

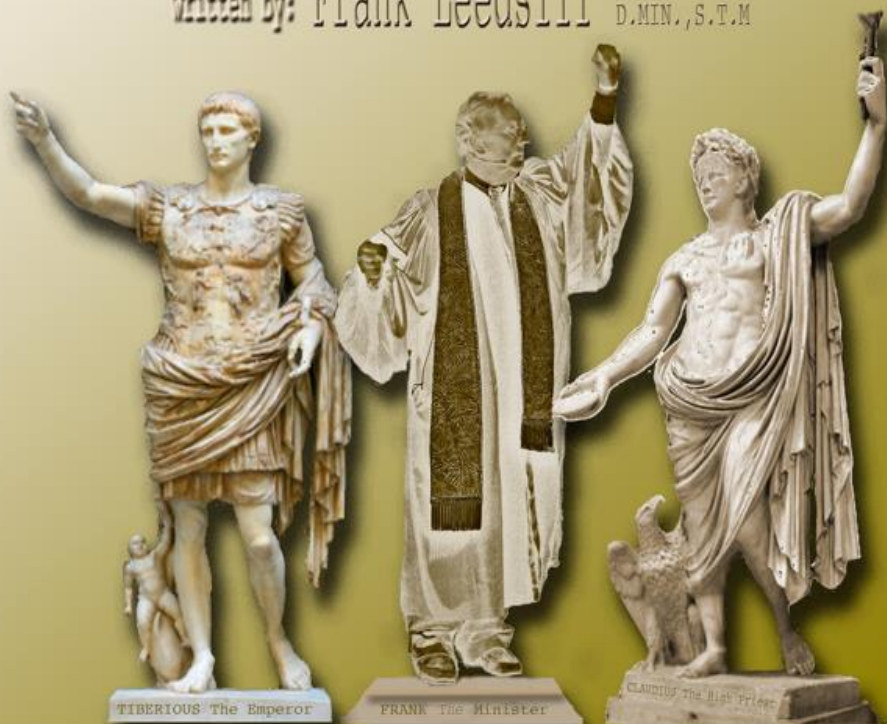
An Overview of ROMAN / JEWISH



Politics



written by: Frank LeedsIII D.MIN., S.T.M



Introduction

It was Richard Yerby [affectionately known as 007] who asked me the question: "*Wasn't Jesus really killed because he was breaking the Sabbath?*" That did not call for a "yes/no" answer so my answer was "*Give me some time and I would be happy to explain it in a little more detail.*" That led to my teaching his Sunday School class and because of the detail involved in my telling of this story, I needed some maps and aids. I prefer people to just "listen" to my stories rather than to take notes. Thus, this little booklet represents the notes given at the end of my story.

My intent is to explain, the best I am able, why Jesus of Nazareth was killed. This is not meant to be a theological interpretation, but rather a historical one. I hope this is an aid to seeing the 'big picture' and as the story moves through some significant individuals and ends up in a small neighborhood, you will be able to see how Jesus so shook up the world that he left it with three options. Using the words of the late Oxford professor [C.S.Lewis], this Jesus was either "Liar, Lunatic or Lord"

The covers for my other little booklets [except for one that was done by Lee] were done by my friend Ron Priest. "*What good is history without humor?*" is one of his things. Thus, this cover that he has so creatively put together. If nothing else, I hope you at least get a smile from the cover.

Michelle Sonnenberg said to me a few months ago, "If you ever need some graphs or pictures for your sermons, I would be happy to do it for you." A few weeks later, I called her and she readily stepped in to help.

Then there is Lee Brummett who is so helpful to me in so many ways, including putting it all together when she is able to squeeze in time with all of her other church functions.

Thank you Ron, Michelle and Lee for all your assistance and to the good people of Oakhurst United Methodist Church for listening to my stories...and perhaps reading my notes.

Frank Leeds III

If you have read the story of "The Silent Years," you will recall that under Alexander the Great, Greece conquered a significant portion of real-estate around the Mediterranean Sea. Of interest is that he did not do so in order "to take" from other people but rather "to give" to other people. Alexander was not Greek. He was from Macedonia. That being said, he loved Greece, its people, and its culture, particularly its philosophy [he was a student of Aristotle] and its theatre.

As a result, wherever he went to conquer, he left theaters, libraries, the Greek language, and because he allowed people to practice their own faith, synagogues sprang up. The overall resulted in people having their own language, but became united with the additional language of Greek.

When young Alexander dies, the Romans began their expansion. This started off rather differently. They did not expand in order 'to give' and I do not think it fair to say they were only interested in 'taking.' Rather, as their annexations began, they quickly discovered the advantages of 'power.' As they acquired more area, they discovered that people possess different natural resources and different skills. By simply knowing about these differences, they were able to control them for their own benefit. More expansion meant more power, which meant 'better business' which meant 'more power'...and the rolling snow ball marched on.

The mighty military of Rome wielded a mighty sword, and I do not wish to make light of that. They fought many a battle. At the same time, they were also known to confront a town and make a deal. In these deals, Roman would meet with the 'movers and shakers' [every town has those] and say to them in essence "look, we have x number of our

soldiers outside your town and we can simply come in here, destroy a great deal, including all of you. Rather than our doing that, why don't you simply join us? If you do, we will give to you [the movers and shakers] Roman citizenship. Now that offer would not mean anything to the average citizen, but to the movers and shakers, the big merchants in town, this was the golden ticket for international business opportunities. It meant they could travel the Roman world to sell their wares and be protected by Roman law as they did so. Rome limited this to a maximum of 10% of the population. Note: Remember the Apostle Paul had Roman citizenship which allowed him the international travel.

The following shows the extent of the empire which went into Britain by the time of Christ.

The Large View of the Real-estate of the Roman Empire:



It is important to remember that at the time of Christ, the Jewish community is spread throughout the Roman Empire which surrounds the Mediterranean Sea. They are not all of one mind and are divided into various groups. Core to their understanding, however, is the following “**Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.**”

To this end, they have one temple, and that temple is in the City of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where many of them live, and many live further north in the Galilee, and of course around the Mediterranean Sea, but where ever they live, they are under the control of Rome.

Rome is the headquarters of it all. The Emperor, however, does not necessarily stay there, so it is important at this stage to also point out the Isle of Capri, which is south of Naples just a few miles off the coast. The empire is extensive with a host of cultures and nationalities which are very different and thus, very challenging to control.

I have no idea how many people would be involved in working for the Roman government, but for our reflection on the New Testament and The Passion of Christ, it is important to mention a few of them.

Key Players:

Tiberius: The first is Tiberius. At birth, his name was Tiberius Claudius Nero and through various marriages it eventually became Tiberius Julius Caesar. For our purposes, we will simply refer to him as Tiberius.

It is for a number of reasons that I begin with Tiberius. He was the Roman Emperor from 14 AD

to 37 AD and thus, was the reigning Emperor during the time of Christ. Although his life began as a great General, it ended as “A DIRTY OLD MAN” and I purposely put that in capital letters.

Putting his activities into print is embarrassing for the Victorian mind, but likewise, with all of the sexual changes since the Victorian era, it even blushes the senses of sexual libertarians.

He managed to turn the isle of Capri into a Playboy Mansion on steroids and then brought in sex traffic trade, pedophilia, and murders. This past sentence should be enough to give you a mental image, but I decided, because it is so important in understanding the political situation at the time, the following quotation from the Roman historian

Suetonius.





Obviously, this is a contemporary picture of Capri, but it was Tiberius's isle.

"On retiring to Capri, he devised a pleasance for his secret orgies: teams of wantons of both sexes, selected as experts in deviant intercourse and dubbed analysts, copulated before him in triple unions to excite his flagging passions. Its bedrooms were furnished with the most salacious paintings and sculptures, as well as, with an erotic library, in case a performer should need an illustration of what was required. Then in Capri's woods and groves, he arranged a number of nooks of venerary where boys and girls got up as Pans and nymphs solicited outside bowers and grottoes: people openly called this "the old goat's garden," punning on the island's name.

He acquired a reputation for still grosser depravities that one can hardly bear to tell or be told, let alone believe. For example, he trained little boys (whom he termed tiddlers) to crawl between his thighs when he went swimming and tease him with their licks and nibbles. Unweaned babies he would put to his organ as though to the breast, being by both nature and age rather fond of this form of satisfaction. Left a painting of Parrhasius depicting Atalanta pleasuring Meleager with her lips, on condition that if the theme displeased him, he was to have a million sesterces instead, he chose to keep it and actually hung it in his bedroom. The story is also told that once at a sacrifice, attracted by the acolyte's beauty, he lost control of himself and, hardly waiting for the ceremony to end, rushed him off and debauched him and his brother, the flute-player, too. Subsequently, when they complained of the assault, he had their legs broken.

How grossly he was in the habit of abusing women even of high birth is very clearly shown by the death of a certain Mallonia. When she was brought to his bed and refused most vigorously to submit to his lust, he turned her over to the informers, and even when she was on trial, he did not cease to call out and ask her "whether she was sorry"; so that finally, she left the court and went home, where she stabbed herself, openly upbraiding the ugly old man for his obscenity. Hence, a stigma put upon him at the next plays in an Atellan farce was received with great applause and became current, that "the old goat was licking the does."

Lucius Aelius Sejanus: 20 BC-- AD 31

With Tiberius choosing to remain on the Isle of Capri, he needs a key person to be in Rome as his segregate. At first, he selects the man named Strabo who headed up his *praetorian guard* that

protect the emperor and other Roman Officials. Tiberius also has needs in Egypt so he appoints Strabo to go to Egypt and then appoints Strabo's son, Sejanus, to head up the praetorian [similar to the U.S. Secret Service who guard the President] and then to be his key person in Rome.

As one can guess, with Sejanus' obvious leadership skills and his outstanding accomplishments, he soon has gained enough power that he has his eye on becoming the next emperor...overthrowing Tiberius. This is a desire that he must play with his cards held closely to his chest. If Tiberius suspects it, he would have Sejanus killed.

But Tiberius, being Tiberius [he did not get to be Emperor by being naive] develops his suspicions and fears. His fear is: Sejanus, as his job requires, goes to Capri every three months to check on the praetorian guards who protect Tiberius's life. Sejanus's position as head of the guard requires that he always be 'sword bearing'. Thus when he pays his official visits to Tiberius he is always armed.

Tiberius asks himself, "If Sejanus were to attack me, would the guards stop him or help him? They are the best paid soldiers in the world, and he is their immediate supervisor. In concluding that he is vulnerable, he has Sejanus killed on his next visit to Capri. The rational is, "He was not a friend of Caesar."

It is believed [but history offers mixed confirmations, that it was Sejanus who appointed Pilate to his position as Governor of Judea. More about Sejanus later.

Pontias Pilate:



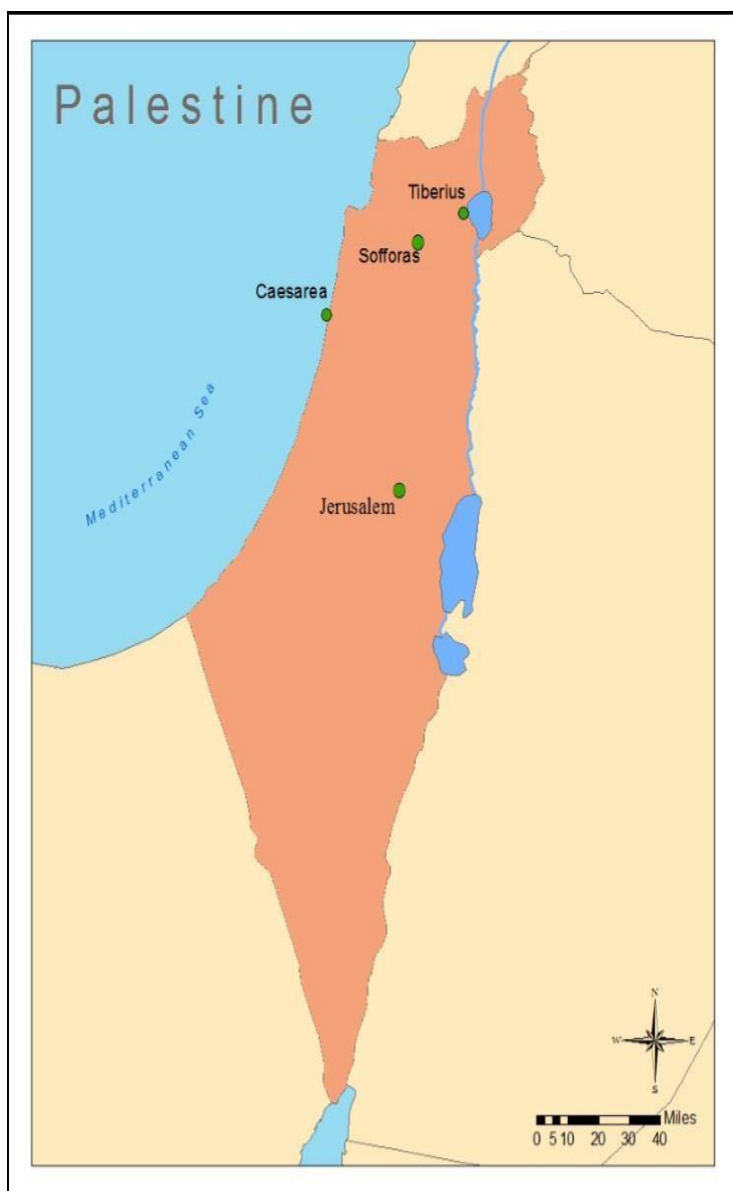
In the past twenty years there have been four different Governors of Judea. No political appointee wants to end up there. At best, it is a 'stepping stone' assignment to something better or it could be like stepping on a land mine if things go amiss in this difficult place to manage. It is not a prestigious assignment to be sure, and it is far enough from Rome to be off the radar screen for something better. But, if things go wrong, this assignment would be the kiss of death.

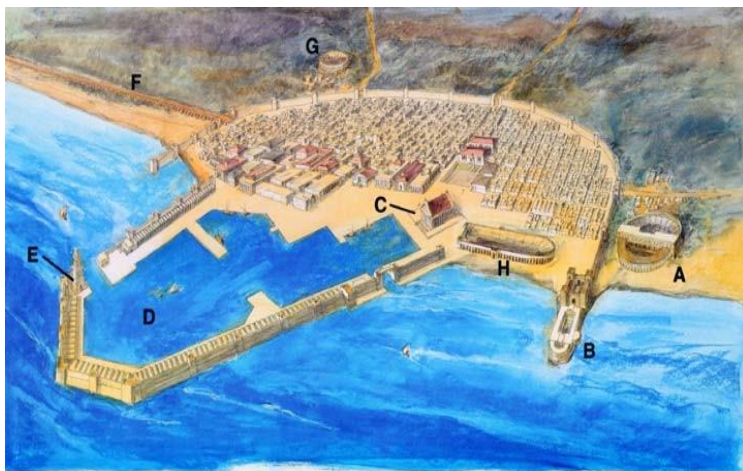
He enters this new job with a degree of cockiness and determination to set the Jews straight from the beginning as to whom is boss and how it will be. One of his first acts is to have his soldiers decorate the land with what is known as "The Roman Standards." These are statues of an eagle on a column and under the eagle is a bust of "Tiberius." Yes, that is the same Tiberius that we have previously discussed. Knowing what was just mentioned about Tiberius, can you image how the

people felt about having his image all over their beloved city? Pilate does so with determination, but the Jews are appalled by these graven images. So, there is an immediate confrontation between Pilate and the Jews. The situation reminded me of the conversation with President Eisenhower and the Prime Minister of Israel. On discussing the difficulty of management, Eisenhower made the statement that the United States was so large that it is really difficult to manage 300,000,000 million people. The Prime Minister of Israel responded that it was even more difficult for him to management 30,000 prime ministers. The Jews won that battle. Pilate lost round one. He will try to be smarter next time.

By “keeping his friends close and his enemies closer” he works on forming a close working bond with the High Priest Caiaphas. I will return to discuss Caiaphas. For now, just be assured that they were the original “odd couple.” They had absolutely nothing in common...except their lust for power.

When Pilate moves to be Governor of Judea, he moves to Caesarea which is on the Mediterranean Sea south of present day Haifa. [This is a different city than Caesarea Phillipi]





- | | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| A Theater | E Lighthouse |
| B Palace | F Aqueduct |
| C Temple of Augustus | G Amphitheater |
| D Harbor (Sebastos) | H Hippodrome |

Judea that Pilate controls includes the City of Jerusalem, but it does not include the northern area where Jesus is from which is the Galilee. The Galilee is controlled by Herod Antipas.

Herod Antipas:

This Herod is a son of Herod the Great. Any understand of Herod would quickly lead to the conclusion that he had a dysfunctional family, which he did. Antipas and I will stick with that name, as to not confuse him with his father, was not the King of the entire land, but was rather a tetrarch meaning that he ruled 1/4 of the area. As did Herod the Great, Antipas ruled only with Roman approval. Antipas was the ruler of the Galilee and Perea area. It is easy to assume that both Herod the Great and his son Antipas were Romans, but in fact they were Hebrews.

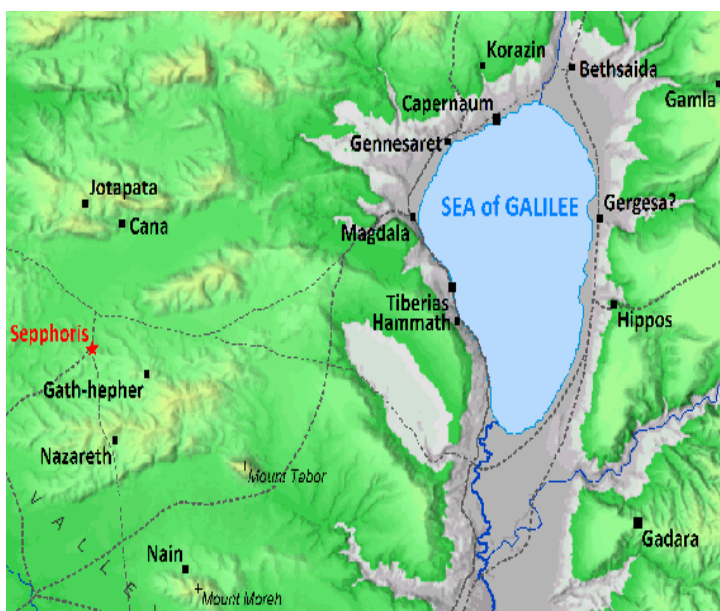


Pilate ruled the area of Judea. Antipas ruled the area of the Galilee.

Like his father, Antipas was a builder. Three things that come to mind are his building of Tiberius and the making of that city his Palace and his capital. Notice whom he named his capital after, and I will leave you to guess why he did so.

In addition, he built the town of Sepphoris in the Galilee and the town of Betheramphtha in Perea. Sepphoris is a town about 4 miles north of Nazareth. Sepphoris was set up as a city that

could control "taxes." It became illegal for a Jew to buy or sell to anyone where the selling did not take place in a certain area. Thus, Antipas was able to tax the people coming into the town to buy or sell. To show his generosity, he also was quick to give loans that ranged from 25% interest on grain to 100% interest on olive oil. With these loan, he was quickly able to acquire more and more land from the poor Galilean farmers. Mathew, the tax collector, worked for Antipas.

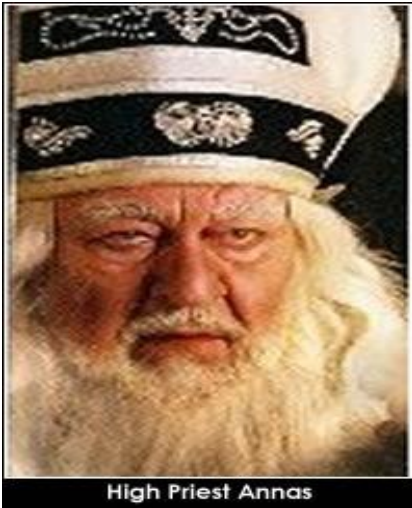


The above map shows both the city of Tiberias on the coast of the Sea of Galilee and Sepphoris [written in red] to the west and a few miles north of Nazareth.

So far, we have two appointed rulers of the area. Antipas rules the north from Tiberius and Pilate rules the south from Caesarea.

“All politics is local” is a political realism expressed by the late Speaker of the House, Tip O’Neal. As we begin to focus on the City of Jerusalem, the man without an official title is the former High Priest, Annas.

Annas



Annas was the High Priest before Caiaphas. He was also Caiaphas’s father-in-law and believed to be the power or at least a very significant figure behind Caiaphas. He is the Joseph Kennedy behind the late President and his brothers. He is not the upfront guy, but he is there with significant influence.

Caiaphas



As the High Priest, Caiaphas was the power of Jerusalem. He would be the mayor, the leader of the Supreme Court, [Sanhedrin], the Ruler of the Temple, the head of the Temple Police. He was simply the 'go to guy' and nothing went on in Jerusalem that he was not aware of.

In addition to the above 'individuals', there were a few significant groups of people that were **Temple based**.

Sadducees: The people believed in the five books of Moses. They were a powerful party that had purchased control from the Romans. There is not a great deal about the Sadducees written in the New Testament but one of their major tenants of believe was their insistence that there was no after-life. The resurrection of Lazarus was a major embarrassment to them. Thus there was the push to get Lazarus killed while they were on the hunt to kill Jesus.

Pharisees “separated ones”. These were the back to the Bible people and by that their stress was on the Oral Law of rules for following the Sabbath. They were divided into two basic groups. One group was led by Shammai and was known for its strictness of the moral code such as the rules of the Sabbath. The other was led by Hillel. Nicodemus is believed to be in this camp which put a greater stress on the Hesid [loving kindness] of the Lord. Contemporary Judaism, as we know it today, would be followers of Hillel. A group of Rabbis led by Zaikai and Gamaliel II gave shape both to this and the finalization of the O.T. Canon with the Law, the Prophets and other writings. That occurred at the council of Jamnia in 90 AD which is the same time that John was writing his Gospel.

Above, I mentioned the term, Temple Based. There were two cities in the world at the time that were Temple based. One was Ephesus with the worship of Artemis, and the other was Jerusalem and their worship of the One, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The temple was the number one tourist attraction, and the ‘cash cow’ of the city’s economy. It was the ‘wall street’ of the city. Whatever the official political structure is in any area, the golden rule abideth still. He who has the gold—rules. Let’s follow the money.

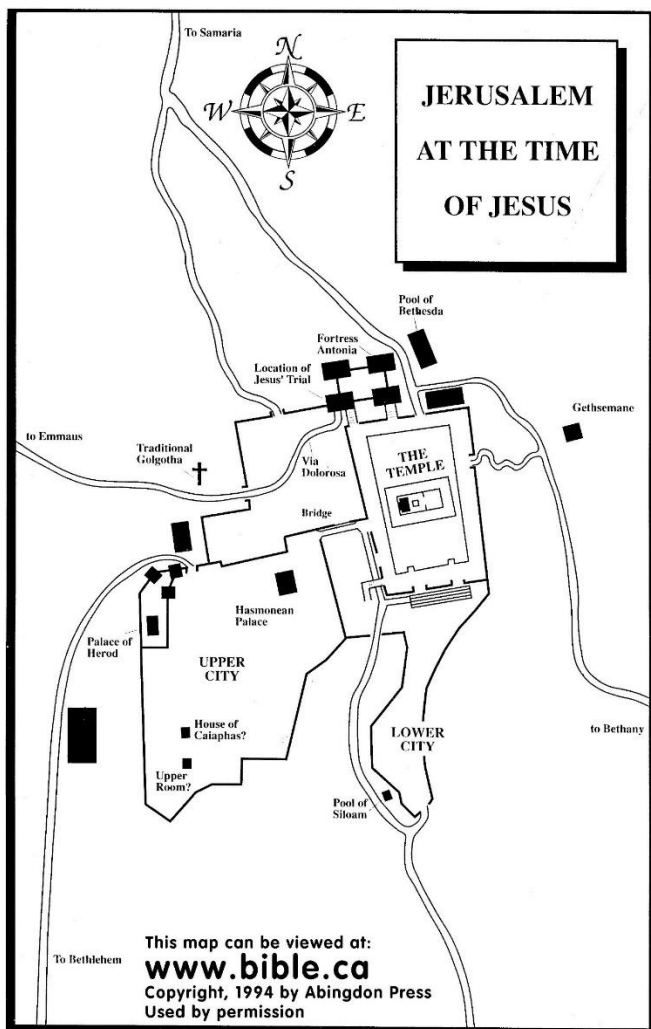
The **TAXES**. No one likes taxes, but taxes are the price of civilization and taxes used for the public good are one thing. Taxes used for Tiberius’s sick playground, and Antipas’s self-indulgences and simply an ‘in your face’ tax with no public good coming from it. It is a robbery of those who are already poor and a ‘land grab’ by those who are greedy. It is a redistribution political system with the accent on robbing the already poor. Antipas

gets rich, and with his riches comes the payoff to Rome to keep him in power.

The **TEMPLE**. Jesus cleans out the Temple twice. The Gospel of Mathew, Mark, and Luke, have Jesus cleaning it out near the end of his ministry. The Gospel of John shows it at the beginning. From John, we are able to count the Passovers and know that Jesus' ministry was three years. The Temple collected money for the selling of the sacrifices. That does not seem to be the problem. The problem is the money changers. These are not cashiers who are giving you something for your money. The money changers are the ones who take your everyday currency of denarii and change it into the Temple Currency of silver. For that, they charge a big fee and thus rip the people off before they even purchase anything.

This money then goes to the High Priest who in turn pays off Rome for his position of power.

The position of High Priest is an appointed position that must be approved by Rome.



On the map, the size of the Temple says a great deal. It is THE CENTER OF POWER and Caiaphas rules the Temple. The City is then divided into an Upper City and a Lower City.

The poorer people, who are able to live within the city, live in the Lower City. The rich people live in

the Upper City. All together, the City holds about 25,000 people, but whenever there is a major Jewish holiday such as Passover, the city swells to over a 1,000,000.

On these occasions, two people would always come to town to keep an eye on this. One was Pilate. He would journey from his palace in Caesarea and stay in Herod's palace in the Upper City of Jerusalem. Likewise, Antipas would take another portion of the Herod palace. The House of Caiaphas is a few doors down. Are you starting to get the picture? These people are all "neighbors." They all know each other and they all live in the same 'Hood."

Jesus:

Jesus is a problem to the entire system. His not obeying the Sabbath by healing people on that day is an irritation and as 'in your face' as the Roman taxation system is. His 'blasphemy' by calling "God his Father" [he does this 107 times], is ripping apart their foundation and would justify their killing him. But the good works? How does one account for the good works? How does one explain that? They can't, but they tolerate it—until the blind man from birth is given sight. The crowds that have followed Jesus has been getting larger and larger, but after the blind man got his sight, everything has gotten out of hand. The crowds have simply gotten too big and fear enters the power structure of Jerusalem. They now know for sure that this Jesus has got to be stopped.

Then comes the grand-daddy of them all. Jesus claims that he is the Good Shepherd that stands at the gateway to life. He claims that he has the

power to take life and lay it down, or to take life and pick it up again. Yes, I know, it sounds like lunatic talk.

Jesus has had other lunatic talks. When he called himself "The Bread of Life," ...he shortly thereafter feeds the 5,000. When he called himself "The Light of the Word," ...he shortly thereafter gave sight to the man born blind who never had light. Knowing this, how do you think the dots would be connected when he says he is "The Gateway to Life?"

Let us take a look:

After saying this, his friends come to him and tell them that his friend Lazarus is sick. Jesus responds that this "*sickness is not unto death.*" After hanging around for four days, he goes to see Lazarus and is told that he has been dead for four days. His body is all wrapped up and the body sickish because it has begun to decompose.

Like the other of his friends, he sheds his tears. He also "groans in the spirit" [This is a horse term. It is what a horse does that gets kicked in the stomach and he is angry] Whereas in the past, he really does not draw attention to himself, in this case he does. He shouts to his dead friend Lazarus to "Come Forth!!!" Like one of his sheep who has heard his voice, Lazarus comes forth. This is not a resurrection in which the man is pushed forward, but one in which his friend is brought back.

The implications and the consequences of all this are without end. For Lazarus, he has his life back. For Lazarus' family, and friends and neighbors, Jesus is without a doubt "The Christ." For the Sadducees, who have a history and a proclaimed position that there is no such thing as a

resurrection, this is a total embarrassment to their position. To Caiaphas, the Sanadrin and all of the leaders of the Temple, this is the straw that broke the camel's back.

All of the chief priests, the Pharisees, gather together and ask: 'Now what do we do? If we let him alone, all men will believe in him: and the Romans will take away our place and the nation.' Caiaphas, the high priest then rules: "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" In other words "Jesus should die for the nation..and not for that nation only but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

The decision was made: **Jesus must die.**

Please note: #1. I live in a condo. We have an official condo meeting once a year. Most of the meetings are held on the street with a few neighbors making the necessary decisions. This above meeting is a group of neighbors meeting on the street where they all live.

Please note: #2. The decision was made BEFORE the trial. On hearing the news, Jesus takes off and hides out for a while in the woods of Ephraim [about 40 miles north of Jerusalem]. The chief priests are on the lookout for him and demand that people tell them where this Jesus is. This is where Judas' decision that he might take the opportunity to 'cash in.'

Jesus sneaks back into Bethany [about 2 miles from Jerusalem] and that is where Jesus, Lazarus, and his sisters Mary and Martha have their dinner party, and Mary anoints Jesus' feet with the

expensive ointment. The chief priest decided that they need to kill Lazarus as well because he was a walking testimony to Jesus' power.

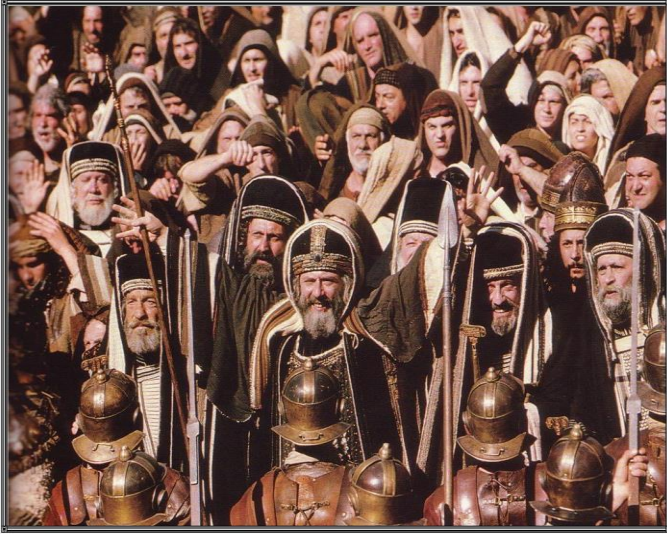
The next day, Jesus, Lazarus, Mary and Martha and their friends and neighbors all head to the feast in Jerusalem. Among other reasons, they are there to celebrate Lazarus' new birth and to give testimony to such. This is a significant portion of the crowds [thought not the entire] in scenes such as this.



The leaders could have grabbed Jesus and Lazarus at this time, but they were afraid of the crowds. They need to arrest him when no one was around. This is where Judas comes in. He identifies Jesus on the lonely road back to Bethany.

The rest of the story you probably know. I hope this has been helpful in your understanding, a little more fully, the context in which this all takes place.

As mentioned "in the beginning," we are all left with three options: Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?



For further information, please see the church website oakhurstumc.com "sermons" "The Gate-Keeper Of Life" (4.12.15) or Archives "Roman Influence" at <http://goo.gl/uQWG91>

Caiaphas is one smart and clever High Priest. He outsmarted Pilate when Pilate was determined to put the Roman Standards throughout the land that was an offense to the Jews. He now outmaneuvers him again. Caiaphas has already made the decision that Jesus must die in order to save the entire Temple structure meaning both the building and the culture of the Jewish people. The problem is: He has to get someone else to do it, so Pilate is his designated pawn.

Pilate wants to set Jesus free and is determined to do so. How does Caiaphas out-smart him? I mentioned that I would come back to Sejanus who

was a growing concern to Tiberius. When Tiberius acted on his fears, he had Sejanus captured and executed immediately. That is what happens when one *is* ***“No Longer A Friend Of Caesar.”***

Caiaphas capitalizes on this, and knowing full well that Sejanus, who appointed Pilate, had recently been executed for “no longer being a friend of Caesar” claims that Jesus claimed to be a king and anyone making such a claim would be “No friend of Caesar.” Pilate then very quickly gets the message: If he were to let Jesus go and Tiberius found out, then he too would be executed. Pilate then does an immediate change and turns Jesus over to be Crucified. Pilate can now take credit for protecting the inter-circle of “The Friends of Caesar” known as the **Amici Caesaris.**

Caiaphas accomplished his mission by getting rid of Jesus [or so he thought] and **Pilate** was able to take credit. Politics.

The Great Sanhedrin

“The Jewish Court that had jurisdiction of crimes punishable by death was the Great Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court, the origin of which is ascribed to Moses. It was a court of 708 members made up of a High Priest, or presiding judge, and a Religious Chamber of 23 chief priests, a Law Chamber of 23 scribes and a Popular Chamber of 23 elders. It was to this Court that Jesus referred when he said that he “must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priest and scribes, and be killed....

Members of the Sanhedrin acted both as judges and jurors – they did not have separate juries – and a member was required to disqualify himself in any case in which he had an interest or knowledge of the parties or facts. The Court had to decide the question of guilt or innocence solely on the evident presented in the courtroom.”

Hon. Harry W. Fogle (1920-1988) Circuit Judge
and Past President of the Seminole Kiwanis Club.