

# EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

## Gabbatha and the Trial of Jesus

Gethsemane was where Jesus agonized over “The Cup of Suffering” that he would experience on the cross (See: last month’s Exploration Bible article). From Gethsemane where he was arrested, Jesus was taken to the House of Caiaphas the High Priest. In a classic example of a ‘kangaroo court’ Jesus was convicted of blasphemy and then handed over to Pilate.

In the past, the locations of these trials were a mystery. Two events that occurred in Jerusalem eradicated them from human memory. In 70 A.D. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans under the command of General Titus. Then in 135 A.D. Roman Emperor Hadrian squelched a Jewish uprising called the Bar Kochba revolt. He then leveled Jerusalem and built a new Roman city on the rubble that he named Aelia Capitolina (Aelia—Hadrian’s family name and Capitolina—to the Roman god Jupiter). Ancient Jerusalem was buried under Hadrian’s city.

Josephus tells us the House of Caiaphas was located on the Western Hill of Jerusalem. Its precise location, however, remained a mystery until excavations were conducted just north of the modern-day Dormition Abbey Church in the 20th century.



The grainy photo (on the Left) shows the excavations that located the residence of Caiaphas. (On the right) only a few lavish artifacts found in the excavation remain on display in this Armenian Church courtyard. (Left Photo Fair Use Act - Right Photo, by Chip Thompson, 2018)

From the House of Caiaphas, Jesus was taken to Gabbatha. But what is Gabbatha? The Bible says, “Pilate... sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” So, Gabbatha was the Jewish name for

the stone pavement where Pilate tried Jesus. The question is, “Where was Gabbatha?”

In an excavation conducted in 1971-72 by Magen Broshi along the southwestern wall of the Old City of Jerusalem a city gate was discovered. The location of this gate was unique in that it would have led into the Palace of Pilate and the Praetorium. It was outside this private city gate that a flagstone pavement with a raised stone platform for a judgment seat was found. The layout of this gate, pavement, and judgment seat, perfectly match the information described in the gospel of John.



Outside the western wall of Jerusalem Gabbatha was discovered. Inside this wall where the grass field, parking lot and large buildings are today, is where the Praetorium was located. (photo by permission Joel Kramer, Expedition Bible video, YouTube.)

The Praetorium was only about a block north of the House of Caiaphas. The Jews would have taken Jesus outside of the city to meet with Pilate at his private gate that led into the Praetorium. In John 18:28-29 we read, “Then they led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to the Praetorium... But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium... Pilate then went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?”



This Gate, Stone Pavement, and Throne Platform identify Gabbatha. (Photo by Chip Thompson, 2018)

John chapters 18 & 19 recounts activity into and out of this gate as Pilate examined Jesus and interacted with the Jews. “(18:28) Pilate then went out to them...” “(vs. 33) Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, and called for Jesus [who also entered the gate]...” “(vs. 38) Pilate went out again to the Jews...” “(19:1) So then Pilate [went into the Praetorium], took Jesus and scourged Him...” “(vs. 4) Pilate then went out again, and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you...’” “(vs. 5) Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe...” “(vs 9) Pilate... went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, ‘Where are You from?’” “(vs. 12) Pilate [went out to the Jews and] sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, ‘If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend.’” “(vs. 13) When Pilate heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha...” “(vs. 15-16) The Jews cried out, ‘...Crucify Him!’ Pilate said to them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar!’ Then he delivered Him to them to be crucified.” Pilate and/or Jesus went into or out of this gate at least ten times in this short story.

All the above information provides proof that the trials of Jesus happened in the precise locations described in the Bible. We know Jesus knew what would happen to him long before it happened. Jesus knew He would be betrayed by a friend. He knew He would be arrested and falsely condemned. Jesus knew He would be tried by Pilate and suffer through a Roman scourging. He knew He would be crucified on a Roman cross.

Jesus knew the sins of humanity would be placed upon Him and his Father would and forsake him. Jesus was innocent. Why would He submit to a cruel cross??? Hebrews 12:2 says, “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

IF YOU ARE A BELIEVER IN THE FINISHED WORK OF JESUS ON THE CROSS FOR YOU, YOU ARE THE JOY THAT WAS SET BEFORE HIM – THAT’S WHY HE DID WHAT HE DID.