

THE TWELVE VOICES OF
EASTER



THE CHIEF PRIESTS: VOICE OF DECEPTION

Matthew 27: 62-66 | Matthew 28: 11-15 My name is Abishua. I am one of the chief priests in Jerusalem. We have charge over all the functions of the temple. It is our sacred office to offer sacrifices in the temple for the glory of God and the redemption of His people. It is the highest office in the land, and with the scribes, we are the most powerful religious leaders in Israel.

Our authority is unquestioned. Everyone knows our lineage. From the time of Aaron, we have been God's chosen vessels, His official ministers. So it has always been. So it shall always be. We view any circumstance which might upset this order with profound concern.

The recent case of the troublemaker from Galilee illustrates my point. You understand, His teachings have disturbed the people and have even called our temple practices into question. A dangerous extremist. He has challenged an authority and practice that transcends our time, one established and approved by longstanding tradition.

Certainly we have encountered similar challenges before; those who would destroy, cloaking themselves in the disguise of reform. But none as dangerous as this Jesus of Nazareth. His followers and sympathizers have numbered in the thousands. Some even dare to claim that He may be the long-awaited Messiah. But surely if that were so, we in the priesthood should have been among the first to acclaim and honor Him. No, I am afraid the people are too easily deluded. You see, we have been aware of this man for quite some time. And none of our information substantiates these irresponsible claims.

We first took notice of Him in connection with the affairs of John the Baptist, so-called. Our informants tell us that when Jesus was baptized, some who were there reported a miraculous sign from heaven as He came up from the water. If you believe such things, perhaps you would be interested in some beachfront property I have on the Dead Sea.

But rumors spread quickly and are believed too easily among the common folk, and the small crowds became larger. He became decidedly dangerous. You may have heard, for example, that He healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, a clear violation of the observance. But when His error was called to His attention, He actually claimed to be Lord of the Sabbath! And when He came to Jerusalem, He made a terrible scene right in the temple. He drove out those who changed money and overturned their tables. You must excuse me, I do not like to raise my voice, but some things cannot be tolerated. The temple and its precincts are our responsibility. And to attempt reform without going through the proper authority is nothing short of criminal.

He knew we were angry and so He tried to disguise His purposes. He stayed away from Jerusalem and taught the country people, using parables to hide His malice. We did not wait idly. We attempted on several occasions to discredit Him before the people He misled. And we have considered a long series of plans to remove Him.

Our opportunity presented itself at the time just before Passover, when one of His followers came to us and offered to betray Him. He was a dreadful fellow named Judas, a common man of Cheroth. But one must take one's opportunities where one finds them. And he came for a modest price. For just thirty pieces of silver, he agreed to hand Him over to us. This was our time.

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It was the night of the Passover. We were still reclining at table when Judas knocked. He had come directly from the house where Jesus and His followers gathered. Judas told us that soon they would make their way out of the city by the Eastern Gate and cross the Kidron to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was their customary practice. And it fit our purpose exactly. An escort was arranged. Some men with arms was deemed prudent.

Judas led us to the garden and he kissed his "master" in familiar greeting. That was our sign. His arrest was effected and He was taken directly to the house of the high priest. There He received a pre-trial hearing by Annas and subsequently He stood before Caiaphas to answer our charges.

The trial was critical. We had to work quickly and carefully. Our charges against Jesus had to be substantiated by witnesses. Regrettably, we were forced to pay certain witnesses for their testimony. Their testimony was not as compelling as one would wish, but it did open the way for direct examination, and soon He was condemned by His own lips. He blasphemed openly before the council.

Having gained Caiaphas' sentence, all we needed was the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. We are not allowed to carry out capital punishment without the approval of the empire's occupation force. We have learned how to play our cases before the Romans. All the governor cares about is the authority of Rome. All we had to do was convince him that this Jesus was a dangerous rebel.

It was daybreak. We arrived at the governor's residence and called for a hearing. Sleepy-eyed and disinterested, Pilate heard our charges. We suffered some anxious moments as Pilate played the stupid Roman, adopting the position that Jesus had done nothing wrong. Clearly this would not do. We were so close to the final solution. We had paid a disciple to betray Him. We had paid witnesses for their testimony. We could not be stopped just one step short of the goal.

As Pilate interviewed the Nazarene, we worked our way through the crowd, arranging for a convincing solidarity. So when Pilate stood Him before us, the crowd answered with one voice. Ours. "Crucify Him." The chant surged through the crowd like the undulations of an angry serpent. The governor took our message. Jesus must die.

Pilate was in no mood for a fight. He released Jesus to the crowd and He was taken out of the city to the place of the skull, and crucified as a common criminal. Our work was finished.

Pilate made one final gesture, a sign placed above the head of Jesus as He hung on the cross. The words were written in Aramaic, Latin and for all the world to read. "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

We objected. "Don't write 'King of the Jews.' Write instead, 'He said, I am King of the Jews.'" But Pilate refused. Stubborn Roman fool. Small matter. Jesus died on the cross. Terrible, in a way, of course, without question. But we look at it as a great triumph. The threat to God's appointed priesthood had failed. Our place and office had been secured. The priesthood continues to offer sacrifice for the glory of God and the redemption of His people. So it shall ever be.

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