

The Passion and Death of Jesus

1. The Feast of Unleavened Bread, called the Passover, was now drawing near, and the chief priests and scribes were looking for some way of doing away with Jesus, because they mistrusted the people.

Then Satan entered into Judas, surnamed Iscariot, who was numbered among the Twelve. He went to the chief priests and the officers of the guard to discuss a scheme for handing Jesus over to them. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He accepted, and looked for an opportunity to betray him to them without the people knowing.

Response: Jesus, through your death lead us to a new understanding of life.

2. Then he withdrew from [his disciples], about a stone's throw away, and knelt down and prayed. "Father," he said, "if you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless, let your will be done, not mine. . . ." In his anguish, he prayed even more earnestly, and his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

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3. Judas, one of the Twelve, came up with a number of men armed with swords and clubs, sent by the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. Now the traitor had arranged a signal with them. "The one I kiss," he had said, "he is the man. Take him in charge, and see he is well guarded when you lead him away." So when the traitor came, he went straight up to Jesus and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The others seized him and took him in charge.

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4. The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus on which they might pass the death-sentence. But they could not find any. Several, indeed, brought false evidence against him, but their evidence was conflicting. . . . The high priest then stood up before the whole assembly and put this question to Jesus, "Have you no answer. . . ? What is this evidence these men are bringing against you?" But [Jesus] was silent and made no answer at all.

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5. The high priest put a second question to him, "Are you the Christ," he said, "the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. . . . The high priest tore his robes, "What need of witnesses have we now?" he said. "You heard the blasphemy. What is your finding?" And they all gave their verdict: He deserved to die. Some of them started spitting at him and, blindfolding him, began hitting him with their fists and shouting, "Play the prophet!" And the attendants rained blows on him.

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6. While Peter was down below in the courtyard, one of the high priest's servant-girls came up. She saw Peter warming himself there, stared at him and said, "You too were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth." But he denied it. "I do not know, I do not understand, what you are talking about," he said . . . and Peter recalled how Jesus had said to him, "Before the cock crows twice, you will have disowned me three times." And he burst into tears.

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7. [And Pilate said] "What am I to do with the man you call king of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" "Why?" Pilate asked them. "What harm has he done?" But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, having ordered Jesus to be scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

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8. They dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes. They led him out to crucify him. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene . . . to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull.

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9. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: "The King of the Jews." And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, "Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!" The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. "He saved others," they said, "but he cannot save himself. . . ."

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10. It was now about the sixth hour and, when the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus had cried out in a loud voice, he said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." With these words he breathed his last.

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