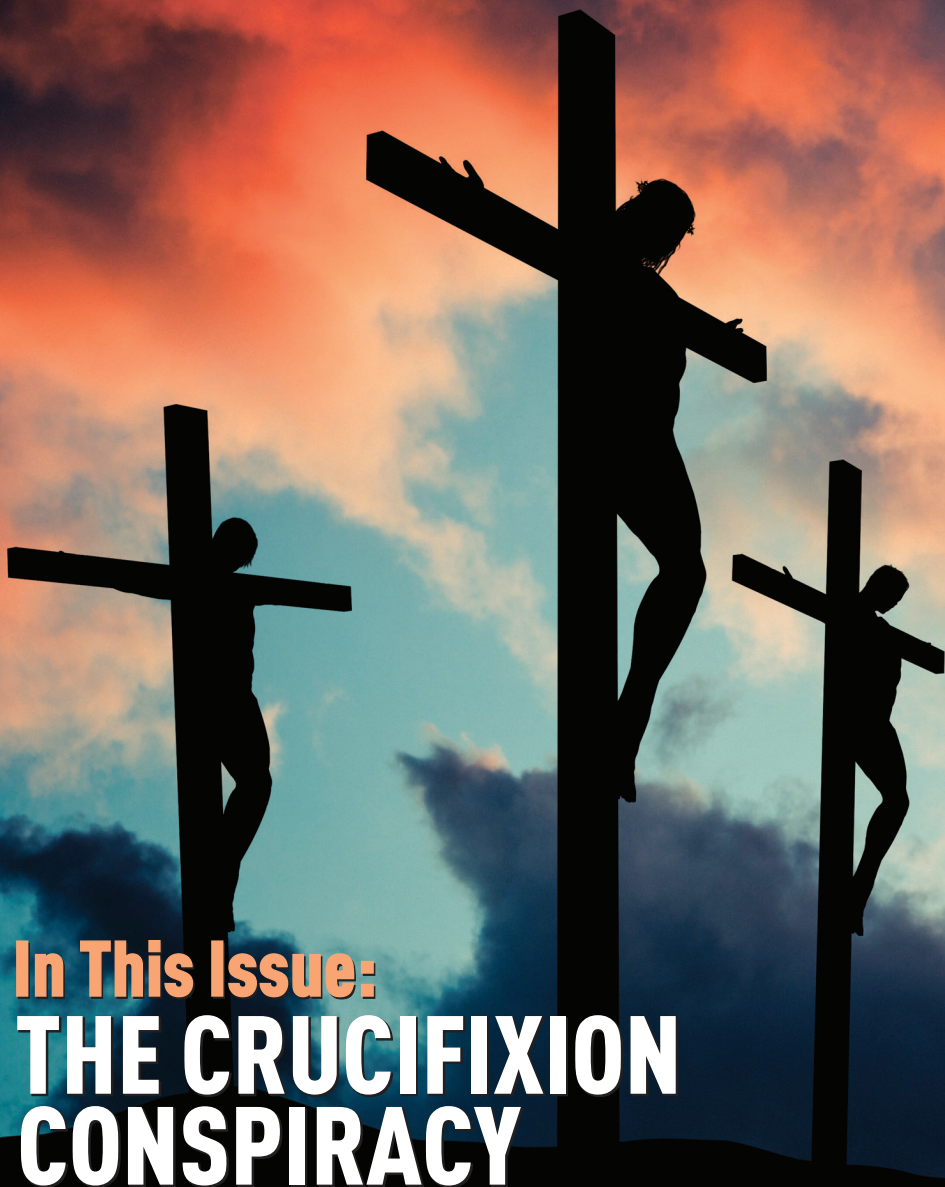


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THE CRUCIFIXION CONSPIRACY

BY SHARON HARDY KNOTT

“And the LORD spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house.... Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: you shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And you shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening” (Exodus 12:1-6). Every house chose its lamb the same day, and four days later killed their lambs at the same time in the evening.

“And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.... And thus shall you eat it; with your

loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’S Passover” (vv.7-11).

The Exodus from Egypt

They were ready to exit Egypt. Their deliverance had finally come after 400 years and 10 awful plagues. Before they left, God started something new—This was such a fantastic, awesome, miraculous deliverance, He gave them a new calendar to mark the occasion, *because their sufferings were over*. Egypt’s bondage was past history. Today we think of the Jewish New Year as being in the fall, on *Rosh Hashanah*, celebrated in September or October. That is their *civil* calendar. But this was their new *religious* calendar which began in spring, in the month of *Nisan*. Rabbis say God brought them out in the spring, because it was neither too cold nor too hot for them to travel, especially in the wilderness.

On *Nisan 10*, every household picked out a lamb. It had to be perfect, without blemish, a male in the

prime of life, which was a year old. It was the day to choose the perfect lamb and bring it into the house. You know, if you have a little lamb in your house for four days, you're going to get attached to that little lamb—they're kind of cute—they're kind of lovable. It's like having a new puppy in your house for four days—you become attached to it. That's what happened during those four days. The family would become attached to that little lamb and love that little lamb, but in four days they had to sacrifice it.

Let's picture in our minds the multitudes of families in Jerusalem, and the heads of the families going out into the flocks, choosing their lambs, and bringing them back into the house. We are talking about thousands of lambs. With this in mind, let's go to Matthew 21 that describes what occurred on Nisan 10 (what we call Palm Sunday) in Jesus' day.

"And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway you shall find an ass (donkey) tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me." (We have a mama donkey and her son the colt). "And if any man say ought (anything) unto you, you shall say, The Lord has need of them; and straightway he will send them.

"All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the

prophet, saying, Tell the daughter of Sion, Behold, your King comes unto you, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon" (vv.1-7).

Imagine that you're in your home, sitting in your living room, and you hear somebody starting up your car in your driveway. You get up and look out the door and see *somebody in your car*, getting ready to back out of the driveway, and you run out and shout, "*Hey! What are you doing?*" He answers, "*The Lord has need of your car.*" I wonder how you or I would respond?

Scripture doesn't tell us anything about the owners, but they didn't stop them from taking the animals. This was to fulfill the prophecy spoken by Zechariah: "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King comes unto you: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech.9:9).*

Jesus didn't ride on both of them. He didn't hop on one for a while and then hop on the other. Mark and Luke tell us in their Gospels "*the colt was unbroken,*" so it had never been ridden on. When riding on a horse or a donkey for its first time, they can give you a hard time and try to throw you off. Bringing the mother tied with the colt would have calmed the

colt down, so the colt would allow them to put clothes on him and Jesus to ride on him.

“And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (vv.10-11).

Friends, this was *Nisan 10—Palm Sunday*. All over the city of Jerusalem people were picking out their lambs and bringing them into their houses, because in just four days, on Passover, they would be sacrificed. At the very time when they were picking out their lambs, *God picked out His Lamb*, seated on the colt as the crowds led Him from the Mount of Olives into the city. On that day when lambs were bleating everywhere—*Baa, baa, baa*—being led into homes all over the city, Jesus was heading for the Temple. Multitudes would have been there for Passover, not just locals, not just Jerusalemites, but thousands from all over Israel, because Passover was one of the three feasts when if possible, every adult male Israelite was to go to Jerusalem to celebrate.

Jesus, the Passover Lamb, was sitting on the prophetic donkey. Peo-

ple with palm branches in hands were laying them on the ground before Him or waving them as He passed. It was such a festive thing—such a celebration! The crowds, waving their palm branches, loudly cried out: *“Hosanna!”*—meaning—*“Save us now!”* They cried: *“Hosanna to the Son of David.”* In Mark’s Gospel it’s recorded: *“Blessed be the kingdom of our father David.”* They were attributing to Jesus *the Messianic title—Son of David*, and asserting that He was eligible to be *their king*. They rejoiced, *“Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.”* This they did on Nisan 10—Palm Sunday—the day when the Passover lambs were chosen.

Certifying the Lamb

The priests were responsible for certifying the lambs as being acceptable for sacrifice. They could not offer the runt of the flock, nor one that was blind or crippled. They had to offer *the best*—a year-old male without blemish, and the priest examined it to declare it worthy.

Paul said in 1Corinthians 5:7, *“Christ our Passover (Passover lamb) is sacrificed for us.”* This means if Jesus was the Lamb sacrificed for us, He had to be certified by the priest as acceptable. It had to be a priest of the sons of Aaron, someone who could follow the priestly protocol to certify the Lamb.

There was a priest whose name was Zacharias; a Levite, he was in the line of Aaron. He was married to

Elizabeth, also in the lineage of Aaron. They were old and childless when he received a visitation from the angel Gabriel during his rotation to burn incense in the Temple. The angel told him they were going to have a child, a son who would be a prophet—a great prophet, because he was to *prepare the way of the Lord*—the Messiah (Luke 1:5-17).

Nine months later, was born to them a son, whom they named *John*, as they had been instructed by the angel. Later he was called *John the Baptist*, but he wasn't a Baptist; he was actually a Pentecostal, because he was filled with the Holy Ghost in his mother's womb. It really meant was he was *the baptizer*—John the Pentecostal Baptizer. He was a full-blooded priest on both his mama's side and his daddy's side. His ministry was to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord.

“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lights every man that comes into the world.... John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spoke, He that comes after me is preferred before me: for he was before me” (John 1:5-9, 15).

These are legal terms. John came to *bear witness* of the Messiah; to give legal witness—to *certify* the One who was the true Light. John's minis-

try was to baptize people unto repentance in preparation of the Lord's coming. One day, baptizing people in the Jordan River, he saw someone coming toward him. In that moment he knew who He was, and declared: *“Behold, the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world”* (v.29). According to the priestly protocol, John certified Jesus as the Lamb of God. He was affirming, *“He is the One—the Lamb God has chosen.”* This was before Jesus started His ministry, before He was baptized of John and then went out officially and demonstrated His ministry.

He was in ministry three-and-a-half years as far as we can ascertain according to the Scriptures. This means in the *fourth year* of His ministry, the Lamb that was certified by John was offered up as the Passover sacrifice. He was certified according to the Scriptures that He was without blemish: *“He had done no violence, and neither was there any deceit in his mouth”* (Isa.53:9). Confirmed in 1Peter 2:22: *“Who did no sin; neither was guile found in his mouth.”*

God revealed to John that when he saw the Spirit descending from heaven as a dove on someone—He was the One. When Jesus was baptized of John, the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit came down in the form of a dove, landing on His shoulder, and God spoke out of heaven: *“You are my beloved Son; in you I am well pleased”* (Lk.3:22). John said, *“And I all saw and bare record that this is the Son of God”* (Jn.1:34).

John, a priest according to the lineage of Aaron, had certified the Lamb. Four years later, it was time for the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed for the whole nation—not just for one household.

The Corrupt Priesthood

Whenever a lamb was to be sacrificed for the sins of the nation, it had to be offered by *the high priest*, on both Passover in the spring and Yom Kippur in the fall—*the Day of Atonement*. The high priest was ordained to offer these sin sacrifices, but in Jesus' day, the priesthood was totally corrupt and in cahoots with the Romans. They were liars, bribers, slanderers, and murderers. In fact, Caiaphas, who was the high priest in Jesus' day, was not supposed to be the high priest at that time. Reading the Scriptures, you might get confused, because Luke 3:2 says "*Annas and Caiaphas were the high priests*" when John began his ministry. Four years later, at Jesus' trial, John 18:24 says, "*Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas who was the high priest that year.*"

Annas was the high priest, but the Romans deposed him and put Caiaphas, his son-in-law, in his place. I was surprised to learn that the high priests during the Roman occupation lived lavish lifestyles. Their homes would be considered mansions by the people. One thing that supported their opulence was the temple tax that every Jewish man had to pay. The Jewish people were extremely oppressed. They had to

pay temple taxes to the priesthood; they had to pay taxes to Herod, their puppet King; and they had to pay tribute to Caesar in Rome. The sheep of God were being fleeced while the priests were living lavishly. Archeologists have unearthed ruins of some of their mansion homes. In fact, the house of the high priest Caiaphas, where they took Jesus to be tried by the council, was the former mansion of Herod.

The priesthood was colluding with the Romans, who allowed the Jewish religion to keep them submitted. They could not abolish Judaism, and in order to keep some semblance of peace and order in Judea, they allowed their Temple worship and sacrifices, and the priesthood, but controlling it behind the scenes. I was shocked to read that Josephus, the foremost Jewish historian of that time, said that *the priests had actually started doing a daily sacrifice in the temple to Caesar!* Apparently, in order to placate the Romans, they actually performed this *abomination in the Temple!* This shows how foul the priesthood had become!

While Rome allowed them to keep their religious laws, still the priests did not have the authority to put someone to death. They could pass the sentence of death, but they could not exact the execution; they had to go to the Roman governor for that. Only the high priest could condemn someone to death; only he could condemn Jesus to die.

At this point, the priests were

irate, furious over Jesus' triumphal entry on Nisan 10, and "were sore displeased" by the people's adoration of Jesus and their crying, "Hosanna! Blessed is the Son of David!" Their envy was growing; even Pilate, the Roman governor, "knew it was for envy they had delivered Jesus to him" (Mt.27:18). Then Jesus added insult to injury when He entered into the Temple and went on a house-cleaning rampage. He overturned the tables of the money-changers, making a whip to drive them out. His disciples stood by with their mouths agape in astonishment, wondering what got into Him—He was opening cages and pens—birds were flapping frantically; sheep and goats were running in all directions, bleating with alarm. Money was falling onto the stone floor: *Ching! Ching! Cha-ching!* And then they remembered the Scripture that said, "The zeal of thine house has eaten me up" (Ps.69:9).

O, that the zeal for God's house would eat us up; the zeal for the holy things of God, for true righteousness and pure worship, would eat us up! Until we will say, "Away with the corruption of the Word! Away with all the hypocrisy in the pulpit!"

Jesus knew the money-changers were gouging the poor people. They were needed to exchange the Roman denarius for the Hebrew shekel in order to pay the Temple tax, because a Jew would never bring a Roman coin with Caesar's image into the House of God. It bore the image of

the emperor with the inscription: "Tiberius Caesar Augustus: Son of the Divine Augustus." On the other side, it proclaimed him "Chief Priest." His father had declared himself to be deity and demanded the people worship him—something no Jew would do.

His righteous indignation boiling over, Jesus cried, "My Father's house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." He called the religious leaders a bunch of thieves—do you think they were okay with that? They were offended, adding to their brewing envy. They had been watching Him for a long time, trying to snare Him with His words. Then the people had made a public display of their belief in Him with their passionate *Hosannas* as He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Did they know the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9? Of course they knew! When the children began chanting "Hosanna," the chief priests rebuked Jesus: "Do you hear what they are saying?"

When Jesus went into the Temple and cleaned house, it was the final straw. He threatened their authority. The rest of that week, if you read Matthew 22 & 23, Jesus preached some red-hot sermons! He taught some bold parables that week; especially when He zoned in on the Pharisees: "You are a bunch of snakes—hypocrites—you look holy on the outside like a whited sepulcher, but on the inside you are full of dead man's bones." (It was a custom to paint the

outside stone walls of tombs with white limestone.) He pulled no punches: “How can you escape the damnation of hell?”

The Conspiracy

The Pharisees, scribes, and chief priests were hopping mad. Something had to be done to silence Jesus: “Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (Mt. 26:1-5).

The majority of the chief priests in Jesus’ time, including Caiaphas, were Sadducees. Unlike the sect of the Pharisees, the Sadducees only believed in the first five books of Moses. They did not believe the prophets, psalms, and other Old Testament books. *They also did not believe in miracles or in the resurrection of the dead.* This is more remarkable when we keep this in mind regarding Caiaphas was the high priest. Many of the Sanhedrin were Pharisees, including Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Usually, these two sects were at odds, but they came together to decide what to do about Jesus. They wanted to take Him with *subtlety*.

The first time we see the word *subtle* in Scripture is Genesis 3:1: “Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the

Lord God had made,” and “beguiled Eve through his subtilty” (2Cor.11:3). It means *to be crafty, sly, to deceive*. It is an adjective that pertains to Satan. By this we see *who their daddy was*. Jesus said in John 8:44, “You are of your father the devil, and his lusts you will do. He was a liar and a murderer from the beginning.” Here this same adjective is attached to them. They wanted to take Jesus with deceit and craftiness like Satan did with Eve, and in such a way so as not to rile up the people. They wanted to do it as quietly and underhandedly as possible which meant not doing it on the feast.

Meanwhile, Satan was working on Judas, who was being tempted because he had a *covetous* spirit. He was a *thief*, and *the treasurer* for Jesus and the disciples. Isn’t it amazing, the Lord made Judas the treasurer when he had a problem with money! It’s like the Lord was saying, “Judas, I am going to trust you, and give you a chance to get the victory over the sin of covetousness.” But he didn’t, and sin always grows; it’s never stagnant. If you don’t get rid of sin, it will go from sin to sin and “*iniquity to iniquity.*”

Because Judas didn’t get rid of the sin of covetousness, he committed the worst sin of all, and betrayed the Son of God for thirty pieces of silver. I imagine in the back of his mind he thought, *I’ve seen Jesus disappear before. When they tried to stone Him, He disappeared. They tried to throw Him off the cliff, and*

He disappeared. I'm sure He will get out of this too, and I'll have the money, and nobody will be the wiser.

I believe he believed this; otherwise, why did he go and kill himself? What he should have done is repent. Had he repented, the Lord would have forgiven him, just like He forgave Peter who denied him three times. It doesn't matter what your sin is, the Lord will forgive you *if you ask*. It wasn't that the Lord wouldn't forgive him—he didn't ask for forgiveness. He was *remorseful*, but *remorse* is not the same as *repentance*. A person can wallow in remorse his whole life and never repent, and be filled with bitterness and die like that.

The High Priest Offers the Lamb

The conspiracy was set, and Judas was on board, but the plot was not initiated until the high priest gave the order to the Temple guards to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane. Judas knew they would be there, and he would identify Jesus with the signal kiss of betrayal. Once Caiaphas released the Temple guards, the murder plot was put in motion. It was *not Roman guards* who arrested Jesus in Gethsemane. The Romans were not involved at this point. It was strictly the Jews, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the scribes, the elders, and the chief priests, with Caiaphas the high priest. There were 24 guards who guarded the Temple at all times, working in cycles. The high priest dispatched them to Gethsemane

where they took Jesus and brought him to Caiaphas' house.

“And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.... Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council (Sanhedrin), sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none” (vv.57-59). Mark says they had many false witnesses, *“but none of their stories agreed.”*

“At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (v.60). This upset them, because it took 46 years for Herod to build that Temple. But Jesus was not talking about the stone-and-mortar building—He was talking about *the temple of His body*. He said, *“A body thou hast prepared me. Lo, I come to do thy will, O God”* (Heb.10:5-9).

“And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answer you nothing? What is it which these witness against you? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest said unto him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said unto him, You have said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall you see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

“Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He has spoken blas-

phemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy. What think you? They answered and said, He is guilty of death. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote you?" (vv.62-68).

At night they held the trial, an illegal sham. Their so-called witnesses couldn't even agree on the lie for which they were accusing Him. Finally, two liars' stories agreed, and they accused Jesus of blasphemy and condemned Him to death. These were the ministers of God, the priesthood, who committed lying, slander, and bribery to manipulate the conviction of Jesus for blasphemy, resulting in the murder of an innocent man.

As evil and as corrupt as the whole thing was, *it was necessary for the high priest to condemn Jesus!* He was ordained to offer the lamb for the atonement of the sins of the nation. John records that Caiaphas told the council when they first conspired to take Jesus, *"You [do not] consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spoke he not of himself (he was inspired to say this): but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation"* (Jn.11:50-51). Caiaphas didn't realize the import of what he was saying—as high priest, he would offer Jesus as the Passover Lamb for

the nation of Israel.

In the morning, they took him to Pilate. If you read all four Gospel accounts (and you must to get the whole picture), in the beginning of Pilate's examining Jesus, he kept saying, *"I find nothing in this man worthy of death."* His thinking probably was: *Maybe he is a false prophet according to your Jewish faith; maybe he goes around saying provocative, foolish things according to your religion, and this irritates you and upsets you, but I don't see where it rises to the level of capital punishment. I can't just kill somebody because you don't like him.*

He was looking for a way out. At one point, he said, *"I know that at Passover we have a custom that I release one of your prisoners from prison as a kindness on Rome's part—How about I release Jesus?"* But they were having none of that. They cried out, *"Release to us Barabbas!"* Barabbas was a bad man, a seditionist and murderer. I am surprised Pilate agreed to let him go since he was a true threat to stir up anarchy and rebellion. Roman governors were always seeking to keep the peace, because if Pilate couldn't keep the peace in Judea, Rome would recall him. He would lose his job and his position. He tried to offer them Jesus, but they refused.

While trying to figure out what to do, he got an urgent message from his wife: *"Have nothing to do with this just man, because I have suffered many things in a dream this day*

because of him” (Mt.27:19). It was a divine intervention that Pilate ignored. Perhaps it’s hard to reconcile it in our minds, because *we know Jesus had to be crucified*. He had to go to the cross. He had already won that victory in Gethsemane when He prayed to His Father for the third time, “*Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done!*” I hope you are seeing how all these people came together—some to kill Jesus, and some to try to save Him—but ultimately, it was God’s will for Jesus to go to the cross. Incredibly, they refused Jesus and spared Barabbas. They chose the Lamb that Caiaphas, the high priest, had said was worthy of death.

Side Trip to Herod

Pilate was still pondering how to handle the situation when somebody mentioned the fact that Jesus was actually a Galilean—*Galilee!* Pilate knew *Galilee was Herod’s jurisdiction*, and as fate would have it, because it was Passover, Herod was in Jerusalem! Pilate didn’t even have to send an armed escort to take Jesus to Galilee. Glad to be done with Him, Pilate ordered his soldiers to take Jesus to Herod’s palace. Oddly enough, Herod was “*exceeding glad*” to see Jesus. He had never met Him, but was “*desirous to see him for a long time, because he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.*” He not only didn’t get to see a miracle—he didn’t get one word from Jesus! Herod questioned

Jesus at length, “*but he answered him nothing*” (Lk.23:7-9).

Think about the fact that Jesus was a man with emotions just like us, and how He controlled Himself before Herod. Herod had beheaded John, His cousin, His friend, and Heaven’s prophet. Yet in Herod’s presence He never said a word. I would have expected Him to call him some kind of snake or rat, or to accuse him: “*You killed John, the holy one, and what did he do to you, but tell you the truth—that you that you are an adulterer, married to your brother’s wife!*” But he never opened his mouth! “*Neither was there any guile found in his mouth.*” When He hung on the altar of the cross, He was going to be a pure, and holy, and sinless Lamb! He wasn’t going to lose His temper and say anything someone could misconstrue. Jesus was not going to let the enemy get the upper hand. He was going to go to that cross as the pure Lamb, without spot or blemish.

After a while, Herod got bored with the whole thing and had his soldiers take Jesus back to Pilate. At this point, Jesus had been accosted by the Temple soldiers, the Roman soldiers, and now, Herod’s soldiers. After mocking Him and putting a purple robe, a sign of royalty, on Him to hail Him as a king, they marched him right back to Pilate. Luke tells us that prior to this, Pilate and Herod had been enemies, but that day they became friends (vv.11-12).

By then Pilate may have been sit-

ting down to lunch and thinking, *I am so glad I found a way to get rid of those crazy Jews and their religious rantings about some prophet who thinks he's the son of God.* Before he could eat a bite, in came Herod's men with Jesus. Once again, he was faced with finding a way to rid himself of Jesus!

"Then said Pilate unto him, Speak you not unto me? Know you not that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you? Jesus answered, You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from above: therefore he that delivered me unto you has the greater sin.

"And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, you are not Caesar's friend: whosoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, GAB-BATHA. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he said unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate said unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away" (Jn.19:10-16).

If Pilate had been nervous

before; if his wife's note had unsettled him before, he was really nervous now. When Jesus said, *"You have no power except it be given you from heaven,"* it pierced his heart like an arrow. Then the coup de grace, *"If you let him go, you are no friend of Caesar."* The last thing he wanted was for an evil report to get back to Rome that he had an anarchist who claimed to be a king, and he let him go. The truth—they were hypocrites, because they would never declare Caesar as their king!

Remember when the Pharisees came to Jesus, asking if it was lawful for them to pay tribute to Caesar, Jesus asked for a coin, and they gave Him a Roman denarius. He asked, *"Whose image is on the coin?"* and they quickly answered, *"Caesar's."* Jesus dropped a proverbial bomb when He said, *"Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."* They were amazed by His brilliance, because they knew of course, that Caesar claimed to be divine and deserved worship, and the inscription on the coin stated so. But Jesus took them in their own craftiness and evaded their Caesar snare, while honoring God. Now they were saying, *"We have no king but Caesar."* How wicked! But it was the catalyst that moved Pilate to crucify Jesus.

"And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew GOLGOTHA: Where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either

side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, *JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS*. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city (on a well-traveled road): and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin” (v.17).

The Inscription

Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were the three most common languages spoken then. Moreover, Scripture says, “*In the mouth of two or three witnesses, shall the matter be established*” (Deut.19:15). But this did not sit well with the chief priests; in fact, they were highly upset: “*Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written, I have written*” (v.21). Why were they upset? Because of the “king” reference? The scripture says that many Jews saw it, and they would have been reading the Hebrew inscription which formed an *acrostic*. This is when the first letter of each word in a composition creates a word or phrase. In ancient Hebrew vowels were not actually written, only consonants. This is what they would have read:

YESHUA—Jesus

HA NAZRI—Nazareth

V’ MELECH—the King

HA YEHUDIM—of the Jews

The first four letters are YHWH. This is the unpronounceable, sacred Name of God, which translates into English as JEHOVAH (LORD in English Bibles). When Moses asked God His name, God said: “**I AM THAT I AM.**” This is equivalent to JEHOVAH, which is derived from a verb tense meaning: “*I am the Lord which is, and which was, and which is to come.*” Jesus used this title to refer to Himself in Revelation 1:8: “*I am the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.*”

Imagine their horror when they saw God’s sacred name above the head of the crucified Jesus who claimed to be the Son of God! Was it the “king” title that upset them, or because they realized—*they were killing God!* No wonder they wanted Pilate to change it! By this time Pilate was fed up with them and as much as said, “*It is what it is, and it’s staying like it is. You will have to go by it and watch that man dying on that cross that says JEHOVAH, knowing you put Him there.*”

I Was There!

So *who* really crucified Jesus?—*Caiaphas*? He was the one who had to certify the lamb, and Jesus told Pilate that the one who delivered Him into his hands had the greater sin. *Caiaphas, the high priest*, acting as one with all of the priests and the counsel, delivered Him to Pilate.—*The chief priests and scribes*? Pilate knew they wanted Jesus dead out of envy—*Herod*? Paranoid, he had

killed many, even family he perceived to be competition for his throne—*Pilate?* He had authority to set Him free, but instead released Barabbas, a notorious insurrectionist and murderer, because he feared Roman reprimand.

Yes, yes, yes, and yes—But there were others!

In 1630, Rembrandt, one of the greatest painters the world has ever known, did something astounding in his painting, *The Raising of the Cross*. He included *himself* among those standing at the foot of the cross of Jesus. Wearing a blue beret, commonly worn by painters of his era, he stands out among those dressed in biblical attire. His *self-portrait* conveys the message:

I crucified Jesus Christ! I'm as guilty as those who drove the nails, because my sins nailed Him to the cross! And so did yours and mine!

Right before His death, Jesus said in John 10:17, “*Therefore does my father love me because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No man takes it from me but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.*” He made his mind up in Gethsemane after first praying, “*Father, take this cup from me if possible,*” but the third time, He prayed: “*Not my will, but thine be done.*”

All of the actors on the stage of His death had to play their roles, but ultimately, Jesus laid His life down—

and the best part—He laid it down so He could take it up again! In Gethsemane, He cried and agonized *until his sweat came as drops of blood falling on the ground* (Lk.22:44). We are told in Hebrews 5:7, “*He offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.*” The human part of Jesus feared death. He had seen people crucified by the Romans alongside the roads—He knew what He faced. But He also knew if He was willing to drink the cup of sufferings and death, *on the third day, He would rise again*. He died to pay the penalty for our sins—“*The wages of sin is death*” (Rom.6:23). *He was raised again to prove He paid the penalty*. We wouldn't have proof that He paid the penalty for our sins unless “*He rose again for our justification*” (Rom.4:25).