

Before the Play Begins

Much historic research and Bible study has gone into the production of the Badlands Passion Play. To get the most out of the play we suggest you and your party do some advanced preparation. Read the section “**What to Watch for at the Play**” below and be sure to arrive for the pre-show if possible.

You may also want to read **Comments on Scenes of the Play** in order to watch for certain details described there, especially in the section on **Priestly Duties** that tells how certain duties and actions of the temple priests symbolically relate to certain scenes.

Afterwards you can discuss the **Questions** provided in this booklet, with everyone looking up the Bible references to find answers. You might want to give your party the questions beforehand. **Any part of this booklet can be reproduced in any way.**

The Bible references are brief, selected to facilitate discussion without requiring lengthy study beforehand. For more extensive research, read the entire chapters from which the references are taken, and look for further resources in your church library or public library.

For additional information and discussion your program gives the Bible references for each scene in the play. Most of the text of the play consists of quotations from various Bible translations.

What to Watch for in the Play

Try to arrive at least half an hour early. For about forty minutes before the play begins you can see the **pre-show** happening. Various merchants and shoppers arrive at the marketplace in the early morning. They barter over goods enthusiastically in Middle Eastern fashion. They greet one another, encounter thieves and beggars, pursue their vocations, and cope with their lives. **Roman soldiers** are on patrol and wherever you see them, all throughout the play, there is a possibility of trouble because Zealots are prowling the hills and ordinary Jewish people are oppressed by the Roman occupation. **Angels** are looking down from the hills all around you. Watch for what is happening even behind you.

You can leave your seat to go down to the coral path by the stage area. As the audience **you must not enter the stage area** where the First Century is happening. That would be like walking onto the stage in a theatre during a performance. After the play finally ends you will be allowed to enter the performing area to explore everything closely. Then the actors will be able to talk to you and discuss what you have seen.

How many different kinds of merchants can you pick out? Our brickmakers make real bricks out of bentemite clay and straw, and ship them to various parts of town. That is why our big wooden building is designed and painted to look like an uneven structure made of mud bricks. Outside the town, in the vineyard on your far right, workers seem to make wine, and they bring it to town to sell.

On your left the **priests and Pharisees** should be arriving to open up the temple. They sing cantor songs based largely on the words of Psalms. Although the songs actually date to a few centuries after Christ they are similar to the songs that First Century Jews would have sung. Be sure to go down and listen to them if your seats are very far on the right, because you may not be able to hear them from your seats, especially over the music of the Hebrew dancers further to the right. Can you recognise Psalm 118?

Note the dress of **Caiaphas**, the High Priest. He is the one with the bells and artificial pomegranates on his fancy robes.

Those **stone signs** by the temple steps contain a warning, in Greek, telling Gentiles they must not cross into the temple area. The translation reads, "NO OUTSIDER SHALL ENTER THE PROTECTIVE

ENCLOSURE AROUND THE SANCTUARY. AND WHOEVER IS CAUGHT WILL ONLY HAVE HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR THE ENSUING DEATH." After the show you can go and look around at the furnishings in our temple set, but during the show even Jewish women cannot enter the main temple area. The real Jerusalem temple a vast beautiful building divided into several areas that were all enclosed indoors. Being sacred, it would never have been connected to any other building. Gentiles could go to pray in the outermost area, but in Jesus' time they would have been distracted by all the merchants selling animals for sacrifices right on the temple site, and the moneychangers who provided travellers with Hebrew currency to buy animals. The temple had become a place of great profiteering by Jesus time. You will see all this in the second act. The next area would have been the court of the women, beyond which Jewish women could not go. (Even in the court of the women they were on two elevated galleries separate from the men.) Our set only really depicts the Court of the Priests where many sacrifices were performed.

You can see the laver for the all-important ceremonial washing, the cutting table for offerings, the tether block for slaughter, the altar upon which a real burnt offering lies, the golden Menorah (lamp stand with seven stems), the altar of incense, and the table of shewbread. You may notice people dropping their donations into the bronze-coloured offering trumpet; there were seven of these in the real temple. Also visible is a Torah reading desk with its scroll, although this was more a fixture of synagogues than of the temple.

Notice the large **curtain** of the temple, covering the Holiest Place or the Holy of Holies. The curtain represents the barrier between God and man caused by sin. In real life it would not have been hidden behind an outer veil. **Remember to watch what happens to the temple curtain** later on, right after the **crucifixion**, when the thunder sounds.

You can go very close to the **tax booth** where everyone must pay their taxes to the Romans. Hebrew tax collectors were despised because they worked for the Romans and collected extra money for their own pockets. Further to the right you see fishermen preparing their nets. Watch for the **lepers' tent** near **Calvary Hill**, and the **vineyard** over on the other side of the hill.

Unless your seat is far back you should take a walk high up the stands to see the farmers with their crops and their goats, past the threshing floor. A dip in the ground hides the farm area from the lower seats.

Notice that a lot of Jewish men wear small black boxes on their foreheads called **phylacteries**. They also wear straps on their left arms, leading to their hearts. Small phylacteries would be attached to these straps in real life.

At the beginning of the play the **schofar** sounds, the traditional Hebrew trumpet made of a ram's horn.

If you head toward the concession building during intermission do not miss what happens on the hill behind you. Zealots and Romans are on the move, and if you look back you will see action.

During late intermission, watch for the ceremony on top of the market building in which Governor Pontius Pilate presents the **High Priest's breastplate** to Caiaphas. The Romans confiscated that breastplate to keep the Jews under control, and only returned it during Passover. Without it the High Priest could not enter the Holy of Holies to present the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. Therefore the priests had an incentive to keep the people subject to Rome, in order to ensure that the nation's most important annual sacrifice could be performed on schedule.

Questions

1. Why did religious Jews wear phylacteries on their heads and arms? (Deuteronomy 6: 6-9, Deuteronomy 11: 18, Matthew 23: 2-5.)
2. What was the purpose of the Holy of Holies? (Leviticus 16: 1-5, 15-16, 34.) Note: Aaron, the brother of Moses, was the first High Priest.
3. What was the purpose of the High Priest's breastplate? (Exodus 28: 4, 15-16, 34, 43.)
4. Why did people have to buy animals, often with foreign currency, when they came to the temple at Passover? (Deuteronomy 14: 22-26, Leviticus 17:3-7.)
5. Why did Jesus object to merchants and moneychangers in the temple area? (Mark 11:17, Isaiah 56: 6-7., Jeremiah 7:9-11.)
6. What is the significance of what happened to the curtain of the temple when Jesus died? (Matthew 27: 51, Hebrews 9: 7-12, 24, 10:19-21.)
7. The flogging and crucifixion of Christ are deliberately depicted as being much less violent than they really were. Do you know about what happened in a real crucifixion? (Psalm 22, Isaiah 52:14.)
8. Read Isaiah 53. Who do you think it describes?

Answers and Comments

1. Rabbinical tradition created phylacteries to be literal symbols of obedience to God's Laws: "Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads." Phylacteries contained parchments of Scripture that were also used for memorisation, but Jesus objected to the hypocritical use of them for appearance's sake. In the play he paraphrases Matthew: "They even make a big show of wearing Scripture verses on their foreheads and arms..." Jewish people also put Scripture commandments in the Mezuzah, a box constructed on the doorposts of their houses, because the Torah says, "Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."
2. The Holy of Holies represented the presence of God. The sacrifice had to be offered there annually on the Day of Atonement for the people's sins. Even though an animal sacrifice could atone only in a symbolic way it was considered essential for the forgiveness of Israel. God was so righteous and holy, and sin was such a dangerous thing, that a rope was tied around the High Priest so that if God rejected the sacrifice and struck him dead his body could be pulled out. The bells on his robes indicated by their ringing that he was still alive. "The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die." –Exodus 28:35
3. The High Priest wore the breastplate to show that he stood before God on behalf of the people. In the same way Jesus is our High Priest who intercedes with God on our behalf by praying for us.
4. All Jews gave sacrifices and offerings to God. Animals had to be killed to show that the consequences of sin are death. Symbolically, the animals died in place of the people. The Bible states that there can be no atonement for sins without the shedding of blood. Jews had been commanded since Old Testament times to travel to the temple in Jerusalem to offer all sacrifices. They could offer no other place, and that is why there have been no sacrifices since the destruction of the temple. This restriction was to try to ensure that people would only sacrifice to the true God instead of making offerings to idols.
5. Not only was commerce right on the temple site wrong, but it prevented people from non-Jewish nations from praying there. Historically there was also a lot of dishonesty being practised. Jesus quotes Isaiah and Jeremiah because the temple had also been dishonoured during much of Old Testament history.
6. There need no longer be any barrier between God and people because Jesus paid for all our sins. His sacrifice was real, not merely symbolic. The Old Testament High Priest had, in fact, always symbolised the Messiah and the sacrifices had symbolised how Jesus would become a sacrifice for sin, offering His own blood instead that of some animal. As a man He paid for sin by becoming separated from God, since this is the spiritual death that results from sin. This is why He said, "My God, why have you forsaken me?"
7. Note that Psalm 22 contains many prophecies about the crucifixion, and many medically accurate details. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus had to experience the consequences of sin in the form of separation from God the Father, that is, spiritual death, which is even more painful than physical crucifixion, in order that those who follow him need not be eternally separated from the Father. The mockery and the gambling for his clothes are described in verses 6-8 and 18.

From the beatings and the flogging prior to crucifixion, Jesus would have been severely deformed until "his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness". The flogging was done using braided leather thongs with metal balls and sharp bones that shredded flesh from the shoulders down to the back of the legs until the spine might have been exposed. Veins, muscles, sinews, and internal organs were flogged. The racing heart would pump non-existent blood; "My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me". Lost blood causes severe dehydration, leading to Christ's remark that he was thirsty. "My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth."

Sharp spikes, five to seven inches long, were used to nail the wrists and feet to the cross. The crushed median nerve in the wrist, the longest nerve from the hand, produced intense pain. The word “excruciating” was invented to describe this pain. When the cross is erected the arms stretch about six inches, causing shoulders to be dislocated. As tendons stretch, bones pop out of joint: “. . .all my bones are out of joint.”

The victim cannot exhale except by pushing up from his feet, scraping his flogged back against the wood, in order to raise his chest. You cannot whistle a tune when you are being crucified because you are suffocating. Each time Jesus spoke he had to exert enormous, painful effort. He also became very dehydrated, which was why he thirsted.

The victim dies when he is too exhausted to push up and breath. The Romans used a large mallet to break the knees of those who were crucified with Jesus in order to hasten their deaths by preventing them from pushing up. This was done to accommodate the Jews, so that the bodies could be buried before the Sabbath. Normally victims were left for days to die.

Jesus probably died of cardiac arrest due to sustained, rapid heartbeat. “My heart has turned to wax. . .” This type of shock would cause fluid to collect around the heart and lungs, causing “a sudden flow of blood and water” when a soldier pierced Jesus’ side.

Symbolically the latter part of Psalm 22 foretells the resurrection and the spreading of the gospel throughout the world. “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him.”

8. Early Rabbis accepted that prophets such as Isaiah foretold a *suffering Messiah* who would become a substitute for sin. Later Rabbis argued for new interpretations of such passages because they objected to having them applied to Jesus by the “Nazarene heretics”. Passages such as Isaiah 53 were reinterpreted to refer to Israel personified or to some prophet. For more information see Edersheim’s book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, referred to below in “For Further Reading”.

Comments on Some Scenes of the Play

Throughout the play the actors simulate the customs of First Century **Middle Eastern society**. People then were more sociable and demonstrative than we are, spending much time greeting and conversing. However, they were very hierarchical. You may notice how women give place to men. Men and women alike give place to priests and Pharisees. All Jews, however, must give place to Romans.

Priestly Duties performed in the temple throughout the play often correlate with the scenes in the script. Before the wedding the priests blow two silver trumpets, an allusion to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. When a leper is healed by Jesus he must go to the temple for a cleansing ceremony required by the Law. While the multitude is fed from five loaves the priests rotate the temple shewbread or “Bread of the Face” that represents the presence of God. A drink offering is poured during the story of Christ walking on water. The High Priest portrays his authority during the discourse about who is greatest in the Kingdom. While two leaders ask what is the greatest commandment the priests are studying and discussing the Torah.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night when only the guards stand in the temple. During the parable of the sower, the grain offering is made on the altar. While Jesus predicts his death more discussion of the Torah is going on. Those who plot Christ’s death wash their hands in the laver.

After Judas’s betrayal the priests focus on the Passover ritual. Flayed lambs are sent from the temple to the Passover oven during the Last Supper. During the crucifixion the blood offering is put on the altar.

The Wedding at Cana would have lasted days. A marriage celebration was so important that the pious fasted and confessed their sins before attending.

The Samaritan Woman was surprised that a Jew would speak to her because Samaritans were of impure Jewish ancestry and had conflicts with Israel. They had built their own temple; its ruins were on Mount Gerizim where the woman said her ancestors worshipped. They had rewritten parts of the Bible (falsifying the Pentateuch, the first five Old Testament books) to justify their practices. At times in Jewish history they had been considered relatively acceptable; other times it was said that their bread was unclean like “swine’s flesh”. Even the disciples were surprised that a devout Jewish male would speak to any woman at all. Social standards said it should only be done as an absolute necessity and in as few words as possible.

The Selling and Money Changing Business in the Temple which Jesus compared to “a den of robbers” was run by the High Priest and his wealthy family. The greed and corruption of the business dealings in the temple court were widely recognised. Popular indignation would eventually abolish “the Bazaars of the sons of Annas” three years before the Romans destroyed the temple.

Annas was a prominent Jewish leader who once served as High Priest and then continued to exert great influence through five of his sons who served as High Priests. Furthermore, his son-in-law Caiaphas is the High Priest in our play and in the gospels. His grandson also held the position.

The Centurian whose servant was healed was not a proselyte. (That is, he remained a Gentile and did not convert to Judaism.) Jesus therefore went against tradition by praising his faith and predicting (in the Bible) that unconverted Gentiles would enter the Kingdom. (See Matthew 8:11-12.) It was thought at the time that only Jews would be in God’s Kingdom.

The Trial of Jesus, it has been said, violated many legal principles and Sanhedrin traditions. It was held by night during the Passover Feast time. No two witnesses could be found whose testimony agreed. (Even the false testimony that Jesus said He would destroy the temple was not properly collaborated.) Normally evidence for the innocence of the accused would be heard first. A real trial was not been concluded on the day that it began unless the accused was acquitted. The accused, when asked whether he was the Messiah, was being pressured to testify against himself. Actually there does not seem to have been a legal trial at all. The Bible only seems to report informal interrogations held in the homes of the Annas and Caiaphas. The leaders then took Jesus to Pilate, who finally sentenced Christ after declaring him innocent.

Jesus was taken to Pilate early in the morning, before most of his supporters were awake. Up to five hundred priests and many other temple employees could have been summoned to attend.

Pilate and First Century Politics are a topic that reminds us of many of today’s issues. The assignment of Pilate to Palestine meant that his career was going badly, since the Romans considered the area to be a backwater. Jews were considered rigidly narrow-minded fanatics who despised the human race. (This was because they avoided even eating with idolatrous Gentiles.) Roman philosophers at the time were sceptical and atheistic; this may have influenced Pilate’s cynical question, “What is truth?” As an educated Roman politician he would have only had contempt for a people who believed that their religious belief system could be known for certain to be true. The idea of a God who reveals absolute moral and spiritual truths to man would not have seemed realistic to him. He lived in a society that denied any absolute right or wrong. He served a State headed by an emperor who demanded worship as a god.

Fortunately, most of the time the emperors allowed Jews throughout the empire to enjoy many privileges, including religious freedom and exemption from the offensive requirements of paganism. However, people often resented the privileges, the prosperity, and the religious customs of Jews. What right did they have

to not conform to the standards of such an advanced society? What right did they have, as a conquered people, to refuse to honour Caesar and the gods of Rome?

The gods of Rome had ordained the overthrow of Israel. Common Roman people in fact attributed their world domination to their own piety and their recognition that the gods controlled everything. They greatly misunderstood the customs of Judaism and had distorted ideas of Jewish history. Jews were criticised by writers and orators, and were portrayed as figures of ridicule in comedy plays.

Pilate had a degree of understanding about Israel, but he had greatly offended Jewish beliefs on several occasions, causing riots and uprisings. His career could not survive another incident, so it was expedient for him to act as he did.

Pharisees were extremely strict followers of pious tradition, and they were much less willing to work with the unclean Romans than were Sadducees. Priests were mostly Sadducees, and their willingness to cooperate with Rome gained them an influence greater than that of their rival Pharisees. Rome demanded the power to appoint the influential High Priest to office, so he had to be willing to appease Rome to keep his position.

The Jewish War that ended in the destruction of the temple and of the Israelite nation occurred within a generation after the crucifixion. Jesus predicted these events in several Bible passages such as Matthew 24. Also see Luke 19:41-44 and 23:28-31; these latter two passages are quoted in the play.

For Further Reading

EDERSHEIM, ALFRED, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962

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