



MATTHEW 27; MARK 15; LUKE 23; JOHN 19

THE PASSION OF THE MESSIAH

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE

On the same night as the Last Supper, Jesus suffered in Gethsemane, was arrested, and accosted. We now look at the next morning when He was tried in multiple courts, scourged, crucified from noon to three, and buried. The descending weight that began in Gethsemane was heavier than the physical torture and emotional abuse that followed. Yet in His weakened state, His persecution and suffering continue; “From indignity to indignity, from torture to torture.”¹

The Book of Mormon encourages its readers to look for “types and shadows” of the Savior (Mosiah 3:15; 13:10). This council is easily applied to these chapters as much of the Law of Moses points directly to this time of the Lord’s death and resurrection (Galatians 3:24–25). Finding the types, shadows, and prophecies enrich our understanding of both the Old and New Testaments.

Kent Brown describes this section as, “Kingship Misunderstood.” The account “brims with irony . . . [as] Jesus’ royalty drips from the verses in this chapter, but it goes unheeded . . . The Savior, with his hands bound, walks steadily, willingly, toward the crucifixion and burial.”² Luke especially portrays Jesus’ obedience to Roman and Mosaic Laws (but which is opposed to the “tradition of the Jews” or 10,000 Oral Laws).

	MATT	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
JEWISH TRIAL CONTINUED				
3 rd Stage of Jewish Trial Jesus Condemned by the Sanhedrin and Led to Pilate	27:1, 2	15:1	22:66–23:1	18:28
Judas’ Remorse and Suicide (30 silver shekels = 4 months’ work)	27:3–10			Acts 1:18–9
ROMAN TRIAL				
1 st Stage: Jesus before Pilate for the First Time	27:11–14	15:2–5	23:2–5	18:28–38
2 nd Stage: Jesus before Herod Antipas			23:6–12	
3 rd Stage: Pilate Sentenced Jesus with Crucifixion	27:15–26	15:6–15	23:13–25	18:39–40
Scourged and Mocked Jesus	27:27–30	15:16–19		19:1–2
Pilate delivered Jesus to the Jews				19:3–15
THE CRUCIFIXION				
On the Way to the Cross	27:31–34	15:20–23	23:26–33	19:17
Jesus Crucified and Reviled	27:35–44	15:24–32	23:33–43	19:18–27
His Three Sayings during First Three Hours, Darkness Three Hours, Four Sayings	27:45–56	15:33–41	23:44–49	19:28–30
Jesus Died. Cataclysmic Earthquake				
Jesus Found Dead, Body Buried, Tomb Guarded	27:57–66	16:42–47	23:50–56	19:31–42

SETTING: Jerusalem—east, west, and north. The Lord is led to King Herod’s palace, back to the High Priest’s palace, possibly to the Antonian Fortress or Judgment Hall, to Calvary/Golgotha/Place of the Skull, and finally is laid in a Tomb in a garden.

JEWISH TRIAL CONTINUED

Jesus' Condemnation and Delivery to Pilate

Matthew 27:1-2, Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-23:1; John 18:28-37

Matthew 27:1, Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:28-37 “in the morning . . . the whole council condemned him” Other Greek manuscripts include “at daybreak” suggesting that the Jewish trial with Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin lasted until about 6:00 a.m. As mentioned previously, the Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling body made up of 70 members (Numbers 11:16). They were chief priests (from the temple), scribes (similar to lawyers) and elders (the lay branch of membership). Both major parties were represented, the Sadducees and Pharisees (the latter being the minority in the council). Only twenty-three of the members were needed in attendance to make a decision.

Each Gospel includes different details. Luke refers to the assembly or Sanhedrin as the “multitude.” He uses this word 24 times, Matthew never does, and Mark does once. Luke includes the group asking Jesus two questions: “art thou the Christ,” and “art thou the Son of God.” These questions were answered in Luke’s birth narratives by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:32, 35). This becomes one of Luke’s many connections between Jesus’ birth and death accounts.³

Matthew 27:2, Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; “they bound him . . . and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor”

As a vassal state, Judea had a Roman prefect [governor] assigned to: 1. Keep the peace, 2. Act as Judge, and 3. Watch over Rome’s economic interest (taxation). Pilate, was of the lower Roman nobility, and ruled as the sixth Roman prefect in Judea for ten years (AD 26 to 36). His appointment was initiated by an anti-Jewish Syrian delegate.⁴

Jews despised Pilate for many reasons. Once he marched into Jerusalem at night with images of the Emperor and the eagle (thus breaking the second of the Ten Commandments), and minted pagan symbols on their coins. Josephus and Philo indicated that Pilate was a stern ruler and not wise. Josephus claimed that Pilate used sacred temple treasury funds to build an aqueduct from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. When the Jews found out, they rioted, and Pilate extinguished the uproar with bloodshed.⁵ The early Christian historian, Eusebius (AD 263-339), claimed that Pilate committed suicide.

John 18:28-29 “the Jews did not enter the Praetorium to avoid being defiled and unable to eat the Passover”

(BSB) We assume that the “hall of judgment” was the Roman praetorian—either in the Antonian Fortress (the garrison on the NW corner of Temple Square) or more likely, Herod’s Palace (on the west hill of Jerusalem near modern Jaffa Gate).⁶ The irony is tragic—to avoid ceremonial uncleanness which would disqualify them from

eating the Passover the upcoming night, the Jews did not go into the Roman judgment hall. So, Pilate stepped out to talk to them. Yet all the while, their filthy hearts sought to murder Jesus, the true Pascal Lamb. Readers now do not miss the point that Jesus has the power to make these Jewish leaders and all of us clean every whit (not just ritually clean).⁷

Judas Commits Suicide

Matthew 27:3-10

Matthew 27:3-4 “Judas . . . brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests . . . I have betrayed the innocent blood” Judas learns of Jesus’ condemnation and goes to the temple to talk to the chief priests. In addition to the previous discussion on the spectrum of prices for slaves (see notes from Matthew 26:13 and Old Testament ties to Zechariah 11:12; and Exodus 12:32), Taylor Halverson and others have noted that thirty pieces of silver is one-tenth or a tithe of the cost of the ointment Mary of Bethany used to anoint Jesus about a week earlier (Mark 14:5; John 12:5). Interestingly, Judas was the one who complained about the wasted money. Then a week later, he valued the Lord so little that he betrayed him for only 10% of Mary’s gift.



Remorse by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

Matthew 27:5 “he threw the pieces of silver into the temple sanctuary” (NASB) Matthew’s original text describes Judas throwing the money toward a specific part of temple, the “sanctuary/*naos*.” This was known as the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. In Moses’ tabernacle, this was where the Ark of the Covenant topped with the Mercy Seat was placed (Exodus 24:33). This symbolized the throne of God.

“. . . hanged himself on a tree. And straightway he fell down, and his bowels gushed out, and he died” (JST) There must have been different traditions that spread regarding Judas’ death, because the two places this is mentioned in the Bible only agree in part. (Acts 1:18 reads: “this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.”) The JST addition (above in italics) adds to their commonality.

In the Bible, there are only two other examples of men who hang themselves (2 Samuel 15:30; 17:23; 18:9-13). Both stories foreshadowed the Lord’s betrayal. Judas’ death was foreshadowed by David’s betrayal by his trusted counselor,

Ahithophel, and David's son, Absalom. When David learned that Ahithophel betrayed him, the king went out to the Mount of Olives to weep and pray. His son, Absalom, had revolted against his father and gathered an army to fight against him. During a battle, Absalom rode through a forest, but his long thick hair got caught in an oak tree. As his mule ran on, Absalom hung there until his enemies found him, mocked him, and killed him with a javelin.

Matthew 27:9, “Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled” (NIV) This is the last of Matthew's fourteen “fulfillment” passages.⁸ Jesus' life fulfills many Old Testament patterns, and similar to Jeremiah 18:2 or 32:6–15, we find an even closer match with Zechariah 10:12–13, “. . . they weighed for my price thirty *pieces* of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty *pieces* of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD.” Matthew's citation is interesting in light of historical accessibility to scriptural texts. Rarely did one individual have access to all the scripture scrolls, especially all the writings of the prophets. I wonder if Matthew had just remembered the prophet and was not reading the text. Matthew had just quoted Zechariah when describing Jesus' Triumphal entry.⁹

THE ROMAN TRIAL

1st Stage: Jesus before Pilate

Matthew 27:11–14, Mark 15:2–5; Luke 23:2–5; John 18:29–38

John 18:29–30 “What accusation bring ye against this man?” The Jews would not go in, so Pilate went out to ask them (either on a balcony, from his front porch, or outside). Pilate rarely interacted with the Jews, and the issue of ritual purity may have been one of the reasons. The relationship between the Jewish leaders and Pilate was already strained. Because the Jews asked Pilate for a favor, this turned into an unusual scene where Pilate got them to a place of cooperation. To foster this Jewish submission to Roman authority, Pilate betrayed Jesus.

Luke 23:3 “. . . to accuse him . . . forbidding to give tribute to Caesar . . . saying, that he himself is Christ a King” The Jews expected their Messiah to be a king, so they use the phrase, “Christ a King” (with Christ as the Greek word for Messiah). While the Jewish leaders falsely attacked Jesus on political grounds, “perverting the nation,” the Gospel of Luke portrays Jesus as innocent. Repeatedly, Luke demonstrates Jesus obeying Roman and Mosaic Laws. What Jesus denounced was the rabbinic traditions or oral laws.

John 18:31–32 “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” These verses suggest that Jews were unable to sentence anyone to death. As Rome conquered and annexed countries to its Empire, they wrote specific by-laws for their governing. We do not have that document for Judea. But, in many cases, Rome kept the right to inflict

capital punishment. According to Josephus, Roman law gave power from Caesar to give the prefect “authority even in capital cases.”¹⁰ Nonetheless, in the New Testament, we find certain Jews stoning Stephen (Acts 7:54–58). If Josephus was right, then the high priest who had Stephen stoned acted under “lynch law.”

Matthew 27:11a; Mark 15:2a; Luke 23:3a; John 18:33 “Art thou the King of the Jews?” All four Gospels quote this phrase exactly (a very rare find!). It is a question for all disciples to answer as well. Pilate’s question can be answered positively by all disciples. It appears that there was no interpreter present in the praetorium, but that Jesus speaks Greek to Pilate. Most educated people at the time spoke two or three languages, with koine Greek being the most common. (The Gospels record Jesus speaking Aramaic—probably his mother tongue—in Gethsemane, on the cross, and earlier.¹¹)

John 18:33–35 “Sayest thou this thing of thyself or did others tell it . . .?” As He often did, Jesus answered Pilate by asking Him a question (at least in John’s Gospel). Another way of interpreting Jesus’ question is, “Are you converted or just quoting others?” Pilate ignored the opportunity to ask Jesus about His teachings, and instead became defensive. Pilate answered with the usual Roman contempt for Jews.

Christ in front of Pilate by Mihály Munkácsy, 1881. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



John 18:36 “My kingdom is not of this world” Jesus did not answer Pilate’s second and third questions (“am I a Jew? . . what hast thou done?”), but went back to the first about His kingdom. Jesus’ subjects include numberless angels who could have defended Him, but He will not fight or reign in Jerusalem this morning.

Matthew 27:11b; Mark 15:2b; Luke 23:3b; John 18:37-38a “thou sayest . . . to this end was I born” This becomes another thought-provoking question for disciples to ask—to what end were we each born? Jesus was born to rule on earth—and in heaven. But Satan, the great usurper, has become the counterfeit king of the world. Tragically, most mortals obey him. In Matthew’s Gospel the JST adds: “*for thus it is written of me.*”

“Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?” Jesus continued to teach more about Himself, but His words fell on deaf ears. Unless people are committed to learning truth, they will not listen to His voice. Fortunately, Jesus told someone about this private conversation and it was recorded, so that His words live on. Now each reader can answer Pilate’s question. Jesus did not answer’s his question in verse 38, but He did in 1833; “Truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24).

Luke 23:4; John 18:38b “I find no fault,” or “I find not even one fault in him” (ABPE), or “no crime in him” (ASV). Luke alone includes that Jesus did not offend the Roman authorities, and Pilate offered a verdict of innocence. This message that Jesus and the early Christians were law abiding, devoted citizens is repeatedly found in Luke. This is Luke’s first disclosure from Pilate’s mouth that the Lord was not guilty.

Matthew 27:12–14; Mark 15:3 “when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing” Previously, Jesus answered Pilate, but He no longer answered those who He had already taught.

Luke 23:5 “and they were the more fierce . . .” Jesus’ silence riled the Jewish leaders all the more and they relentlessly repeated their demands. They claimed that Jesus was a national threat from Galilee to Jerusalem, but in reality, He is only a threat to Satan’s kingdom.

Luke 23:6–7 “as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod’s jurisdiction . . .” Up to this point the two Roman rulers in Palestine, Pilate and Herod, had been competitive enemies. But, when Pilate heard that Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate happily passed Him over to Herod Antipas to find a verdict. (This was the son of King Herod, the great builder. This Herod beheaded John the Baptist and would soon kill James the Apostle and imprison Peter (Acts 12:2–3). The soldiers next took Jesus to Herod’s quarters.



Pilate Sends Jesus to Herod by William Hole, 1905.

2nd Stage: Jesus' Hearing before Herod Antipas

Luke 23:8-12

Luke 23:8-9 “Herod . . . was exceedingly glad . . . he hoped to have seen some miracle” Herod is portrayed as a “sign seeker” (the word “miracle” is often translated *sign*, NIV, ESV, BLB, etc.), but Jesus was not intimidated by Herod’s position and refused to even talk to him. In this scene, Luke points out that Jesus is in complete control. (Jesus initiated the arrest and trials by going to the place where Judas could easily find Him.) Only Luke includes Jesus’ contempt for Herod and the mistreatment of another Roman official. This may have been included to parallel with Herod’s father in the birth narratives (Luke 2:1; Matthew 2:1).

Luke 23:10-11 “. . . mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe” Perhaps in revenge for Jesus not cooperating, or perhaps to placate the Jewish leaders, Herod mocked Jesus having Him wear a “gorgeous” or “bright and shining” robe. In two verses we learn that Herod also found no reason to have Jesus killed.

Luke 23:12 “Pilate and Herod were made friends” The two enemies now had a common enemy that ironically unified them. Luke has neither Roman official saying anything against Jesus’ character.

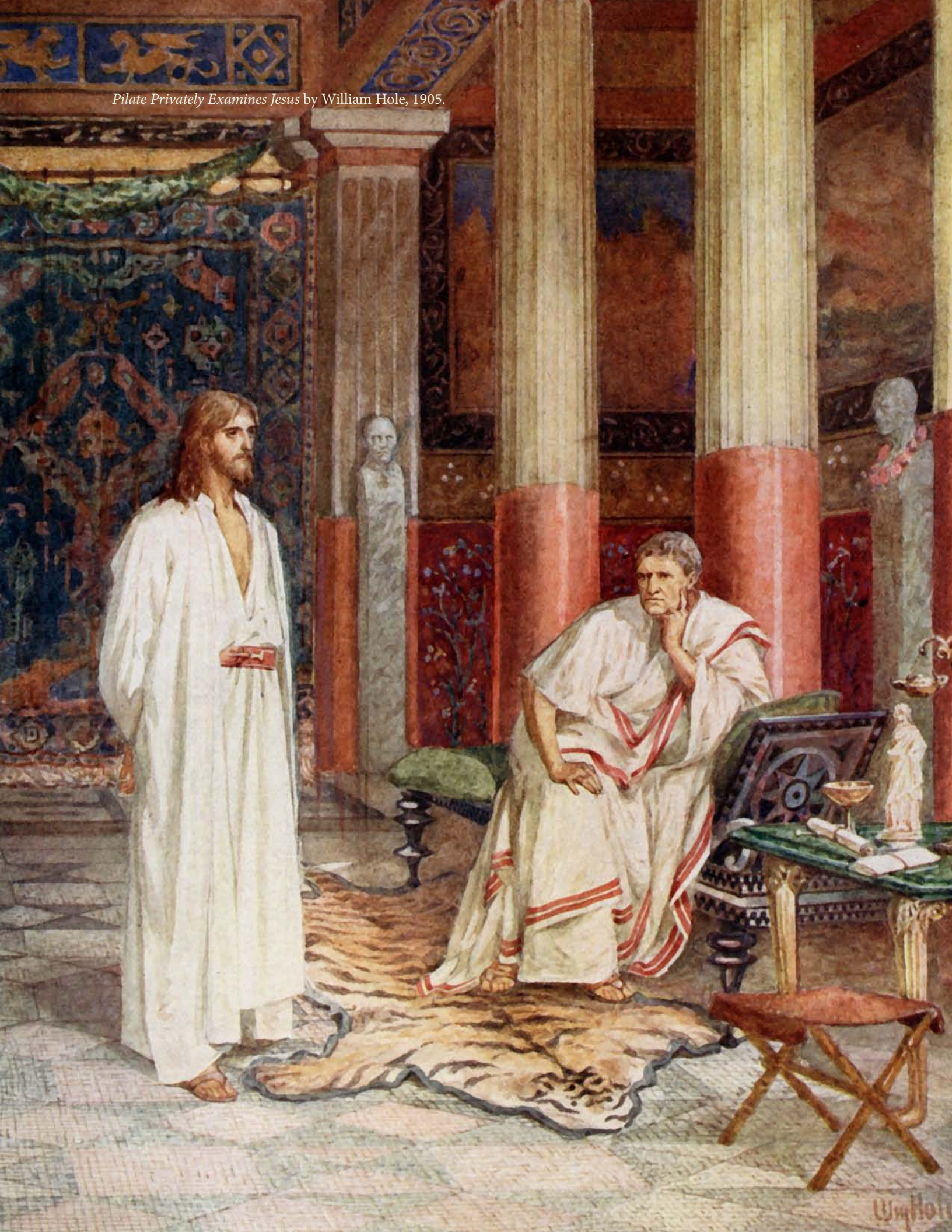
3rd Stage: Second Hearing before Pilate

Matthew 27:15-32; Mark 15:6-21; Luke 23:13-26; John 18:38-19:16

Luke 23:13-15 “I . . . found no fault in this man . . . nor [has] Herod” Members of the “council” or Sanhedrin escorted Jesus back to Pilate who stated Jesus’ innocence for the second of four times in Luke. Jesus was not guilty of what they accused him—He had not offended Rome.

Luke 23:16 “I will therefore chastise him . . .” Cruel Pilate tried to placate the Jews by suggesting he “chastise” or “scourge” Him (John 19:1). At the Last Supper Jesus introduced Himself as the servant/slave, “the one who leads should become like the one who serves . . . I am among you as the One who serves” (Luke 22:26-27, ISV); in John’s Gospel He enacts that by washing their feet (John 13:2-17). In the Roman Empire, the identifying sign of a slave, was scars on their backs from whippings.¹² This seems all too meaningful to miss the sign of Jesus’ scourging now as He becomes the servant of us all.

Pilate Privately Examines Jesus by William Hole, 1905.



Wm Hole

BARABBAS

Matthew 27:15; Mark 15:6; John 18:39a “**You have a custom that I should release one man . . .**” (ESV) The custom of releasing one of the prisoners at Passover to display clemency, appears to have affected only the provincial jurisdiction of Judea, not the rest of the Roman Empire.

Matthew 27:16; Mark 15:7–8 “. . . **Jesus Barabbas Jesus know as Messiah?**” The Anchor Bible prefers an older Matthean text that includes the parallel first names, too. The names are quite interesting as Jesus/Yeshua was another form of the name, Yehoshua/Joshua. The Hebrew roots mean, “to deliver, save.” The name, Barabbas means, “son of the Father” in Aramaic. In a sense, both men tried to deliver their people, one through violence and the other through fulfilling God’s plan. Mark and Luke explain that Barabbas had been part of the violent uprising against Rome, and “committed murder in the insurrection” or “sedition” (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19). Ironically, he is the antithesis of the Lord, and actually committed the wrongs that Jesus was charged with. The Jews wanted to let him go like the scape goat, filled with sins (Leviticus 16:10). Barabbas’ name and political tyranny represent everything that Jesus was being tried for: In the Roman trial He was tried for tyranny against the government, and in the Jewish trial, for blasphemy for claiming that He will sit “at the right hand of the Mighty One” (Matthew 26:65.)

Matthew 27:17; Mark 15:9–10; John 18:39b “**Shall I release . . . the King of the Jews?**” Pilate’s response can be interpreted in different ways. Is he honoring Jesus or laughing at the Jews? In light of his tense relationship and cruel history with the Jews (see Matthew 27:2 above), I see him poking fun at them and Jesus. He called a bound prisoner their king. Pilate had already declared Jesus’ innocence, yet his actions showed that he did not care about justice. His words showed that he was politically motivated. The Jewish trial was “a mockery of a prophet, and the Roman trial a mockery of a king.”¹³

Matthew 27:18–21; Mark 15:11–12; Luke 23:18–20; John 18:40 “**They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!”** (NIV) Clearly, as recorded in all four Gospels, the voice of the Jewish leaders gathered outside the Praetorian wanted Jesus killed. Pilate’s position was made more challenging as his wife intervened with the message that she had had a dream of Jesus’ innocence. Pilate would someday regret not following his wife’s advice. Centuries later, the Greek Orthodox Church made Pilate’s wife a “saint” for defending Jesus.¹⁴

Matthew 27:22; Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21–22 “**They cried, saying, crucify him, crucify him**”

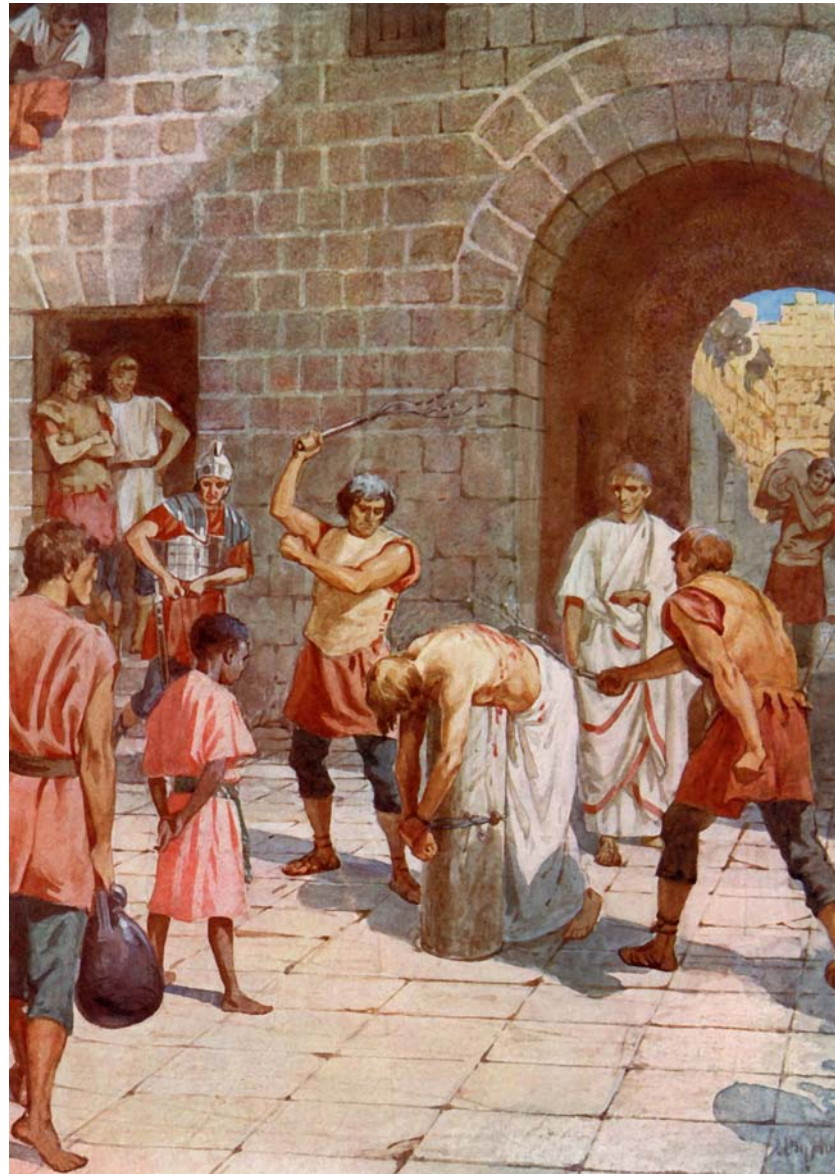
Pilate’s Soldiers Scourge and Mock Jesus

John 19:1 “**Pilate . . . took Jesus, and scourged him**” John does not paint a nice picture of Pilate and is the only Gospel to include Pilate’s order to scourge Jesus. (Matthew and Mark include the scourging after the mocking, without identifying Pilate.) Often Romans preceded a crucifixion with scourging or flogging. The weapon was a

whip made with leather thongs and attached to a wooden handle. It was made more dangerous by weaving sharp objects into the leather (such as bones, rocks, and lead shot). To perform the torture, two soldiers tied their victim to a post, and both soundly beat him. If it were a Jewish whipping, the Law of Moses allowed “no more than forty lashes” (Deuteronomy 25:3, BSB). They usually stopped at 39 to make sure they did not break the Law (2 Corinthians 11:24). Some victims died from the scourging and loss of blood. If the prisoner lived, they were left naked in excruciating pain with quivering bleeding flesh. Some victims were then taken outside the city wall to endure the terror of living crucifixion.

Jesus’ skin was lashed, ripped, and pierced like a crushed olive.¹⁵ This episode fulfilled two sections of Isaiah: “I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isaiah 50:6); and “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores” (Isaiah 1:6). While Jesus fulfilled the role of the “suffering servant” in Isaiah, he also received the trademark of a slave in the Roman Empire, a “scarred back.”¹⁶ A few years after Jesus’ scourging, the Sanhedrin also had the apostles beaten (Acts 5:40).

Matthew 27:27–29; Mark 15:16–17; John 19:2 “the soldiers . . . stripped him, put on him a scarlet robe . . . platted a crown of thorns . . . a reed in his right hand . . . a purple robe . . . and mocked him” Matthew and Mark join John in their inclusion of the soldiers mocking Jesus. They took Jesus back into the hall or Praetorium with “the whole band” gathered to mock Jesus. This actually identified a “cohort” of soldiers (600 men!). The dramatized mockery of a king had probably been performed before by the Romans on others who aspired to take over their leadership.



Pontius Pilate Delivers Jesus to Be Scourged by William Hole, 1905.

Thorns for Jesus' crown could have been easily gathered, but difficult to create without injury. The land of Israel was filled with thorns of all sizes and strengths. They draped a robe on Jesus that was from fabric used for royalty. (Scarlet in Matthew and purple in Mark, John, and the JST of Matthew.) Purple was the name for an expensive fabric associated with extreme wealth. The costly dye was extracted from sea snails and mollusks from the Syrian and Phoenician coast. (The name Phoenicia, means "land of the purple.")¹⁷

Matthew 27:30; Mark 15:18–19; John 19:3 “Hail King of the Jews! And they smote him . . . spit . . . worshiped him” The mocking by the Roman soldiers was probably more for political humor—laughing at the Jewish excuse for a king—than directed animosity at Jesus. As they mocked Jesus, they were scorning the Jewish nation by mimicking, “Ave Caesar!”¹⁸ The Roman records describe a similar scene in their triumphal marches of the first century.¹⁹ The Roman Soldiers in Jerusalem were, at best, apathetic toward Jews and, at worst, rabidly anti-Jewish. Ironically, the unbelieving gentiles called Jesus, a king, but soon believing gentiles will use the same title.

Pilate Delivers Jesus to the Jews

John 19:4–15

John 19:4–5 “I bring him forth to you . . . I find no fault . . . Behold the man!” Only John records this scene. The setting *appears* different than what Pilate says. It appears that Pilate was sarcastically jeering at his Jewish subjects. If he had planned on protecting Jesus after announcing Him innocent for the third time (John 18:38; 19:4, 6), why did Pilate parade Jesus before the mob in a beaten, bleeding state, all dressed up as a mock king? By Pilate introducing Jesus this way, still “wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe,” we get a feel for Pilate’s animosity against the Jews. If Pilate’s words were sincere, why then the scourging and additional mocking?

John 19:6 “Take ye him and crucify him” Pilate allowed the Jews to take control of their victim, but they preferred the Romans did their dirty political work. Pilate became one of the serfs of Satan who disfigured Jesus as prophesied in Isaiah’s suffering servant passages (Isaiah 52:14–53:12; also 42:1–7; 49:1–6; 51:4–11).

John 19:7 “by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God” The Law of Moses that was to protect the name of God and prepare a people to receive their God, was used by the Jewish leaders of this time to kill Him. Leviticus 24:16 explains that “whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD must to be put to death. The whole assembly surely must stone him.” But rather than the Jews stoning Jesus’ and risk falling out of favor with the majority of the Jews who honored Jesus as a prophet or Messiah, the chief priests and scribes asked the Romans to crucify Him.

John 19:8–9 “Pilate . . . was the more afraid . . . but Jesus gave him no answer” John recorded the dialogue between Jesus and defensive, superstitious Pilate who worried about Jesus being Divine. The polytheistic Roman religion believed in half-mortal-half-gods. Pilate’s fear of Jesus fitting into this category led him to question his



Pilate Yields Jesus to Be Crucified by William Hole, 1905.

decision. Jesus refused to respond to the hypocrite. Jesus again fulfilled Isaiah 53:7, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.” Jesus’ response shows His control of the conversation and the entire situation.

John 19:10–11 “Speakest thou not unto me? . . . I have power to crucify thee” As we look at life from an eternal perspective, no one has any power on his or her own. Everything we have comes from our Omniscient Father.

John 19:12 “The Jews cried out, saying, If you let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend” Romans used the honorific title, “Friend of Caesar,” for those who performed a great service or loyalty.²⁰ By now though, Pilate had already egged-on the Jewish mob and weakly succumbed to their pressure.

John 19:13 “Pilate . . . sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement . . . Gabbatha” For capital sentencing, Pilate would have mounted the judgment seat. In reality, though, Jesus is the only Judge in the room. Everyone else is actually on trial. Kelly Ogden explained that, “*Gabbatha* is equivalent to the Greek *lithostroton*, meaning the stone courtyard of the judgment hall . . . made of large Roman flagstones . . . in a raised platform resembling a throne where the governor sat in judgment.”²¹

John 19:14 “it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour” The preparation of the Passover means the day before the Passover (with Passover starting at sunset, or approximately 6:00 p.m.).²² Holy days, like Passover, were also called and treated as Sabbaths. As the Jewish daylight hours began at 6:00 a.m., the sixth hour would have been noon. The Levites were slaughtering their unblemished, male Passover lambs at the temple as the sun began to decline.²³ No unleavened bread was eaten after noon as well.

Matthew 27:23–25 “Pilate . . . took water and washed his hands before the crowd . . . I am innocent of this man’s blood” Matthew includes Pilate’s regret of his involvement by washing his hands. This was not after the Jewish manner of washing to become clean. Pilate had only a little understanding of Jewish beliefs, and even less respect for them. The Romans and also the Greeks practiced this custom to absolve themselves of responsibility.

Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:23–25’ John 19:15 “Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” This put the Jews right where Pilate wanted them—to confess they have no king but Caesar. As a master politician, he manipulated the situation to his own ends. “The meaning of the trial is now clear; the presence of Jesus has provoked a judgment whereby the Chosen People have abandoned their birthright.”²⁴ Philo (a Jewish contemporary of Jesus, who lived in Alexandria), complained that Pilate had “vindictiveness and furious temper,” and was “naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness . . . his corruption, and his acts of insolence, and his rapine, and his habit of insulting people, and his cruelty, and his continual murders of people untried and uncondemned, and his never ending, and gratuitous, and most grievous inhumanity.”²⁵

THE CRUCIFIXION

Jesus' Painful Walk to Golgotha

Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26–31

Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26 “A certain man from Cyrene, Simon . . . they forced him to carry the cross” (NIV) The victim usually carried the cross for his crucifixion through the city streets to the place of crucifixion. Yet, after Jesus’ overwhelming night in Gethsemane, the scourging and mocking, Jesus was too weak to carry His own crossbeam. The Synoptic Gospels each record that a man from Northern Africa had just arrived in Jerusalem, and as an obvious foreigner, the Romans compelled him as a slave to carry the cross. It appears that this Simon became a Christian, or at least his family did, because Mark adds, “the father of Alexander and Rufus.” As the author knew and included their names, we assume that he had enough contact after this experience to learn his name, and that his children’s names would mean something to other Christians in Mark’s audience.



Christ Carrying the Cross by Titian, ca. 1560.
Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Luke 23:27–31 “There followed . . . women, which also bewailed and lamented him” In opposition to the detractors, Luke switches the scene to Jesus’ supporters, the women. This group of women may have included those that Luke highlights as working with Jesus in Galilee, supporting Him financially, and traveling with him, “Mary called Magdalene . . . Joanna . . . Susanna, and many others” (Luke 8:2–3).

Even in this time of excruciating pain and exhaustion, Jesus saw their sorrow, and reached out to the women. Culturally, men were discouraged from speaking to women, especially those not in their family. Jesus’ action broke several of the oral laws. Jesus continued, even during His last hours, to reach out to empower women and give hope to those who were sorrowing.

“Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming . . .” Jesus prophesied of the future destruction of Jerusalem as a warning to them. This verse also hints that Jesus had taught in Jerusalem before and had disciples there as well as in Galilee (as the Gospel of John records).



Crucifixion by Gabriel Metsu, ca. 1660. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Golgotha or Calvary

Matthew 27:33–34; Mark 15:24–26; Luke 23:33; John 19:16–27

Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; Luke 23:33b; John 19:17 “they brought him to . . . Golgotha (which means the place of a skull) (RSV) Along a main road, outside a city wall in Jerusalem was the location where crucifixions took place. The JST changes the *skull* to a place of burial. This may have been the site where the ritual ashes of the red heifer were kept “without the camp in a clean place” beyond the walls of the Temple and city as “a water of separation: it is a purification for sin” (Numbers 19:9). Both “Golgotha” (Hebrew) and “Calvary” (Latin), mean skull. Perhaps it was referred to as place of the skull because of all the bones left there; or perhaps the pockmarked limestone rock along the road may have looked like a skull.

Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23; “they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but . . . he would not drink it” (ESV) Twice in Mark the Lord is offered something to drink during his last hours. This timing would have been before the crucifixion. Perhaps more than for thirst, this drink was to stupefy the senses. Matthew and Mark have the drink offered to Jesus before His arms are stretched out and nailed to the cross beam. Gall (Matthew) or myrrh (Mark) may describe a mind-altering drug that numbed the pain like an analgesic.²⁶ The authors included this detail in part to show it fulfilled prophecy: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for *some* to take pity, but *there was* none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psalms 60:20–21).

Jesus is Crucified

Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24–25; Luke 23:33; John 19:18

Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18 “There they crucified him” The upcoming Passover did not detour the Jewish leaders nor the Roman’s from carrying this out. Mark 15:25 tells us the soldiers crucified Jesus at the “third hour” or 9:00 a.m. (This means He was on the cross for over six hours.) Romans crucified robbers, revolutionaries, and insurrectionists. From 37 BC to AD 70 the Romans crucified thousands of Jews in Palestine for these reasons. They used three kinds of crosses: one in the shape of a “T,” another in an “X,” and the last in a “I” (or a dagger). Some crosses left the victim 8–10 inches off the ground and others about three feet off the ground.²⁷ Crucifixion was official governmental violence.

CRUCIFIXION

Romans refined the Persian, Greek, and Syrian practices of crucifixion to create maxim torture. They hoped to delay death as long as possible to inflict more pain. In an attempt to put fear into their subjects and to maintain order, they crucified malefactors in public areas so that more people could see and be scared into obeying the Roman rule. They kept the instruments of crucifixion always ready. Large poles (or trees) were secured in the ground near major roads. These acted as a warning to all passersby. When a victim was crucified, they usually carried their own cross beam to the major road where the posts stood. Then the victim was nailed or tied to the cross beam before being lifted up by a pulley system onto the main post. Once suspended, the victim suffocated as they hanged. To draw out the torture, Romans placed a piece of wood for the victim to sit on to rest their arms from the weight of their body pulling on the nails. But, leaning on the seat would have only prolonged their suffocation from hours to days of excruciating pain, burning fever, thirst, and the sting of insects. Just hanging publicly naked was the uttermost humiliation for a Jew.

Jesus First Words from the Cross

Luke 23:34 “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” Luke’s emphasis of the empowered and gentle Jesus, records this sensitive gift of forgiveness to those carrying out the high priest’s wishes and Pilate’s orders. The JST adds that Jesus was specifically talking about the Roman soldiers. Kent Brown summarized, “In pleading with his Father to forgive his executioners . . . Jesus’ terrible situation on the cross, which seems to point to his defeat, really shows off his power to remit sin and to bring willing souls to himself.”²⁸

Matthew 27:35–36; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24 “and parted his garments” It was a perk for the Roman executioners to have the right to the victim’s possessions (sandals, head covering, outer robe, etc.). All four Gospels include this detail. Perhaps that is because “the coat was without seam, woven from the top” (John 19:23). The seamless woven tunic or garment denotes its expensive nature. It was probably a gift from one of the

wealthy women who “ministered unto him of their substance” (Luke 8:2). Some have argued that Jesus’ tunic was similar to the sacred garments worn by the Aaronic temple priests. Moses instructed, “Weave the tunic of fine linen” (Exodus 28:39).²⁹ John refers to four parts suggesting that there were four soldiers who crucified him.

“**Casting lots**” was done by each participant placing their own piece of wood, stone, or potsherd into a bowl and then shaking it. Whatever piece jumped out first would signify its owner as the winner. Greek uses a different word for shaking “knuckle bones,” which were similar to our dice. Matthew includes that they stayed and sat down when their job was done.

The event was foreshadowed in Psalm 22:18, “They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19–22 “This is the King of the Jews” Again, only John identifies Pilate as the one who wrote the sign (until the JST, which added Pilate to Matthew and Mark as well). John recorded that Pilate had Jesus’ name and title written in three languages: Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Pilate’s title, “King of the Jews,” upset the high priest, but Pilate would not change it. Customarily, Romans wrote the crime on a board and then carried it before the prisoner as he walked through the city to his crucifixion. In Jesus’ case, they placed it on the cross. Each of the Gospel sources remembered the title slightly differently, but they all included, “King of the Jews.”

Matthew	Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews
Mark	The King of the Jews
Luke	This is the King of the Jews
John	Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews

At Jesus’ birth he received the same title, “King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2).

Further Mocking by the Rulers and Crowd

Matthew 27:39–43; Mark 15:29–32a; Luke 23:35–37

“**IF thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself**” The main road was filled with people preparing for the Passover. The crucifixion poles had been intentionally placed close enough for any passerby to chide or strike them. In addition to the physical pain from lacerated veins, crushed tendons, swirling dizziness, cramped muscles, traumatic fever, and the feeling of suffocation with every short breath, Jesus had the emotional abuse of his countrymen. The railings, “If . . . if thou be . . .” sounds just like Satan’s temptations all over again.

Second and Third Conversations from the Cross

Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32b; Luke 23:39-43; John 19:25

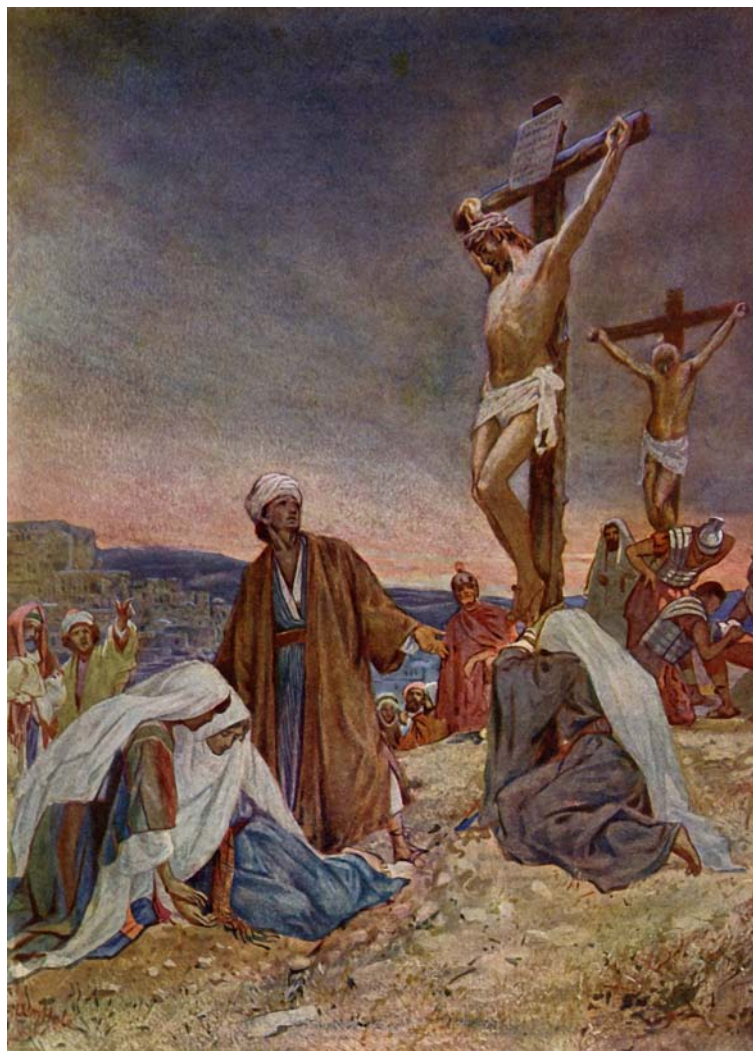
Matthew 27:44; Mark 15:32; Luke 23:39-43 “Lord remember me . . . Today shalt thou be with me in paradise” The second thief knew of Jesus’ innocence and defended Him to the other thief. Jesus’ fame must have been well enough known that even prisoners had heard of Him and understood that Jesus’ kingdom was still to come. This man believed that Jesus could help him eternally, and asked for help in the afterlife. I trust that Jesus’ promise of being with him in paradise left the man with peace. We are fortunate to have President Joseph F. Smith’s vision to enlighten us on Jesus’ mission in paradise. Only a very few Christians know of the beautiful work that Jesus did to organize missionary forces in the Spirit World during the three days and nights that his body lay in the Tomb (D&C 138).

Witnesses at the Cross

Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:39; John 25-27

Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:39; John 19:25 “Now there stood by the cross . . . his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary . . .” Every Gospel shares a list of women who did not forsake Jesus, but remained close enough to witness His crucifixion and death. John remembered them “standing by the cross,” but Luke’s sources reported they “stood at a distance and saw . . .” (RSV). In either case, they were close enough to witness and talk to the Lord even when “looking on from afar” (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; RSV). This becomes another connection with the birth narratives, when wicked men tried to kill Jesus, and women tended to Him.

The last time that the Gospel of John specifically mentions both Mary the mother of Jesus and John the Beloved together with Jesus was back at the wedding of Cana (John 2:4). By combining the women at the tomb and the women at the cross, we find a lot of consistency. One of the women that John mentions is Jesus’ “mother’s sister,” opening an interesting familial possibility:



Jesus Charges John With the Care of His Mother by William Hole, 1905.

MATT 27:56

Mary Magdalene
Mary mother of James & Joseph
Mother of sons of Zebedee
Other women

MARK 15:40

Mary Magdalene
Mary, mother of James the less & Jose
Salome
Other women

LUKE 24:10

Mary Magdalene
Mary of James
Joanna (wife of Chuza)

JOHN 19:25

Mary, Jesus' mother
Mary Magdalene
Mary wife of Cleopas
Jesus' mother's sister

Which of these women are Jesus' aunt? I see three possibilities—either Salome, Joanna or another woman. Joanna was “the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward” (Luke 8:3). With such an important position of wealth, it does not seem consistent with an arranged marriage from a poor family in the small town of Nazareth. This makes Joanna an unlikely choice. Salome seems more likely, especially because that relationship makes the apostles, James and John (also known as the “sons of thunder,”) Jesus’ first cousins. The last option is that the Synoptic Gospels do not mention Jesus’ aunt by name, and she is one of the “other women.” It also seems less likely that such an important person in early Christian history would not be pointed out.

John 19:26–7 “When Jesus saw his mother . . . woman behold thy son” Only John’s Gospel records Jesus lovingly giving the guardianship of His mother to His beloved disciple. We learn in Mark 6:3, and Matthew 13:55–56, that Mary had at least six other living children. It appears that Joseph had died, though, as no Gospel mentions him alive during Jesus’ ministry.

Tradition states that John the Beloved, took Mary to Ephesus where they built the Kingdom for decades. (Visitors can go into a little house where some think Mary lived.) One reason why John received the care of Mary rather than one of her own children, is because John tells us they did not believe in Jesus’ divine role at this time. Also, John the Beloved would have been able to take care of her throughout her life since he will outlive Mary (and everyone for two millennium). If there were a family tie, that guardianship makes even more sense. Mary was the first Christian disciple, and now she received the role of the mother of the ideal disciple. With this commission of His mother, Jesus finished the work He came to do.

Nature Responded to Her King

Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44–45

Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44 “there was a darkness over all the earth” Jesus had already been on the cross for three hours when all went dark (Mark 15:25). As Passover is timed with the vernal equinox (which

includes a full moon), it would have been impossible for an eclipse to occur then. The three hours of darkness began at noon, and ended at three in the afternoon, the “hour of prayer.” The darkness is understood by the Creation mourning its Creator’s death, or because “he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made” (D&C 88:7). Whatever the cause, the blackness covered Jesus as well, as this would have also been the hours during which the lambs were being slaughtered at the temple altar for hundreds of thousands of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem. No storm is mentioned, only darkness and later an earthquake.

Matthew 27:51; Mark. 15:38; Luke 23:45b “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” In the Mosaic tabernacle and subsequent temples, the Sanctuary was bifurcated by a veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. The veil represented the dividing line between heaven and God’s throne room. In Herod’s Temple there were two veils hung eighteen inches apart. The torn veil may have been the inner one to open the way to the Holy of Holies. This also takes us back to Luke 1 with Zacharias in the Holy Place lighting the incense beside the veil. Symbolically, the opening reflects at least two things: 1) Jesus opened the way to the presence of God again so that humans could all return to His presence through repentance; 2). the end of animal sacrifices or Mosaic temple ritual.

Final Words from the Cross

Matthew 27:46–50; Mark 15:34–37; Luke 23:46; John 19:29–30

Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34 “Jesus cried . . . *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus has now been on the cross for half the day; it is 3:00 p.m. or “the ninth hour” (Mark 15:34). Repeatedly, Matthew and Mark portray the mortal side of Jesus’ nature. Here they are the only two to include this desperate call for help. These two Gospels include the last Aramaic phrase from Jesus’ mouth. For some tragic reason, Jesus had to experience His Father’s absence, too.

Matthew 27:47; Mark 15:35 “them that stood by . . . he calleth Elias” We only know of the soldiers, John the Beloved, and the group of five-plus women who remained beside Jesus’ cross, but there may have been others. Elias is the Greek name for Elijah. Those near him may have thought of the well-known promise in Malachi 4:5, “I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

John 19:28–29 “Jesus knowing . . . the scripture might be fulfilled, saith . . .” Jesus knew which scriptures had to be fulfilled, including Psalms 69:21, “They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” Before Jesus’ crucifixion, Matthew and Mark mention Jesus rejecting the wine mixed with gall, which acted as a mild pain killer. Three hours later, Jesus was again offered vinegar on a sponge, as they had earlier before the crucifixion.



Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; John 19:29 “one of them ran and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar . . . and gave him to drink” This time, six hours later, Jesus accepted the drink. Vinegar was thought by some to be a cheaper wine. The liquid was transported to Him via a sponge or a hyssop branch (according to John 19:29). John may have specified the hyssop, because of its symbolism for purification. It is an herb like thyme, but ever since its use in the first Passover in Egypt, when Israelites dipped hyssop with the paschal lamb’s blood to smear on their doorposts, it has been a sign of God’s protection. This symbol of the Lord’s protection extends to each pilgrim’s sojourn in the wilderness/world/Egypt.

John 19:30 “Jesus . . . received the vinegar, he said, It is finished, and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost”

Luke 23:46 “And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice he said: Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” Jesus’ last sigh of relief in Luke and John’s records, can be read as a cry of triumph—not merely patient resignation. As Jesus “gave up the ghost,” John again used the

word, “*pneuma*/breath/spirit-ghost.” This ties to the beginning of John’s Gospel when John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus and stay with Him (John 1:33). Now, the Spirit has gone on. Luke and John record almost nothing of Jesus’ physical suffering during the crucifixion.³⁰

The Old Testament allusions of sacrifices underline the “great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:10). The Gospels center on how the crucifixion inaugurated the new covenant and kingdom. Medieval Christian traditions concentrated on Jesus’ agony, which obscured the proclamation of the cross as a sign of victory.³¹

Luke and John include slightly different versions of the last words. They portray a more dignified and trusting Jesus than in Matthew’s and Mark’s version with His desperate cry of disappointing abandonment. Each Gospel

consistently portrays a different perspective that fits into the author's theology and message of Jesus as our Savior. Jesus' sigh of relief can be read as cry of triumph—not merely patient resignation.

In review, here is a list of the combined Gospels' seven recorded statements from Jesus on the cross:

1. Luke 23:34 "Forgive them for they know not what they do. (JST meaning the soldiers who crucified him.)"
2. Luke 23:43 "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"
3. John 19:26–7 "Woman behold thy son! . . . Behold thy mother!"
4. Matthew 27:46 & Mark 15:34 "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? (My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?)"
5. John 19:28 "I thirst."
6. John 19:30 "It is finished." (JST Matthew 27:50; "Father it is finished, thy will is done.")
7. Luke 23:46 "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit"

Soldiers Attempted to Break Jesus' Legs but Instead Pierce His Side

John 19:31–37

John 19:31–2 "the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath day" Only John's Gospel includes these two details in the next six verses. Did he include them for prophetic and symbolic lessons too? The word *Sabbath* meant either an approaching Friday night to Saturday night, or a Holy Day. As mentioned in John 19:14, this was actually the "*preparation*" for the Passover, so it could have been any day of the week. The Jews had enough influence with the Romans to make sure that no victims were "exhibited" on their Sabbath or Holy Feast days.

John 19:32 "Then came the soldiers and break the legs" We find examples of other Jews requesting to break the legs of those being crucified, in order to shorten the length of time on the cross.³² Usually the Romans left the bodies on the crosses after death to be eaten by birds and animals of prey. This deprived the family from the privilege of visiting the grave. However, the Jews tried to remove them before night fall in keeping with Deuteronomy 21:23, "His body shall not remain all night upon the tree."

Ironic as it sounds, breaking the legs was a kind thing to do as it brought a quicker end to the torture, because now the crucified victims would suffocate, not being able to hold themselves up on their legs. However, when the soldiers came to Jesus He had already entered into His Eternal Reward.

John 19:33, 36 "he was dead already. . . the scripture should be fulfilled" Not breaking Jesus' bones fulfilled the Old Testament citations from Exodus 12:46 and Psalm 34:20. This fulfillment of scripture testifies that Jesus'

death had been planned from the beginning. Yet some Jews at that time believed that if a victim were truly innocent, God would not let him or her die. With this misunderstanding, they thought because God allowed the soldiers to crucify Jesus, He could not have been innocent, nor the Messiah. Furthermore, Deuteronomy 21:23 states anyone hung on a tree (including for crucifixion), “is accursed.”

Yet others, including the apostle Paul saw Jesus’ death in the symbolism of the children of Israel killing their paschal lambs: “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7; also see 10:1–6). Likewise, John the Baptist referred to Jesus as “the Lamb of God” (John 1:29, 36). We can find at least seven ways that Jesus typified sacrificial lambs.

1. The lamb must be the firstborn (Exodus 13:2,12; D&C 93:21).
2. The lamb must be a male (Exodus 12:5; Matthew 1:21).
3. The lamb must be without blemish (Exodus 12:5; Hebrews 7:26–27; 1 Peter 2:22; Malachi 1:7–14; 3 Nephi 12:48).
4. No bones of the lamb were to be broken (Psalm 34:20; Exodus 12:46; John 19:36).
5. The lamb was to be killed from noon to three (John 19:14).
6. The lamb was to be eaten near the spot of the sacrifice with no flesh carried far away (Exodus 12:8, 46; John 19:41).
7. Nothing of it shall remain until the morning (Exodus 12:10).

John 19:34–35 “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side and forthwith came there out blood and water” The Church Father, Augustine (AD 354–430), and others, saw Jesus’ water and the blood from the cross as symbolic of the Christian sacrament of baptism and the sacrament flowing from Jesus’ redemptive death. They saw the spear wound in Jesus’ side symbolic of Adam’s side opened for the creation of Eve. With Jesus’ death, the church can now be born from the side of Jesus—the new Eve from the side of a new Adam.³³ When Jewish sacrifices were killed, the Jews were required to immediately drain out the blood and sprinkle it on the altar. This is another type of Christ. The blood also witnesses of Jesus’ mortal body.

John 19:37 “They shall look on him whom they pierced” This fulfilled Zechariah 12:10. “. . . and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem . . . And the land shall mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart.” This has at least a dual application. John also quotes it later in the Book of Revelation, looking forward to its fulfillment at Jesus’ second coming “and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him” (Revelation 1:7).

Jesus Yields Up the Ghost by William Hole, 1905.



Jesus' Burial

Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 1:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42

Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:42-43; Luke 23:50-51; John 19:38 “there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph . . .” All four Gospels include the kindness of Joseph of Arimathaea. He was not only well to do, but also well respected and well connected. Luke refers to him as a “good” and “just” man who “waited for the kingdom of God.” Mark adds that he was an “honorable counsellor.” To make sure the reader does not question Joseph’s loyalties, Luke adds, “the same had not consented to the counsel and deed of them.”

The Synoptic Gospels explain that he was a member of the “counsel” or Sanhedrin. In order to be a member of the Sanhedrin, he must have been over 50 years old. John includes that he kept his discipleship a secret, “for fear of the Jews.” This fact might have made it easier for Pilate to allow him to take Jesus’ body. The Synoptic Gospels describe Joseph’s interaction with Pilate, that he “begged the body” (Luke 23:52; Matthew 27:58), and “craved the body” (Mark 15:43).

Archeologists do know where Joseph’s home town, Arimathaea, was located. But, early Christian historians claimed it was the town where the prophet Samuel was born and buried, “Ramathaim-Zophin” (1 Samuel 1:19; 25:1).³⁴ With his responsibility in the Sanhedrin, Joseph may have moved closer to Jerusalem for his tenure in the Sanhedrin.

John 19:39 “also Nicodemus . . . and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight”

Only John mentions another Sanhedrin member, and secret disciple. John includes a conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus about being born again in John 3:1-21, and defends Jesus to the chief priests and the Pharisees in John 7:50. The courageous begging of Jesus’ body from Pilate showed Joseph’s and Nicodemus’ courage, in contrast to their previous timid discipleship. Their story demonstrates how Jesus’ death (and upcoming resurrection), began drawing people to Him.

Even though these men maintained a distance from Jesus and His followers, it appears that their position allowed them to be in the right place now to help. They came forward and did what the Galilean disciples could not have done. The two men probably worked together and divided their tasks: Joseph went to Pilate while Nicodemus bought the burial supplies. As wealthy men of influence, they would have also had several servants/slaves to help them with the task.³⁵ (Half the population of Jerusalem at this time were servants/slaves.³⁶)

Nicodemus brought an enormous amount of expensive burial myrrh mixed with aloes and oil. The total mixture amounted to a hefty seventy-five pounds. (“Pound” is the translation of Greek *litra*, which was actually twelve ounces by U.S. standards.) Myrrh is an aromatic gum grown in Arabia, Abyssinia, and India. The ancients highly prized myrrh from earliest times (Genesis 37:25). Israelites used it in incense (Exodus 30:23) and as a perfume



Joseph of Arimathea Lays Jesus' Body in His Tomb by William Hole, 1905.

for garments (Psalm 45:9). It was part of the cosmetic treatment used to purify young girls for the king's bed (Esther 2:13), and it was also used in embalming (Mark 15:23; John 19:39). In Revelation 18:13 myrrh appears among the items of luxury trade flowing into Babylon as it meets its doom.³⁷

Matthew 27:58–59; Mark 15:44–46; Luke 23:53; John 19:40 “they took Jesus’ body, and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury” (WEB) Once Pilate was assured that Jesus was already dead, these two good men reverently handled our Lord’s mortal remains and gently prepared His body for burial. The Jewish custom was to wash, anoint and clothe the body for burial.

Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46b; Luke 23:53b; John 19:41 “At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and . . . a new tomb” We learn that Golgotha was close to Joseph of Arimathaea’s garden and new sepulcher. This provides another echo from the Old Testament, where the paschal lamb must be eaten on the spot (or in greater Jerusalem), and not carried away (Exodus 12:46).³⁸

This is John’s second reference to a garden outside of Jerusalem. The first was the Garden of Gethsemane (18:1, 26) and now a garden where Jesus’ body was laid. These references to “gardens” should hearken back to the Garden of Eden where the promises to Adam and Eve are being fulfilled. The only other record that states that the burial was in a garden is found in *The Gospel of Peter*.³⁹ According to Matthew 27:60, the borrowed tomb was Joseph of Arimathaea’s own sepulcher.

The scriptures give us several details on the tomb. The Greek, *Codex Bezae*, adds that Joseph “put before the tomb a stone which twenty men could scarcely roll.”⁴⁰ Kelly Ogden outlined the following qualifications for the Lord’s tomb.⁴¹

1. It must be outside the city walls (John 19:20).
2. It must be near a main thoroughfare (Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; John 19:20).
3. It must be near a place of execution (Mark 15:27; Luke 23:33).
4. There must be a garden nearby (John 19:41; 20:15).
5. The garden must contain at least one tomb (John 19:41–42).
6. The rock tomb must be newly cut (Matthew. 27:60; Luke 23:53; John 19:41).
7. The tomb apparently had an anteroom (mourning chamber) and several places for burial; the tomb must be large enough to walk into (See Mark 16:5; Luke 24:3; John 20:8).
8. This particular tomb must have a large, heavy stone to seal the entrance, with a groove or trough for the stone to roll (Matthew 27:60; Mark 15:46; 16:4; Luke 24:2).
9. The tomb entrance must be small, so that one has to stoop to look inside; a person looking in from the outside could see the place where the body was laid (Luke 24:12; John 20:5, 11–12).
10. The tomb must have some place where linen burial cloths could lie and where a “young man” could sit (Mark 16:5), or two angels, one at the head and one at the foot, where Jesus’ body had lain (John 20:6–7, 12).

Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:54–56; John 19:42 “The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed . . . and saw . . . how his body was laid” (NIV). This enabled the women to return to the right place in three days. I presume there was a mutual respect between these two groups of disciples.

“Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation” John tells us a little about the timing, and Luke adds, “the Sabbath drew on.” This means it was approaching 6:00 p.m. In just a couple of hours, they were able to get everything done before their Sabbath or holy feast day. Thus, ends the New Testament account of the death of our Lord.

Header Image: Image of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ by Pete_Linforth via Pixabay.

Below: Pietà by Michelangelo. Photograph by Jebulon via Wikimedia Commons.



ENDNOTES

1. Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. ii (New York: Longmans, Green and Co, 1898), 603.
2. Kent Brown, *BYU New Testament Commentary: The Testimony of Luke* (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2015), 1051–2.
3. Lynne Hilton Wilson’s article: “Jesus’ Atonement Foretold through His Birth” in Richard Holzapfel and Kent Jackson eds., *To Save the Lost: An Easter Celebration* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 103.
4. Pilate was given his assignment thanks to Sejanus, and anti-Jewish advisor to Tiberius Caesar.
5. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:60-62; Wars of the Jews, 2:175-177.
6. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John XIII-XXII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 845.
7. Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scriptures*, 5.444.
8. Matthew includes fourteen similar “fulfillment” verses followed by an OT citation (Matthew 1:22; 2:5b, 15, 17; 23; 3:3; 4:14; 8:17a; 12:17; 13:14a, 35; 21:4; 26:56; 27:9a). As mentioned earlier, the number fourteen was significant in Hebrew orthography as: David.
9. Most small villages shared one copy of the Torah with their Rabbi. Larger towns had the Psalms, next most frequently found text from this era is Isaiah. Furthermore, also find that Matthew mixes up two people in Matthew 23:35, “Zechariah son of Barachiah” (Zechariah 1:1) rather than “Zechariah son of Jehoiada” (2 Chronicles 24:20-22). Perhaps he intended to quote the closer parallel in Zechariah 10:12-13.
10. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/procurator> (accessed 6/7/19).
11. Matthew 5:22; 27:46; Mark 5:41; 7:34; 11:9; 4:36; John 20:16; and 1 Corinthians 16:22. Jews were taught this language in their Babylonian captivity and brought it back when they returned to Judea.
12. Beryl Rawson ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (England: Oxford University Press, 1991), 161.
13. Brent A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top, *Sperry Symposium New Testament* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1990), 79.
14. Kent Jackson, Robert Millet, eds., *Studies in Scriptures: The Gospels* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1986), 5:446–447.
15. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, *Allegory of the Olive Tree* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1994), 8.
16. In approximately AD 165, Apuleius and Peter Oswald wrote, *The Golden Ass*. He described a group of slaves, “Their skins were seamed all over with the marks of old floggings, as you could see through the holes in their ragged shirts that shaded rather than covered their scarred backs; but some wore only loin-cloths. They had letters marked on their foreheads, and half-shaved heads and irons on their legs.” https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Golden_Ass. (Accessed 6-5-19.) Also see Beryl Rawson, ed., *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 161.
17. For most of Old Testament history, Phoenicia held a monopoly on the purple dye (Exodus 25:4; 2 Chronicles 2:7, 14; 3:14; Proverbs 31:22, etc.). The Romans and other ancient peoples found other sources in crustaceans and insects.
18. Brown, *Anchor Bible: John XIII-XXII*, 875.
19. T. E. Schmidt, “Mark 15.16-32: The Crucifixion Narrative and the Roman Triumphal Procession” *New Testament Stud-*

ies, 41 (1995): 1-18. “The praetorian guard gathers early in the morning to proclaim the triumphator. They dress him in the purple triumphal garb and place a crown of laurel on his head. The soldiers shout in acclamation of his lordship . . . and performs acts of homage to him. They accompany him through the streets of the city. The sacrifice walks alongside a person who carries the implement of the victim’s death. The procession ascends to the place of the death’s head, where the sacrifice is to take place. The triumphator is offered ceremonial wine. He does not drink it but pours it out on the altar at the moment of sacrifice. Then, at the moment of being lifted up before the people at the moment of the sacrifice, the triumphator is again acclaimed as lord... and his vicegerents appear with him in confirmation of his glory . . . he is one with the gods.”

20. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 879.
21. D. Kelly Ogden, Andrew C. Skinner, David B. Galbraith, *Jerusalem: The Eternal City* (UT: Shadow Mountain, 1996), 175–176.
22. Jewish calendaring began their day at sunset because the creation accounts in Genesis start with darkness before light.
23. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 883.
24. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel and Epistles of John: A Concise Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1988), 93.
25. Philo, *On the Embassy of Gaius*, Book XXXVIII, 299–305.
26. W.F. Albright, and C.S. Mann, *The Anchor Bible: Matthew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 348; it “stupefied.”
27. Jackson, Millet, *Studies in Scripture, Gospels*, 449. According to Peloubet’s Bible Dictionary, crucifixions were abolished by Constantine.
28. Kent Brown, *Luke*, xx.
29. Edersheim, *Life of Jesus*, 592. Edersheim argues the seamless garment was the dress of the High Priest, and that Moses wore one.
30. Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness Articles of Faith*, 289; Elder McConkie claimed that Jesus had to continue to suffer for our sins on the cross, however I do not find that in scripture. (Also see James Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 605, 612–613.)
31. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 353.
32. Erkki Koskenniemi, “Wine Mixed with Myrrh (Mark 15:23) and Crucifixion (John 19:31–32): Two Details of the Passion Narratives,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 27 (4): 379–391.
33. Brown, *Gospel*, 95. Greek traditions held that the gods enjoyed an equal balance of blood and water (Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 954).
34. Brown, *Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 938; The “Onomasticon of Eusebius” and Jerome make this claim.
35. Heshey Zelcher, *A Guide to the Jerusalem Talmud* (Universal Publishers, 2002), 92. “The middle class citizens often owned eight slaves, the rich from five hundred to a thousand, and an emperor as many as twenty thousand.”
36. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Bartchy, “Servant” 4.420. Tim G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins, 2003), 183. Junius P. Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopedia of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABD-CLI, 1997), 7.548. In AD 47, a census across the Roman Empire documented that one-third of the population was enslaved or worked as servants. Some large cities, including Jerusa-

lem, recorded that fifty-percent of the population were servants or slaves.

37. Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row), 672.
38. *Brown, Anchor: John XIII-XXII*, 943.
39. *Ibid.*
40. Kent Brown, *Luke*, 1099.
41. Kelly Ogden, *Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times*, 147.