

Mel Gibson's powerful but troubling new movie, 'The Passion of the Christ,' is reviving one of the most explosive questions ever. What history tells us about Jesus' last hours, the world in which he

lived, anti-Semitism, Scripture and the nature of faith itself.

Who Killed Jesus?

BY JON MEACHAM

IT IS NIGHT, IN A QUIET, NEARLY DESERTED GARDEN in Jerusalem. A figure is praying; his friends sleep a short distance away. We are in the last hours of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, in the spring of roughly the year 30, at the time of the Jewish feast of Passover. The country—first-century Judea, the early 21st's Israel—is part of the Roman Empire. The prefect, Pontius Pilate, is Caesar's ranking representative in the province, a place riven with fierce religious disputes. Jesus comes from Galilee, a kind of backwater; as a Jewish healer and teacher, he has attracted great notice in the years, months

