking for it, that's all.

ADLAI: It sounds like they're trying to threaten me.

ALMELEM: I'm not trying to threaten you, Adlai, I'm simply saying—

GESTAS: Almelem, do you know Samuel?

ALMELEM: Do I—Does it matter?

GESTAS: Adlai, tell Almelem. About Samuel.

ADLAI: Oh, well, Samuel is my cousin's oldest. (laughing) Inheritor of the great kingdom of The Shithole Near The Shithouse. And we don't know if it's the air around the sewers that made him simple, but he has as much sense as a bag of rocks.

GESTAS: Now, that is unkind. Fair (Adlai laughs) but unkind. (Gestas laughs)

ADLAI: (laughing) He is family! I can say it! But he's desperate to make money for his poor mother and father. And for some reason he is the center of their hearts, no matter how fucking stupid he is.

GESTAS: (whispering) And he is very fucking stupid. (laughing)

ADLAI: (laughing) Oh, I see! Now *you* can say it!!!

GESTAS: Look, everyone knows that Samuel is thus. Everyone.

ADLAI: Of course!

GESTAS: And everyone knows that a man like that should probably not be in business.

ADLAI: Yes! [beat] Well, I mean—yes, of course.

GESTAS: But he's family!

ADLAI: You see, Almelem. Listen to this man, he understands. He has a heart.

GESTAS: Of course.

ALMELEM: Gestas, we need—

GESTAS: You can pay us when you can pay us, my old friend.

ADLAI: I expected nothing less! You are a scholar of the moral code.

GESTAS: A fucking Rabbi.

ADLAI: (laughing) A "learned man!"

GESTAS: (laughing) Of course. Pay us when you can.

ALMELEM: Gestas.

GESTAS: I do think you should be careful.

ADLAI: I—What?

GESTAS: Listen, this is just between us, since we've known each other forever.

ADLAI: Sure, sure, of course.

GESTAS: Please keep an eye on your neighbors. And see if you can keep these pigs somewhere out of sight.

ADLAI: (not laughing) How do you mean?

GESTAS: Yaakov.

ADLAI: Yes.

GESTAS: Uh, he's done well with the sheep and the milk. As, as well as you have.

ADLAI: Well, huh. He doesn't have the friends I have! (Adlai and Gestas laugh) I'm not worried.

GESTAS: Of course. But he does want the friends you have. He spoke to Almelem.

ADLAI: He—Oh. And [beat] Almelem, he spoke to you?

ALMELEM: I've spoken to Yaakov, yes.

ADLAI: And you think—

GESTAS: No, no! No, no. We've known each other forever, that's not what I'm saying. I'm saying he has a seat by the Eastern Wall, and all those fuckers chatter like a combing circle.

ADLAI: Yes.

GESTAS: So, if he knows you have pigs—anyone who knows that you have pigs and wants to make trouble for you... (Gestas trails off)

ADLAI: But, I can trade with the Romans! There is no law!

GESTAS: Of course.

ADLAI: (Interrupting) There is no law!

GESTAS: There is no law. I'm just saying, anyone who knows you have pigs can try to make trouble. Anyone.

ADLAI: But, Almelem, you could—You talk to everyone! If they tried—

ALMELEM: I would do whatever Gestas says to do. But gossip only works in one direction. You can't make things unsaid.

ADLAI: And anyone who knows I have pigs—

GESTAS: Not us, of course.

ADLAI: No. Of course. Gestas, uh—(clears throat). Please, stay here for one moment. I-I'll be right back. [footsteps, the creak and bang of a door as it opens and closes.]

ALMELEM: (whispering) Gestas, Yaakov has never spoken to me about trade.

GESTAS:(whispering) And I never said he did. Quiet. [the door creaks again]

ADLAI: Gestas, [coins clink in a bag] my wife has been hiding coin from me.

GESTAS: Ah! That is just like a woman!

ADLAI: (laughing) I'm sure this is why you never married!

GESTAS: I love coin too much! (Adlai laughs)

ADLAI: Here. [coins clink as Adlai hands them over] This is what I owe you for the oil.

GESTAS: Oh, Adlai, we can be patient!

ADLAI: No no no no! I insist. You must take it. Almelem, my friend?

ALMELEM: I—yes?

ADLAI: You won't let them say anything.

ALMELEM: You are an old friend of my master, I would never do anything to you that he hadn't asked for.

ADLAI: And you would never do anything to hurt me, Gestas, I know that.

GESTAS: My friend, I'm just grateful that it need not be said.

[Music, a staccato beat over drones and distortion. The music fades into the sound of footsteps on a sandy path and a busy crowd.]

ALMELEM: How did you know he had coin?

GESTAS: Everyone has coin. Are you kidding? How could he not have coin?

ALMELEM: But the pigs were—

GESTAS: Everyone pretends that coin is different from other coin if you keep it in a separate purse. It's so infuriating.

ALMELEM: So, it didn't matter that Samuel gave him pigs? [cart wheels rolling over the gravel road]

GESTAS: Carina! You look lovely today!

CARINA (Jordana Williams): And you look like an underfed tree, Gestas.

GESTAS: Why are you so cruel to me, when you love me so much!

CARINA: I love you like I love the toilets. When I need you, I'm happy to see you and when I'm done, I'm happy to leave you behind.

GESTAS: May the sun rise on your happiness!

CARINA: (calling loudly) May your fruit ever be ripe! [the cart wheels roll away.]

GESTAS: First of all, the sure sign of an absolutely horrible person is when they shift blame to someone they think you already dislike. The *second* someone says, "it's not my fault, it's the Philistines, or the Idiots, or the untouchables" or whatever, you know you're dealing with a complete piece of shit.

ALMELEM: Okay.

GESTAS: Fucker blames his wife.

ALMELEM: Right!

GESTAS: But second of all, people will tell you that they don't have *your* coin, as if their coin is all divided into piles. But coin is like water.

ALMELEM: Right.

GESTAS: There is a well. If they tell you, oh the bucket is empty and your water should be in it, make them put the bucket back down the well.

ALMELEM: Right. Understood. But—there is more to all of this than coin, yes?

GESTAS: (sighs heavily)

ALMELEM: Gestas. The Romans make us use coin that is not even ours. We make their coin under their rules, and we should be trying to—

GESTAS: (interrupting) No.

ALMELEM: Please, Gestas. Please, you've gotta talk to him.

GESTAS: No fucking way.

ALMELEM: I told him you would talk with him! (Gestas sighs) I gave him my word!

GESTAS: That sounds like a mistake.

ALMELEM: Gestas, you have to at least talk to him, he can—

GESTAS: Not [a creak as a door heaves open] out here, Almelem. [The door creaks again as they step inside and close it with a thump. The noise of the crowd is so muffled it can barely be heard.] What is wrong with you?!

ALMELEM: [footsteps across a stone floor] This isn't just a job, Gestas. This isn't just fun or something. This isn't for money. [clinking and rustling of fabric] This is a chance for us to do something really good. [the sound of a heavy cloth bag hitting a wooden table] We might actually inspire some real change here!

GESTAS: I know the man! Are you kidding me? [creaking, as if someone is sitting down into a chair] Yahya, right?

ALMELEM: John.

GESTAS: Before he was John, he was Yahya. [coins clinking and sliding around] I know the man. At least I knew him before he went crazy.

ALMELEM: He's not crazy.

GESTAS: He's letting people think he's crazy. He's making people think he's crazy. [more cloth and paper sliding around on a table] There's no difference.

ALMELEM: Come on, you don't believe that. [coins spilling out onto the table with a ringing clatter]

GESTAS: His story is a complete mess! Wh-what is he even trying to do? [setting the coins in stacks on the table]

ALMELEM: He's bringing down the Roman occupation and trying to—

GESTAS: (groaning) Oh, for the love of God.

ALMELEM: He is!

GESTAS: How does that help me?

ALMELEM: Uh, it helps everyone?

GESTAS: [paper slides across the table] Uh, not me. And not you. What's the count?

ALMELEM: Forty one. Eh, let me re-count. [the coins slide against the table]

GESTAS: Is that from? (trailing off)

ALMELEM: From last night, I've got this morning right here. Forty one. [a pen scratches against the paper] You don't want to end the Roman Occupation?

GESTAS: Do the Romans go to the Jewish whorehouses?

ALMELEM: Fine.

GESTAS: Do the Romans gamble? Do they play the numbers? The Romans will pay for those pigs!

ALMELEM: There's gotta be more than that.

GESTAS: Oh, come on. [paper rustles]



ALMELEM: There's gotta be more!

GESTAS: [the paper slides against the table] There is! There is more! And if I could find another kid like you, we'd have another warehouse, we'd run more numbers. I'd run twice the olive oil out to Galatia and Crete. [more coins clinking] If you get rid of the Romans, [slapping leather, like Gestas has closed a book] I'll have to find a whole new set of people to deal with. I know the Romans, [clinking] I trust the Romans. They love coin and they help us make coin, so why do we need to get rid of them? [rustling]

ALMELEM: We can't survive under foreign rule. We will lose ourselves, we won't be Jews.

GESTAS: C'mon. [more clinking coins] We've never ruled ourselves, we don't know how. If we didn't have the Romans to fight against, we'd have to find someone.

ALMELEM: What if John is the prophet we've been waiting for? (Gestas scoffs) What if he can unite us? Not just in opposition! (Gestas chuckles) Not just in opposition, but as a leader? (Gestas hums) What if he can bring down the Roman Occupation, and then actually build a new country, a Jewish country? What if he could bring us to Israel?

GESTAS: Okay, but he's *not* doing that.

ALMELEM: He is! (with undisguised excitement) That's what he's doing!

GESTAS: Look, one day this will be your job and you will need to know the difference between doing a thing and "bringing down the Roman occupation."

ALMELEM: Bringing down the Roman Occupation is doing a thing!

GESTAS: No, it isn't. It's crap. Listen to me. [clinking] If you say, "Yahya is making a mountain disappear" then I will tell you that that is not a thing. If you say, [creaking and clinking] "Yahya is moving dirt with a shovel from the top of a mountain and one day the mountain will be gone", then I will agree with you that he is doing a thing.

ALMELEM: John. He's going by John.

GESTAS: Okay! Good! That's a thing [clinking] he's doing, he's insisting on being called John. What's the count from Adlai?

ALMELEM: Fifty even.

GESTAS: Fifty? Ugh, that's three short. You're talking about Yahya and I'm missing coin.

ALMELEM: John. [pen scratches across paper]

GESTAS: Yes. John. He's John. Great. What else is he doing?

ALMELEM: He's ushering in a revolution—

GESTAS: (Interrupting) Uhuhuhuhuh. [creaking]

ALMELEM: He's leading a—

GESTAS: No.

ALMELEM: He's baptizing people.

GESTAS: There you go. [creaking]

ALMELEM: But the baptized are following him.

GESTAS: Yes.

ALMELEM: And if enough of them come together, they can actually lead a revolution! He can do it, he's the man that can do it!

GESTAS: Ah, but-but why are they following him? Wh-what does the baptism do, exactly?

ALMELEM: It-it gives you a new, uh—you become part of the fold.

GESTAS: (sighing) Give me two more sheets.

ALMELEM: [rustling paper] Here.

GESTAS: Alright, you go under water and emerge as a new Jew, that's what you're saying.

ALMELEM: You always do this. Just because it doesn't make sense to you doesn't mean it's not true.

GESTAS: Look, it's nonsense.

ALMELEM: It washes away your sins! (Gestas scoffs) All of the sins you've committed before you're baptized are gone. You become part of a larger thing. You dedicate your life to God and no matter who your father was, who your mother was, you become part of this holy order. You become a new kind of

Jew, a Jew without sin who's dedicated to this flock, this purpose. [the crowd sound from outside has gotten a little louder]

GESTAS: [beat] Okay. [the chair creaks as Gestas rocks] Okay. You get baptized, you become part of this larger thing. This revolution, right? The poorest person, the richest person, they all become part of the same thing in John's eyes, right?

ALMELEM: In God's eyes.

GESTAS: Sure.

ALMELEM: Yes.

GESTAS: No matter who your father is. You're a-a new kind of Jew.

ALMELEM: Yes! And you should see it: hundreds, *hundreds* of people getting baptized.

GESTAS: (interrupting) Ah! Jews.

ALMELEM: [beat] What?

GESTAS: Ch-eh, you think I don't get it, but-but you're missing something here.

ALMELEM: Of course they're Jews!

GESTAS: Of *co-why* are they Jews?

ALMELEM: I'm sorry, Gestas, who else would they be?

GESTAS: Romans.

ALMELEM: Why would a Roman join the group dedicated to a revolution against the Roman Occupation?

GESTAS: It's a great question. Why would they?

ALMELEM: They wouldn't!

GESTAS: Could they?

ALMELEM: No! [beat] No! I mean--no, I don't think so.

GESTAS: No matter who your father is, right? The poorest, the wealthiest, it doesn't matter, if you devote yourself to John The Baptist's God and you jump in the magical mikvah, you're part of the movement, right?

ALMELEM: Right.

GESTAS: No matter who your father is? Even if your father has blue eyes and an uncut cock?

ALMELEM: What? No!

GESTAS: Let me ask you this: suppose a Roman gets baptized?

ALMELEM: They can't.

GESTAS: But wh-what if he does? Just one Roman. And he likes it. And then he gets his buddies and his wives and his children baptized. What's to stop that?

ALMELEM: That's not gonna happen because the Romans will be *gone* by the time it would even have a chance to—

GESTAS: (interrupting) And five years from now, or a hundred years, or five hundred—[paper rustling] all the Romans are getting baptized and becoming one with God, or whatever the hell John The Baptist is talking about. Huh? Baptism won't be a Jewish thing any more. This isn't a real revolution. This is the kind of revolution the Romans can just let happen and slowly take away from us.

ALMELEM: Gestas, with all respect, the Romans laugh at the Jews getting baptized. They stand at the water's edge and mock them. Worse than you do. They hate us.

GESTAS: Yeah. They hate me every day [Gestas rises from his chair with a creak and a rustle] with small bags of silver. Put these in the stack for Kislev, these in Tevet [paper parcels rustling].

ALMELEM: Silver, which the Romans tax. These for Kislev, these for Tevet?

GESTAS: Yeah.

ALMELEM: [footsteps] And they use the money to build more crosses for Golgotha.

GESTAS: You think the Sadducees won't tax us if they run things? You think the Pharisees will let us keep every coin? [paper rustling and more footsteps] The Romans can have their coins, Caesar's face is on them anyway.

ALMELEM: You don't care about taxes because you can afford them.

GESTAS: We. [footsteps]

ALMELEM: Yes. Sorry, yes. We.

GESTAS: If you don't like the system, you're free to go out on your own.

ALMELEM: Gestas, come on. Please. You say I should speak my mind.

GESTAS: Yeah, but I want you to *think* as well. You *know* these things, you're just not thinking them through. [paper rustling]

ALMELEM: Should I bring him in?

GESTAS: (stopping) He's here?

ALMELEM: He was—I told him to meet me when we—yes. He's outside.

GESTAS: (whispering)[paper rustling] I said I didn't want to see him.

ALMELEM: You called him "John the Baptist". You already picked a name for him.

GESTAS: (spluttering, then groaning) [music creeps in] Fine. Bring him in. [the door creaks open and closed]

ALMELEM (outside): Come in, but he's in a mood.

JOHN (Mac Rogers)(outside): He's in a mood? Should I just come back later?

ALMELEM (outside): Come on in, it'll be fine. [the door creaks open and closed again, there is the sound of people outside and footsteps as John enters the room.]

GESTAS: (covering his nose) Oh shit, Yahya! [the music fades out] You don't wash yourself before you come in here?

JOHN: [leather sweeping against the ground] I come before you as God made me.

GESTAS: Have you been actually fucking a sheep?

JOHN: I wear what I can find, what God has decided to give me.

GESTAS: (interrupting) Y-ye-yeah, how much money do you have?

JOHN: I don't negotiate with Roman coins. I only have the word of God.

GESTAS: Then get out of my house. Almelem, get him out of here.

ALMELEM: Wait!

GESTAS: (ignoring them) Do you need food? I can give you some fruit and bread. But if you want my help, you give me coin or you get out of my house.

JOHN: Alright. [leather swishing] Yes. I have coin.

GESTAS: Give me what you have. [John groans, coins clink as he counts them out and drops them on the table.] Almelem, take these, plus the coin from Adlai and bring it to the temple. Exchange it for sheckels, pay our tribute. [coins ring as Gestas passes them to Almelem.]

ALMELEM: I understand. [footsteps]

GESTAS: Wh-wha, hold on, hold on. Hang outside for a few. I-I-I'll call if I need you.

ALMELEM: Wait, don't they want you to pay our tribute?

GESTAS: Oh, shit, right. No, sorry, I didn't tell you, uh, I made a deal with them. I send you from now on. They were feeling "awkward."

ALMELEM: I understand. [footsteps]

GESTAS: Oh and make sure you keep calling it a tribute. [door creaks open and closed, allowing a wave of sound from the crowd outside] I'd hate for you to think of it as a tax.

JOHN: I trust that my coin will find a way to enrich the Jewish people, as I know you are a man of The Word and you would never—

GESTAS: Cut the shit, Yahya. [footsteps]

JOHN: Gestas, it has been a long time since—

GESTAS: I said Cut. The shit. You've got coin, so I can help you but I'll tell you what I tell everyone. Follow the story everywhere, but not in here. In here, if we're not talking, there's no point.

JOHN: I am not one of your customers, Gestas. I am speaking on behalf of the one true God, and it's your responsibility to carry our people away from the Roman—

GESTAS: [footsteps and rustling] Get the fuck out of my house! Now! Walk out that door right now. Here—here—here's your coin back. [coins clinking] If you pull this natural man in the wilderness routine, I swear I'm not going to spend a single second—

JOHN: (interrupting and talking over Gestas) Wait, WAIT, WAIT, Yes! I'll—please! I will be straight with you! I'll be straight with you!

GESTAS: [beat] Tell me.

JOHN: I've got seven hundred and twenty men and women. [intermittent footsteps and rustling, as if the men are pacing around the room as they talk.]

GESTAS: Congratulations.

JOHN: You see my problem.

GESTAS: I guess I don't.

JOHN: I had this idea, right? I sell absolution, the end of your sins. If you are baptized and washed clean in the river, your sins are taken away.

GESTAS: Yeah, I-I don't get any of that. It sounds like goatshit to me.

JOHN: Well, it makes sense though. It's what the temple is selling, except I'm giving it away for free. I make these people purified in the eyes of God. And they get out from under Herod.

GESTAS: That—huh. That's actually a really good idea.

JOHN: Right?

GESTAS: Because the river costs you nothing. A-And there's no way to prove that god still holds them responsible for their sins, they won't know that until they die. (chuckling)

JOHN: Right. And when they get to that point, what are they gonna do, really?

GESTAS: (laughing) They show up and say, "I was baptized. You're welcome." And God says, "I don't even know what that means, dummy."

JOHN: Well—God knows what it means. He knows all.

GESTAS: Sure, sure. But God's not going to be impressed that they fell for a con.

JOHN: It's not a—look, I don't really want to talk about the baptism. The point is I'll have a thousand by the end of the spring.

GESTAS: So what's the problem?

JOHN: What do I do then?

GESTAS: Lay them out and get them dry. Maybe you can baptize them again.

JOHN: I thought about that. It won't work.

GESTAS: (laughing) Of course you thought about that—[leather rustling] Oh good Lord, John, don't take that cloak off, it makes the smell worse! (groans)

JOHN: (ignoring this) So, I don't know what to do with the baptized.

GESTAS: Then why the hell are you baptizing them?

JOHN: Because—Are you serious? It's great! You should come down to the river. We're all together and we're like a family.

GESTAS: Come on, Yahya. You want me to guess?

JOHN: Well, that's not necessary, I think we can let it go unsaid.

GESTAS: (interrupting) We were boys together, we became men together. I've got a pretty good guess why you'd want to get as many people stripped bare and lying back in the river.

JOHN: That's not really what I'm doing here.

GESTAS: And it's men and women, right? You've never been that particular.

JOHN: I—it wasn't—look, that's not necessarily a bad part of the whole thing, but I actually wanted to bring people together. I wanted to find a way to make a—a family. A community?

GESTAS: Really.



JOHN: Yes! These shit-eating Romans are as bad as Herod and I'm sick of it. I fucking hate it. And we need a movement, an organization, some way to show each other that we're part of this new tribe. I—I thought I could get a couple dozen people to prepare for the coming r-revolution or whatever.

GESTAS: Sure, sure, but it's not a couple dozen now. You have—w-what did you say? Seven hundred?

JOHN: These people are all coming down to the river to pray, they're-they're joining the movement to overthrow the Roman Occupation.

GESTAS: Almelem says that's what you're doing.

JOHN: Sh-sure. Right. I mean—it's not *not* what I'm doing. I just didn't really have a larger plan in place. I just hate Herod, I hate him the way everyone hates him, and it's just—it's him and the Romans and I just wanted to do something. We can't sit around and do nothing while our temples are being desecrated. [more footsteps as John's pacing ramps up]

GESTAS: [a drawer opens and shuts] Yeah, it's just terrible.

JOHN: Look, I'm serious about that. God doesn't want the Romans here. [paper rustling] This is the land of Israel.

GESTAS: You asked him?

JOHN: Gestas, this is true.

GESTAS: Fine.

JOHN: You know this is true. Whatever might be happening with the Temple, whatever might be happening with Herod or Pilate or whomever, you know this is the land promised to us. You know we need our own rule, our own land.

GESTAS: I know no such thing, but you've hired me to help you. Is that what you want? [rustling paper] You want to be a Palestinian Caesar?

JOHN: I can be. I could be. [beat] Yes, that's what I want.

GESTAS: And you'll have a thousand people by spring (sighs)?

JOHN: I can have more.

GESTAS: And you want to know—

JOHN: What do I do then?

GESTAS: Huh. Well–th-this is no small thing. You’re saying you’re the Messiah.

JOHN: I’m not. To you. I’m not saying that. I’m saying I could be. I’ve got the people. I’ve got a thing. People are coming to me and I can put together an army.

GESTAS: Nuh-no, no, no. [beat] Not an army.

JOHN: Not an army.

GESTAS: The Romans won’t be led out of here by the point of a sword. Believe me. You might think that’s how you want to win, but if you live like that, you’re gonna end up dead. There’s–there’s a political move. Uh, give me a minute.

JOHN: Yeah. (chuckles)[the scrape of a chair across the floor] I don’t have any idea how I’d lead an army anyway. I can’t even imagine, me with an army.

GESTAS: Quiet.

JOHN: I’d just be at the front of the army, [creaking] sort of pointing at the Romans saying, “Okay, everyone, let’s uh, go do some battle!”

GESTAS: Quiet for a second! [beat] If we can get–Alright, alright, here’s how you can do this.

JOHN: Great.

GESTAS: Double down on the baptisms, send your, uh, your-your whatever-you-call-them, the people you’ve baptized–send them out to proselytize for you. Have them bring their friends and family to you. If you can accidentally have a thousand by the end of the spring, you should be able to double that if you do a little work. [a chair scrapes against the floor, footsteps]

JOHN: Understood.

GESTAS: Almelem! (to John) Hold on a second. Almelem!

JOHN: Almelem.

GESTAS: Yes, what?

JOHN: Is Almelem–[the door creaks open, the crowd grows louder] Never mind.

ALMELEM: Yes, Gestas.

GESTAS: Okay, we're gonna start [door closes, crowd fades] but we're starting small.

ALMELEM: I got it.

GESTAS: No thunderstorm, just a little light rain.

ALMELEM: Gestas, I got it. Whispers, giggles, I got it. No yelling from the hilltops.

GESTAS: Just servants, right? I-I don't want heads of households, not yet. W-We-We've gotta—

ALMELEM: I got it. I already had it. [the door creaks open, the crowd is louder, footsteps] Going slow. On my way. [the music creeps in, footsteps on the gravel path]

ALMELEM: So. I go first to the baths. I can talk to Aaron and Hindel, and that is one of the four families done. The Brennermen are the easiest. [beat] No. No, I'm not gonna second-guess this, Gestas, this is the right move.

[musical interlude]

GESTAS: [creaking and footsteps] So. Step one. Let me think on step two.

JOHN: Almelem is [paper rustles]—what is Almelem?

GESTAS: I'm sorry?

JOHN: I just—okay, never mind. [creaking]

GESTAS: Are you trying to ask me something?

JOHN: No. I mean—No. I just—

GESTAS: You want to know *what* Almelem is?

JOHN: I just—

GESTAS: Oh my God, Yahya. [beat] Here's what Almelem is: the kid I trust most in the world.

JOHN: Almelem?

GESTAS: Yeah. I'm telling you, they're-they're better at this than I am and eventually, when I die, this whole operation will be in better hands than it is now.

JOHN: Really. *You* trust Almelem that much?

GESTAS: I mean—th-they know every single page and servant in Jerusalem. Say one thing to Almelem and next thing you know, it's being whispered in every laundry and toilet in the city. It's—y-y-you know? I-i- It's more than that. Almelem's still so young, but that kid hears parts of the story that would never even occur to me. Not always, but-but sometimes a thing will come out of their mouth and I'm just astonished.

JOHN: Okay, but—

GESTAS: Plus there's something about Almelem that ties people like you in knots.

JOHN: (laughing) Just tell me—Almelem. I-I-If I—I-I-I mean—is—they, um?

GESTAS: Look, what the hell do I know? Eh-uh-neither? I didn't ask. Why you tie a note to a pigeon's leg, do you turn it over to see if it's a boy or a girl? All that matters is that it has wings, right?

JOHN: Well, I'm not exactly thinking about tying notes to legs. (chuckles) There's something about—That kid's got me walking into walls.

GESTAS: Enough, good God. Let me think on the rest. [paper rustling] I'll see if I can arrange a-a meeting. I-I might be able to get, uh— (sighs) I don't know.

JOHN: The Magdalena?

GESTAS: I don't know. [creaking] I think I can get one of the four families. I just I-I really don't know. We have to negotiate this really carefully. But I-I will reach out to the families and then we can talk to the Pharisees or—[paper rustling]

JOHN: Not the priesthood, not the King. Hear me. My people? They're here because they hate how things are. They're coming to me for a change.

GESTAS: I understand, but they are going to have to fight for change and then deal with the change they get. One step at a time.

JOHN: [creaking] Will this happen?

GESTAS: It can. But it might not happen the way you think. The people are waiting for the Messiah, people say they think you are He.

JOHN: Do you think I am?

GESTAS: [beat] Are you making a joke? (laughing) Yahya, I know you! I've known you since we were children! You're smart, you're fast, but you're *you*. You've got one good idea! That's it! You came up with one good idea, to-to wash dummies in the river and tell them they now have God's love. Now that's amazing. It is. It's a miraculous idea. But are you asking me if you're the Messiah?

JOHN: (interrupting) I could become the Messiah. Maybe he won't be born, maybe he will become it.

GESTAS: How? Washing himself in the river? I'm not saying you don't need it—

JOHN: I know you don't believe it, but others will.

GESTAS: But guys like me? Guys who've know you your whole life? We know—look, apologies for this—but we know you're a pig.

JOHN: I will transcend. I will become the man I was meant to be. I can become something larger than myself, larger than all of us. I can—[music fades in] I will lay me down in the river—

GESTAS: Yeah. There you go. That's how you should talk.

JOHN: [the music builds to a crescendo as John speaks] I will lay down in the river. The same waters that wash away the sins of the believers will wash over me and turn me into the man I should be and I will become—[beat] no. [creaking] I will create the son of God inside myself and I will manifest to the world as The Messiah. And I will lead my people to the walls of Jerusalem and the Romans will walk away, swords tucked in their sheaths. We will have a Jew as our king and our country will be called Israel. [music stops]

GESTAS: Go now. Hold on to that and go. [rustling leather, footsteps] Ulgh.

JOHN: [The door creaks open, the crowd is louder] Two thousand by Spring?

GESTAS: Yeah, but Yahya...

JOHN: John. [footsteps]

GESTAS: John. Hold on to that. Have that, have that voice, have that tool. But-but don't lose your head. If-if you run into the Sanhedrin, do-uh-measure your response. Let-let them say what they will say, and I'll do all I can to make sure they say the right things.

JOHN: [footsteps] God be with you, Gestas. [the door creaks closed]

GESTAS: You got it.

[The theme fades in and plays under the following voiceover]

VOICEOVER (Jordana Williams): Gideon Media presents ALMELEM by Sean Williams, directed by Jordana Williams. Sound Design by Bart Fasbender. Music by Adam Blau. Produced by Cara Ehlenfeldt. Featuring Nat Cassidy, Dani Martinek, Mac Rogers, and Sean Williams. Special thanks to Augustus Alexander, Steve Alexander, Micah Busey, Julie Castle, Dan Kois, Harper Kois, Lyra Kois, Kate Cosma, Will Lowry, Lori Parquet, Stacy Raymond, Alia Smith, Moira Stone, Barnaby Williams, and Marlena Williams.

END OF EPISODE ONE