

D A T E L I N E
JERUSALEM

**A Companion Guide to
the Video Series
*Dateline Jerusalem***

by
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Introduction

What if Jesus had been born in the media age? Or what if his contemporaries had possessed TV cameras? What if TV anchors had reported on Christ's every move? The eight segments of *Dateline Jerusalem* capture the result of this hybrid situation.

Passion week has never seemed so modern. The "breaking news" gives a fresh face to an old story, using today's catchwords to recast the story as a contemporary event. You'll see the press slant the story to fit their preconceived notions. You'll sense what it meant for Jesus to step into the tinder-dry Passover at Jerusalem, bearing the lighted match of a message of radical reform. You'll feel the supercharged pressures that made the authorities react as they did.

Eight Crucial Days

The Passover period—eight crucial days near the end of Christ's earthly ministry—are covered by anchor Martyn Lewis, supported by Roman affairs correspondent Dennis Touhy and reporters Lynda Bryans, David Jessel and Richard Lindley. Masked for anonymity, Judas Iscariot gives the cameras his take of the facts. You'll hear Michael Cole, spokesman for Caiaphas, spin the news with the high priest's slant. Tapped for background information are area specialists Michael Greenspan, Rabbi Tony Bayfield, Jewish affairs correspondent David Harris, as well as Douglas Davis, Tal Ilan, Joe Zais, anthropologist/historian, and Jesus Movement Analyst Jerry Murphy O'Connor.

Series Preparation

In preparation for the study series, as the teacher/facilitator, you may want to preview the video series in its entirety first to familiarize yourself with the contents and the format of the presentation. Also, read through the contents of the study guide. You will notice that a story headline introduces each section, similar to how a newspaper would read, were it published in those days. Several study questions have been provided, each followed by a fairly detailed answer along with additional background information. Biblical references are noted frequently for further scriptural guidance and study. While this guide is extensive, you may come up with many other points of discussion throughout each segment that you may want to raise in class. For example, you may want to discuss with the students the series' modernization of the ancient Biblical events. Are the video images drastically different from the events you have seen portrayed elsewhere? Also helpful would be a review of the recommended reading items found on page 28 of this study guide. These sources will prove helpful in understanding the historical background behind the various events presented.

On page 29, you will find several other video programs and a video curriculum package that will prove to be excellent resources for further study on the life of Jesus and his impact on the Jewish society around him as well as on the world at large. To contact us for further information on these programs, or for a more complete catalog of other study materials, please find our address, phone, fax and web information on the back cover of this study guide.

Let the adventure begin!

The “Awkward Squad,” Back from Galilee

Q: What is Passover? How did it get its name? When and where was the first Passover?

Passover is a celebration of the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt possibly as early as 1500 B.C. At that time, the firstborn of every house in Egypt was slain by the angel of the Lord except in those homes which had painted their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. The angel passed over those homes (Exod. 11 & 12).

Q: What is a high priest? What was his most important duty? Do you think God honors the sacrifices made by an unworthy high priest?

Joseph Caiaphas. A tomb bearing the name Caiaphas was found recently in Jerusalem, but he was already well-known to history, from not only the Bible but other sources. We even know the years that he was high priest—A.D 18 to 36. By the time Caiaphas came to power, the office of high priest was a Roman appointment. It had lost spiritual vigor. Caiaphas is mentioned by name several times in the Gospels. The high priest was head of all the priests. It was his duty to offer the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement.

Despite the failings of the high priests, God accepted the offering of atonement for the high priest offered it for himself, too. God used Caiaphas despite his evil heart. In his capacity as high priest, Caiaphas even unknowingly uttered a prophecy concerning Jesus’ death (John 11:41-53).

Commercialization of the temple. Herod had built the Jews a great temple. Maintenance of it cost a great deal. No doubt sales at the temple helped defray the costs. There was also a special tax of two drachmas levied to help pay temple expenses. The drachma was a silver coin that was worth about one third of a day’s wage. At a minimum wage of \$5.10, based on a working day of eight hours, this would be equivalent to \$30 in today’s wages. When Peter was asked if his master paid the temple tax, he said yes. Jesus instructed him to go fishing and said that in the mouth of the first fish he took from the water would be a shekel, a coin worth four drachmas, with which Peter could pay both Christ’s temple tax and his own (Matt. 17:24-27).

Q: What was the significance of Christ’s entering Jerusalem on a donkey?

Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey. The story of Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem is recorded in all four Gospels (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-40; John 12:12-19). When Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey to shouts of “Hosanna,” he was fulfilling a prophecy made by Zechariah roughly 500 years before. Zechariah began writing in 520 B.C. He said, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9). The idea is that a military conqueror would ride in on a war horse, but Christ entered Jerusalem on a peaceable donkey.

Q: How did Jesus show his authority to proclaim a new kingdom? What kind of outfit is Christ’s kingdom?

Christ’s kingdom teaching. The thrust of Jesus’ message was the coming of a new kingdom, the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17). Christ’s kingdom is of the heart-- of voluntary submission to heaven. His authority to announce his kingdom was demonstrated by miracles, among which was the dramatic incident in which he raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11). It was shortly after bringing Lazarus out of the tomb when Jesus entered Jerusalem in triumph. He went to the temple, looked around and then left for the night (Mark 11:11). The next day, he stirred up a hornet’s nest.

Rebel Rabbi Accused of Criminal Damage to Temple

Q: What is the only occasion that we know of when Jesus resorted to physical force?

Temple corruption. Capital cities tend to become corrupt, because power-seekers are drawn to them as iron filings to a magnet. Corruption was rampant in Jerusalem, the seat of Jewish government in Christ's day. Jesus rebuked the ruling classes for their part in a number of serious abuses of power. They oppressed the poor, he said (Matt. 23:14). They wrote harsh laws but did nothing to help lift the resulting load (Luke 11:46). They were hypocrites, pretending to be one thing while doing another (Matt. 23:13, 14, 29; Mark 7:5, 6; etc.). This all sounds like the rulers of most countries through all the ages, doesn't it?

The only reports we have of Jesus' becoming angry or indignant have to do with tussles he had with the ruling class (Matt. 23; Mark 3:1-5). But nothing roused Christ's anger like the misuse of God's temple. Roughly a thousand years before Christ's birth, David prophesied that the Messiah would be consumed with zeal for God's house (Ps. 69:9). Jesus indeed was troubled by the behavior of the moneychangers and sellers of sacrifice, so troubled that he actually resorted to the use of physical force—the only time he is recorded to have done so (Matt. 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46). As a historian remarked about the desperate years when the Reformers were persecuted for breaking with Rome, "Christ used force to drive men out of the temple but never to drive them in."

Christ's attack on the merchants and moneychangers was a blow to temple profits. Reaction was inevitable. The Jerusalem leaders immediately wanted to know what authority Jesus had to act as he did. The implication was that as an outsider his behavior was illegitimate. Jesus used the challenge to show them that they themselves were outside of the only legitimate source of temple authority (Matt. 21:23-27).

Q: When reporter Richard Lindley says "By his actions today Jesus may have signed his death warrant," what does he mean? Why would the Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus?

Murderous reaction. Because he exposed their hypocrisy, the authorities wanted to kill Jesus (Matt. 21:46; Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). Perhaps they justified their attitude by telling themselves he was from a historically mutinous province. They may have compared him to an earlier rebel leader, Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37).

At any rate, they created legal traps in an effort to trick him so that they might bring charges against him (Matt. 22:15; Luke 20:26; John 8:6). Probably they thought themselves more sophisticated--more "in the know" than he was. We know that just a few weeks later they would describe the apostles as "unlearned men" (Acts 4:13).

Q: What kinds of behavior did Jesus engage in that might cause people to describe him as mad?

Jesus' "psychological problem." Have you ever noticed that often when a brave man contradicts the establishment or speaks up against evil, someone suggests he is imbalanced or suffering a psychological problem? This happened to Christ. What kinds of behavior did Jesus engage in that might cause people to describe him as mad? Jesus was accused of being mad or having a demon (Mark 3:21; John 8:52; 10:20, etc.). In *Dateline Jerusalem* this aspect of Christ's experience is captured when newscaster Martyn Lewis says Jesus might be suffering from the Jerusalem syndrome, "a psychological condition affecting some visitors to the Holy City which makes them believe they have some sort of divine destiny."

Q: When Lynda Bethea refers to Christ's manifesto, what does she have in mind?

Background on Galilee. Galilee was the northernmost of the three provinces of Palestine. It was located by the sea of Galilee. Jesus grew up in this area; much of his ministry took place there, including his "manifesto"--the Sermon on the Mount.

Concerning the tenancy law which *Dateline Jerusalem* reporter Lynda Bryans mentions as causing hardship in Galilee, she was in error. The land was not supposed to revert to public ownership every fifty years but to its original tribe and family (Lev. 25:23-28). No doubt Herod's henchmen distorted the law in their own favor.

Q: What did the lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread each represent?

The foods of Passover. Each food used at the Passover had a significance. The foods eaten at Passover were established by ancient law and each represented some part of the story of deliverance from Egypt (Exod. 12:8). The bread was unleavened because the people had no time to leaven it as they prepared to flee from Egypt. The bitter herbs symbolized their bitter bondage in the land of the Nile. The lamb was necessary, for by its death and blood, the angel who killed all the firstborn in Egypt knew to pass over a home and spare its occupants.

Q: What was this Sanhedrin that we hear about in Dateline Jerusalem?

The Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin, or council, of *Dateline Jerusalem* is mentioned several times in the Gospels. It was a body of Jewish elders presided over by the High Priest, and it served as the internal government of Palestine in its ordinary day-to-day affairs. Rome might hold ultimate authority and control of the region, but preferred to govern through local figureheads as much as possible. We know as much as we do about the inner workings of this council because the apostle John seems to have had contacts who reported its affairs to him. He reported its actions on one significant occasion (John 11:47-53).

Dissident Rabbi Challenged over Call for Tax Strike

Q: Does the Bible ever give permission to refuse to pay taxes?

Taxes. Nothing in this world is certain except death and taxes—and talk of taxes will often bring death. Taxes were never the emphasis of Jesus' teaching. However, the Pharisees saw in this hated institution an excellent opportunity to lure Jesus into a trap, by posing an "impossible" question to him. Should the Jews pay taxes or shouldn't they? If Jesus said "yes," his popularity would dwindle with the crowds who thought it was wrong to pay tax to a pagan authority. If he said "no," he could be hauled before Pilate as an anti-tax agitator, and the case for his execution was ready-made. Jesus found himself in a trap but made a good escape. His reply is recorded in Matthew 22:15-22 and Luke 20:24, 25.

Q: What relationship did John the Baptist hold to Jesus? Why was he called the "Baptist"? What was John's name for Jesus?

John the Baptist. The Virgin Mary had a cousin named Elizabeth who bore a son under miraculous circumstances (Luke 1). Named John, he became a mighty prophet announcing the kingdom of God. He baptized for repentance of sins in the Jordan and consequently was nicknamed "the Baptist" (John 4:1-3). The Gospels have much to say about John, who was eventually imprisoned for speaking out too boldly against sin in the life of Herod the Tetrarch and was executed at the request of Herod's malicious wife (Matt. 14:3-12).

John, who was Jesus's second cousin, prophesied his death by calling him the "lamb of God" (John 1:29). Lambs, of course, are sacrifices, a fact especially apparent at Passover—the very period in which Christ was executed. Like any Passover lamb, Jesus was sacrificed up by the High Priest himself.

Q: Give some examples from scripture that show us how Christ dealt with women.

Christ and women. It was by a woman (Eve) that sin came into the world and by another (Mary) that salvation came. Unlike prominent teachers in other world religions, Jesus treated women with respect. He allowed them to learn beside his male followers (Luke 10:42) and to accompany him in his travels (Luke 8:2, 3). Next to Jesus' mother Mary, the woman whose name is most closely associated with Christ is Mary Magdalene. Contrary to popular belief, there is no record in Scripture that she was ever a prostitute, although we are told that Christ expelled seven demons from her (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:2).

Christ's teaching and attitudes went a good distance toward liberating women, and Christ's compassion for women set an example that turned "society upside down." Women responded to this kindness. The most notable instance is the case in which a weeping woman anointed his feet with perfume (Luke 7:36-50).

Q: How many miracles of healing can you remember from the Gospels?

Miracle cures. Scripture tells us that Jesus went about healing (Matt. 4:23). No doubt many followed him because of this fact alone without real change of heart. *Dateline Jerusalem* gives four examples of miracles Jesus worked. As can happen in news reporting, the research of the reporters was inaccurate, for no blind man is mentioned in Scripture as having been given sight in Capernaum, although Mark 8:22 records that one was brought to Jesus and healed in the nearby town of Bethsaida. The story of the ten lepers Christ healed is found in Luke 17:11-19. The blind man at Jericho appears in Luke 18:35-43, and the restoration of Lazarus to life occurs in John 11.

Q: In what sense can God live in a temple built by human hands? Do you think he was actually present at the temple in Jerusalem? Why isn't there a Jewish temple in Jerusalem today?

Jesus talks of the destruction of the temple. *Dateline Jerusalem* reports that Jesus told his followers the temple would be totally destroyed. The temple was the center of Jewish culture, and only one was allowed as a demonstration of God's unity. To enter the holiest place was permitted only to the high priest, and then only once a year because God's presence was there. We know from Solomon's great prayer of intercession that no building made by man can contain God; according to Paul, the bodies of Christians are temples of the Holy Spirit. From our own inner experience, we perhaps can understand what it means for God to be present.

The presence of their temple dedicated to God was to prove no protection to the Jews when they revolted against Rome. The events of Christ's ministry took place around A.D. 30. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Christ's prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, an event which occurred in A.D. 70. Jesus declared that not one stone would be left standing on another at the temple (Matt. 24:2), and literally this came true, for it was torn down to its foundation. Jesus also said that if the temple were destroyed, he would rebuild it in three days, which the disciples eventually understood as a reference to the resurrection of his body (John 2:19-21).

Exclusive Evidence of Blasphemy and Treason

Q: What is a Messiah? Why did the Jews expect a Messiah to come in Christ's day?

Messiah talk. Based on a timetable established by the prophet Daniel, the Jews expected Messiah to appear at about the time Christ came (Dan. 9:24-27). Regrettably, most did not recognize him when he came. One who did was Peter, who declared that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus called him blessed, saying the Father had revealed this to him (Matt. 16:13-20). Think about it: Apart from his miracles and teachings, Jesus must have seemed very much an ordinary guy to the disciples, hard to identify as a Messiah. He got tired and hungry, had to blow his nose and carry out all of the other physical functions common to mankind. It wasn't easy seeing past this ordinary behavior to the glorious being predicted by Old Testament scripture.

Christ's ordinary human exterior, however, may be part of the reason why the Jewish authorities rejected Christ. They had no inkling that God had really become man and considered his authoritative utterances blasphemous because his claims made him equal to God (John 5:18). They were also offended because he rejected their interpretation of the law, and they were jealous because he was more popular than they (Matt. 27:18). In *Dateline Jerusalem*, reporter David Jessel says, Jesus "doesn't look like monarch material to me." This, of course, was the consensus of Christ's contemporaries and also was prophesied by Isaiah, who wrote of the Messiah, "He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him nor appearance that we should be attracted to him" (Isa. 53:2).

So what is a Messiah? Literally, the Hebrew word means "anointed one." Kings and priests were anointed with oil as a token of their office. For example, when Samuel declared David to be king, he anointed him (1 Sam. 16:12, 13). The Messiah was to be both a military and spiritual leader along the lines of David. The problem was that Jesus divorced his role as victor from his role as spiritual leader. To the Jews it appeared that Jesus could not deliver the goods. He showed no disposition to free them from Roman rule. He refused to allow them to make him king when they attempted it (John 6:15).

Caesarea. Described by *Dateline Jerusalem* as "Pilate's home away from Jerusalem," Caesarea was built by Herod the Great, who constructed an artificial harbor and wonderful buildings. Because of its sea breezes and baths, it was the preferred habitation of Governor Pilate.

Q: Did the disciples always get along with each other?

A split in the "Jesus Movement"? Throughout Christ's ministry there were minor rifts among the disciples who sometimes quarreled with each other (Mark 9:33-37; Luke 22:24, 25). For example, we are told that James and John asked to be allowed to sit at the right and left of Jesus when he came into his kingdom. The other disciples were indignant (Mark 10:35-45). It was only a few days later, on the night of his arrest, that Jesus demonstrated, by washing his disciples' feet, that a true leader serves others, a concept that was novel to their imaginations (John 13:1-17).

Q: What do we know about Judas Iscariot? How do you think he came to be chosen by Christ?

Who was Judas? Little is known about Judas. The Gospels call him "Iscariot," and as reporter Richard Lindley of *Dateline Jerusalem* indicates, no one knows for sure just what that means. How did Judas enter Christ's inner circle? We know Jesus chose him along with the other twelve. However, we are not told when he joined Jesus or where Jesus called him, information which we have about several other apostles—for example, Andrew, Peter, James, John, Matthew and Nathanael.

We know, however, that Judas carried the disciples' money (John 13:29). You might say he was their treasurer. Perhaps he also was touchy. His betrayal of Christ might have been an act of revenge because Jesus had rebuked Judas just a few days before the betrayal. The rebuke came about because Judas had complained of a woman who "wasted" a bottle of expensive perfume on Jesus. Hypocritically, he pretended that this was out of concern for the poor, whereas it was really the money he wanted—he was a thief (John 12:1-8). In the end he made contact with the chief priests and elders (what our *Dateline Jerusalem* reporters mistook for "shuttle diplomacy") and betrayed Jesus for a few silver coins. Later, in remorse, he threw these coins back into the temple, a deed that had been acted out hundreds of years before by the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 13:12, 13).

When Judas cried out in anguish that he had betrayed innocent blood, the priests did not try at all to console him or make sacrifice for him (which would seem to have been their responsibility) but replied coldly, "What is that to us? See to that yourself!" (Matt. 27:3-5) Judas did see to it. He hung himself (Matt. 27:5). Evidently the rope broke, for he fell headlong and burst open (Acts 1:18,19). The money was used to buy a field to bury paupers.

Governor Pilate Arrives to Take Charge

Q: What kind of picture does the Bible paint of Pilate?

Pilate. The Bible does not indicate when Pilate came to Jerusalem. It merely accepts that Pilate was there when Jesus was handed over to him for trial. Pilate was a tough customer. One time when Jesus was speaking to the crowds, he was told that Pilate had “mingled the blood” of several worshipers with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1).

Q: Why do you think Christ stayed in Bethany instead of Jerusalem?

Bethany. Bethany was a town about 2 miles southeast of Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Jesus spent time in Bethany his last week before his crucifixion (Mark 11:11, 12). Bethany was the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus (whom he had raised from the dead). Jesus stayed with these friends (John 12:1). He also ate at another Bethany house—the home of Simon the Leper—in the eight days surrounding Passover (Matt. 26:6). Later Christ ascended to heaven from Bethany.

Q: What is a parable? Name the parables you remember. Do you have a favorite parable?

The message of Jesus. According to *Dateline Jerusalem's* reporters, Jesus used simple stories to illustrate his moral principles. This, of course, is true. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus taught many things by parable (Mark 4:2). Other Gospels echo this. A parable, as Jesus used it, is a short narrative illustrating a spiritual truth. His parables used everyday objects and events to make his points: a precious pearl, a lost coin, the door into a sheepfold, torn cloth, a man in bed who doesn't want to get up, a farmer planting seeds.

Q: How did the Passover get turned into the Lord's Supper?

Buying time. A day before Passover, Jesus sent Peter and John ahead to prepare for the Passover meal. He then gathered with his twelve disciples and ate with them the meal that we speak of as the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-14). It was at this meal that Christ instituted the Lord's Supper (Eucharist). He also uttered profound teachings about himself, the Holy Spirit, and servanthood that night. Some of this teaching was given in the room where the disciples ate the last supper and some as they walked out of town.

Jesus also prayed for them. His deep love for his followers compelled him to pour out truth and to intercede one last time for them before he died. From his own words, we know that he anticipated the deep distress they would shortly experience—a grief shortly to turn to joy, as he himself promised (John 16:20). He did his best to prepare them for the sorrow they were to face. Grief and unbelief dulled their grasp of what he said.

Q: Where was Jesus arrested? Is the name Gethsemane significant?

Jesus arrested. Jesus came with his disciples to the garden of Gethsemane. Gethsemane takes its name from the great Olive presses there with rounded stones of many tons. In a sense a weight like one of these stones was bearing down on Jesus in that moment, and he was crushed out for us. Until the very end, his focus was on the disciples, preparing them, warning them of what was to come. But now his personal distress became intolerable (Luke 22:39-46).

It was in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus was arrested. As our *Dateline Jerusalem* reporters note, the arrest was made by a mixed squad of Jews and Romans. This showed that both sides were acting in collusion, taking Jesus seriously (John 18:3). Judas led a detachment to Jesus and identified his teacher with a kiss of greeting. What a contrast is here demonstrated between the behavior of Jesus, the true friend of all he met, and Judas, the false flatterer. Did Solomon foresee the event when he wrote “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy” (Proverbs 27:6)? As we have already noted, Judas experienced remorse soon afterward and committed suicide.

Dissident Rabbi Executed. Was the Wrong Man Killed?

Q: What is the difference between Peter's denial and remorse and Judas' betrayal and remorse?

Christ's trial. The story of Peter's three denials that he knew Christ is told in all four Gospels (Matt. 26:69-75). Jesus had predicted this behavior, thus demonstrating his divine foreknowledge in foretelling the future. Did Peter's denial really happen? It is hardly the sort of story one would make up about oneself, which certainly suggests it is true. Peter was sifted by Satan, became truly sorry, repented and sought forgiveness. Judas was filled with Satan, was sorry in a way, and then killed himself.

Q: On what grounds did the Pharisees finally succeed in condemning Christ?

At the trial, Jesus was convicted of blasphemy. The grounds for this was his refusal to issue a denial when asked point blank, "Are you the Son of God?" His conviction as a criminal thus hinged on *who* he was. He was convicted of claiming to be the Son of God.

Deadlock. Having found Jesus guilty of their own law, the Jews had the problem of convincing Pilate to execute Jesus. Romans would not execute a man for Christ's kind of a religious claim. Under Roman rule the Jews could not legitimately execute a man, although this did not stop them from stoning Stephen (Acts 6, 7). Therefore it was necessary for them to work up a charge that Pilate could accept.

The Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pilate (Luke 23:1). They accused him of crimes against the state. Pilate's main concern was whether Jesus was indeed a claimant to the throne. He quickly saw that he was not. As reporter Richard Lindley noted, "Jesus adroitly side-stepped the issue of his kingship" (John 18:33-37). What were some of the ways that Pilate tried to escape condemning Jesus? Pilate declared that he found no guilt in Jesus. Furthermore, he recognized that the Jewish leaders handed Jesus over out of jealousy (Matt. 27:18). At the same time, his own precarious position with the Roman authorities placed him under pressure to accommodate the Jews. He sought a way out. First he attempted to placate the Jewish leaders by having Jesus flogged (Luke 23:16). When this did not satisfy them, he thought he would do an end run around them.

Pilate went to the people. It was the Roman custom to give amnesty to a Jew at Passover. He decided to offer them a choice between two men. If the crowds chose Jesus, then the priests would be forced by their own people to let Jesus off. To make the choice as stark a contrast as possible, Pilate matched the most notorious criminal in Jerusalem against Jesus. No doubt he expected the people to prefer a popular, holy teacher to a murderer. He was wrong. Whipped up by their priests, the people howled for Barabbas, condemning Jesus. Pilate's plan had backfired. He even tried switching venue with Jesus, sending him to Herod who was in town, but that failed. Finally, when the Jews stated that if he let Jesus go he was no friend of Caesar (John 19:12), and a riot seemed imminent (Matt. 27:24), Pilate crumbled. He washed his hands of Christ's blood and ordered Jesus executed.

Execution. Crucifixion is one of the cruelest forms of torture ever invented. Christ, who did no wrong, was executed on a cross because he refused to deny the truth about who he was. In being nailed to a tree, he became accursed under God's law (Deut. 21:23).

The sky darkened at the time of Christ's death (Matt 27:45). There is actually secular historical evidence of this phenomenon. A Christian apologist of the third century named Africanus cited an account by the historian Thallus, who, writing in A.D. 52, attributed the darkness to an eclipse. Africanus rightly pointed out that an eclipse did not satisfy the facts. Eclipses are regular and can be plotted. Astronomers know that no eclipse fell on the likely dates of Christ's crucifixion.

Q: What were some motives people had to be at the cross? Do you think Jesus was tempted to do it?

Crowds flock to the site. What were some motives people had to be at the cross? Not only would the crowds have witnessed the gruesome executions by crucifixion, but they also would have seen Roman soldiers gambling for the prisoners' garments, for the military were entitled to the personal effects of the executed men. And the crowds would have heard Jesus utter several statements from the cross. As *Dateline Jerusalem* reports, at one point Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) They would have heard priests mocking Jesus and calling on him to save himself as he had saved others.

Uneasy Calm in Jerusalem. How Will History Remember Turbulent Rabbi?

Q: What are some of the spectacular events that accompanied Christ's death?

Uneasy calm. On the surface it may have seemed that Jerusalem had returned to normal by the Passover Sabbath. However, there must have been a great deal of talk about the events of the day before. In addition to the extraordinary darkness at noon, an earthquake (not mentioned in the newscasts) shook the land. The veil of the temple was ripped from top to bottom. A number of dead saints were resurrected and appeared in the streets of the city (Matt. 27:51).

Talk of the execution of the miracle-working rabbi was on many people's lips. Huddled behind a closed door for fear of the Jewish leaders, the disciples discussed the execution too with heavy hearts (Luke 24:17,18).

Q: Do you think the religious authorities thought deep in their hearts that Jesus might really be whom he claimed?

Still the authorities fear Jesus. Although the authorities had silenced Christ by nailing him to a cross, they still feared him. The disciples may not have comprehended Christ's claim that he would rise again, but the authorities did. Consequently, they came to Pilate and asked for a guard to post at Christ's tomb (Matt. 27:62-66). Perhaps they did not wish to post men from the temple guard because those men would have to miss the Passover and work on the Sabbath.

King of the Jews. In order to execute Jesus, it was necessary under Roman justice to state a charge. Pilate had found no wrong in Jesus. Indeed, he had tried to free him. Eventually he had caved in to political expediency. So when Jesus went to the cross, Pilate had to come up with a charge to legitimize the execution. Labels above the two men crucified with Jesus probably read "thief." The charge Pilate published over Jesus indicated treason against Rome: "King of the Jews."

The priests were upset. They asked Pilate to change the inscription. "Write, 'He said, 'I am the King of the Jews,'" they pleaded (John 19:19-22). Pilate, however, was in no mood to compromise with these men who had already caused him to violate his conscience. Under pressure from them he had executed a noble-minded man, and he knew it. As a result, in the greatest irony of all history, Jesus was condemned for being exactly who he was.

Q: What do you think reporter David Jessel meant when he commented that Christ's death was "not necessary but it was inevitable"?

Did Jesus have to die? Under the law, Jesus had done nothing to deserve death, but only his death adequately could fulfill Old Testament Biblical prophecy. In fact, the entire Old Testament sacrificial system with its innocent animals was a picture of Christ's obedience and death.

Q: Why do you think Christianity ultimately became so successful?

Why Jesus lost. In modern politics we analyze wins and losses. With Christ's death, it appeared that he was the loser. To the worldly wise, the reason may have been plain. Jesus surrounded himself with too many ignorant followers and had no political savvy. His principle "lieutenants" were fishermen. The group had neither the political, financial nor military clout to force change. Jesus himself showed no interest in building up a campaign chest. He missed his political opportunities. In modern terms his organization was unsophisticated, did not maintain adequate tracking polls and squandered its political capital. His boldness could not be doubted, but he remained an elusive figure to the end, surrounded by rumors because of his unusual birth and his unlikely address in Nazareth of Galilee.

"Right now the rabbi is not looking very victorious." With Jesus' death, it appeared his opponents had won (Matt. 27:39, 40). They would write history, and Jesus would find no place in its pages. It seemed he was out of the equation. His body was thrust hastily into the private tomb of a wealthy backer, Joseph of Arimathea, mem-

ber of the Jewish council--the Sanhedrin (Matt. 27:57-61). The Sabbath was about to begin, and there was no time to dress the body properly. An ointment was smeared on his body to help reduce the odor that would be present when the tomb could be reopened after the Sabbath so that the corpse could be more properly prepared for burial (John 19:39). His burial fulfilled another Messianic prophecy which said that his grave would be with the wicked, yet with a rich man (Isa. 53:9). Crucified between two thieves, Jesus was laid in the tomb of a wealthy man.

Q: Why were the women the first to learn of the resurrected Christ?

Resurrection. That ointment was not needed. Jesus was not destined to remain in the tomb. In Jewish culture, the task of preparing dead bodies fell to women. Thus the women came early in the morning to finish the job (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1,2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). Because women had a lower status than men, it was safer for them to be about. Their movements were considered below notice, whereas visits by Jesus' male followers to the tomb might expose them to arrest. They could not know that the guards had fled.

Without men, the women wondered how they would roll away the stone that barred the entrance to the tomb (Mark 16:3). They found the stone rolled back; the guards, gone; the tomb, empty.

Of course, the disappearance of the guarded body raised serious problems for the authorities. No good explanation presented itself. The one "fact" that the religious leaders had in their favor was that everyone knows dead men don't get up and walk. Relying on that generally accepted certitude, Caiaphas, through his fictional spokesperson, Michael Cole, declared the incident closed. Men of the world have agreed on that point ever since.

Jesus Mov't Reports Sightings of Their Executed Leader, Hints at Payoff to Guards

Evidence of the resurrection. Our *Dateline Jerusalem* reporters were quick to suggest that there is no independent evidence for the resurrection. Only Jesus' followers had "seen" their risen Lord. "Mass hallucination," said the newsmen.

Meanwhile, the Pharisees were putting out a story that Jesus' disciples stole the body while the guards were asleep as a cynical ploy to pretend Christ had risen from the dead (Matt. 28:11-15). They may have been the first to scoff at the resurrection, but they were not the last. Since Bible times, worldly-wise men have sneered at the suggestion that Jesus rose from the dead (Acts 17:32; 26:22-25).

Is there independent evidence for the resurrection? Actually there is. As Christians we can rejoice in that, because if the story is a lie, Christians have no hope (1 Cor. 15:17). (1) The first piece of evidence is the empty tomb. Opponents have never disputed this. (2) Second, the disciples clearly believed and taught from earliest times that they had seen the resurrected Jesus. From terrified men, hiding behind closed doors, they became bold leaders of a new movement (Acts 4:13). The eyewitness evidence is strengthened by the fact that the chief opponent of the Jesus followers among the Pharisees came over to their side, claiming to have seen the glorified Christ (Acts 9:1-22). (3) A third and strong bit of evidence concerns the women. If the resurrection story were made up, men would have been credited with the first sight of the resurrected Christ rather than women. Women were not allowed to act as witnesses in Jewish practice. However, all the gospels agree that women were the first witnesses to report the empty tomb and the risen Christ. However, when Paul formally set forth the eyewitness case for Christ, he gave emphasis to Peter, the first male witness—women's testimony in that culture not counting (1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Appearances. After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared several times to his disciples. One appearance was to two men on the road to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem (Luke 24:13-33). But to reporter Richard Lindley it is "not what they saw, but what they say they saw." The story, he adds, has "all the hallmarks of a rumor that's gotten out of hand."

This brings us to two of the explanations that the world gives for the resurrection: (1) Christ's followers were suffering delusion, or (2) they were lying to maintain the movement. How might you answer these two claims? Neither argument will hold up. No delusion in history has had the effect of turning cowardly, sinful men into bold and holy witnesses. Many men willingly suffer and die for causes. Few are willing to suffer and die for a lie that they themselves have created. Yet millions of Christians have suffered or died for a Christ whom they claim to have known personally because he has appeared to their spiritual eyes. And so Jesus Movement Analyst Jerry Murphy O'Connor predicts "If Jesus really has risen from the dead, this movement is going to take off."

Take off, it did. In a Roman Empire where countless thousands were executed by crucifixion, the story of the death of one seemingly insignificant rabbi from a troublesome province somehow gained extraordinary power and swept the empire. Remnants of the "Jesus Movement" were responsible. This fact is amazing when you consider that their leader had died a criminal death. As analyst Douglas Davis points out in *Dateline Jerusalem*, no one was poised to take over leadership of the movement. The man that Jesus had designated as his successor, Simon Peter, proved to be a weak reed, three times denying him (Matt. 26:69-75, etc.). "Not much loyalty there."

The result had to be supernatural. As we know, Christ's message survived the events that clouded the most memorable Passover of New Testament times. Was the joy of the early Christians premature? You be the judge.

Recommended Reading

Those who want more background on Jerusalem in the first century or more evidence for Christ would be advised to look at the following books:

Habermas, Gary R. *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*. This is a careful, authoritative scholarly treatment that leaves little wiggle room for those who deny the authenticity of the gospel accounts. In addition to demonstrating the solid historical evidence for Christ and comparing it favorably with the evidence on which we base other historical events, it quotes the liberals to show that they, too, are forced to accept the core claims of Christianity. Warning: Habermas is college-level reading.

Maier, Paul. *Pontius Pilate*. Maier is a well-studied historian. Although this is a novel, he has produced a fascinating and well-documented account of the life and background of Pilate. The book is not only accurate, but it also is a delight to read.

Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Strobel presents the evidence for Christ in a popular account that reads like a novel.

Zacharias, Ravi. *Jesus Among Other Gods*. What makes Jesus different from other religious leaders? Born a Hindu in India, where several major world religions flourish, Zacharias is well able to answer. That there is a difference, he leaves no doubt. Drawing on Eastern culture, he is also able to explain events in Christ's life that don't make much sense to Westerners.

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