

## Hannah, Samuel and Isaiah: the noisy children in the temple: Matt 21

Hannah, Samuel and Isaiah have travelled with their parents into the city, from their home in Bethphage on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The place is packed with people, all coming for the Passover celebrations, a big event in the Jewish calendar. It's the time of year when their nation celebrates how God saved them out of Egypt.

The whole family has come. Hannah clings on to her grandfather's hand, careful not to get lost in crowd, while Samuel and Isaiah duck and dive through the people, keen to get to the front. Why? Because today Jesus is in the city! Everyone is buzzing, keen to get a glimpse of this miracle worker, storyteller, healer, saviour of the world!

But not everyone is excited to see Jesus. Samuel narrowly misses running into a Roman soldier, his spear gleaming in the sunshine. No one can forget that the city is under Roman rule, and the Romans are not too happy about this crowd. They are worried that a fight is going to break out. "Be careful", their mother shouted after the boys as they disappeared into the crowd.

Samuel and Isaiah make their way along Solomon's colonnade, a covered walkway on the edge of the temple court. That's where all the debates happen. That's where the action is. Today the place is packed with people who can't see and can't walk. Lots of people have come, wanting Jesus to heal them.

But that's not what is drawing Samuel and Isaiah to the front. It's the kids! A whole group of them are pushing forward, and someone starts shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David", someone else joins in and before they know it, they are all shouting out.



“Hosanna to the Son of David”, Isaiah bellows at the top of his lungs! Joy bursts from him as he lets his voice ring out around the temple walls.

And then Jesus speaks, and they all fall silent, pressing forward to hear what he’s saying.

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” the chief priests and teachers of the law ask him.

That’s us, Samuel nods.

Do you hear?

“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,

“From the lips of children and infants  
you, Lord, have called forth your praise’?”

Later, when the boys report back to their father what Jesus said, he points out to them that those words come from their Hebrew scriptures. “Those words come straight from Psalm 8” he tells them. “Today, as you were shouting praise to Jesus in the temple, you were bringing scripture to life!”



## Benjamin and his jar of water

Luke 22

It was time for the Passover meal and my whole family had been preparing all day. We live in a two storied house in the old city of Jerusalem, and my relations had all travelled to be with us. Let me tell you about this one day in particular. It's hard to describe in words, but it involves a jar of water.

On the day in question, I had been down to the well in the centre of town to collect water for our Passover preparations. I was walking back to my house when I felt prompted to turn around. Walking towards me were two men. I could tell they were from Galilee in the North; their clothes were those of fishermen.

And I walked forwards to greet them.

Peter and John were their names, and they had a request to make.

The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?

Now I don't normally lend my rooms out to people I don't know, but something in me said Yes! So, I led them upstairs to my guest room on the second floor. It's a great room, big enough for a decent sized gathering.

Peter and John looked around and liked what they saw, and they began to make their preparations for their Passover meal. I helped them set up the table, my wife helped with the food organisation, and as we worked together, they told us about their teacher.



Jesus, the miracle, the storyteller, the healer, and the saviour of the world!

That night all his closest friends would gather today in my guest room, to share together this Passover meal. Little did we know that this would be the final time they would meet before Jesus' death at the hands of the Romans.

When I saw him hanging on a cross on the road out of the city I recognised him, and John keeping vigil nearby. We talked, we cried, and John told me all that had happened at the meal in my guesthouse. How Jesus had torn the bread in two and picked up a cup and talked to them about his body and his blood.

And an angry look came over his face as he told me how one of their own had betrayed Jesus, leading to his arrest and death.

It all feels hopeless. Each day as I carry my jar down to the well to get the water for our house, I can't help but wonder what it all means. That Jesus, the healer, the miracle worker, the storyteller, the saviour of the world, has been killed on a cross.



Sarah sits by the fire:  
A servant girl warming herself by the fire  
Luke 22

In the courtyard outside the high priest's house the men lit a fire. They needed warmth as the cold wind seemed to cut through their uniforms. They had just brought one of those rebels from the north to the high priest, and now they wanted to relax. Others gathered around the fire, drawn in by its warmth. A few of the household staff settled down around it, after a long hard day serving. And a few extras on the edge in the shadows.

Sarah worked in the kitchens during the day with her two older sisters. They were all together on the edge of the fire when Sarah looked across at the scruffy man sitting beside her. He was staring bleakly into the fire, he looked in distress.

He looked familiar.

She looked again. Could it be? Yes, she thought it was, could she be sure? She peered a little closer.

"This man was with him." she said to her sisters, loud enough for the fireside gathering to hear.

"Woman, I don't know him," he replied, his voice sounding concerned.

So she let him be. Maybe she was mistaken, but then someone else spoke up, her sister Leah.

"Yes, you were one of them, one of those men with that Jesus!"

"Man, I am not!" Peter replied, a little more forcefully this time.



It wasn't until about an hour later than someone else spoke up, a soldier named Darius.  
"This fellow definitely was with him, he's from Galilee!"

And Peter sprung to his feet, yelling, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" At that, a rooster sitting on a wall nearby crowed, his voice cutting through the darkness of the early morning.

At that, Jesus from the distance of the High Priest's house turned and looked straight at Peter.

It was like Peter dissolved, like wax in front of the fire. He simply crumbled, tears rolling down his face. He muttered something about disowning Jesus and staggered out of the courtyard and off into the night.



## Claudia's Dream – Matt 27

Church tradition has called her Procula or Claudia. We don't know her name. But, for our purposes today we will call her Claudia. She stands beside her husband looking out across the streets of Jerusalem, hearing the cheers and the sounds of dancing and celebration. Palm fronds are waving in the air. As always, her husband's guards are on high alert, always concerned when crowds form. Revolutions and rebellions are not to be tolerated here in this outpost of the Roman Empire.

"Who is he"? She asks, pointing down at the figure in the middle of the crowd, riding a donkey on a path strewn with coats.

"Some call him the King of the Jews", Pilate replies. "But he is a carpenter from the North, and his name is Jesus. His arrival has sure got the people excited."

Long after Pilate has gone inside, Claudia watches on from her balcony, her eyes fixed on this man in the middle, causing such joy. "Who are you?" she murmurs to herself? It seemed like only days later that he is arrested, and a series of events are set in motion. Jesus is brought before Pilate to be tried.

"Are you the king of the Jews?" Pilate asks.

"You have said so," Jesus replies.

Pilate is surprised. When the Jewish leaders had questioned him, Jesus had given them no answer. Then Pilate asks him, "Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?"



But this time Jesus makes no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of Pilate. It so happens that this time of year there is a custom. Try one prisoner and set one free. Pilate has before him two choices, Jesus and a well-known prisoner called Barabbas. The crowd is calling for Pilate to release Barabbas. But something strange has happened to Claudia. Let's hear from her what happened.

“I have been troubled all day, unable to sleep. I lie down and I toss and turn. When I do dream, my dreams are disturbed. I dream about Jesus, the man on the donkey, the man who now stands trial before my husband. There is something I cannot shake, this fear that calling him guilty and sentencing him to death would be the wrong thing to do. There is something about this man, and I know in my heart that he is innocent.”

So Claudia goes to her husband to warn him. “Don't have anything to do with that innocent man,” she tells him. But the Jewish leaders and the crowds are calling for Jesus to be put to death.

Crucify him! They yell.

“Why”? Asks Pilate. “What crime has he committed?”

But the crowd keeps on yelling. Things are starting to get out of hand. The Roman guards were getting worried, raising their spears. So, Pilate walks over to a pot full of water and washes his hands. As he does this, he looks down on the crowd.

“I am innocent of this man's blood, he yells. It is your responsibility.

But the crowd simply yell back, “His blood is on us and on our children!”

Then he released Barabbas to them.  
But he had Jesus flogged  
and handed him over to  
be crucified.





## Marcus and his surprising discovery

### Matt 27

My name is Marcus. As a Roman centurion it is my job to keep the peace, to make sure that the rule of Rome remains supreme, even in the far reaches of the empire. On this particular day I was on duty on a street on the outskirts of the city of Jerusalem. Along this road are lined crosses, with dead and dying criminals hanging from them. They stand there on the road as a reminder to anyone coming or going from the city that Rome is not to be messed with.

I stood duty as a man named Jesus was hung up to die. There's nothing too strange about that, he had disturbed the peace and he was made to pay, at least that's what I had heard. But the events that unfolded were anything but ordinary. All day people threw insults at him. People walked past and hurled horrible words like stones.

“You said you were going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, and yet here you are. Save yourself!”

“Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

Even the Jewish religious leaders got in on the action, mocking him.

“He saved others,” they said, “but he can't save himself.”

“He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him.”

“He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him.”

One by one they threw their insults at Jesus.

Nothing unusual about that. Mocking these criminals happens all the time. That's why we put them on public display.



But at about noon, lunchtime, that's when things got very unusual indeed. To start with, the sky went dark. Solar eclipse dark! No sun, no moon, pitch black. It stayed like that for about three hours. As you could well imagine we were terrified.

And then a voice pierced the darkness, a voice of such anguish,  
"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

"Who was that?" we asked each other, looking around in the darkness.  
Someone said, "He's calling for the prophet Elijah."  
It was Jesus!

Straight away someone jumped up and ran to get some wine vinegar, soaked a sponge in it and then lifted it up on the end of his staff for Jesus to drink.

"Now leave him alone." some said, "Let's see if Elijah comes to save him."  
But Jesus cried out one last time in a loud voice and gave up his spirit.

I almost can't put into words what happened next. The very earth shook in horror as Jesus died. The rocks split, the tombs broke open and we were all knocked off our feet. We heard later that the huge curtain in the temple had torn from the top to the bottom and people were seen alive who had been dead.

There is no way to describe it. I shook with fear, my whole body trembled like the earth beneath my feet.

"Surely, surely this man was who he said he was. Surely, he was the Son of God!"



## Crispus spreads some rumours Matt 27-28

Pilate wanted to make sure that no more trouble erupted. He has handed Jesus over to the Jewish authorities and they had sentenced him to death. Now he was buried in a tomb, gone, out of the picture.

But the Jewish authorities weren't happy. They came to Pilate.

"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.'

They demanded that Pilate make extra sure that Jesus wasn't going to be able to get out of that tomb. What if his disciples snuck in and stole the body, and then told everyone he had been raised from the dead.

"The last deception will be worse than the first," they declared grumpily.

So Pilate told them to take a guard to secure the tomb. Crispus the guard secured the tomb and he put a seal on the stone so that no one could tamper with it. And the guard stood outside.

But Crispus couldn't stop him, a seal couldn't stop him, the Jewish authorities couldn't stop him, Pilate couldn't stop him. As the sun came up on the first day of the week the ground shook. A violent earthquake rattled the tomb. An angel came down from heaven, took hold of the stone and rolled it back. Then he sat on it.



The angel looks like lightning, his clothes were bright white.

And those guards, men trained to withstand armies, fell to the ground like dead men. But the women who had gathered there, even though they trembled with fear, heard the angel speak to them.

“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’ Now I have told you.”

So, the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. “Greetings,” he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”

Meanwhile, the guards picked themselves up and heading into the city to tell the Jewish authorities what had happened. The elders were absolutely shocked by this and had to devise a plan.

“I know, let’s bribe the guards” one said.

“Let’s pay them lots of money to spread the rumour that this scoundrel’s friends snuck in and stole his body.”

So, that’s what they did! They paid the guards a large sum of money to keep quiet, and this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

