

THE JEWS REJECT THEIR MESSIAH

It was 30 A.D., and the year had begun with increasing tension throughout Roman Palestine, a mounting feeling among the Jewish people that they were approaching a fateful crisis for the nation. The whole country was a boiling cauldron of unrest, defiance and rebellion against the Roman occupation.

In Samaria, the religious excitement generated by the prophecies of a Samaritan prophet regarding an imminent revelation of the whereabouts of the missing sacred vessels of the destroyed Samaritan temple had become politicized into a simmering revolt as the expectant inhabitants of Samaria were frustrated by the repressive presence of Pilate's Roman legionaries. In Galilee, new groups of guerrillas had emerged to link up with the elusive Judas of Gamala, and had become more daring as the dominance of the revolutionary Zealots was challenged by the terrorist Sicarri fanatics. Rumors were widespread in various forms that a loose coalition of all anti-Roman rebels had agreed on a combined plan for revolt in Jerusalem around the time of the coming Passover.

It was in this tense atmosphere of political and religious ferment that the Great Sanhedrin met to discuss what was to be done about

Jesus of Nazareth. Although the priests were the official element in the Sanhedrin, transacting its daily business and playing the leading role before the public, the real masters were the scribes, or “*doctors of the Law*”, who exerted the greatest influence within the Council itself. The secret of their influence was their allegiance to the Pharisee party; and the priests, — who were mostly Sadducees — were obliged to shape their policy to comply with those of the Sanhedrin’s Pharisee members who had the greatest public support. The power of the Sanhedrin in Palestine was mostly exercised in the province of Judea, and even there it was further circumscribed by the official powers of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate. But, with Roman consent, the Sanhedrin was regarded as the supreme interpreter of the Mosaic *Laws* and the rabbinical *Traditions* of the Jewish people; that is, the code of regulations which embraced the entire civil and religious life of Jews from birth to death, and which were regarded as obligatory on every Jew whether they lived in Palestine’s three provinces or in the Dispersion nations.

The Friday meeting to decide the ultimate fate of Jesus was attended by a small group of Sanhedrin representatives, selectively chosen by Caiaphas the high priest. He knew that there were those who were ambivalent about the prophet from Galilee, impressed by the spirituality of his message while being concerned about his claims to Messiahship and related divinity. The select group at the secret meeting accepted that there could be no question about the veracity of the miracles done by the Galilean prophet, but several members expressed doubts about the alleged source of them. If real, the latter insisted, they were of Satanic agency. The Sadducees, of course, totally rejected the supernatural, and they were particularly incensed at the reports of “resurrections” of the dead, especially of Lazarus. But all present were agreed that whether they were actually of Satanic origin, or simply a Satanic delusion, it was evident that unless something was done soon all the people would believe that Jesus was sent from God. Caiaphas, the high priest, a Sadducee, reminded the members slyly of the well-known Jewish adage, “*It is better one man should die than the community perish.*”

Nicodemus, as ruler of the Temple, was present at the meeting,

and he was so dismayed at the malevolent intentions being displayed by the members that he sent word of the meeting and its deliberations to Jesus through mutual friends. But Jesus and his Apostles had left Bethany quietly for the distant small town of Ephraim, close to Galilee for a brief time of rest and reflection before the final anticipated events.

When the time of the Passover Feast approached Jesus left Ephraim and, traveling southwards along the border of Perea, he and his Apostles joined the many thousands of pilgrims traveling on the main road to Jerusalem. When it was known that Jesus of Nazareth was traveling with them the group quickly became a huge multitude acclaiming him as the Messiah. Now Jesus no longer attempted to restrain them. As the festive crowd reached a Samaritan village ten lepers came out to meet Jesus, one of them a Samaritan. Standing at their socially enforced distance from people they shouted "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

"Go, show yourselves to the priests," Jesus called out to them.

The ten lepers left immediately - before experiencing any healing —so great was their faith in Jesus' power to heal. Within a short distance they found themselves cured and, while nine of them continued on their way to see the priests, the single Samaritan among them turned back and, running up to Jesus, he fell at his feet to thank him. Jesus drew attention to the absence of the nine others who, whatever their beliefs, were still Jews by race yet without thanks for God, while the "pagan" Samaritan was the only one showing gratitude.

Jesus had been speaking about the evils of ingratitude and greed before the interruption of the lepers and had stated categorically, "You cannot serve God and Money", implying the idolatry involved in such cupidity where money or self-interest rather than God was the determining factor in any circumstance. He used the ingratitude of the nine lepers as an example of self-interest to illustrate the wide gap between the two incompatible commitments: "What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight. The nine lepers were more concerned with their healing than with their healer. Consider divorce for an example of self-interest: anyone who divorces his wife

and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

The Pharisees among those listening saw an opportunity to entrap Jesus and asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” The provocatively phrased question indicated the mischievous purpose behind it. All rabbi schools held that divorce was lawful, the only question being the grounds for divorce. This had been carried to ludicrous extremes and might involve divorcing a wife for spoiling her husband’s meal, or even if she “found no favor in his eyes” because he had discovered someone more attractive.

The Pharisees retorted contentiously, “Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?” They were triumphant as they thought they had at last found Jesus opposed to the *Law* of Moses.

Jesus quoted from the *Law* of Moses. “Haven’t you read” he demanded, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So, they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together man must not separate. Marriage is for life. Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because you were determined to have your own way. But it was not intended this way from the beginning of creation. I am telling you that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another, commits adultery.”

He could see even his Apostles were puzzled, and when they were alone together he explained the divine purpose of marriage to them. The original institution of marriage by God was a joint acceptance of unity—two becoming one in a commitment before God reflected in the physical union—and only one thing could terminate that unity: its absolute breach by death of one or the other. Therefore, to divorce one’s wife, or husband, while this unity lasted, and to marry another, was adultery; because the divorce did not exist before God and the original covenanted marriage still remained in existence.

“If this is the situation between a husband and wife”, one of the

Apostles said disbelievingly, “then it is better not to marry.”

“Not everyone can accept this teaching,” Jesus replied inflexibly, “but only those to whom it has been given and gladly accepted. Some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by physical intervention; and others have renounced marriage because of their commitment to the kingdom of heaven. The one who can practice this should accept it”. He had taken them through all relationships in their commitment to the kingdom of God—the rejection of family, relatives, property, possessions, neighbours, community, and country—and now he had set before them the greatest commitment of all, the rejection of marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God. Any true disciple of his should have all thoughts, feelings and impulses so engaged with the divine purpose that alternatives were no longer attractive or existent. It was not just sublimation that was desired by God, but such inward preoccupation with Him and His purposes that everything else was eliminated. This was what God meant by *“being perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

A well-dressed, obviously wealthy man came forward, knelt before Jesus and said to him with apparent humility, “Good teacher, what good thing must I do to receive eternal life?”

“Why do you call me good?” Jesus asked him. “There is only One who is good—God alone. Why do you ask me about what is good? If you want eternal life, obey the commandments.”

“Which ones?” the man asked.

“You know the commandments,” Jesus replied: “do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

“Teacher,” the man replied sanctimoniously, “all these I have kept since I was a boy. What do I still lack?”

Jesus knew that the man was being contentious, wanting assurance for both wealth and eternal life. “You still lack one thing,” he said. “*If you want to be perfect*, go and sell all that you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.”

When he heard these words from Jesus, the man's expression changed as he struggled with the enormous challenge of "*If you want to be perfect . . .*" Jesus watched the man's face cloud over with disappointment, with incipient self-deceit, or more likely, disappointment because of a foiled plan to entrap Jesus.

Jesus said to those around him, "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven; it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

The Apostles were astonished. "Who then can be saved?" they asked.

Jesus looked at them pityingly. "With natural man this is impossible", he told them firmly, "but with the help of God all things are possible."

Peter, still grappling with the implications of these new words of Jesus, volunteered complacently, "Lord, we have left everything to follow you! What reward will there be for us?"

Jesus gazed at Peter thoughtfully. So eternal life and being perfect in the presence of God still wasn't enough for him or the others—even after three years of companionship and instruction from the Son of God! At least, the rich man who had wealth and who kept the commandments had said he wanted something more spiritual to fill the lack; his Apostles, who had assured eternal life and a ruling position in the kingdom of God, wanted something more! He would tell them and see what they made of it. "At the renewal of all things in the last days, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life as God's gift. But"—Jesus paused for the full effect of his words to take effect—"many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first."

Seeing their continuing bewilderment, Jesus went on to explain something more of the mysteries of the kingdom of God: "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them

a *denarius*, a standard day's wages, and sent them into his vineyard. About mid-morning he went out and saw others standing in the market-place doing nothing. He told them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard and I will pay whatever is right.' So they went. He went out again about noon, and then in mid-afternoon, and he did the same thing. In the late afternoon he went out and found others still standing around. He asked them, 'Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?'

"Because no one has hired us" they answered.

"He said to them, 'You also go and work in my vineyard.'"

"When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.' The workers who were hired in the late afternoon came and each received the standard day's wage. When those came who had been hired first, they expected to receive more; but each one of them also received the same. When they received it they began to grumble against the landowner, saying 'These men who were hired last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have done most of the work in the heat of the day'.

"The landowner replied, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for the standard wage? Take your pay and go. If I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you just envious because I am generous?' So, the last will be first, and the first will be last." The first worker was paid what was his due; while the last worker was the beneficiary of the landowner's generosity.

Those standing around and listening to him were stunned at the implications as they understood them, but found it difficult to comprehend that the reward for labor performed was related to the landowner's considered value of the work and not on the energy spent on the task.

Jesus went on to state that grateful tax-collectors and the harlots who believed in him were accepted into the kingdom of God before the professional religionists who were convinced that it was their

due. He gave another example of the son who said "I will not go" but afterwards did, who would take precedence over the other son who said "I will go" and did not. Even the believing Gentiles from the furthest parts of the earth would be first into the kingdom of God before God's own unbelieving chosen people of Israel. It was hard truth for them to accept, but it was the only way to know the true nature and bountiful provision of God.

It became quickly obvious that the Apostles had not rightly understood what Jesus was saying about rewards when James and John with their mother, Salome, the aunt of Jesus, approached him to discuss their future reward to share the twelve thrones of Israel. Salome, their mother, kneeling before Jesus, said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right hand and the other at your left hand in your kingdom."

"You don't know what you're asking," Jesus told his beseeching relatives. "Can you participate in what I am about to do? We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and the teachers of the *Law*. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Romans to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life! Yet you are only concerned about your personal rewards in the hereafter!"

"We can," the two Apostles insisted stubbornly in response; and Jesus knew that they still could not comprehend that what he was saying to them about his imminent death by crucifixion would really happen.

"Eventually you will understand", he told them somberly, "but not now. And the decision to sit at my right or left is not mine to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."

When the other Apostles heard of the incident, and of Salome's request for her two sons, they were furious with them, and Jesus had to call them together to resolve the bitterness the argument about places near the throne had generated. He ended his rebuke with the words: "You know that the Roman rulers lord it over their officials by force and their appointed officials exercise authority over

the subjects. This kind of structured domination is not so in the kingdom of heaven. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave - just as I did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give my life a ransom on behalf of others. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything you need will be granted to you."



The road to Jerusalem on which they were traveling crossed the River Jordan just before reaching Jericho. At this time Jericho was considered "*the garden city of Palestine*", a city of palms and fountains, perfumes and history. As old, if not older than, Jerusalem, its wealth had attracted many invaders over the centuries, and its fearsome walls had been breached in battles and rebuilt many times. Less than a century before the Roman General Pompey had destroyed its fortifications. Then Herod the Great had built forts and palaces, theatres and gardens, baths and gymnasia, adorning Jericho until it became his favorite city. Josephus, the Jewish historian, had written of it as "*a little Paradise*."

In the spring of 30 A.D., as Jesus and the festive Passover multitudes walking with him approached the city, they passed waving groves of feathery palms, towering above them in cool and stately beauty; sweet-scented balsam-plantations, and gardens brilliant with flowers. In the distance rose the purple and violet mountains of Moab, and, ahead, the road to Jerusalem wound through limestone hills.

The streets of Jericho were crowded with previously arriving pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem, with priests and anchorites, traders and soldiers, officials and courtiers—and tax-collectors everywhere, for Jericho was the central station for collection of local and national taxes and customs. Jericho was only a comfortable day's journey from Jerusalem, and even nearer was Bethany, so the works and words of Jesus were well-known there. It was the custom for the residents of the cities, towns and villages through which the pilgrims

passed on their way to the Passover Feast to greet them and make them welcome. When it was known that Jesus and his followers had arrived in Jericho great crowds struggled to see and meet him. Men — curious, admiring, contentious, and envious, — watched with interest; women held up their children to see the famous prophet from Galilee; soldiers and bandits, Zealots and Sicarri watched with amusement and contempt; professional religionists watched with disdain and calculation.

Among the crowds was one man who had more questions than all the others. He was a hated tax-collector, notorious for extortion, who had little hope of his questions ever being answered. His name was Zacchaeus, almost a dwarf in size, very wealthy, but unable to persuade the antagonistic crowds to let him near the approaching Jesus. Deciding that if he could not talk with Jesus he could at least see him, he ignored his pride and climbed a sycamore tree to sit in a branch above the street where Jesus and his company were approaching.

Jesus was in front, with his Apostles and followers grouped around him, and the other pilgrims walked behind him in a long line between the crowds of Jericho inhabitants standing on either side of the street. Jesus' expression was thoughtful as his gaze ranged over the joyous celebrating crowds, wondering how many would believe in him as Messiah in a few weeks later. But as he reached the overhanging sycamore tree he looked upwards, saw Zacchaeus — and stopped. Those who knew the hated tax-gatherer watched with interest to see what the prophet of Galilee would say to the hated tax-gatherer.

“Zacchaeus, come down right now”, Jesus called out to him. “I want to stay at your house today.” The astonished and delighted Zacchaeus clambered out of the tree and went with Jesus to his home. But the crowds were unhappy about the action, and some of them muttered that Jesus “had gone to the house of a notorious sinner.”

Zacchaeus was not to be robbed of his one incredible opportunity, and, standing beside Jesus, he declared with a ringing voice over the complaining murmurs of the crowd, “Look, Lord!

Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

In the sudden silence Jesus said to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to your house.” Turning to the crowd he said, “This man, too, is a son of Abraham like all Jews, and I came to seek and to save those who are lost.” Having caught the attention of the crowd he went on to tell them a parable loosely based on an incident they knew. From where they stood in the courtyard of Zacchaeus’ house, Herod’s palace could be seen on the hill above them. From that palace Herod Archelaus had gone to Rome to persuade Caesar to make him king, leaving an official called Philippus in charge of his affairs. While Archelaus was in Rome his many enemies in the city and country conspired against him. So Jesus told the parable: “A certain nobleman went to a foreign country to have himself appointed king, and then to return. So he called ten of his servants and gave them ten *minas*⁸. ‘Make profits from this money,’ he said, ‘until I come back’.

But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king. He was made king, however, and returned home. Then he sent for the servants to whom he had given the money, in order to find out what they had profited with it.

“The first one came and said, ‘Sir, your *mina* has gained ten more.’

“‘Well done, my good servant!’ his master replied, ‘Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.’

“The second came and said, ‘Your *mina* has earned five more’.

His master answered, ‘You take charge of five cities.’

“Then another servant came and said, ‘Sir, here is your *mina*; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow.’

“His master replied, ‘I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and repaying what I did not sow? Why then

⁸About three months’ wages

didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?'

"Then he said to those standing by, 'Take his *mina* away from him and give it to the one who has ten *minas*.'

"'Sir,' they protested, 'he already has ten!'

"He replied, 'I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given, but as for the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them - bring them here and kill them in front of me.'"

Jesus wanted those listening to him to understand that there was a two-fold aspect to the kingdom of God: one, the *temporal*, which began with his incarnation on earth among them to launch the distinctive rule of God on earth as it was in heaven; which would emerge in its full glorious manifestation only when the purposes of God for the world were completed at his second appearing on earth. And, two, the *spiritual*, which had already begun within them from the first announcement of the kingdom by John the Baptist, and his own manifestation as Messiah, which was now working effectively in the lives of all those who believed in and followed him, and which would be fully manifested shortly by his resurrection from death and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit from God to indwell them.

The bewilderment and misunderstandings of his Apostles and others were caused by their confusion regarding these differing aspects of the kingdom of God. They still expected him to set up an earthly kingdom as an earthly king, but one with heavenly powers. They still thought he would enter Jerusalem as a leader of the Jewish people, and set up a kingdom as they conceived it—declaring again the royal line of David literally and materially in Jerusalem, breaking the Roman yoke and establishing a Jewish state, removing the squabbling professional religionists and appointing a new order of priests, and restoring the former glory of the Temple. Because of this preconception they could not understand what he was teaching them of the spiritual revolution which would have to take place in the hearts of people everywhere—Romans and other foreigners as well as Jews—before the true kingdom of God

would be revealed as a new world order.

From the parable he had just given them they should understand that he, too, was a king going away to be confirmed as a king in that new kingdom—not just as its Creator but as its Redeemer—and that he would return again in God’s time in the future as King of Kings to reward, and punish, those who had been faithful and those who had been faithless. To drive the point home he recounted another parable. “Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week, and give a tenth of all I get’. But the tax-collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’. I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”



In Jerusalem there was widespread speculation among the people already there whether, or when, Jesus would come. They had heard reports of his appearances at the earlier Feasts a few months before, and there were reports of his triumphant progress in Galilee and Samaria and Peraea in recent months. It seemed inconceivable to many of them that he would avoid the Passover at this critical time; but it was also said that the chief priests and the Pharisees had given strict orders that if anyone knew where Jesus was to be found it was to be reported and Jesus arrested.

The news of the raising of Lazarus brought thousands of pilgrims to Bethany, both to see Jesus and to see Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead. In the shaded courtyard Jesus sat beside Lazarus, Mary and Martha, surrounded by his Apostles and followers, while outside he was acclaimed by the huge company of pilgrims many of whom had traveled with him from Galilee and Jericho, and each day as he continued to teach, believers in him as Messiah multiplied.

At the same time, with blind prejudice and unconscious irony, the professional religionists plotted to have Lazarus also put to death so that the impact of his living presence might be diminished. It did not seem to occur to the religionists that Lazarus had already been dead and had been raised, and that the one who had been responsible for his resurrection was still among them. The greatest irony of all was that they were also plotting to put Jesus to death, who had so recently demonstrated that he was the Lord of Life.

The day after the Sabbath, and six days before the Passover Feast which Jesus had said would be his last, Jesus sent Peter and John to the nearby village of Bethphage. There, he told them, they would find by the side of the road a donkey tied, with her colt, which had never been ridden before. These they were to loose and bring to him. When they were asked by the owners or neighbors what they were doing, they were to reply, "The Lord needs them, and he will send them back right away." The Apostles went without questions, guessing that the owners must have been blessed in some way by Jesus and had offered to provide him anything he wanted when required.

When they returned to Bethany they found Jesus ready to depart for Jerusalem, surrounded by the huge crowd which rarely left him now. The word had spread quickly that Jesus was about to ride into Jerusalem for the first time, and those who knew the Scriptures were excitedly reminding others of the prophetic words of Zechariah:

*"Say to the Daughters of Zion,
'Do not be afraid.
See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"*

They also remembered that riding on a white donkey was the ancient symbol of authority and royalty. As the Apostles placed cloaks on the donkey for Jesus to sit on, there was a rising murmur of excitement among the onlookers. Many of them stripped off their cloaks, while others ran to the sides of the road to break off branches from the trees to throw on the road in front of him, shouting that at

last the Messiah was about to announce his kingdom.

The great crowd moved forward from the village of Bethany on to the broad and well-worn track winding between large boulders and loose rocks on the sloping shoulder and steep decline of the Mount of Olives. At the top of the ridge Jesus, riding serene and majestic among his joyous followers, stopped to view the golden city he loved: terrace upon terrace, from the palace of the Maccabees and that of the high priest to the summit of Mount Zion, where more palaces, the Temple and Antonia Fortress—gleaming spires, frowning towers, and magnificent gardens—reflected the rays of the morning sun.

Jesus shook his head slowly and sighed, speaking softly so that only those close to him heard the words: “O Jerusalem, if you had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will besiege you on every side. They will grind you to the ground with you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.”

The procession dropped down the long shoulder of the Mount to the main road leading to Jerusalem, where thousands of pilgrims were streaming into the city. The shouting crowds surrounding Jesus continued to strew the ground with cloaks and leafy branches, acclaiming him with the royal and Messianic: “Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel who comes in the name of Jehovah!”

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”

“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

The triumphant procession passed through the city gate, and wound through the packed streets of astonished residents and pilgrims on their way to the Temple, and they, too, joined in the cheering until the whole city knew that Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet from Galilee, had entered the city riding on a white donkey and was being publicly acclaimed as the Messiah.

The professional religionists were appalled at the spectacle, fearfully calculating the impact that it would have on the Roman authorities ever sensitive to anything political, and the implications as millions of pilgrims returned later to their foreign homes with the news. They knew, and they suspected that Jesus also knew, the prophetic words of the *Psalms of Solomon* regarding the Messiah and his task:

*“Behold, O Lord, and raise up their king, the son of David, at the time thou hast appointed, O God, to reign over Israel thy servant.
Gird him with strength to shatter wicked rulers.
Cleanse Jerusalem from the Gentiles who trample it and destroy.
In wisdom, in justice, may he thrust out sinners from God’s heritage,
crush the arrogance of the sinner like a potter’s crocks,
crush his whole substance with an iron mace,
blot out the lawless Gentiles with a word,
put the Gentiles to flight with his threat!”*

All it needed was for the Roman rulers in Jerusalem to have the word “Gentiles” replaced by “Romans” by some scribe informer, and every Jewish religionist would be punished for treason in seeming to give support to this charismatic Galilean. Only a few days before, the Romans had savagely suppressed a revolt by a group of Zealots led by a revolutionary called Barabbas, and they had arrested him and his followers. While the revolt by Barabbas and his followers had been an armed insurrection, it was much less public and less politically serious than this Messianic display of public support for Jesus of Nazareth.

The more provocative among them shouted at the religious leaders, “See, how you prevail nothing against him! The whole world has gone after him!”

When the procession reached the gates of the Temple Jesus got down from his donkey, and he was immediately confronted by the furious religionists. “Rebuke your followers for this

display!" they demanded in incoherent rage.

Jesus looked at them contemptuously. "If they keep quiet the stones will cry out" he said dismissively. He turned away from them and entered the Temple, with the crowds following him every step of the way. But on this occasion he remained silent, taking note of all the Passover preparations, and then leaving to return to Bethany.

Meanwhile, the religionists were in a quandary as well as enraged. They wanted Jesus arrested and put to death, yet they were faced with an unprecedented demonstration of his popularity which restrained them from attempting his arrest publicly. It was totally unacceptable to them that he should be allowed to pose as "*king of the Jews*" as he had just done, and that they should be made objects of public contempt and ridicule when they tried to oppose him. Somehow he would have to be isolated from his following, a means of betraying him found by some misguided fanatic from among those nearest to him who would witness against him on political as well as religious charges which would satisfy the Sanhedrin, and at the same time bring about his death by the Roman authorities. It must be done this week, while he was in the city, and before the Passover. This working-class, itinerant bleeding-heart Galilean must be stopped here and now. This was Sunday, and the Passover began on Friday evening—so they had five days.

Chapter 14

will be available on this site on the 1st May 2010