



To Golgotha



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By Rodney Reeves

JESUS KNEW THEY WERE COMING FOR Him. Just a few days before, He had provoked the Jewish leadership when He “cleansed” the temple (Matt. 21:12-17). Incite the Pharisees and they will make plans to kill you (12:14). Anger the priestly aristocracy—the most powerful Jews in Jerusalem—and you will be dead in a week. Perhaps Jesus had heard about the “warrant” they issued for His arrest (John 11:57), which may explain why He stayed outside the city during Passover, sneaking into Jerusalem to observe the Seder via a clandestine operation (Mark 14:12-16). He even knew that one of His own disciples would betray Him. What the priests and Judas thought was a secret arrangement—“we’ll take Him by surprise at night when nobody’s looking”—Jesus knew (Matt. 26:14-16, 20-25). Indeed, when they came to arrest Him in Gethsemane, Jesus knew they were coming for Him. From His vantage point—the garden was situated on the

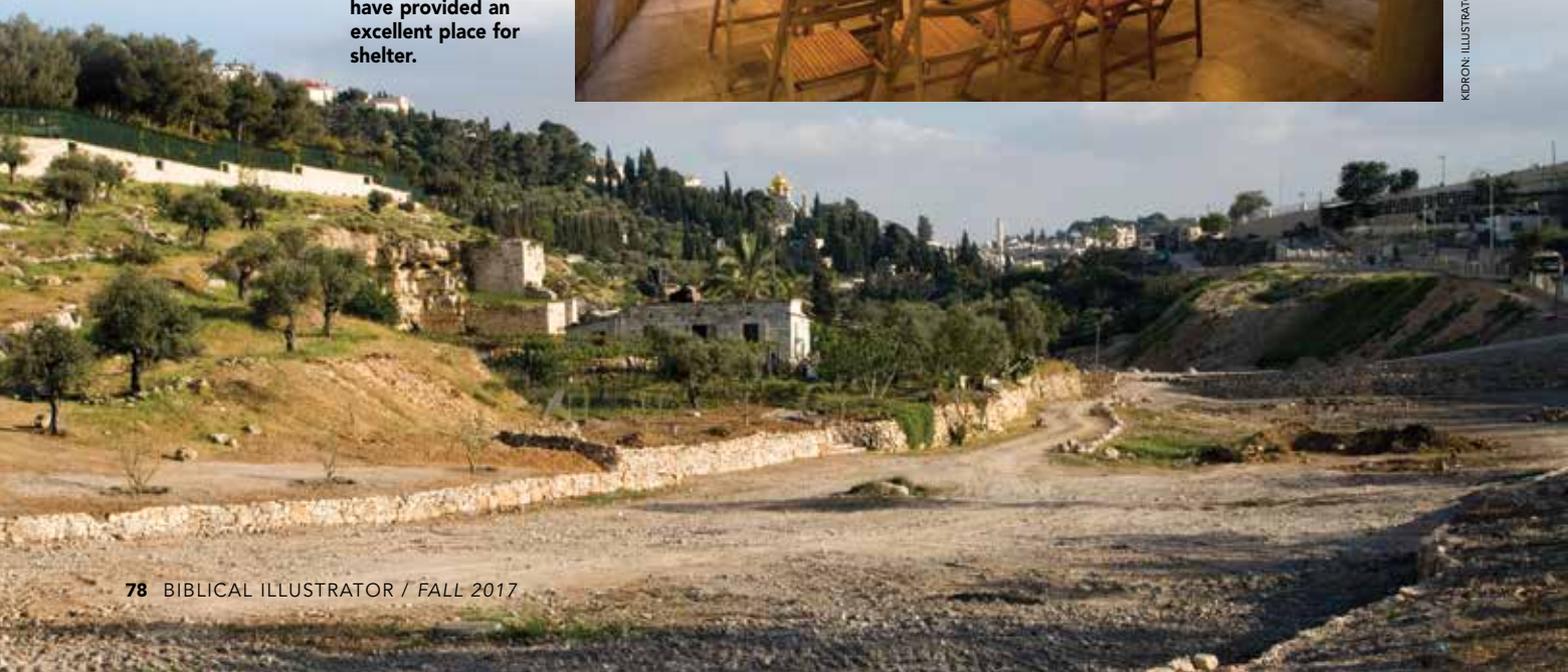
Below: The beginning of the Kidron Valley in Jerusalem. The Old City of Jerusalem, including the Temple Mount, rises to the right; Mount Scopus and the Mount of Olives rise on the left.

Above: Coin minted by Pontius Pilate; obverse shows a Lituus (Roman priest’s staff); the date on the coin is Year 17 of Tiberius, meaning A.D. 30.

Right: Small chapel located in what is known as the cave at Gethsemane. Archaeological evidence indicates the cave was used for producing olive oil. The olive presses would have been used in the fall and winter of the year, after the olive harvest. Jesus and His disciples would have been in Jerusalem at Passover, which was in the springtime. The cave would have provided an excellent place for shelter.

west side of the Mount of Olives, which was directly east of Jerusalem—He could see the stream of torches exiting the city, coming down the Kidron Valley, and up the side of the mountain to the garden. As He prayed, “Father let this cup pass from Me,” He could see the end was near. His disciples woke up confused. The temple guard was bowled over by His courage (John 18:6). But Jesus saw the whole thing coming: “So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, ‘Whom do you seek?’ They answered Him, ‘Jesus the Nazarene.’ He said to them, ‘I am He’ ” (vv. 4-5, NASB).

Jesus knew they wanted Him to die. He even knew the Romans would crucify Him (Matt. 20:19). That meant He would eventually appear before Pilate—the only man in Jerusalem who had the authority to execute Jesus. But, before they led Jesus to the Roman governor, the Jewish leadership had to bring capital charges against the Nazarene. Once they had the evidence, then they could expect Pilate to carry out the death sentence. And yet, the only crime punishable by death according to Roman law was treason against the empire.



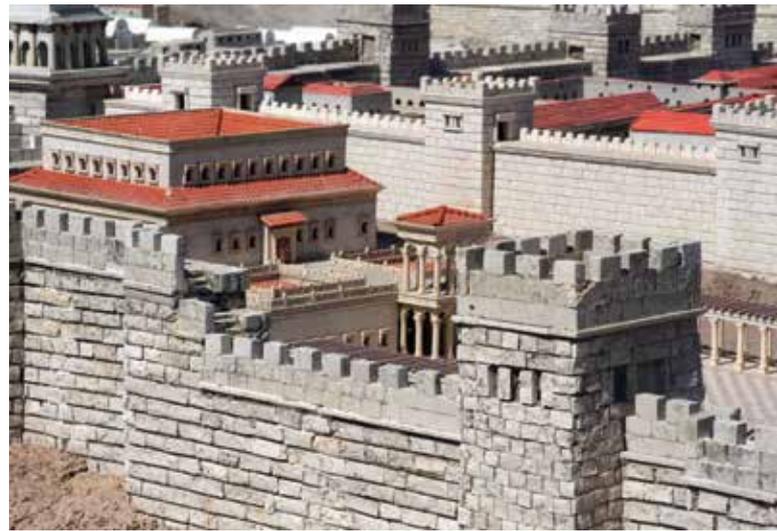
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Left: Shown in the model of Jerusalem is the

Eastern Gate, also called the Golden Gate.

Above: Herod's Palace, part of the Jerusalem model.

Passover brought everyone to Jerusalem, not only Jews but also the Roman governor, who typically ruled Judea from his headquarters in Caesarea on the coast. During the week-long celebration (that included the Festival of Unleavened Bread), Roman procurators would have to travel to Jerusalem to keep the peace in this temporarily over-populated city. Jews had to come to Jerusalem to observe the holiday, requiring travelers to find hospitality within the city walls—many counting on distant relatives to host the meal. Most houses were not large enough to accommodate all the visitors. Many pilgrims would stay in villages around Jerusalem or (especially those of low status) would sleep in public places like Gethsemane. Other than the fact that Jews typically celebrated the holiday with their families, what Jesus did during the festival was not all that unusual: staying with friends at Bethany (26:6), finding a place inside the city to celebrate the meal with His disciples, and bedding down for the night outside Jerusalem in the garden. The ordinary routine of Passover would be displaced, however, by an astonishing, lightning-quick sequence of events—the result of a conspiracy to kill Jesus—that would leave His disciples dazed and confused.

Sent by the High Priest, the Jewish temple guard arrested Jesus and brought Him to Caiaphas's palace to be interrogated by the Sanhedrin (the Jewish council led

by the High Priest). We do not know where Caiaphas lived inside the city. Either he owned his own house in the upper city among the more powerful and wealthy citizens or he occupied the Hasmonean palace, built over a century earlier for the Hasmonean kings of Israel. This palace was also located in the upper city. At that time, Jerusalem was a walled city situated on twin peaks of a mountain that was surrounded on the east, south, and west by valleys. The temple occupied the eastern peak (Mount Moriah), the Antonia fortress positioned like a sentinel on the northwest corner of the temple complex, with the city of David situated on the southern slope. The upper city occupied the western peak (Mount Zion), where a palace Herod the Great built commanded the northwestern corner of the city. If Caiaphas lived in the Hasmonean palace—directly west of the temple, built close to a bridge that connected the upper city to the western entrance into the temple complex—then the temple guard would have escorted Jesus through the Golden Gate (the eastern gate of the temple), out the west gate of the temple courtyard, on the bridge that led to the upper city, to Caiaphas's house. The Sanhedrin usually met in the hewn-stone chamber (situated on the south side of the temple courtyard), which means the temple guard possibly took Jesus there to face Caiaphas (or perhaps to another “council house,” located outside the western wall of the temple complex. But, according to the Gospels, Peter followed Jesus as far as the “courtyard of the High Priest” (Matt. 26:58; Mark 14:54); the location of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin seems to have been the High Priest's residence (perhaps moving to the hewn-stone chamber in the morning, Luke 22:66). Some think the “trial” had to be



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Above: The steps leading to the traditional site of the house of Caiaphas.

Right: According to tradition, this altar inside the Church of the Holy

Sepulchre marks the spot of Jesus' crucifixion on Golgotha.

at the High Priest's residence since the temple was usually locked at night. And yet, the temple guard the High Priest commissioned to take custody of Jesus would have had access to the temple complex regardless of the time. Due to the late hour, perhaps examining Jesus at the High Priest's house was simply a matter of convenience.

The Sanhedrin needed to find enough evidence against Jesus to have Him executed (Matt. 26:59-60). According to Jewish law, blasphemy was worthy of death (Lev. 24:10-16). And, since Jesus claimed to be the heavenly "Son of Man" of Daniel 7:13-14, the High Priest accused Him of blasphemy (Matt. 26:63-66). But such a religious indictment meant nothing to the Romans. So, when the chief priests brought Jesus to Pilate, they accused Him of treason against the Roman Empire (Luke 23:2). When he visited Jerusalem, Pilate would have stayed either in the Antonia fortress or Herod's palace. Since Herod's palace was more luxurious, Pilate probably preferred to stay there—a large complex with several residential rooms, meeting halls, an interior courtyard, and perhaps the perfect spot for the "bema" seat, a portico overlooking a plaza, adjacent to the upper market where merchants sold goods to the wealthy. Therefore, when Pilate asked the crowd whom they wanted to be released according to the custom (Matt. 27:15-20; perhaps a Roman gesture of goodwill to mark the significance of Passover—release from captivity), the majority of the crowd would have been the upper-class citizenry. Once Pilate pronounced the death sentence, washed his hands of the matter, and turned Jesus over to the Roman soldiers to be beaten and executed, the soldiers would have led Jesus east along the northern wall, exiting the city either at the Gennath Gate or at a small gate just



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TODAY, VISITORS TO JERUSALEM ARE led up a crowded street, the Via Dolorosa—a route from the Antonia fortress to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which marks the traditional location of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. Many pilgrims today visit an alternate place for Jesus' execution and burial—called "Gordon's Calvary." While this site may be more aesthetically appealing due to its beautiful garden and accessible tomb, we have no evidence the Romans ever crucified their victims there, nearly half a mile from the ancient city.

northeast of Golgotha that Christians later called the Judgment Gate. According to the most ancient tradition, Jesus was crucified there (the Church of the Holy Sepulchre marks the spot), His body temporarily placed in one of the tombs in the garden nearby—an ancient quarry having created ready-made tombs for burial. There the stone was rolled before the door of the tomb. 📖

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