



EASTER EXAMINED

CHRIST CONDEMNED

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Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane by the Temple guards, probably about 11pm, late at night.

Jesus was first taken to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest, where He was interrogated. Annas had been the high priest between AD 6-15 and still held a position of power within the ruling hierarchy. Jesus refused to answer the questions put to him and stated that he had not performed his ministry in secret, so those who had heard him should answer. The proceedings then moved to the house of Caiaphas, where the current high priest, teachers and Elders were gathered. Witnesses were called to give testimony against Jesus, but they did not agree among themselves and so the case was dismissed for lack of evidence. This trial was highly irregular as it was taking place at night and the prisoner should have been arrested by those who were putting charges against him, not the Temple guards. Finally, two men testified that Jesus had claimed he would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, which was a misunderstanding of something Jesus had actually said. (John 2:19-21) Jesus remained silent. The High Priest asked Jesus if he was the Messiah, and Jesus said he was. The high priest proclaimed this as blasphemy and the council pronounced Jesus as guilty, deserving death.

The Jewish authorities did not have the power to condemn someone to death, and the Romans would not condemn someone for a religious offence, so the charge had to be changed for the trial before Pilate. It may well be possible that the Jewish leaders had already prepared Pilate for the likelihood that they would be bringing Jesus to him as a prisoner, as Pilate was available to see them early in the morning, and Pilate's wife also knew that this was going to happen. The Jewish authorities had to work quickly because they wanted Jesus dead before the Passover feast started on the Friday evening.

Very early in the morning Jesus was taken before Pontius Pilate. The council accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews, and of telling people not to pay their taxes to the Romans. Jesus refused to answer the accusations. Pilate received a message from his wife begging him to have nothing to do with Jesus, as she had had a dream about him the night before.

Pilate then found out that Jesus was from Galilee, so saw a way to get out of his dilemma. Herod Antipas, the governor of Galilee, was in Jerusalem for the Passover so Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Herod was pleased to see Jesus as he had heard about him and was hoping to see Jesus perform a miracle. He asked Jesus a lot of questions but Jesus refused to answer. The priests and teachers continued with their accusations. Finally, Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus, put a royal robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. Pilate was still in a difficult position.

Pilate was reluctant to condemn Jesus and told the priests and religious leaders that he had examined him and found him innocent. (John 18:33-38) He offered to release Jesus as he usually released a prisoner to mark the Passover.

The leading priests and elders persuaded the crowd to ask for the release of Barabbas, who was in prison for taking part in an insurrection in Jerusalem, and they shouted that Jesus should be crucified.

Pilate wanted to release Jesus but the crowd were excited and said that he would be no friend of Caesars if he did not crucify Jesus. Pilate finally gave in, as he was probably afraid that releasing Jesus might provoke a

riot, and also that he might be seen as aiding an enemy of Rome. Pilate therefore condemned Jesus, but only after washing his hands, literally, of the affair.

Jesus was sentenced to death and handed over to be crucified by a man who realised that he was innocent, but was driven by political necessity.

Whilst this was happening another episode had taken place, which greatly affected one of Jesus's disciples. Peter and another disciple, probably John, had followed Jesus after he was arrested, and Peter was outside the gate of Caiaphas's house when a woman asked him if he was a disciple. Peter denied it. Later on, he was asked again whether he was a disciple of Jesus, and he denied it. Then one of the relatives of the man whose ear Peter had cut off asked him the same question, and Peter denied it a third time. The rooster then crowed and Peter remembered Jesus's words to him, *'But Jesus said, "Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me."*' (Luke 22:34) and he left the courtyard weeping.

Lessons From The Events That Took Place:

- Jesus was an innocent man. At no point did he do or say anything that justified his crucifixion by the Roman authorities. He was not inciting men to disobey Roman authority, oppressive as that was, or to not pay the Roman taxes, as corrupt as they were. Instead, his message was to the hearts of men, calling them to repent and turn to God. His was a message of peace and love, and this did not justify his violent execution.
- The charges were trumped up to produce the required verdict. We can see that the authorities had decided that Jesus had to die before the start of the Passover feast. This led to Jesus's arrest late on Thursday evening, an unusual time for such action, arranged by using Judas to inform on Jesus's movements. It was illegal for the arrest to be made by the Temple guards and illegal for the trial to be held at night, only trials about money could be held then. It was illegal for the priests to cross examine Jesus, only the witnesses were allowed to do that. It is obvious that the charges continued until something could be found that warranted a sentence of death, and blasphemy was the offence that the judges used in this case.
- Pilate knowingly condemned an innocent man. He stated directly to the people that he had found no reason to condemn Jesus. (John 19:4) He gave in to political pressure in his desire to avoid a possible riot, which was why he was in Jerusalem at the time. We can understand his dilemma but truth and justice are real and should be respected. (John 18:38)
- Peter was devastated. Peter had declared that he would never deny Jesus, even if he had to die with him. (Matthew 26:35) Jesus had told him that he would deny Jesus three times before the night was over and the rooster crowed. When this happened, Peter went away weeping. This is understandable, and is a warning to us not to promise things that we cannot deliver, Jesus knows what we can and cannot do before we know ourselves. Peter eventually went on to be a great apostle and was martyred for his faith, which shows that even when we mess up God can still use us if we have the right heart and spirit. He is a forgiving God.
- God had everything in hand, as prophesied by Caiaphas.
- *"Caiaphas, who was high priest at that time, said, "You don't know what you're talking about! You don't realize that it's better for you that one man should die for the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed." He did not say this on his own; as high priest at that time he was led to prophesy that Jesus would die for the entire nation. And not only for that nation, but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world."* (John 11:49-52)
- Even though it looked as though the power of Jesus was going to be stopped by human malice and weakness this was not the case, and the crucifixion of Jesus was God's plan all along. These events did not surprise God, he knew that they were going to happen and he turned them into the means of salvation and blessing for all mankind. We can learn that God is in control in all things, and He will bring about his purposes.