

Who Killed Jesus?

1. Warm-up Question: What's your favorite murder mystery movie or TV show, past or present?

2. On Sunday we began a sermon series where we'll try to determine who bears ultimate responsibility for the death of Jesus. We began by looking at a dramatic confrontation between Jesus and the institutional religious leaders of his culture that took place just four days before his death. At the end of this story, we're told, "When the chief priests and scribes heard this [i.e., what Jesus said and did in our story], they began looking for a way to kill him. Read Mark 11:1-19, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. Normally this Gospel story is interpreted as a condemnation of commerce in God's house. Do you buy that? For example, is it wrong to operate a coffee house in a church or to sell books or other items as fund raisers?
 - b. Although conducting mass commerce in God's house may have played a role in Jesus' anger in our Gospel passage, that's not the main point. The main point becomes evident only when we understand the layout of the temple. Take a look at the diagram of the temple on p. 4 and the explanation of who could go where in the temple. If the temple still existed today and operated under the same rules, how far would you be allowed into the temple? And how would that make you feel about God and religion?
 - c. In the theology of the Old Testament, God was thought to dislike the presence of imperfect people, which meant it was dangerous to be in God's presence. If you dared to enter God's presence with some secret sin or blemish or uncleanness, God might just strike out and punish you. That's why the temple was constructed with a series of courtyards meant that functioned as screening devices to protect God from us and us from God. Some of us were raised with that same kind of Old Testament fear of God. How about you? When you were a child, did you see God as kind and gracious or judgmental and dangerous? And how did your view of God make you feel?

3. As time passed and multitudes of pilgrims began flocking to Jerusalem for temple festivals, a problem developed. Traveling long distances with sacrificial animals in tow was difficult. As a convenience to the pilgrims, the priests began allowing Jerusalem farmers to setup booths in the Court of the Gentiles to sell sacrificial animals. Money changers were also allowed to operate, so pilgrims could purchase sacrificial animals with authorized temple coinage instead of dirty Roman currency. All of this required a lot of space, so the priests basically turned the Court of the Gentiles into a religious marketplace. In the process, they were depriving "unclean people" of quiet space to worship, pray, listen to Rabbis teach, and seek God. That made Jesus livid. As we've seen in previous weeks, these were Jesus' people. Jesus was determined to embrace and include people who were different and despised. When they were pushed out of the temple and made to feel unwelcome, it made Jesus furious. That's why, at great personal risk, he lashed out in a provocative act of civil

disobedience that would ultimately get him killed. He was determined that the temple should “be a house of prayer for all nations/people.” Mark 11:17.

- a. When have you felt most unwelcome in a church? What made you feel so unwelcome?
 - b. When have you felt most welcome in a church? What made you feel so welcome?
 - c. What are some things you can do as an individual here at LifeJourney to help others experience the radical welcome of Jesus in this place?
 - d. When you’re out and about during the week and around others, what are some things you can do to help them feel the radical welcome of Jesus in and through you?
 - e. Although churches today are supposed to operate with a New Testament mentality of grace and welcome, many seem to naturally gravitate toward an Old Testament mentality of judgment and exclusion. Why is that? Why is the gravitational pull of Old Testament theology often so irresistible for institutional religion?
5. When institutional religious leaders had Jesus arrested and condemned, they thought they had prevailed. But Jesus wasn’t done with his temple protest quiet yet. Four days later when he was on the cross, Matthew 27:50 tells us that, as his very last act, “Jesus cried with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment, the curtain of the temple [guarding the Holy of Holies, the earthly ‘throne room’ of God] was torn in two, from top to bottom.”
- a. What’s the significance of that? What message was Jesus sending?
 - b. The New Testament says, “Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16. Suppose someone asked you what that verse means. How would you explain it?
6. Take a moment to imagine yourself walking into a room where God is present. Pause for 30 seconds to imagine that experience before answering the following questions.
- a. Before you walked through the doorway into the room, how did you feel?
 - b. When God saw you enter the room, what was the expression on God’s face?
 - c. What was the first thing God said to you?
 - d. What was the first thing you wanted to say to God?
 - e. How did you feel in God’s presence? And what does that tell you about whether you’re operating with an Old Testament or New Testament mindset?

Mark 11:1-18 (selected verses)

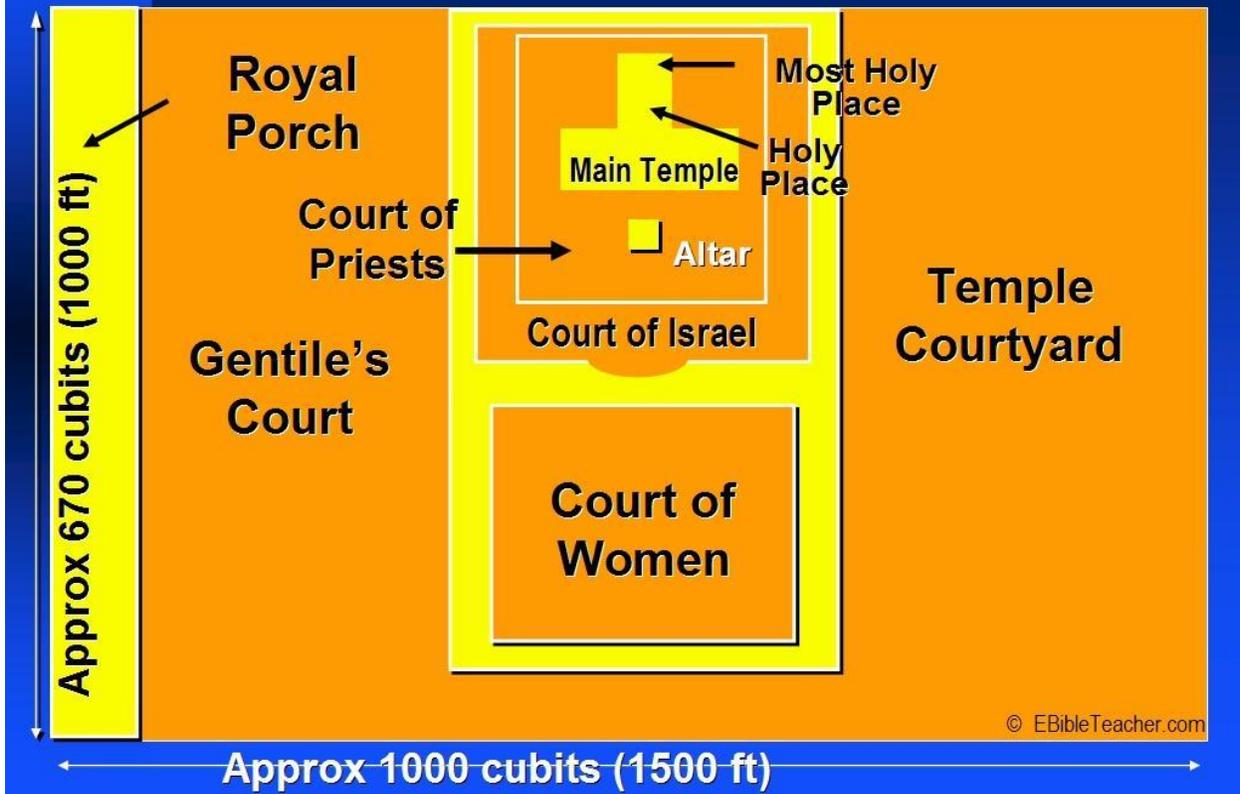
When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, ‘Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, “Why are you doing this?” just say this, “The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately. . . .”’

⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! ¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!’

12 On the following day . . . , 15 they came to Jerusalem. And Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching and saying, ‘Is it not written, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations”? But you have made it a den of robbers.’ ¹⁸And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him.

[Temple diagram appears on next page.]

Herod's Temple



Court of the Gentiles

Anybody could enter this courtyard, even Gentiles and unclean people, to quiet themselves, pray, worship, listen to Rabbis teach, and seek God.

Court of Women

Only observant, orthodox Jewish men and women could enter.

Court of Israel

Only observant, orthodox Jewish men could enter.

Court of Priests

Only priests could enter.

Temple Building, Holy of Holies

Only certain priests at certain times with elaborate cleansing rituals could enter briefly for specified purposes.