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Jesus Sentenced to Be Crucified

Mt 27:15-26; Mk 15:6-15; Lk 23:13-25; Jn 18:39 to 19:1, 4-16a

About 7:00 am Friday morning, the fifteenth of Nisan

Jesus sentenced to be crucified DIG: Why do the people, after witnessing Yeshua's miracles, hearing His teaching, and praising Him with hosannas, now demand that Jesus be crucified? Why does Pilate grant their request? What insights into the gospel do you see in the release of bar-Abbas in exchange for Christ (Mark 8:37 and 10:45)? What mental, physical, and emotional brutality do the soldiers inflict on Messiah? Why? Did their mockery stem from fear, anger, unbelief, or what?

REFLECT: When, if ever, have you been caught up in the enthusiasm of a group and done what, in hindsight, you knew was wrong or sinful? What would you think if your ancient relatives make an oath that you were held responsible for? How does the story of bar-Abbas illustrate what Jesus has done for you? In our journey through life, we come to forks in the road. Our decision to trust in Christ is the most crucial choice we make, but it is the first of many. Each day we must choose which kingdom we will serve. Do you feel like you usually submit to truth or succumb to power?[1562]

If **Pontius Pilate** thought **he** had escaped from **Caiaphas'** snare **he** was wrong. For soon the entire **Jewish group** that **he** had previously tried to get rid of a short time ago managed to find **their** way back on **his** doorstep again. **He** had hoped that **Herod** Antipas would have taken the problem off of **his** hands but that plan hadn't worked. **He** was going to have to deal with this unpleasant issue **himself**. **The procurator** tried several times to release **Jesus**, but was blocked at every turn by **the Jewish religious leaders** and the providence of **God**.

Pilate noticed at once that **Herod** Antipas had mocked **Jesus'** claim of being **a king** by returning **Him** with a purple robe draped over **His** shoulders. **The**

governor interpreted this to mean that, to **Herod** at least, **the Nazarene** was comical. A clown among kings.

The party arrived under the double arch of **the praetorium** and word was sent in that Antipas had interviewed **the prisoner** and had found **Him** innocent of any crime against Galilee. In a few minuets **Pilate** came out for the third time with **his** men and again sat in the curule chair in the courtyard. **He** smiled faintly as the parties to the action assumed **their** places because **the procurator** thought that **he** had won a victory. **He** had acquitted **Jesus** once and **Herod** Antipas had come to the same conclusion. The spiteful **little man** was ready to squeeze a small triumph from **his** enemies.

Pilate called together the Sadducees, the rulers and the people, and said to **them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion."** Then, trying to release **Him**, **Jesus, Pilot** continued: **I have** personally **examined Him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against Him. Neither has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; as you can see.** Then this is **my** verdict. **He has done nothing to deserve death (Luke 23:13-15).** Over and over again **the governor** declared **Jesus** to be innocent of the charges against **Him**. But **the mob**, on signal, began to cry for vengeance.

He stood, having pronounced a second verdict. But the amount of venom from **the crowd** was so shattering that, for an instant, **Pilate** lost **his** poise and turned and looked at **the people**. For a moment, **his** eyes showed that **he** was more frightened than **he** was **the governor**. **So they cried out again, saying, "Not this man, but bar-Abbas." Now bar-Abbas was a robber (John 18:40 NASB).** Out of the roar of **the crowd**, **the procurator** heard parts of words or phrases, and realized that some were asking a **Passover** pardon for a prisoner named **bar-Abbas**. **Pilate** suddenly realized **he** could resolve **his** problem. The potential solution sat in a cell roughly two thousand feet from **the praetorium**: a well-known **robber. He** wasn't merely a petty thief. The Greek term describes what we would call **a terrorist, a zealot**. Rome hated **robbers** and pirates who disrupted trade over land and sea. But in Judea, **robbery** and murder came with a political agenda.[1563]

Now it was the governor's custom at the festival of Pesach to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd (Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6). This action would be doubly symbolic for this **festival**, which, at its core, is a celebration of freedom from slavery. Without question, the Romans followed this custom with the hope that

the compassionate gesture would foster a good relationship with the people that they had conquered.[1564]

At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was bar-Abbas. It is ironic that **bar-Abbas** was guilty of the very crime that **Jesus** was being accused of – sedition against Rome. **He was in prison with the zealots who had committed murder in the uprising.** But the irony goes even further. We know from secular sources that **his** full name was **Yeshua bar-Abbas**, which means *salvation, son of the father.* So while **bar-Abbas** was actually guilty, true *salvation,* **Son of the Father**, **Yeshua the Messiah**, was not guilty. Therefore, **the crowd** forced its way **up to the praetorium and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did (Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7-8).**

So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate declared**: It is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the festival [of Passover] (Matthew 27:17a; John 18:39a).** This is the fourth of four **Passovers** mentioned in the ministry of **Christ**. The first is mentioned in **John 2:13**. The second mentioned in **John 5:1**, the third is referred to in **John 6:4**, and the fourth in **John 11:55, 12:1, 13:1, 18:28** and here in **18:39,** and **19:14** see below. By dating these, we are able to conclude that **His** public ministry lasted three-and-a-half years.[1565]

So **Pilate** decided to use **the Passover** pardon to close the case on **Jesus**. **He** thought **he** could tempt **the mob** into releasing **the Nazarene** by giving them a less attractive option. If **the Jews** chose to release **bar-Abbas**, a genuine enemy of Rome, **they** risked damaging the good will of Tiberius. Certainly, **they** would choose to release **the innocent man** rather than invite the wrath of Caesar. But **the governor** underestimated **the Sanhedrin's** hatred for **Christ**.[1566] **He** turned to **the crowd** and held up both hands for quiet, and then **he** said: **Which one do you want me to release to you? Yeshua bar-Abbas, or Yeshua who is called the**

Messiah? This was a truly fatal question poorly phrased. **The crowd** was made up of two factions: a vast majority who backed **the Great Sanhedrin** and wanted **Jesus** dead, and a minority of disciples who wanted **Yeshua** freed. **The procurator** promised that whomever **the people** chose, **he** would **punish him and then release him (Mattityahu 27:17b; Mark 15:9; Luke 23:16; Yochanan 18:39b).**

The Roman **governor knew it was out of self-interest that the Sadducees had handed Jesus over to him (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10).** The Greek word **knew** is *eginosken*, meaning *it gradually dawned on him*. **Their** pretense of loyalty to the emperor was too flimsy for **him** to believe. Like a political shark, **he** knew the real reason was what it always came down to in **his** mind, **self-interest**, and **they** were swimming in **his** waters.

Just before **the Messiah** was brought before the masses of **people**, **Pilot** received a disturbing message from **his wife** (art by Sarah Beth Baca: see more information on Links and Resources). **While he was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of Him" (Matthew 27:19). But the Sadducees and the elders stirred up the crowd to ask for bar-Abbas' release and to have Yeshua executed on the stake. "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor.** The response surprised **Pilate** because **he** didn't realize that **the mob** in front of **him** didn't represent the true feelings of the approximately one million people who had crowded into **Jerusalem** for **the Passover**. But it seemed like **the whole**

crowd shouted back almost in chorus: **Away with this man! Give us bar-Abbas.** By this time **the priests** didn't have to prompt **the people**.

Besides the obvious sovereignty of **God**, quite likely the **Jerusalem crowd** preferred **bar-Abbas** because **he** was **a zealot**, committed to active resistance against **Rome**. **He had been thrown into prison for an insurrection and murder in the City of David (Matthew 27:20-21; Mark 15:11 CJB; Luke 23:18-19; John 18:40).** When this failed, **Pilate** made another attempt to release **Jesus**.

Then, in an effort to appease **the crowd**, **Pilate** had **Jesus** cruelly whipped **(John 19:1). This was the third mockery.** At that time the Romans used three forms of punishment: the *fustigatio,* was a less severe whipping meted out for relatively light offenses such as criminal activity; the *flagellatio,* a more serious, cruel whipping for greater offenses; but the *verberatio,* a **flogging**, was the most terrible of all and the one that always preceded the **crucifixion**. It was so terrible that it was not unusual for a man to die from the **flogging** before reaching the cross to be **crucified**. Consequently, it appears the **Jesus** was abused twice on **Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan** – first, here, with *flagellatio,* a cruel whipping in an effort to appease **the Jewish mob**; and then secondly, when that didn't work, the dreaded *verberatio* in preparation for the cross.

For the fourth time **Pilate came out and sat in his chair. He** had hoped that seeing **Jesus** mocked, humiliated and beaten would satisfy **the** angry **crowd** in **his** courtyard. But **they** would accept nothing less a sentence of **crucifixion**. This time **he** seemed impatient. **He** glanced angrily at **the crowd** and, raising **his** right hand high, **he said to the Jews gathered there, "Look, I am bringing Him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against Him" (John 19:4)!** This was another declaration of **His** innocence.

But the concession by **Pilate** to have **Jesus** cruelly whipped had failed. **Wanting to release Christ, Pilate appealed to them again,** saying: **What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the king of the Jews? Pilate asked them.** What **do** you **do** with **a man** who claims to be **God**, but hates religion? What **do** you **do** with **a man** who calls **himself Savior**, yet condemns systems? What **do** you **do** with **a man** who knows the place and time of **His** death, yet goes anyway? You can either accept **Him** or reject **Him**. Perhaps **the crowd** resented **his** desire to dictate **their** answer, and, with fickle cruelty, **the mob all kept shouting, "Crucify Him!" "Crucify Him" (Matthew 27:22; Mark 15:12-13; Luke 23:20-21)!**

Shocked, **Pilate** dropped **the prisoner's** hand and continued to **speak to them.** Still reluctant, **he** asked: **Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have Him punished and then release Him. But as soon as the Sadducees and their officials saw Jesus, they shouted all the louder, "Crucify Him," "Crucify!" "Crucify!" But Pilate** answered: **You take Him and crucify Him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against Him (Matthew 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22; John 19:6).** But it was useless.

Then **the Jewish leaders** came up with the real reason **they** wanted **Him crucified. They** insisted:**We have a commandment, and according to the Torah He must die, because He claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7).** This caught **Pilate** off guard. The title "Son of God" was especially meaningful to the Romans. In fact, Caesar Augustus declared himself the son of god because he was heir to the power and title of Julius Caesar, who had been declared god. **The governor** was at **his** wit's end.

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid. He turned on **his** gilded sandals **and** walked quickly **back inside** to **his** headquarters for a second private interview with **Christ.** Once inside, it was **the procurator** who seemed pressured. **"Where do You come from?" he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.** Insolence! **Do You refuse to speak to me?** It seemed like **he** was trying to save **a man** who wasn't interested in being saved. Agitated, **Pilate** spoke slowly through **his** teeth: **Don't you realize I have power either to free You or to crucify You?** But **Yeshua** let **the** Roman **governor** know who was really in control. With dry broken lips **He** answered in a hoarse voice: **You would have no power over Me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed Me over to you is guilty of a greater sin (John 19:8-11).** **Pontius Pilate** was running out of time and options.

The governor continued **to try his** best **and set Jesus free, but the Jewish leaders kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12).** This got **his** attention. Unfortunately for **Pilate**, two years earlier in 31 AD **Tiberius** had discovered **his** good friend Sejanus (**to see link click Lo – Jesus Before Pilate**) had poisoned **the emperor's** son Drusus and executed the traitor. So **Pilate** would find no help from Rome. The last thing **he** needed was someone who claimed that **he** was **no friend of Caesar**. Then to release someone who claimed to be **king of the Jews**, and a competitor to **Caesar**, was unthinkable. **He** wasn't going to risk

his life for this Jew, even if **He** did claim to be **the Son of God**.[1567]

On the other hand, **the procurator** didn't really have to make an immediate judgment. **He** could merely sent **Jesus** to the Antonia Fortress to be held until further notice. In fact, **Pilot** could hold **Yeshua** there until after **the Passover** – perhaps *long* after **the Passover**, when **he** had already left town. But **he** could also tell **the Jews** were intent on action and action immediately. Otherwise there would be trouble with them and for **his** own sake **he** didn't need trouble with **the Jews**. What was this Jewish prisoner to **him**? So, **he** finally sent **Caiaphas** on **his** way and reluctantly accepted custody of **the Nazarene**. The fate of **Messiah** was then in the hands of Rome.

One might think there were tens of thousands of people shouting at **Pilate**. But recent archaeological discoveries have confirmed that the area was only large enough to hold little more than a hundred people. So **the crowd** that passionately opposed **Jesus** was comparatively small and surely didn't represent every Jew in **the City**, let alone the entire Jewish world! Obviously **their** actions in the heat of the moment can't be applied to all future Jewish generations.[1568]

It was the day of Preparation of the Passover, and Shabbat would **begin** at sundown that late afternoon**. Preparation day** is, therefore, the day *before* **the Sabbath**. **This is standard Jewish language found in all rabbinic literature, and it *always* means the sixth day of the week, or Friday.** They were starting to mentally prepare themselves for Queen **Sabbath**. In other words, it was **Friday, the fifteenth of Nisan** during **the Passover** celebration. **It was to be a special Sabbath**, or a high **Sabbath**, because it was also the first day **of Pesach (Mark 15:42a; John 19:14a, 31a 23:54).**

It was *about* the sixth hour (John 19:14b NASB). According to the famous messianic Jew Alfred Edersheim, in the Fourth gospel time is reckoned not according to the Jewish mode, but according to the Roman civil day, from midnight to midnight.[1569] Here, **John** speaks of the trial as still not being completed at **about the sixth hour**, or **6:00 am** as the Romans calculated time.[1570] We have estimated **Pilot's** sentencing to be **about 7:00 am**. So that puts us in **about** the right time frame.

When Pilate heard the crowd shout, **"If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar," he** immediately **brought the Nazarene out and he himself sat down on the**

judge's seat called *the bema* **(John 19:12-13a).** It was a raised platform from which official decrees were read, including verdicts and sentences in criminal trials.[1571] It had the advantages of a private entrance for **Pilate**, and it also provided a place where prisoners such as **Jesus** could be led out and tried, then quietly walked back to their prison cells. **Yeshua** was judged at *the bema* **seat** of **Pilate**, and as believers, we will be judged at *the bema* **seat** of **Christ** (see my commentary on **Revelation Cc – We Must All Appear Before the Judgment Seat of Christ**).

At a place known as the Pavement of stone**, which in Aramaic is Gabbatha (John 19:13b).** It was an open-air courtyard paved with flagstones within **the praetorium**, which served as military housing for the Romans guarding **the procurator**. The courtyard was next to **Pilate's** residence, so **the Jewish delegation** didn't technically violate the Sabbath and were permitted to enter on **the day of Preparation of the Passover**. That explains the presence of **the Sadducees** who, representing **Caiaphas**, made sure the sentence handed down by **the Sanhedrin** was carried out.

Then **Pilate** had the tribune take **Jesus** out to be **flogged** (at this point, please stop and read **Lr – The Soldiers Mock Jesus**).

The crowd was hushed and **Pilate** was about to speak **when he** saw **the prisoner** return from **His flogging**. **Caiaphas** also looked across the polished stones to the left and saw a tribune and some soldiers leading **Jesus** out of the adjacent courtyard. **The prisoner** could not be seen, because two of **the soldiers** in front blocked the view. But the slowness of the procession indicated that **the prisoner** was not in good condition. The group drew up close to the arches beside **the procurator**. Then **the soldiers** pulled away, and **Jesus** was left standing, with but two **soldiers** flanking **him** and holding **him** erect.

The Son of God came out wearing the crown of thorns and [the soldiers] own purple robe. Some in the crowd gasped. Their eyes showing the horror set before them, and some turned away in disgust. This **man** was a shocking sight. The hair, under the thorns, was damp and discolored. The face was so marred that individual features were almost indistinguishable, and the body teetered slowly backward. The soldiers leaned closer to keep **Him** erect. **His** eyes were glazed over as **He** stared straight ahead.[1572]

Pilate said to the crowd, "Here is your king!" Their response was predictable.

With loud shouts they insistently demanded that Jesus be crucified, "Take Him away! Crucify Him! Execute **Him** on a stake like a common criminal**." Pilate** asked: **Shall I crucify your king?" The Sadducees** answered: **We have no king but Caesar. These** were the very ones who tried to trap **Jesus** with **their** question about paying **taxes to Caesar** (see **Iz – Is It Right For Us to Pay Taxes to Caesar or Not?**)**.** Now **they themselves** rejected the Jewish **king** and accepted a Gentile one when they cried out: **We have no king but Caesar. And their shouts prevailed (Luke 23:23; John 19:5** and **15).**

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, and seemed a little perplexed by **the crowd's** choice. But when **he** saw where all the turmoil was leading**, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd.** This was a Jewish symbol, not a Roman one. Moshe had established it in **Deuteronomy 21**. In its original form, it concerned the action to be taken in the atonement for an unsolved **murder**. **The elders and judges of the nearest town** from which **the body was found** had to kill **a heifer and wash their hands over it,** saying: **Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done." Then the bloodshed will be atoned for, and you will have purged from yourselves the guilt of shedding innocent blood (Deuteronomy 21:1-9).**[1573] This declaration of innocence was the most strategic because it came right from **the judgment seat** itself. **I am innocent of this man's blood, he** declared. **It is your responsibility (Matthew 27:24)!**

All the people in the small courtyard **answered**, including **the religious leaders**, saying: **His blood is on us and on our children (Mattityahu 27:25)!** But unwittingly **they** took upon themselves the curse of the **blood**. This curse, however, does not go beyond 70 AD (see the details of this curse in **It – The Triumphal**

Entry into Jerusalem as the Passover Lamb). If **the Jews** were the only ones who killed **Jesus**, then **He** didn't die for anyone else. But **He** died for all, not just **the Jews**. Everyone, Jew and Gentile alike, is a sinner. By sinning, everyone killed **Him**. So everyone, not just the Jews, is guilty of **His** death **(Yochanan 3:16; Romans 3:23, 5:7-8**; **First John 2:1).**[1574]

Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate decided to grant their demand and released bar-Abbas to them. He was **the zealot who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder (Matthew 27:26a; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:24-25a).** Some argue that **Pilate's** protests against putting **Yeshua** to death show that **he** did not want to do it, and therefore little blame rests with **him**. To this is added the argument that **Messiah Himself** says there is **one** whose blame in the matter is **greater** than **Pilate's (John 19:11).** If these arguments are true, they support anti-Semitism: **the Jews** and not the Gentiles (as represented by **Pontus Pilate**) are responsible for the death of **Jesus**.

But these verses above take pains to show just how weak-willed and unconcerned for justice **the procurator** was. The **yelling** and **shouting** of **the mob prevailed** over **him**. **He decided** (the Greek can mean *passed judgment*) **to grant their demand** rather than the righteous demand of justice. **He** released **a man** whose black character **Luke** paints with the words **insurrection and murder.** Consequently, **Pilate** not only surrendered **his** feeble intentions but **his** commission under Roman law and under **God** (for **Genesis 9:5-6**, which establishes human government to protect human life, applies to Gentiles as well as to Jews), not to do the will of the Jewish people as a whole but to do the will of an unruly **mob**.[1575]

Whether **he** knew it or not, **Pilate** stood at the crucial juncture in **his** life. **He** had to decide which kingdom **he** would serve. Tiberius or **Jesus**. The kingdoms of earth or the kingdom of heaven? Power or **truth**? But as most politicians do, public popularity trumped personal integrity. When forced to choose, **he** elected to trust in power, and to serve Rome. **He** did what was politically expedient. If **he** had rendered a "not guilty" verdict and released **Jesus**, it would have destroyed his political career and probably would have invited severe punishment from **Rome**. So, instead of submitting to kingdom of **God**, **Pilate** set the **truth** aside for the sake of power, earthly success and short-term comfort.[1576]

Although **Pilate** believed **he** was **washing his hands** of this matter, **he** is far from **innocent**. The responsibility belonged to **him** alone. Only the Roman

governor possessed the *ius gladii* – "the right of the sword," or, as it is also known, the right to execute.[1577] **Pilate's washing** of **his hands** did not dismiss **his** role in **Christ's** death. This washing was a futile gesture. In the book of **Acts** his role in the crucifixion is clearly stated by both **Peter** and Paul **(Acts 3:13, 4:27** and **13:28)**. Nor has the Church ever forgotten **his** role. Among the earliest creeds of Church, the Apostle's Creed, says, "**He** suffered under **Pontius Pilate**." In 36 AD **Pilate** was banished to Gaul, by Emperor Caligula, and there **he** committed suicide. **He** paid dearly for **his** role in the death of **the Messiah**.[1578]

Caiaphas and **his colleagues** from **the Sanhedrin** could not help looking pleased. Once more **they** had beaten this stubborn Gentile and beaten **him** soundly. **Pilate** correctly judged the temper of **the crowd** to be getting out of hand. **He** didn't want to have a riot at the gates to **his** headquarters and **he** surely didn't want to be known as the instigator. So, **he** gathered what dignity **he** had left, and, turning from the gates, ordered the tribune to release **bar-Abbas** at once.

Then **Pontius Pilate handed Jesus over to them to be crucified (Matthew 27:26b; Luke 23:25b; John 19:16a).** It was about 8:00 am. **Yeshua,** the real *Son of the Father,* would die, while **bar-Abbas**, the one who claimed to be *the son of the father,* was **released**. The one deserving of death was freed, and the innocent **One** was crucified.

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

I rode upon a Railway Train, Somewhere in Kansas, and the Train stopped Thirty Minutes for Lunch. And at one end of the Station was there a little Park, with two great Sun Dials, where one showed Central Time and the other showed Mountain Time. And the Park was attractive, and had Cost the Railway Some Coin, and the result was worth it.

Now there stood in the little Park, right by the Train, a strong White Post, about four feet high. And there was a framed in the top of the post an old-time Drawbar, with a Coupling-Pin and a Link. And upon the Post was painted in Black Letters: Lest We Forget.

And I said to myself, It may be that this is the town where the man lived who first invented the Safety Coupler.

And I entered the Station, and I asked the Young Man who was the Clerk of the Station Hotel. And I ask of him, saying: Why is that Post with the old Drawbar erected in this Town rather than in another?

And he said, Where is it at? For I have never seen it.

And I inquired of another, and he said, Search me; for I have never noticed it.

And I inquired of the Station Agent, and he said, I once knew, but I have forgotten.

Then the Conductor said, All Aboard, and I got on board.

And I considered the days of my boyhood, when I played about the Railroad Cars, and I knew the men who worked on them; and many of them had lost fingers that were crushed in coupling cars. And many lost their hands, and others lost their lives.

And I said, See, there was one who considered all these things, and sat up nights, and by chance pawned his Shirt that he might invent a method of avoiding all this. And here is his memorial, marked: Lest We Forget. And some pass by it every day and never see it; and others once knew its meaning but they have forgotten.

And I looked out of the train window as we moved along, and I beheld a Church, and upon the Church was a Steeple, and upon the Steeple was a Cross.

And I thought of the multitudes who continually pass it by,
and I was grieved in my heart; for I said, Among them
are those who say, I have never seen it; and
others say, I have seen it, but what it
means, I do not know. And
others say, Wow, I once
knew, but I have
forgotten.