

Culham / REEP Easter Calendar 2003

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JESUS ON TRIAL

Jesus was tried twice – once by the Jewish authorities and once by the Romans.

SANHEDRIN

After his arrest Jesus was first taken before the *Sanhedrin* – the Jewish religious authorities. Witnesses gave false evidence. He was asked by the High Priest: 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?' (Mark 14:61). 'I am' Jesus replied. For saying this, he was sentenced to death for blasphemy (insulting God).

PETER

Peter didn't abandon Jesus entirely – he followed the crowd when they took Jesus to the Sanhedrin. While Jesus was being questioned, Peter waited by a fire outside. The servants thought they recognized him as one of the disciples, but Peter angrily denied this three times. As a cock crowed, Peter remembered that Jesus had predicted he would deny being a disciple. Peter was struck by guilt and wept.

PONTIUS PILATE

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of the area. He asked if Jesus was 'the King of the Jews'? Jesus remained silent. Pilate then asked the crowd that had gathered which prisoner they wanted him to release. Should it be Jesus – or a criminal called Barabbas? They shouted for Barabbas. Pilate symbolically washed his hands to show that he took no responsibility for this.

BARABBAS

Barabbas was released. Jesus was taken by Roman soldiers, tied up, blindfolded and whipped. The soldiers also mocked him – dressing him up in a purple robe and putting a crown of thorns on his head.

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EXTRA INFORMATION

SANHEDRIN

'Christ' is the Greek version of the term 'Messiah'. This means the 'anointed one' and was understood by most Jews to be a supernatural figure, whose coming would start a new age in which their oppressors would be vanquished. The High Priest uses the term 'Blessed One' for God, as many devout Jews did not like using the name of God directly – it was too holy and they were too sinful! Jesus himself addresses God as 'Abba' ('Father') as he does when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. This was a much more familiar form of address. In all sorts of ways Jesus' teaching and practice did not fit with those of the religious establishment – no wonder he got into trouble!

PETER

No doubt Peter was being quite brave by making some effort to stay close to Jesus but, unlike Jesus, when asked a direct question he angrily denies his friend: 'He denied it again with an oath: "I don't know the man!"' (Matthew 26:72).

One of the things that gave him away was his strong northern accent. Both Jesus and Peter came from Galilee, an area far to the north of Jerusalem. 'Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away' (Matthew 26:73). Perhaps we should think of both Jesus and his disciples as speaking with the equivalent of a strong Geordie accent!

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PONTIUS PILATE

There were many Jewish rebels against Roman rule at this time. Perhaps Pilate's question suggests that the Jewish authorities had claimed to him that Jesus was one of these rebels. Maybe, in asking the crowd whether he should crucify this 'King of the Jews' he was cynically testing the crowd's loyalty to Rome – would they dare to vote for someone who was accused of rebellion? Maybe, as some have thought, he was not very interested and simply 'washed his hands' of the whole business. Who knows!

BARABBAS

Who was Barabbas? There is some evidence that Barabbas' full name was Jesus Barabbas – Jesus was a common name! As, indeed, was Barabbas, which simply meant '*Father's Son*'! Mark says that Barabbas was '*in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.*' (Mark 15:7).