

14 Part II

EASTER REFLECTIONS

John W. Welch Notes



Day 1: A Week of Completions

The last week of Jesus's mortal life was a time filled with completions. As His time drew near, He knew that many parts of His mission needed to be drawn fully to conclusion. And by the time that week ended, He had in fact finished all that He had been sent to do and all that was necessary to allow the eternal plan of His Father to succeed.

Prophecies needed to be fulfilled. The week began with his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, fulfilling a host of prophecies, beginning with the coming of the king riding on the foal or donkey (Matthew 21:5–7; in fulfillment of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9). As the week progressed, Jesus embodied the similitudes that were long before embedded in the celebration of Passover (see Figure 1). The hours on Calvary saw the actualization of prophetic anticipations in Psalm 22, a psalm of King David, who had long before foreseen this Son of David (Acts 2:30–31). The week ended poignantly as the striking prophecies in Isaiah 53 of this Suffering Servant came to pass (see Figure 2), as our Savior went “as a lamb to the slaughter,” so that “with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5, 7).

Passover Prophecy Fulfillment

On the eve of Passover Jews begin to remove all leaven from their houses

After the last supper and betrayal, Christ is found worthy to be "cast out"



Sunset



Sunrise

Leaven must be eaten until midday then it is strictly forbidden

Jesus' preparations for the crucifixion

Slaughter of Paschal lambs begins at midday and continues until sundown

Crucifixion begins at noon
Death occurs at the ninth hour (3 P.M.)



Sunset

Christ's body is entombed

Firstfruit sheaf is cut down and the Paschal lamb is consumed



Sunrise

Paschal Sabbath



Sunset



Sunrise

Early morning, the sheaf of firstfruits is "lifted up before the Lord"

Christ is resurrected, the "Firstfruits of the Dead," and the tomb is left empty

Figure 1 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "Passover Prophecy Fulfillment," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 10-17.

Isaiah 53 and the Messiah

He "shall grow up before him [the Father] as a tender plant" (53:2)
 "As a root [the root of Jesse] out of a dry ground [Israel]" (53:2)
 He will have "no form nor comeliness" (53:2)
 "There is no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2)
 "He is despised and rejected ..., we esteemed him not" (53:3)
 "We [his friends] hid as it were our faces from him" (53:3)
 "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (53:4)
 He will be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (53:3)
 "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows" (53:4)
 "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (53:5)
 "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted" (53:7)
 "He was taken from prison and from judgment" (53:8)
 "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief" (53:10)
 "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death" (53:9)
 "He hath poured out his soul unto death" (53:12)
 "He was cut off out of the land of the living" (53:8)
 They would number him "with the transgressors" (53:12)
 "He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth" (53:9)
 "He opened not his mouth: as a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7)
 "The chastisement of our peace was upon him" (53:5)
 "With his stripes we are healed" (53:5)
 "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (53:6)
 "For the transgression of my people was he stricken" (53:8)
 "For he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11)
 "He made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12)
 The Father "shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (53:11)
 "His soul [will be] an offering for sin" (53:10)
 "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many" (53:11)
 "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (53:10)
 "I will divide him a portion with the great" (53:12)
 "He shall divide the spoil with the strong" (53:12)

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Chart 10-15

Figure 2 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "*Isaiah 53 and the Messiah*," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 10-15.

Certain people also needed some final attention. As the Gospel of John tells us, Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, and He stayed again one last time in their home in Bethany, returning for three or four nights during this week. In previous visits to Jerusalem, Jesus had made friends with important people in Jerusalem, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. While He had left some Pharisees unsettled during his previous visits, no doubt He would have wanted to finish some of those conversations and reconcile with them if at all possible. Perhaps he succeeded, since the Pharisees seem to have taken a less prominent role during this final week, when it was Caiaphas and his Chief Priests, linked with their Scribes and the Elders, who aggressively took the lead (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, the multitudes held Jesus to be a prophet (Matt. 21:46).

People who had rejected Jesus needed a final chance to change their minds and ways, and Jesus fulfilled that need. He personally confronted people who vigorously opposed Him, even to the point that they perceived that he spoke in the parable of the Wicked Tenants against them (Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). He lamented the impending destruction of Jerusalem, giving the whole city one final prophetic cry, urging them to repent and to come unto His protection, as a hen gathers her chicks (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee who had killed John the Baptist, was given one last chance to rethink what he had done (Luke 23:6–12). The epitome of forgiveness, Jesus even forgave those who knew not what they were doing (Luke 23:34).

Jesus's teaching of the people of Israel also needed to be completed. Teaching them daily in the temple for three days, Jesus completed his climactic series of parables in Matthew 25. There he told the people to be like the five wise bridesmaids in preparing for the Coming of the Lord. He inspired them to be faithful stewards in magnifying the talents with which they had been entrusted by the Lord. He admonished them to be counted among the Lord's sheep, and not the goats, in anticipation of the final day of God's judgment and separation. And He assured them that the righteous who have ministered "unto one of the least of these my brethren" shall enter "into eternal life" (Matthew 25:40, 46).

Jesus also needed to give His apostles one final private session of intense training and love. The week's instruction culminated at the Last Supper. There Jesus and his disciples partook of the covenantal bread and wine of remembrance. Then Jesus delivered a finale of immortal statements: "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34), "in my Father's house are many mansions" (14:2), "if ye love me, keep my commandments" (14:15), "my peace I give unto you" (14:27), "I am the True Vine and ye are the branches" (15:5), "for the Father himself loveth you, because you have loved me" (16:27), "this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent" (17:3), "for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth" (17:19), and "that they all may be one; as

thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (17:21). The five incomparable chapters of John 13–17 make a sublime set of readings at the heart of the Easter Week. It is as if Jesus had saved His best doctrinal wine for last.

And, on top of all that, the greatest of His daunting challenges and miraculous victories still remained to be completed that week. His Atonement, His conquest of death, and His Resurrection would be the exquisite conclusion of this week, and he could finally say, "It is finished" (John 19:30).

But as Jesus came to Jerusalem at the beginning of this week, one other final score also remained to be settled. About a month before this final week, Jesus had crossed paths with Caiaphas, the High Priest, the most powerful man in the land of Judaea. The undercurrent of that conflict runs beneath everything else in this climactic week. As the pressures build, that current churns and eventually boils over, in spite of all that Jesus could do or say. That outcome all began with the raising of Lazarus. Symbolically foreshadowing the resurrection of Jesus Himself, the raising of Lazarus from the dead was more than the proverbial last straw. It was the showdown of Caiaphas, the high priest appointed by Roman authorities, and another High Priest, the Son of the very Eternal God (Psalms 110:1, 4; Hebrews 9:11; 10:21).

Flashing back, the week of the first Easter had begun with Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. On that day, as huge crowds had begun arriving in the Holy City for the coming Passover, many people made a special effort to welcome Jesus. They carried branches of palm trees (John 12:13) and hoped to catch a glance of Jesus. We might wonder, Why? Why had they come? As the gospel of John says, they came precisely because they heard that Jesus, who had raised Lazarus from the dead, was coming (12:17–18). No doubt, they wanted to know if this sensational event had really happened. Some of them probably also hoped to see what Lazarus looked like, after having been raised from the dead. They shouted Hosanna, "Save Now." They were anxious for a complete messianic victory.

The Chief Priests and Their Associates

CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING ALONE

Mt 2:4	tell Herod where Christ should be born
Jn 12:10	consider putting Lazarus to death
Mt 26:14	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal and arrest of Jesus
Mk 14:10	meet with Judas to arrange for the betrayal of Jesus
Mt 27:6–7	refuse to return the thirty pieces of silver to the temple treasury and buy the potter's field
Jn 18:35	deliver Jesus to Pilate (acting in conjunction with entire nation)
Mk 15:3–4	accuse Jesus before Pilate
Mk 15:10	deliver Jesus to Pilate out of envy
Lk 23:4	are told, along with people, of Jesus' innocence by Pilate
Mk 15:11	persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released
Lk 23:23	prevail in asking for Barabbas to be released
Jn 19:6	cry (with their officers) for the crucifixion of Jesus
Jn 19:21	ask Pilate to change the wording of the title on the cross
Mt 28:11	are told by guards of the resurrection and empty tomb
Acts 9:14	give Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 9:21	issue authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:10	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians
Acts 26:12	had given Saul authority to arrest Christians

Figure 3 John W. Welch and John F. Hall, "*The Chief Priests and Their Associates*," in *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2002), 3-9 (Continued below).

**CHIEF PRIESTS ACTING WITH ELDERS (*PRESBYTEROI*), RULERS (*ARCHONTES*),
CAPTAINS (*STRATEGOI*), OR THE SANHEDRIN (*SYNHEDRION*)**

- Mt 21:23 question Jesus in the temple about his authority (elders)
 Mt 26:47 arrest Jesus (elders)
 Mt 26:59 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)
 Mk 14:56 seek false witnesses against Jesus (Sanhedrin)
 Mt 27:1 take council against Jesus (elders)
 Lk 22:4 meet with Judas and captains to arrange betrayal
 Lk 22:52 arrest Jesus with temple captains and elders
 Mt 27:3 refuse the thirty pieces of silver when Judas tries
 to return them (elders)
 Mt 27:12–13 accuse Jesus before Pilate (elders)
 Lk 23:13–15 are told, along with the rulers and the people, of
 Jesus' innocence by Pilate
 Mt 27:20 persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas (elders)
 Lk 24:20 with rulers deliver Jesus to be crucified
 Mt 28:12–13 bribe guards to say the disciples stole Jesus' body (elders)
 Acts 4:18 command Peter and John not to speak of Christ (elders)
 Acts 5:24–26 arrest Peter and John and command them again
 (captains)
 Acts 22:30 convene court against Paul (Sanhedrin)
 Acts 23:14–15 hear oath of vigilantes against Paul (elders)
 Acts 25:15 ask Festus to give judgment against Paul (elders)

CHIEF PRIESTS MENTIONED WITH SCRIBES ONLY

- Mt 20:18 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands
 Mk 10:33 Jesus prophesies his betrayal into their hands
 Lk 20:19 offended by the parable of the rejected cornerstone
 Mt 21:15 are displeased at miracles and popularity of Jesus

Mk 11:18	are afraid of his popularity and temple teaching
Lk 22:2	are afraid of his popularity and seek to kill him
Mk 14:1	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Lk 23:10	accuse Jesus before Pilate
Mk 15:31	mock Jesus on the cross

CHIEF PRIESTS LINKED WITH ELDERS AND SCRIBES

Mt 16:21	Jesus prophesies his suffering and death by them
Mk 8:31	Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them
Lk 9:22	Jesus prophesies his rejection and death by them
Mk 11:27–28	question Jesus in the temple about his authority
Lk 20:1–2	question Jesus in the temple about his authority
Mt 26:3	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Lk 19:47	meet to plot the arrest and death of Jesus
Mk 14:43	arrest Jesus
Mk 14:53	assemble against Jesus
Lk 22:66	assemble against Jesus
Mk 15:1	deliver Jesus to Pilate
Mt 27:41	mock Jesus on the cross

CHIEF PRIESTS TOGETHER WITH PHARISEES ONLY

Mt 21:33, 45	hear the parable of the wicked tenants
Jn 7:32	send officers to attempt to arrest Jesus
Jn 7:45–46	listen as officers report that they will not arrest Jesus
Jn 11:47	confer together to discuss arresting Jesus
Jn 11:57	require disclosure of knowledge of Jesus' location
Jn 18:3	send officers to arrest Jesus
Mt 27:62–64	come to Pilate asking for soldiers at the tomb



Figure 4 This third-century glass plate in the Vatican Museum shows Jesus miraculously raising Lazarus and bringing him forth out of the tomb. It shows the strong faith of early Christians in this final and most powerful sign of Jesus's power over death. Photograph by John W. Welch.

At the same time, however, there were other people in Jerusalem who were also hoping to see Jesus, but for a completely different reason. Because of the raising of Lazarus, the Sanhedrin had met a few weeks earlier and had found Jesus worthy of death (John 11:50, 53). When they hadn't been able to locate Jesus, they had issued a public order calling for any information about his whereabouts (11:57). And then, because Jesus had fled to a village called Ephraim and could not be found, the Sanhedrin issued another order, this time for the arrest of Lazarus (12:10). Apparently they hoped that Lazarus might know where Jesus had gone. Perhaps they also wondered if Lazarus had conspired with Jesus to deceive the people. And, indeed, because of the raising of Lazarus, many people "believed on Jesus" (12:11). Having watched Jesus for quite some time (Mark 3:22–26; John 7:12, 47; 9:16, 29), Caiaphas could not allow this rising crisis to gather any further momentum.

Thus, underlying all of the many events of the final week of Jesus's mortal life was the unfinished legal business that was set in motion a month earlier with the raising of Lazarus in Bethany, just over the hill to the east of Jerusalem. Because that remarkable event is reported only in the gospel of John, most studies of the trial and death of Jesus begin with his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, but that omission is short-sighted.

The raising of Lazarus had been big news, and word about it must have spread rapidly. Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were fairly wealthy. They were socially well connected. They even had their own private tomb for family burials. Many of the leading Jews had gone out to their home to mourn the death of Lazarus, but instead of mourning, they saw "the things which Jesus did" and some "believed on him" (11:45). Others were dubious, and they went immediately and reported to Caiaphas what Jesus had done. Soon the full Sanhedrin had met to deliberate how to respond.

The report given in John 11:47–57 of this meeting makes it clear that important legal steps were taken and set in motion at that time. Over a dozen words in that report have legal significance. This was not just a theological discussion, but an official legal proceeding. What was their concern? More than just recognizing the fact that Jesus had obviously worked miracles (11:47), they saw his miracles as signs, pointing to something and not just doing good. If those signs or wonders led people to "go after other gods," then such miracles were deemed to be evil, and the law clearly required that the wonderworker be "put to death" (Deuteronomy 13:2, 5).

As the Sanhedrin then discussed the case, some argued, "If we let him thus alone, everyone will believe on him." Others feared that "the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (11:48). Here "*the place*" would refer to the temple, and it was especially their duty, under Deuteronomy 12, to protect the temple as the holy place.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, however, had rejected this quibbling over rationales. Saying "Ye know nothing at all," he reasoned that it would be better that one man die "on behalf of" the people than for the whole nation to be destroyed (11:50). John says that Caiaphas did not speak these words on his own personal authority. He acted officially as the High Priest (11:51), as he authoritatively (even if unwittingly) prophesied that Jesus would die for "the people," and not just for the people of Israel, but also so that the scattered children of God could be gathered into one (11:52). These decisive words have a ring of legal finality to them. And the Gospel of John says, "Then from that day forth they took counsel for to put him to death" (11:53). An official legal order was issued that anyone knowing of the whereabouts of Jesus needed to report that information so that he could be captured (11:57). This was not so that he could be convicted (he had already been found worthy of death), but to determine how he should be put to death, and by whom,

whether the Roman procurator or the leaders of the Sanhedrin. The law might also have wanted to give any convict a chance to confess and perhaps to negotiate some settlement. But it was this basic verdict that stands as unfinished behind all that then happens the week beginning with Palm Sunday.

All Jerusalem would have been abuzz about the phenomenal raising of Lazarus, hoping and wondering if Jesus would dare make an appearance in Jerusalem for the celebration of Passover. To stem this tide, the chief priests were prepared to move quickly to apprehend Jesus (with Roman awareness, if not Roman escort), then to sentence Jesus, and get Pilate's consent to publically execute him, all within one final early morning's time.

Thus, as Jesus had walked toward Bethany a month or so earlier to answer the plea of his dear friends to come and heal their dying brother Lazarus, having been previously confronted by legal challenges against his miracle working, Jesus could well have anticipated that, by openly raising Lazarus from the dead so close to Jerusalem, He was effectively setting in motion the final steps leading to His own death. Knowing the risks, both on that previous occasion and equally on Palm Sunday, Jesus generously, lovingly, and willing went forward, having reassured Martha and also the whole world, with the absolutely conclusive knowledge that "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

To be continued . . .



Figure 5 *The Raising of Lazarus, Nativity of Christ Church, Arbanassi, Bulgaria* (photograph by John W. Welch, © 2019; used with permission of the Regional Museum of History of Veliko Tarnovo)

This is one of many scenes that are painted onto the walls and ceilings of a seventeenth-century church in Arbanassi, Bulgaria. Here, viewers see Jesus in the center raising his right hand in blessing, as Lazarus will come forth from the stone-tomb, his burial shroud beginning to unwind. Lazarus has a gold halo, indicating his holy discipleship. He will become known as St. Lazarus. Jesus's left hand appears to be receiving the message that Lazarus had died. The women in black and red are likely Martha and Mary. Behind Jesus are eleven disciples. Presumably Judas is the one not shown. In the lower right, a servant moves away the stone that had covered the entrance to the tomb. In the top-center, the walls around Jerusalem enclose the Temple, with the flaming altar of sacrifice on the left. Caiaphas and three other chief priests or Pharisees are in the middle, with two structures on the right. Being told by eyewitnesses about Jesus's raising of Lazarus in Bethany, Caiaphas will convene the Sanhedrin. They will debate what to do in the face of this miraculous sign that threatens to lead everyone in Jerusalem to follow Jesus. Even miracle workers can be convicted of leading people into apostasy under Deuteronomy 13. And Caiaphas will rule that it is better for Jesus to be executed than for a riot to break out, for

the holy city and temple to be taken away by the Romans, and all the people to be destroyed. An order for the capture of Jesus was sent out. Not finding Him, the Sanhedrin will further rule that Lazarus also was worthy of death, apparently on the allegation of complicity with Jesus in working to deceive the people.

Day 2: “By What Authority?”



Figure 6 The Father's Two Sons, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

None of the actions taken against Jesus by the Chief Priests during his final week would have come as any surprise to Jesus. He knew the hearts, the desires, and the intentions of all the actors in this eternal drama. He had heard their questions and arguments many times before.

Reentering Jerusalem on Monday morning, the day after his Triumphal entry, Jesus made a beeline directly to the temple. He had been there several times before. He was no stranger there (See Figure 7).

Jesus at the Temple

Gabriel there foretold the Lord's coming	Lk 1:17-19
Jesus circumcised there on eighth day	Lk 2:21
Simeon held and proclaimed the Savior	Lk 2:27-35
Anna gave thanks for Jesus' redemption	Lk 2:38
Jesus amazed the elders there at age twelve	Lk 2:42, 46
Tempted at the pinnacle of the temple	Mt 4:5-7; Lk 4:9-12
Regularly went there for Passover	Jn 2:13
Drove out merchants and their sacrificial animals	Jn 2:14-17
Encouraged payment of the temple tax	Mt 17:24-27
Cleansed man at the temple pool of Bethesda	Jn 5:14-16
At Tabernacles declared himself God's emissary	Jn 7:14, 28
There forgave a woman taken in adultery	Jn 8:2-11
Spoke in the treasury about light	Jn 8:12-20
Drove out money changers	Mt 21:12-13; Mk 11:15-19; Lk 19:45
Walked and taught there daily	Mt 21:23; 26:55; Mk 11:27; 12:35-40; 14:49; Lk 19:45-48; 20:1; 22:52; Jn 10:23
Reasoned there with the Jewish leaders	Mt 21:23-23:39; Mk 11:27-12:44; Lk 19:45-48; 21:37
Had his authority challenged	Mt 21:23; Mk 11:27-28; Lk 20:2

Chart 8-12 (1)

Figure 7 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Jesus at the Temple." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 8-12. (Continued on next page)

Gave the parable of the two sons on obedience	Mt 21:28–32
Taught of the wicked tenants’ rejection of the son	Mt 21:33–46; Mk 12:1–12; Lk 20:9–19
Gave parable of the marriage feast on chosenness	Mt 22:1–14
Was asked about what belongs to Caesar or God	Mt 22:17; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:22
Sadducees asked about marriage and the afterlife	Mt 22:24; Mk 12:19; Lk 20:28
Pharisees asked about the greatest commandment	Mt 22:36; Mk 12:28
Pharisees asked about Christ and the son of David	Mt 22:42; Mk 12:35; Lk 20:41
Jesus warned about the pride of the Scribes	Mk 12:38; Lk 20:46
Saw the widow offer her two mites	Mk 12:42; Lk 21:2
Approved Pharisaic teaching but not action	Mt 23:3
Taught his priesthood leaders to be servants	Mt 23:11
Gave eight woes upon the scribes and Pharisees regarding their exclusivity, long prayers, misleading converts, improper temple oaths, missing the spirit of tithing, having external purity only, outward appearances, and rejecting the prophets	Mt 23:13–34
Mentioned the murder of Zacharias in the temple	Mt 23:35
Lamented over the temple’s coming destruction	Mt 24:1–2; Mk 13:1–2; Lk 21:6
Spoke of the return of “the master of the house”	Mk 13:34–35
Used imagery of “my Father’s house”	Jn 14:2
Rending of the veil of the temple	Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45
Earliest Christians continue to meet there	Lk 24:53

There he was immediately asked by the Chief Priests and the elders, “By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?” (Matt. 21:23). Understanding this questioning of Jesus is crucial in understanding the reasons behind the main events in the Easter week. Reinforcing the importance of this critical exchange, it is significant that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all recount this episode almost verbatim (Matt. 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33; Luke 20:1–8).

Jesus had been asked such questions on other occasions before. At the beginning of Jesus's ministry, a group of scribes (lawyers) had been sent up from Jerusalem to Galilee to investigate by what "authority" (Mark 1:27) Jesus was performing his miracles. The legal and religious issue was this: If he had performed miracles by the power of God and to God's glory, his miracles would have been seen as beyond reproach. But if he was doing these miracles "by the prince of the devils" through whom he was "cast[ing] out devils" (Mark 3:22), then Jesus was committing an offense for which he could be put to death. Sorcery, witchcraft, and other forms of working through evil spirits was condemned in several places in the law of Moses. For example, Exodus 22:18 reads, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," and Leviticus 20:27 says, "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death."

By asking Jesus this very question once again right after his entry into Jerusalem, conspicuously soon after his raising of Lazarus and the opinion of the Sanhedrin that Jesus and Lazarus were worthy of death (John 11:50, 53; 12:10), the Chief Priests and the elders that Monday morning in the Temple were bringing up a persistent problem. They would have been acting with a strong belief that Jesus's many signs and wonders raised serious legal problems as they were leading people to follow him and his teachings.

But curiously, the Chief Priests did not act immediately. In light of the fact that an order had been issued for the apprehension of Jesus (John 11:57), one wonders why they did not arrest Jesus on the spot. The answer is fairly clear. As they tried to lay hands on him to arrest him "in that very hour" (Luke 20:19), "they feared the multitude" (Matt. 21:46; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). Likewise they decided that it would be imprudent for them to answer Jesus's question back to them, as He asked them how John the Baptist had received his authority, because they "were afraid of the multitude" (Matthew 21:26; Mark 11:32). They even worried that "all the people will stone us" (Luke 20:6), because the people believed John to be a prophet.

When the chief priests declined to answer Jesus, he chose to speak to them in parables. Before telling them his parable of the Wicked Tenants, he first gave a short parable that is found only in the Gospel of Matthew. I call it the Parable of the Willing and Unwilling Two Sons.

Deeply valuable symbolism is embedded in all of Jesus's parables, and his parable of the willing and unwilling two sons in Matthew 21 is no exception. What does this parable have to do with answering their demand to know: "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" (Matt. 21:23). This simple story is about a certain man who had two sons. When asked to go down and work in the vineyard, the

first son initially refused, but then he went. The other son initially said yes (or so it seems), but then for some unstated reason does not go (21:28-30).

While this parable may be useful in parenting, it would seem that, in this context, Jesus may well have been talking in veiled terms about something much more fundamental. Indeed, in speaking about Jesus's parables in Luke 15, Joseph Smith once taught: "I have a Key by which I understand the scriptures—I enquire what was the question which drew out the answer?"¹ Thus, by focusing on the questions asked by the Chief Priests about Jesus's authority, Joseph's key unlocks the deeper meaning of this parable in Matthew 21:28–31.

The following is a shortened version of my chapter about this parable in the collection of essays in honor of Robert L. Millet, *Let Us Reason Together*, published in 2016 by the BYU Religious Studies Center, and also the chapter in John W. and Jeannie S. Welch, *The Parables of Jesus: Revealing the Plan of Salvation*, published in 2019 by Covenant Communications. In the latter is found this painting by Jorge Cocco (See Figure 6 above, also Figures 8, 9), that illustrates this immortal parable.

Several significant points are included in this instructive story as this parable takes the question of authority into divine and premortal realms. Involved here is no ordinary father, no ordinary vineyard, or any ordinary pair of sons. Bear with me as I explain.

Two sons were asked by *the* father. In the end, it becomes clear that this father is not just their father, but God the Father.² The King James Version chose to supplement the text by inserting the word *his* in italics when Jesus asks, "Whether of them twain did the will of *his* father?" (21:31). Nevertheless, the Greek reads, "Which of the two did the will of *the* father (*tou patros*)?" While it is possible that the definite article here (*tou*) can simply be understood as taking "the place of an unemphatic possessive pronoun when there is no doubt as to the possessor"³ and thus allowing the KJV rendition "*his* father," Jesus's wording here may be significant, referring to "the Father" and not just to their father. The wording echoes Jesus's wording in Matthew 7:21 answering a rhetorical question about who shall enter the kingdom of heaven. The answer: one "who does the will of *the Father* of mine who is in heaven (*tou patros mou*)."³ Thus, the use of the definite article in Jesus's question to the Chief Priests, "which did the will of *the* Father" invites readers to see the

¹ Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 161. See also Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 267–277.

² Arland J. Hultgren, "Interpreting the Parables of Jesus," 637: "It should go without saying that a father can represent God, and so it is."

³ Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1963), §1121.

willing son and his Father in this parable as representing the Father in Heaven and Jesus himself as the one who says “thy will be done” (Matt. 26:42) and who does the Father’s will. The two sons were thus called to serve with authority from God whom they would serve. Those with authority do not take that authority upon themselves but are “called of God, as was Aaron” (Hebrews 5:4).



Figure 8 Study of *The Father's Two Sons*, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

Next, these two sons were both called to “go” by way of commandment from the father. These invitations came, not as polite requests, but as imperatives, literally, “go [-age] down [hyp-]” (Matthew 21:28, 30). While the word *hypage* can have a number of meanings, including to “go away,” “withdraw,” “depart,” “go forward,” or simply to “go,” its sense always depends on the context in which it is used. Here, if the setting is in the father’s house, the sons are being asked to leave the comforts of home and go work in the fields; if the setting is in the father’s mansion on a hill, or in heaven, then the sons will be going *down*, descending, from there.

Moreover, in being asked to go, the two sons were told when and where they were to serve—today, and in the vineyard—so their authority was specific. The message is that those with authority do not have the option of selecting another time or place. They can either respond with a yes or a no, but they cannot modify the father's request.



Figure 9 Study of *The Father's Two Sons*, by Jorge Cocco Santangelo. Used by permission of John W. and Jeannie Welch.

Beyond these points about the nature of authority, this parable draws its listeners into the heavenly realms. In so doing, this story calls to mind events in the Council in Heaven, where a Father indeed had two very different Sons. There Jesus received his commission and authority from the Father.

These heavenly, primeval overtones are more evident in the Greek text of Matthew than in the Latin Vulgate or in typical English translations. The most widely supported Greek texts *literally* read as follows: "A man had two sons, and going to the first he said, 'Go down this day to work in the vineyard.' He answered, 'Not as I will [*ou thelō*],' but then

reconciling himself to the task he went. Going to the other, he [the Father] said the same. And he answering said, "I, Lord!" And he did not go." The differences between this rendition of the Greek and the usual translations of this text—which is clearly more than a mere fable—may be explained as follows.

The first son initially answered the father's request by saying, "*Ou thelō*," which the KJV translates as "I *will* not" (emphasis added). But *thelō* is not a future tense verb. It does not mean "I *will* not, or *shall* not." *Ou thelō* is a present tense verb, meaning "I don't want to," or "I don't wish to," or "I'd rather not," or, idiomatically one might say, "Not (*ou*) [what or as] I will (*thelō*)."⁴ In Elizabethan English, this could mean "I do not will it," as does the Latin *nolo*. But this is not how modern readers hear this crucial word *will*.⁴ Doing the Father's will (*thelēma*—which is the noun cognate to the verb *thelō*) is a central theme in the Gospel of Matthew leading up to Christ's teaching in this parable and immediately beyond (see Matt. 6:10; 7:21; 12:50; 18:14; 26:42). In Gethsemane, as the Savior reconciled and submitted himself to the will of the Father, he said, "Not my will (*mē to thelēma mou*) but thine be done" (Luke 22:42).

The first son "goes *away*" or "departs *from*" (*apēlthen*) the Father's presence. This verb is translated simply as "went" in the KJV in Matthew 21:29, 30. This word, along with the Father's command, "go *down*" (*hypage*), may call to mind the condescension or incarnation of Jesus leaving his Father's presence. These words were used by Jesus himself in referring to his own going away or departure, as a euphemism for his impending death and descent into the spirit prison: "Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? Because he saith, Whither I go (*hypagō*), ye cannot come" (John 8:22); and "it is expedient for you that I go away (*apelthō*)" (John 16:7).

The onerous burden of the work asked by the Father seems to have given even the ultimately submissive first son ample reason for pause. Perhaps this son knew when he was asked to go down that there were or would be wicked tenants in the vineyard who would have already beaten or killed the servants sent by the landowner-father, and now in desperation the father needed a son to send. No wonder even that first son might need to think things over a bit.

At this point in Matthew 21:29, the KJV reads, "but afterward he *repented*," which might seem unbecoming of the Savior. But the idea that the first son repented of some sin (an idea which is found in the Latin word *paenitentia*, the word used at this point in the Latin Vulgate Bible) is actually not necessarily implied in the little parable. This is because the

⁴⁴ H. W. Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 729.

Greek word used here is not the ordinary verb used to mean “repent” (*metanoēō*). Instead, the word is *metamelomai*, which does not primarily mean “to repent.” In the Septuagint and in Koine Greek, with rare exception, it means to feel sad about something or to change one’s mind, but not primarily to repent of an offense. In Classical Greek, it means to regret, or simply to change one’s purpose or course of conduct. Thus, translating it as “repented” conveys a different sense and feel. Thus I prefer to translate *metamelētheis* as “reconciling himself” to the task, as the first son submitted his will to serve in the Father’s plan, even shouldering his daunting task and aligning his own will with that of his Father.

At the same time, there was another son. Most manuscripts call him “the other (*ho heteros*),” while some call him “the second (*ho deuterios*).” This son stood in utter contrast to the first. He is more than numerically second; he is of another mind or has some other purpose. He was eager at first, but in the end he would not serve his father.

Significantly when this other son answered, he did not say, “I go, Lord,” as the KJV reads. Here again the King James translators followed the Vulgate, which uses the words “*eō* (I go), *domine* (Lord).” The word “go,” however, is italicized in the KJV because it is actually not present in the strongest Greek manuscripts. In almost all ancient NT manuscripts, the other son simply says *egō, kurie*, “I, Lord.” In ordinary parlance, this might sound something like “Yes, Sir.” But the pronoun *egō* is significant. For this second son, it seems that it was all about his ego. This is the first word he says. He seems caught up with the fact that *he* had been called. In this context, what does this word *egō* entail? “I *what?* Lord.” “I will gladly go?” “OK, I will [*grudgingly*] go?” or “I get to go!?” “I have been chosen!?” “I will do it;” “I want the glory! Lord.” All of these are possibilities. Moreover, the second and only other word in his reply to his father stiffly calls his own father “Lord,” which may well convey less than close personal love or filial devotion. For whatever reason, that son did not go. He was called, but not chosen.

If the first son is identifiable as Jesus, then the second son in this parable can be understood as Lucifer, his brother. For Latter-day Saints, this identification readily calls to mind the scene in the Council in Heaven in which Jesus was given his commission and authority from the Father. While not exactly the same as in this parable, certain similarities stand out. On that occasion the Father asked, “Whom shall I send?” (Abraham 3:27). In the texts we have, Lucifer then responded with a barrage of six first-person pronouns, “Here am I, send *me*” (Abraham 3:27; Moses 4:1), adding “I will be thy son, . . . I will redeem all mankind . . .; surely I will do it; wherefore give *me* thine honor” (Moses 4:1). Jesus, however, simply “answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me” (Abraham 3:27), adding “Father, *thy* will be done” (Moses 4:2). These two responses typify the contrast between the course of self-interested unrighteousness and the way of submissive righteousness in answering a call from God. Because Satan sought to usurp God’s own

honor, glory, power and authority, Lucifer was cast down (Moses 4:2) and, as in Jesus' parable to the Jewish leaders, Lucifer did not go. Whether he was not allowed to go or whether he took himself out of the running, the outcome was the same. In either case it is interesting to note, the Father was apparently open to sending either (or perhaps, in some way, both), if they would be willing to be his agents and to do his will within the scope of the authority and assignment given to them.

As temple priests, it is not unreasonable that the chief priests and elders would have known something from traditional sources about the heavenly council in which an eternal plan was established from the foundation of the world.⁵ That primal event would have been well known to the Savior and possibly to his disciples and to others of Jesus's contemporaries. Indeed, the apostle John knew and testified that the power and authority of Jesus came from the premortal world where Jesus obtained his right to rule on this earth, not to do his own will, but to do the will of the Father. The authority of Jesus was traceable back to "the beginning" (John 1:1), and his judgment was just because he sought to do "the will of the Father" who had sent him (John 5:30).

Moreover, Jesus had taught openly, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38), and at the Last Supper, only a few days after his Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem and his confrontation with the Chief Priests and elders in the Temple, Jesus affirmed to his disciples, "I am in the Father, and the Father [is] in me; the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but [of] the Father" (John 13:10). "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me" (John 17:8).

So, it would not have been out of character or untimely for Jesus to have taken his disciples privately aside as they returned to Bethany after that Monday in the Temple, at the beginning of Easter Week, to tell to them even more about the source and nature of his authority and to explain to them the meanings of this parable of the willing and unwilling two sons.

⁵ They may have known of the pattern of authoritative callings and the heavenly council from several passages, including 1 Kings 22:19–23; Psalms 82:1; 110:3; Isaiah 9:5 LXX; Jeremiah 23:18; Daniel 7:9–14; Amos 3:7; 1 Enoch 12:3–4. See John W. Welch, "[The Calling of a Prophet](#)," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), pp. 41, 46. Related scriptures may include: Acts 2:23 (Peter's text assumes that his audience on the Day of Pentecost knew something of the idea of God's primordial council and plan [*boulēi*]); 1 Corinthians 2:7 (Paul speaks as well about the wisdom of God that was ordained before the world was), and Alma 13:3 (Alma speaks of priests being "ordained, having been called and prepared from the foundation of the world").

On that Monday, for all who had ears to hear, this parable clearly answered the two questions asked by the Chief Priests: “By what authority do you do all these things, and who gave thee this authority?” As Jesus testified: He was called and authorized by God, his Father. Jesus was chosen because of his willingness to submit his will to the will of the Father. And Jesus was empowered to act in the name of the Father as he came down and did the works of righteousness. This clearly distinguished Jesus from the “other” son and his unrighteous devils and unrepentant workers of iniquity.

And just as Jesus began this final week with this parable in Matthew 21 about his calling in the heavenly council at the beginning of mortal time, he will end his public teachings that week with a final set of parables in Matthew 25 about the judgment at the end of times. Those two bookends that Easter week bracket the whole of the Plan of Salvation, from start to finish.

Day 3: Why Was Jesus Accused of Being a *Kakopoios*?



Figure 10 The raising of a sick man with a wand in a stained-glass window in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Photo by John W. Welch.

People have long wondered, What happened to Jesus after he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane? What kinds of procedures followed, before Caiaphas, members of the Sanhedrin, Pilate, and even Herod Antipas? Were these procedures properly conducted

under either Jewish or Roman law? And of what could Jesus, an innocent man, be accused and convicted? Was he put to death by Romans under Roman law, or by Jews under Jewish law? Was He accused of political offenses or of religious violations?

Definitive answers to such questions have proven extremely evasive and have generated vast amounts scholarly and popular literature. The trial of Jesus is easily one of the most difficult and controversial subjects in the legal history of the world.

Many possible legal issues present themselves to anyone approaching the trial of Jesus. The most crucial question asks, on what specific ground (or grounds) was Jesus convicted? While it was common in ancient law for defendants to find themselves accused of an array of allegations, as indeed was the case in the actions brought against Jesus, John 18:29–30 holds the key for understanding the legal cause of action that was ultimately brought against Jesus by the Chief Priests before Pilate. John says they accused him of being a *kakopoios*, literally “an evil (*kakon*) maker (*poios*),” which the King James translators rendered as “malefactor,” following the Latin “evil (*malus*) done (*factus*; *fictor* = an image-maker, contriver).” A fascinating course of study, which I have pursued for forty years, thus asks, What did it mean in Jesus’s day to be a *kakopoios*, and why would the highest Jewish legal officials have told the Roman ruler that they had found Jesus to be a *kakopoios*?

The following set of notes only scratches the surface of this highly charged historical question. For those interested, here are three of my main publications on this subject. The first is aimed at a general scholarly audience:

John W. Welch, “Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 349–383.

The other two were presented at conferences at BYU:

John W. Welch, “The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus,” in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), 284–312

John W. Welch, “The Legal Cause of Action against Jesus in John 18:29-30,” in *Celebrating Easter*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: BYU, Religious Studies Center, 2007), 157–176.

Here I follow the second of these to explain how the Chief Priests focused on the crime of being a *kakopoios* (Greek) or a “maleficus” (Latin), which is translated into the King James English as “malefactor” (King James English) in order to state the main concern of theirs about Jesus that would also be the most potent concern for the Romans.

Of course, Jesus was accused of many things. He was he accused of blasphemy in Matthew 26:65–66; Mark 14:63–64. But if blasphemy alone had been the issue, Jesus should have been stoned, which was the usual required mode of execution for blasphemy (see Leviticus 24:16; Acts 6:11; 7:59). And because Pilate and the Romans would have cared very little about a Jewish accusation of blasphemy, scholars have often concluded that Jesus must have been executed on some other ground.

Some have suggested that Jesus must have been convicted of organizing a military revolt against Rome, since he was called “king of the Jews,” as Pilate had his scribes write on the placard placed above Jesus on the cross. But, it is very hard to see much substance to a claim that Jesus was a treasonous revolutionary. He was an unarmed pacifist, a Galilean peasant who said, “All they who take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matthew 26:52). When asked by Pilate about his kingship, Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), and it appears that Pilate was satisfied that Jesus posed little, if any, threat to Rome or to the Emperor Tiberias: “I find in him no fault” (John 18:38). Meanwhile, the Jewish law would not have had jurisdiction over a case of treason against Rome.

The solution that I have found most satisfying is found in the Gospel of John. All readers of the New Testament must choose between (a) relying primarily on John and then secondarily on the Synoptics to fill in the gaps, or (b) primarily on the Synoptics and then secondarily on John. In this case and for a number of reasons, I prefer the former.

Besides the fact that John’s report makes impeccable legal sense, John can be trusted as a witness of these proceedings. For one thing, he was there. He was one of the leading apostles, with Peter and James. He was at Golgatha and would have unforgettably known as much as possible about what was happening and why. Indeed, John 18:15 tells us that “another disciple went in” to Annas’s house. More likely, this disciple was John himself, who was thus an eye witness of these legal proceedings. While the Gospel of John is the most theological of the gospels, it is in many ways also historically authentic, as recent scholarship has quite convincingly argued. John’s account is in fact especially in touch with Galilean and Jewish backgrounds of the life of Jesus in ways that relate to the earliest circumstances of Jesus’s ministry.

In particular, John 18:29–30 reports the exchange between Pilate and the Chief Priests as they brought Jesus to the Praetorium: “Pilate then went out unto them, and asked, What legal accusation do you bring against this man? They answered and said unto him, If he were not a *kakopoios*, we would not have turned him over to you” (my translation). The critical question then becomes, what did the Chief Priests mean by *kakopoios*?

Indeed, the Greek work *kakopoios*, which (like its closely related Latin word, *maleficus*), particularly in legal contexts, can mean “magician” or “sorcerer.” To understand how

ancient people generally, and the leaders of the Jewish establishment in particular, would have reacted to Jesus and his miracles, modern readers must understand the positive and negative attitudes of ancient Jews and Romans towards activities that involve the supernatural, divination, conjuring, or magic. Both the Romans and the Jews had strict laws that punished magicians, sorcerers, fortune tellers, diviners, those in contact with spirits, and also miracle workers.

Most relevant to the trial of Jesus is the biblical law that imposes the death penalty on those who use miracles (signs or wonders) to lead people into apostasy (to go after other gods): “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods . . . that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death” (Deuteronomy 13:1–2, 5). Of course, Jewish law recognized that there were good uses of supernatural powers as well as bad. Jewish attitudes toward magic were mixed. On the one hand there was the famous contest between Moses and Pharaoh’s magicians. And King Saul visited the witch of Endore. But Exodus 22:18 commands, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch [either male or female] to live.” The Jews took magic seriously enough that in order to qualify as a member of the Sanhedrin (according to Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 17a), one was required to be able to distinguish between good miracle working and evil trafficking with ghosts, intoxicating “familiar spirits,” or other gods. Although Jesus’ miracles all produced good results, his opponents could use the legal concerns to attack and prosecute him.

And in addition, Roman law also banned certain uses of magic and divination. Empire-wide decrees adopted in the years 11 and 16 AD, which were issued during Jesus’s own lifetime, elevated suspicions about any rogue invocations of supernatural powers. Roman law and society at that time considered magicians, along with brigands, pirates, robbers, astrologers, philosophers, and prophets, to be enemies of the Roman order. For these people, gods were everywhere, good and evil; and thus they took unseen spirits and demons very seriously as constant potential threats. Especially when combined with *maiestas* (anything that insulted, suborned or threatened the Emperor), failing to punish any such use of supernatural powers would especially make a person “no friend of Caesar” (as the Chief Priests reminded Pilate in John 19:12). And here we can see the main Roman concern that the Chief Priests used to capture Pilate’s attention.

And, although for different reasons, Caiaphas and the Chief Priests also were most concerned about Jesus’ miracle working. While we as followers of Jesus have no reason to think that He ever used his powers to harm anyone, people in Jesus’ day did not know where He would stop. If he could still the storm, then he could cause earthquakes (the most likely way in which could instantly destroy the temple), and his words about the

destruction of the temple were alleged (however wrongly) to be an actual threat against the temple: “We heard him say, I will destroy this temple” (Mark 14:58).

Legal debates had in fact ensued over the miracles of Jesus. People wondered: By whose power does he do this? (compare Acts 4:7). In Mark 3:22, Scribes (legal officials) were brought all the way to Galilee from Jerusalem to give their legal opinion in the case of driving a legion of devils out of a possessed man. People accused Jesus: “He hath Beelzebub [Satan], and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils.” What was going on in that case was not a theological debate or a popular news report, but a legal investigation which could have resulted in an allegation with dire legal implications.

This same debate continued in Jerusalem. John 10:19–21 tells us that “there was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; . . . Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?”

As we have discussed previously, the final miracle that tipped the scales against Jesus was the raising of Lazarus. That miracle raised legal issues that could not be ignored, and “from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death” (John 11:53). This unified the two parties that controlled the Sanhedrin: “Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment that if any man knew where [Jesus] were, he should shew it, that they might take him” (John 11:57). And Lazarus likewise, “because by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus” (John 12:10–11).

Seen against this legal background, it is hard to imagine how Jesus’s miracle working would not have been the dominant factor that galvanized the Chief Priests against him. While this factor is occasionally mentioned by commentators, the underlying concern or cause of action is not usually given much attention. The main reason for this disregard is that no formal accusation of *maleficium* appears in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. But the case as reported in John deserves greater weight, attention, and authority. So, let’s take a closer look at John 18:30.

While sometimes the terms malefactor, *maleficus*, *kakopoios*, or *kakon poion* can be understood in a general sense of just being “a bad guy” or “evil doer,” the context here strongly indicates that this term is being used here in a specific way. Here are ten reasons why the word “malefactor” in John 18:30 should be taken as having a technical legal meaning. These linguistic or circumstantial reasons give grounds upon which to conclude that the legal cause of action brought by the Chief Priests against Jesus, as they tried to turn him over to Pilate, was that he was an illegal miracle worker or magician using illicit powers to threaten the public order.

1. *The legal setting.* Ordinary words carry technical legal import when used in a judicial context. English words such as *action*, *motion*, *bench*, or *arise* all have regular meanings in ordinary speech, but they have a legal meaning when they are being spoken in a court, as is the case here.
2. *The legal request.* When Pilate asked, “What sort of *accusation* do you bring against this man?” he was not saying, “What’s going on here?” His words call for a legal response stating a specific cause of action. He would expect the Chief Priests to formulate their reply in terms of recognizable causes of action under Roman law.
3. *The logic of the exchange.* In the synoptic Gospels (of which John presumably was aware), Pilate is said to have asked, “What *kakon* [bad or evil thing] has he done?” (Matt 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22). In their discourse with Pilate, if John were to have the Chief Priests simply respond, “Oh, we found him doing *kakon*,” their response would be circular, evasive, and perhaps even insulting. Their answer, that they had found Jesus to be a *kakopoios*, is best understood as being a specific reply and not simply a repetition of the question back to the magistrate.
4. *The strong meaning of the word.* Ancient astrological treatises, magical papyri, and other documents use the word *kakopoios* to describe bad mystical agents. In an emotionally charged setting, such as the hearing before Pilate, speakers or writers do not typically use strong or technical words in a weak sense.
5. *A legal characterization of early Christians.* The early Christians themselves were seen by others as being involved in magic. Suetonius, in his biography of Nero (*de Vita Caesarum*, 6.16) states that Christians in their first century were accused of being involved in *superstitionis novae ac maleficae*, a label that implies legal charges of magic.
6. *Contemporaneous legal prosecutions of other miracle-workers.* Apollonius (who coincidentally was raised in Tarsus about the same time as was Paul) was another miracle-worker in the first century. He was “tried for his life by Domitian,” who accused Apollonius among other things “of divination by magic for Nerva’s benefit,” and his emphasis “on supernatural revelations inevitably led to his being accused of magical practices” on other occasions as well.⁶
7. *Jesus and exorcism and wonder working.* Jesus and his disciples were indisputably depicted as exorcists, the positive implications of which have been thoroughly explored in other contexts.⁷ But if used for improper purposes in an open and notorious fashion, even exorcisms would have produced legal trouble. Carl

⁶ Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, 222–223.

⁷ Smith, *Jesus the Magician*; R. Shirock, “Whose Exorcists Are They?” *JSNT* 46 (1992): 41–51; C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1947) ch. 4.

- Kraeling has argued persuasively that people generally said of Jesus that he “has a demon,” meaning that he “has a demon under his control,” a concept commonly applied in the ambient culture to people having access to “the spirits of persons who had died a violent death [such as the spirit of John the Baptist].”⁸ After Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath and was then accused by people in the synagogue, he asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil (*kakopoiēsai*),” and his accusers “held their peace” (Mark 3:4). Obviously, it was unlawful any time to do magical evil on any day.
8. *Use in 1 Peter.* The only other place where the word *kakopoiios* appears in the New Testament is in Peter’s first epistle, where it occurs twice, likely referring to a person “guilty of legally defined crimes.”⁹ Peter knew of people calling Christians *kakopoiioi*, but he was confident that judges and others would see their good works, glorify God, and convict them not as magicians or “evil makers” but as “good makers” (1 Peter 2:12, 14). Here the label of “evil makers” was intended by outsiders to be deeply pejorative, not just mildly insulting. Even more definitively in 1 Peter 4:13–16, Christians were exhorted to share the suffering of Christ, but not as a murderer, a thief, a *kakopoiios*, or as a fourth kind of offender (the specific nature of which is indeterminable). Clustered together with the first two very serious offenses in this list, the word *kakopoiios* points to a particular crime of seriously unacceptable magnitude.
 9. *Early Christian attestations.* Some early Christians, such as Lactantius in the late third or early fourth century, openly acknowledged that the Jews had accused Jesus of being a magician or sorcerer.¹⁰ Christians did not answer by arguing that this word in John 18:30 should be understood in some weak sense. They answered by arguing that the astonishing miracles of Jesus were acceptable because the prophets had predicted them.
 10. *Confirmations from early Jewish sources.* Evidence of Jewish opinion (also around the third century) comes from the following passage from the Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 43a: “On the eve of the Passover Yeshe [the Nazarine] was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, ‘He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery

⁸ C. H. Kraeling, “Was Jesus Accused of Necromancy,” *JBL* 59 (1940): 153–157.

⁹ J. H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 468. When Luke calls the two other criminals crucified with Jesus “malefactors” (Luke 23:32), the Greek word he uses is *kakourgos*, not *kakopoiios*. Luke’s word refers to “robbers,” and it must mean something different to Luke than what *kakopoiios* means to John, or else we must imagine that the Jews in John 18:30 were accusing Jesus of being a “robber,” an allegation that lacks any plausible basis.

¹⁰ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 5, 3; in *Patrologia Latina* 6.560–561.

and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favor he was hanged on the eve of the Passover." Notice that the raising of Lazarus and the Sanhedrin trial led by Caiaphas in John 11:47–57 would have happened about forty days before Passover.

Ultimately, however, even Pilate found no such cause of action (or any other) against Jesus, and so he held: "I find in him no fault," or in other words "I recognize no legal cause of action against him" (John 18:38, my translation). Pilate was satisfied that Jesus of Nazareth had not yet broken any Roman law. But obviously Jesus had extraordinary powers, and one can see that some might have seen that as possibly being turned in some way against Rome or Tiberius Caesar. Thus, Pilate was apparently fearful enough about the situation that he was willing to allow the Chief Priests to move ahead, accompanied by Roman soldiers who were going to crucify two others that morning in any event.

All of this textual and contextual analysis is corroborated by the fact that, during the next hundred years, his having been a miracle worker and wonder worker was seen as a dominant part of Jesus' public reputation. This is evident from the writings of Josephus, both in Greek and Slavonic. For example, the Slavonic version of Josephus states: "And [Pilate] had that *wonder-worker* brought up, and after instituting an inquiry concerning him he pronounced judgment: 'He is [a benefactor, not] a malefactor, [nor] a rebel, [nor] covetous of kingship.' [And he let him go; for he had healed his dying wife.]"¹¹

Moreover, the earliest extant Christian art offers further witness of the popular reputation that Jesus had as a wonder worker, not only among his detractors, but also his followers. Pre-Constantinian images of Jesus depict him as a miracle worker more often than in any other pose. The most common compositional element of these images shows Jesus holding a rod or wand, representing the divine power with which he performs his supernatural feats. It would be several centuries after the death of Christ before the cross or the passion narratives became main subjects of Christian art.

Instead, the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–43), the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:22–43; Luke 8:41–56), the miracles of loaves and fishes (Mark 6:38–44; 8:5–19; Matthew 14:17–19; 15:34–36; Luke 16:9–10; John 6:9–13), and the turning water into wine (John 2:1–11) were the most popular narratives in the ministry of Jesus that were depicted in the first

¹¹ Josephus, War IV-VII, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), pp. 648–650 (brackets retained as included in this translated source; emphasis added).

few centuries.¹² As one scholar has noted, “To such Christians, the life of Christ consisted simply of a series of miracles.”¹³ And in depicting these miracles, Jesus touches the body of the deceased, the loaf-filled baskets, and the water-filled amphora with a wand, symbolizing his divinely wondrous powers.

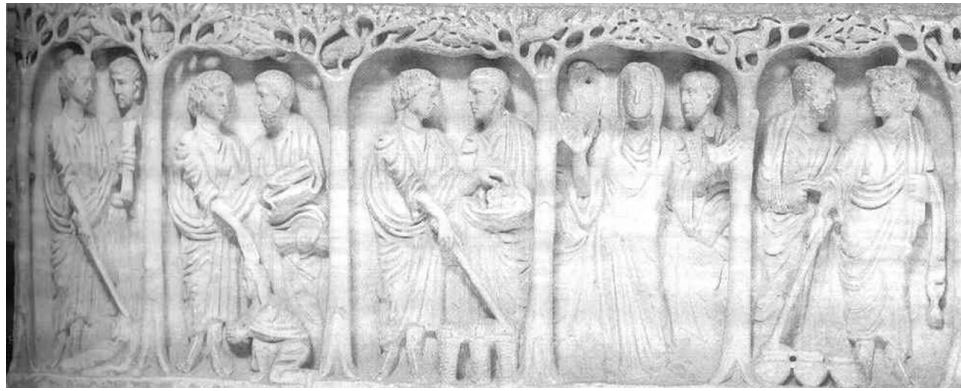
Although found in several locations, the majority of these images are found in the Christian funerary sculptures or paintings in the Roman catacombs—a 12-mile underground labyrinth of niches, alcoves, and passageways beneath Rome. In that iconic burial place, graves were often decorated with religious motifs, sometimes quite elaborately. The resurrection of the deceased was metonymically promised by scenes of the miracles of Christ, as well as by the sign of Jonah being rescued from the whale, and the divine deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace.

Ancient artists often added the detail of Jesus holding a staff or a wand in depicting the Gospel miracle stories (See Figures 11, 12, 13). This was because of the popular correlation of wands with magicians. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, for example, Circe—the magician daughter of Helios—is depicted working her magic with a wand when she transforms a group of people into pigs. In Roman mythology, Mercury was one of the gods who escorted souls to and from the afterlife. Just as Mercury is depicted holding his golden wand to lead the dead back to life, so to Jesus is shown supernaturally bringing people back to life with a wand or staff representing His divine power.¹⁴

¹² See Thomas F. Matthews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Rev. ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 54–91; and Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 64–93.

¹³ Matthews, *Clash of the Gods*, 59.

¹⁴ For Circe, see *Odyssey* 10.293, 388; *Virgil Aeneid*, 7.189–91; *Ovid, Metamorphoses*, 14.278, 413. For Mercury, see *Odyssey*, 24.1; *Virgil, Aeneid*, 4.242; and *Prudentius, Contra Symachum*, 1.89–91 all cited in Matthews, *Clash of the Gods*, 58–59. I thank Josh Probert for his research on early Christian art.



*Figure 11 A family sarcophagus showing series of miracles of Jesus with a wand, for men, women and children.
Photo by John W. Welch.*



Figure 12 A gold-leafed glass plate of Jesus changing water into wine with a wand. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 13 A clear glass plate with etching of Jesus raising Lazarus. Photo by John W. Welch.

Thus, one may wonder why the factor of fearful magic has not been emphasized previously in scholarly or religious literature about the trial of Jesus. I would suggest at least three main reasons:

First, few secular scholars want to allow that the miracles of Jesus really happened. And if they did not happen, of course, they could not have been a factor in the historical trials of Jesus before the Sanhedrin and Pilate. But if those miracles *did* happen, it is hard to see how they could not have been a dominant factor in the case of the Chief Priests against Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, faithful Christians today, of course, generally do not want to associate the innocent Jesus with any suggestion that he was a trickster. But the New Testament itself invites readers to recognize the difference between good miracles and bad magic. The difference is definable by results. Jesus himself said, "By their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20), and convincingly asked, "Can Satan drive out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:23–24). Thus, Christians should celebrate, not shy away from the miracles of Jesus.

Third, critical scholars in the twentieth century gave more historical weight to the accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke than to those in John. But in light of the fact that all three of the synoptic gospels report that Pilate asked, "What *kakon* (evil) has he done?" (Matt 27:23; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:22), the formulation by the Chief Priests of the legal cause of action against Jesus in John 18:30 becomes all the more significant. The charge that Jesus was a *kakopoios* (a *malificus*, magician, or wonderworker) raises a connecting ground, not only between all four New Testament Gospels, but also between the Jewish leaders and their Roman procurator.

Of course, it would help if the world accepted the Book of Mormon, which long ago revealed that even after all his mighty miracles "they shall consider him a man, *and say that he hath a devil*, and shall scourge him, *and shall crucify him*" (Mosiah 3:9). It seems to me, as the Book of Mormon makes quite clear, that it was his miracles that lead to Jesus's scourging and crucifixion. His mighty miracles forced the issue, then as now, requiring people to ask, By what power did Jesus do these things? If by the power of God, then he should be believed, accepted and followed; but if by the power of Beelzebub, then he should be feared, discounted and eliminated.

Jesus certainly came with power. He was the creator of the world. He was good enough, wise enough, and powerful enough to bring to pass the salvation, immortality, and eternal life of all mankind. If he could raise Lazarus from the dead, he could control many other life and death situations, in this world and in the world to come. His powers were also sufficiently in control of all that needed to happen as he came into this world and as he went out of it (see John 10:18). He came to win the cosmic battle against death and hell, to engage the powers of evil, to drive out devils from paralytics and demoniacs, to heal the sick, to overwhelm despair with hope, to raise the dead, and to cast Satan eternally out. This makes one wonder: How, indeed, could he do all of this and *not in some opposing minds* find himself seriously accused of dealing with and in the realms of the preternatural?

Further Reading

John W. Welch, "Miracles, *Maleficium*, and *Maiestas* in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 349–383.

John W. Welch, "The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), 284–312

John W. Welch, "The Legal Cause of Action against Jesus in John 18:29-30," in *Celebrating Easter*, ed. Thomas A. Wayment and Keith J. Wilson (Provo, UT: BYU, Religious Studies Center, 2007), 157–176.

Day 4: Why Jesus Was Put to Death?



Figure 14 *Behold the Man!* by Mihály Munkácsy, 1896.

For reflection especially on the day remembered among Christians as “Maundy Thursday,” the day of the Last Supper and when Jesus was arrested, I invite you to consider some of the perspectives that Latter-day Saint insights add to our understanding of the complex question: Why was Jesus killed?

The Need for Humility

Latter-day Saints in particular, but all people as well, know the importance of approaching the subject of the trials and death of Jesus with humility and cautiousness. It will long remain impossible to give a definitive description of all that happened on these final days and in what is called the trial of Jesus. Too little is known today about what was said and done. The laws and procedures that normally should have been followed in Jerusalem at that time remain in many ways obscure. Moreover, Jesus’s case was hardly normal in any legal, political, or spiritual sense. And too little is known about all that happened or did not happen so long ago in order for any modern person to speak with any degree of particularity and certainty about all questions surrounding this case.

As Elder Bruce R. McConkie has wisely said, “There is no divine ipse dixit, no voice from an archangel, and as yet no revealed latter-day account of all that transpired when God’s own Son suffered himself to be judged by men so that he could voluntarily give up his life upon the cross” (Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah* [Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1981], 4:142). All who approach this subject and ponder the heart-wrenching

twists and turns in the unfolding of the events leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus should take care to be humble, less dogmatic and certainly less judgmental, concerning this vast subject than people tend to be, both intellectually and spiritually.

Accepting Perplexities

Latter-day Saints can also appreciate the fact that many things make it hard to be definitive about why things happened the way they did in the so-called trial of Jesus. Many things contribute to our perplexities. For example, we would like to know more about the legal rules that were normally followed by the Sanhedrin in Jesus' day. While much is known about Rabbinic law from the Talmud, the Talmud was written later, from the second to the fifth centuries, by the Pharisees or their successors, and so the Talmud presumably reflects the rules preferred by the late Pharisaic movement. Moreover, the Pharisees were not in control of the Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus. The Sadducees were decidedly in the majority in that body of seventy-one voting members. While we know that the Sadducees and Pharisees differed on a number of points of law, little is known about what the Sadducees believed on many issues, since they and their writings did not survive the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

We also wonder: Did or did not the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem have the authority to execute anyone at the time of Jesus? All that we are told is that the Chief Priests said to Pilate, "To us is *not* allowed to kill *no one*," as the Greek in John 18:31 somewhat ambiguously reads. But it is not known why they lacked such authorization, or why they would say this to Pilate in this way. Several possibilities come to mind. Perhaps they said this to show deference to Pilate's ultimate political power and authority. Maybe the Sadducees had reached an understanding with their Roman overlords that they would not take any action—even though it was within their traditional right to do so—without first consulting with Pilate. And perhaps their deference toward Pilate helped them get his ratification for their intended action, even if he did not take over the case entirely, particularly according to John.

And, in any event, it would appear that Jewish people under Roman governance did have some power—or at least took the power on some occasions—to punish and even execute people, as we see in Herod Antipas's beheading of John the Baptist, or in the attempt to stone Jesus in Nazareth on a local charge of blasphemy in Luke 4, or in the case where people were testing Jesus on the impending stoning of the woman taken in adultery in John 8, or in the execution of Stephen by the Sanhedrin in Acts 7. None of these cases involved Roman authorities. Thus, it is hard to speak with any degree of certitude about the technicalities, especially any alleged illegalities, in the proceedings involving Jesus.

Latter-day Saints can also appreciate the perplexities that arise in earth-shaking moments. Although the reasons behind the death of Jesus and causes of the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum Smith were very different, they can be compared. Latter-day Saints can well imagine the turmoil, angst, haste, and commotion surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus, because they relate to the abruptness and confusion involved in the week when Joseph Smith was killed. Unusual situations and cases such as these do not lend themselves to simple explanations.

Parenthetically, some Protestants in the late nineteenth century so exaggerated the alleged illegalities in the execution of Jesus that, instead of increasing sympathy for Jesus or provoking outrage over the way He was treated, that approach actually backfired. Many people in the early twentieth century concluded that if the trial of Jesus was such a fiasco or travesty of justice then maybe it simply had to be a myth and was not historical at all.

Much confusion arises in cases such as this from the array of different accounts that begin circulating about these high-profile and high-stakes cases. Even within the four New Testament Gospels, as we have seen, there are significant differences in what they chose to report. John's account is very different from the accounts in the synoptic Gospels, and even between the three Synoptics significant legal differences exist. Harmonizing these four Gospel accounts is possible, but in the process one should not ignore their different purposes. Those considerable differences are conveniently displayed in two charts (See Figures 15, 16), first comparing the purposes of each of the Gospels in general, and the second then enumerates distinctive elements in each of their approaches to the trial of Jesus in particular.

Latter-day Saints are usually not troubled by the technical differences between these four New Testament accounts, but some people are. Some Jewish writers, especially, have taken great interest in how these texts are to be interpreted, because the trial of Jesus has been a major cause of antisemitism over the ages. In response to the antisemitism which fueled the Holocaust, Jewish scholars especially in the 1950s and 1960s passionately argued that the Jews had nothing to do with the crucifixion of Jesus and therefore that the Romans must have been completely responsible.

But, in contrast, we as Latter-day Saints find less drastic ways to accept various versions of important scriptural narratives that do not always agree with each other. Not only do we live with, but we are enhanced by, four differing accounts of the Creation (Genesis 1, Genesis 2, Moses 3–5, Abraham 4–5, and the temple endowment), three distinct versions of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7, 3 Nephi 12–14, and JST Matthew 5–7), as well as the several accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision.

Purposes and Approaches of the Four Gospels

MATTHEW

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the King of Israel, who will restore Israel, the children of Abraham, and royal tribe of Judah

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born King of the Jews
2. Baby Jesus is visited by Magi from the East
3. Jesus is presented as a new Moses, a new lawgiver
4. Jesus sends twelve disciples to the lost of Israel
5. Jesus fulfills many Old Testament prophecies

LUKE

Purpose

To show that Jesus is the Savior of all mankind, bringing salvation on earth to the sons and daughters of Adam through his redemption

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is born in humble circumstances
2. Baby Jesus is visited by shepherds from the hills
3. Jesus is presented as wise child prodigy
4. Jesus sends seventy disciples to the nations
5. Jesus gives many universal, conciliatory parables

MARK

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God here and now on earth, coming in a prophetic mode with divine powers over spirits and forgiveness of sin

Manifestations of this approach

1. No account of the birth is given
2. Jesus is visited by the Spirit of God descending like a dove
3. Jesus is told, "Thou art my beloved Son" (1:11)
4. Jesus' disciples are very slow to understand
5. Jesus performs many powerful miracles

JOHN

Purpose

To show that Jesus is God forever on earth and in heaven, the great I Am, the image of the Father and his eternal love

Manifestations of this approach

1. Jesus is the Creator of the world
2. John the Baptist knew the Lamb before his baptism
3. Jesus is presented as the light and life eternal
4. Many disciples walk no more with Jesus
5. Jesus is in control of all from beginning to end

Features in the Four Approaches

MATTHEW: Israelite Features	MARK: Power Features	LUKE: Populist Features	JOHN: Eternal Features
Twelve legions of angels (compare the twelve tribes of Israel)	When the ear is cut off and healed, no words, just actions	Concern about lowly servant, healing his ear	Foreknowledge of the actions of Judas
Jesus is taken directly to high priest, adjudicator of Jewish law	They arrest Jesus under heavy guard	The arresters blaspheme Jesus (the popular world rejects Jesus)	Concern over impurity in Praetorium
False witnesses testify (compare witnesses against Naboth)	False witnesses are powerless	No actual accusation until before Pilate (making it a public affair)	Concern over who has power to deliver
Jesus shows respect for the Jewish Temple with power over it	Jesus said, "I will destroy this temple"	Allegations involve ordinary public offenses: he stirs up the people	God as king? "We have no king but Caesar"
Focus on blasphemy, violation of Jewish law	Jesus responds powerfully, "I am"	Herod's soldiers play games	"My kingdom is not of this world"
Israelites willing to take responsibility: "His blood be upon us"	Those with power move against Jesus, all condemning Jesus	Women are mentioned; Jesus prophesies to them	"For this cause came I into the world"
When the earth shook, dead Israelites arose	Guards beat Jesus	Jesus asks the Father to forgive those who crucified him	Casting of lots, thirsting, side pierced; all fulfilled prophecy
	Crowd is very demanding, threatening riot	The robber on the cross invited into paradise	Jesus said, "It is finished"
	Roman soldiers mock Jesus' power	The crowd beats their breasts	
	Joseph of Arimathea, a powerful member of the Sanhedrin, mentioned		

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Chart 10-1

Figure 16 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Features in the Four Approaches." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 10-1.

The Perils of Judging Intentions

A problem in many interpersonal relationships is determining another person's intent. Why did any people involved with the death of Jesus do what they did? What did they intend? *What* were their motives?

Even today, the greatest challenge in modern courts of law is trying to prove a person's intent. Scholarly prudence and Christian charity behoove us to withhold casting aspersions. As Jesus asks of us: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Having been misunderstood often enough, Latter-day Saints, of all people, should follow a cautious, sensitive approach as we attempt to ferret out the motives of Caiaphas, the Chief Priests, Judas, Herod Antipas, or Pontius Pilate.

Indeed, one may scan the four New Testament Gospels and find precious few explicit indications of what actually motivated any of these people. We may guess, of course, but our guesses are speculations. We may attribute to these people a wide range of political, commercial, social, personal, religious, or legalistic motives; but in most cases the motives that seem the most plausible to us stem, to a large extent, from our own predilections and presentisms.

Thus, for example, some scholars of the 1970s were quite confident that Jesus was executed as some kind of supposed guerrilla warrior, while post-Holocaust Jewish scholars of the 1950s argued that Caiaphas and his temple guards actually took Jesus kindly intending to offer him protective custody and to warn him about the Romans who were out to get him. Such theories and many others like these are mostly in tune with the needs and angsts of the people who propound them.

Latter-day Saints are not immune from such inclinations to ascribe motives. According to Ernest L. Wilkinson in 1966, the cause of the atrocious death of Jesus was none other than the concentration of "legislative, executive and judicial powers ... in one unit, ...in the Great Sanhedrin," in which Wilkinson expressly saw the ominous specter of Communism in the midst of the Cold War and the tensions over the Berlin Wall.

More commonly, Latter-day Saints assert that Israel's judges were motivated by hate. In 1915 the work of James E. Talmage portrayed the Sanhedrists as being galvanized against Jesus by "malignant," "inherent and undying hatred" (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 627, 637). At that time, the Latter-day Saints themselves were battle-weary from repeated attacks and challenges over the previous 80 years, and so that strong language is understandable. But the word hate is actually not found in any of the New Testament narratives of the trial of Jesus per se.

Specifically regarding the motives of those few, particular Jews, Matthew and Mark only say that Pilate could tell “that the chief priests had delivered [Jesus to him] out of envy” (Mark 15:10). But even that is hearsay. And how did anyone know what Pilate was really thinking? In any event, the word envy is not particularly antagonistic. It connotes jealous resentment of someone else’s wisdom or good fortune, but it would usually take more than this common human emotion to amount to a case of lethal hatred.

Some people see Pilate as a weak, incompetent, middle-management functionary who had recently lost his power base in Rome, who was easily intimidated, and who was manipulated by his wife. But this same Pilate, who usually resided in Caesarea (See Figures 17, 18, 19) and may have been cautious in handling Jesus in Jerusalem, still held in his hands the highest legal power of Rome in the area.



Figure 17 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 18 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 19 Caesarea Maritima, the usual residence of Pilate. Photo by John W. Welch.

Pilate had not hesitated on other occasions to assert himself, even with military force, against even minor provocations. Having tried in several ways to get the Chief Priests to drop their complaint against Jesus, Pilate saw that nothing was working and “that rather a tumult was made” (Matt. 27:24). Physical violence—a riot—was erupting. When he tried to placate the crowd by giving them Barabbas as a “secure pledge,” Pilate may have acted out of desperation, fear for his own safety, or equally out of hope that the crowd would disperse and leave Jesus and others alone. In fact, in the Joseph Smith Translation, Pilate tells the Jews to leave Jesus alone: “See that ye do nothing unto him” (Matt. 27:20 JST). For additional clarifications of the intentions of Pilate and others in the arrest of Jesus, in his exchange with Pilate, and in events on Calvary, the following chart (See Figure 20) displays ten further additions provided by the Joseph Smith Translation.

Speaking of public antipathy and the lack of tolerance generally, Latter-day Saints readily note that the Gospel of John goes so far as to make it clear that the world (not just Pilate or the Chief Priests) would misunderstand, reject, and *hate* Jesus, just like the world would also hate all of his true disciples. Jesus said: “But me [the world] hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil” (John 7:7); “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18), for “I am not of the world” (John 17:14). In the cosmic conflict presented in the Gospel of John, this worldly hate of truth is the theological opposite of divine love. That antipathy broadly provides a legal motive for killing Jesus, but these statements more readily apply to all people, both then and now, who reject Jesus and his Gospel in any way, physically as well as spiritually.

Unique Information or Features in the JST

1. Jesus healed the servant's ear by touching it *with his finger* (Compare Mk 14:47; 14:53 JST).
2. The disciples fled *because they heard this saying* (Mk 14:50; 14:56 JST).
3. The young man who fled was a *disciple* (Mk 14:51; 14:57 JST).
4. The young man who fled *saved himself from the arresters* (Mk 14:52; 14:57 JST).
5. Jesus answered Pilate, "*Thou sayest truly; for thus it is written of me*" (Mt 27:11; 27:12 JST).
6. Jesus answered Pilate, "*I am, even as thou sayest*" (Mk 15:2; 15:4 JST).
7. Pilate's wife had a *vision* (Mt 27:19; 27:20 JST).
8. Pilate told the Jews, "*See that ye do nothing unto him*" (Mt 27:24; 27:26 JST).
9. Golgotha means "*place of burial*" (Mt 27:33; 27:35 JST; Mk 15:22; 15:25 JST; Jn 19:17; 19:17 JST).
10. In his words from the cross, Jesus expressly forgave only *the soldiers* who crucified him (Lk 23:34; 23:35 JST).
11. Pilate *himself* wrote the title, "*King of the Jews*" (Mt 27:37; 27:39 JST; Mk 15:26; 15:29 JST).

The question, Of what crime was Jesus accused?, also has no simple answer. As mentioned in the previous discussion of *kakopoios*, many other accusations were also heaped upon Jesus. Each accusation would have been made for a different purpose and with a distinct intent and desired outcome. The charges against Jesus included blasphemy, sedition, encouraging tax protesters, and declaring himself a king, but none of these really stuck or would carry the day. And in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked his arresters why they came after him as if he were a robber. Such outlaws were given no legal rights, let alone a warning or any statement of the charges being brought against them. Even Pilate had to ask, “What is it these men accuse you of?” No one ever gave a straight answer. The Gospels in the end simply say that he was accused of “many things” (Matthew 27:13; Mark 15:3–4; emphasis added).

All this leaves the matter of intent intentionally vague. This should also remind us that precise, modern pleading practices were not followed in ancient courts and that precise assignments of intent in Jesus’ case are perilous.

Just about everything in the situation surrounding the death of Jesus was complicated. It is no wonder that uncertainty was a common reaction of the people to Jesus. Indeed, in reaction to Jesus’ speech in Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, John says, “There was a division among the people because of him” (John 7:43). “Some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people. Howbeit no man spake openly of him for fear of the Jews” (John 7:12–13).

A Theater of Fear

This last point in John 7:13, about even the populace being afraid, brings up again further reflection on the pervasive sense of fear on the part of lots of people relating to Jesus. When people get confused, they often become afraid. When they become afraid, they act irrationally. Although the factor of fear is rarely mentioned by New Testament commentators, fear provides the driving emotion that best explains the irregularities, the vagaries, and the urgencies of the trials of Jesus. In understanding the intentions of these actors, fear played a much larger role than people have stopped to realize. And sooner or later, just about everyone in this Easter Week picture is afraid.

People who were sympathetic to Jesus were afraid of the Jewish leaders. The Disciples fled from the scene of the arrest out of great fear. Even the powerful Joseph of Arimathea kept his loyalty to Jesus secret “for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38).

The Chief Priests also were deeply afraid. They worried that if Jesus became too popular, the Romans would come and take away “our place [the holy city, the Temple, or the land] and nation” (John 11:48). But more than fearing Pilate, they feared Jesus. Mark 11:18

clearly states that after Jesus denounced the Temple as a den of robbers, they “sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him.”

Their scheme to destroy him, however, seems to have gone quickly awry. After he was arrested, Jesus was treated like a hot potato, being passed quickly from one hand to another—hands “of *frightened* subordinates whose plans had gone astray,” as Dallin H. Oaks, then a law professor, wrote in 1969—with no one wanting to take the rap for either his death or his release.

They were not the only ones who were frightened of Jesus. When Pilate heard the words “he has made himself the son of God,” his reaction was fear. John states that Pilate “was the more afraid” (John 19:8). Even Herod Antipas was said to fear the crowd.

Moreover, Golgotha, that scene of gruesome death, became a theater of fear. The centurion and those with him, when they felt the earth quake, “feared exceedingly” about what they had done. Anxiety and phobias are everywhere in this story—far more than people usually think.

And it bears recalling, Latter-day Saints can relate. They are not unacquainted with fear, either historically or in today’s highly charged atmosphere. The book of Doctrine & Covenants speaks often of the realities of fearful situations (D&C 1:7; 63:6), saying that fear will seize upon the wicked (45:74; 63:16). The Lord admonishes people to fear and revere only him, and that because of fear, blessings will be lost (67:3), especially when one fears public pressures or what society might do (60:2). Knowing absolutely the reality and the magnitude of what was at stake with the trial and death of Jesus, Latter-day Saints can appreciate poignantly the level of fear that surrounded all that happened as the crucifixion of Jesus drew close and then to a close.

A Fear of Power

Although the followers of Jesus accepted his miracles as manifestations of divine power, those who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God found His wondrous works fundamentally disturbing. Indeed, a common reaction to *all* of the miracles of Jesus was fear, for if Jesus worked not by the power of God, he must have been possessed by “Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils” (Mark 3:22).

In Matthew 9 we read that Jesus healed a man who had been paralyzed by some kind of stroke. The King James Version of the Bible says that when the people saw this “they marveled.” But the original Greek says that “they were afraid” (Matt. 9:8). When the multitude saw Jesus raise the son of the widow in Nain and heard the young man speak, their reaction again was sheer terror: “And there came a fear on all,” as Luke 7:16 reads.

Fear of the extraordinary powers of Jesus, which nonbelievers saw as coming from the realm of the occult, explains much of what transpired in his trials.

But even the faithful are struck with awe when they find themselves in the personal presence of a divine being. And indeed, personal manifestations of miracles or the glorious appearance of supernatural beings would probably evoke fear in most of us. Joseph Smith's first reaction, as he felt the power of darkness nearly overwhelming him and then saw the burning pillar of fiery light descend upon him in his First Vision, was fear.

Likewise, the first words of an angel to Zacharias were "Fear not." Mary also was told by Gabriel, "Fear not" (Luke 1:30). As were the shepherds in the fields as well. Even the apostles ran from the angel at the tomb, trembling, "for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). When those disciples had assembled, the resurrected Lord's first words to them needed to be, "Be not afraid" (Matthew 28:10).

And then, imagine the anxieties involved in trying to arrest Jesus. The Chief Priests could not have undertaken this venture lightly and must have steeled themselves against the unexpected. Jesus was known to have amazing powers. In his law-giving, Jesus had presented himself as a new Moses, and the Chief Priests were well aware of what Moses had done to Pharaoh and his army. Some of the Chief Priests had been involved in the attempt to stone Jesus when he "hid himself . . . , going right through the midst of them," and escaped undetected (John 8:59). With Jesus known as something of an escape artist, people had their hands full planning to take him at night and at the height of his power. It is no wonder they needed to enlist the assistance of Judas, one of his closest followers.

Thus, they may well have wondered, if Jesus had the power to command loaves and fishes, to still the waves, to wither fig trees, and to order evil spirits, what powers might he use in defense of himself and his apostles? The raising of Lazarus—which had occurred just a short time earlier and in Bethany just on the other side of the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem—had brought Jesus' powers close to the Holy City. It was then that the Chief Priests and Pharisees gathered in a council and said, "What do we [do]? for this man doeth many miracles" (John 11:47). As discussed previously in these Reflections, that disclosure confirms the deep root of their concerns, that Jesus was a miracle worker. If his wonder workings were not miracles from God, the only other choice was that Jesus had to be some kind of trickster. Coupling these powers with what they considered to be his curse upon the Temple itself (Mark 14:58) yields a potent formula for trepidation and the need to strike quickly.

Even at his arrest, Jesus continued to call upon his miraculous powers. Jesus told Peter, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53); and when Peter cut off the ear of the high

priest's servant, Jesus "touched his ear, and healed him" (Luke 22:51). Anyone in the group of arresters hearing or seeing these things must have been stunned. Moving forward must not have been easy for them.

Supernatural factors continue to play a dominant role up to the end of Jesus' life. People witnessing his crucifixion wondered if Jesus could save himself; they waited to see if the miracle-working Elijah would rescue him from the cross. Although that did not happen, the rocks split apart, graves opened, and holy spirits came forth out of the ground after Jesus's death (Matthew 27:51–53).

Behind everything lurked a strong, albeit misplaced, undercurrent of fear of unseen powers. For Latter-day Saints, this reaction to the miracles of Jesus comes as no surprise. In a significant revelation found in the Book of Mormon, an angel announced to King Benjamin that Jesus Christ would go about "working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, [and] cast[ing] out . . . evil spirits" (Mosiah 3:5); but "even after all this they shall consider him a man, and say that he hath a devil, and shall scourge him, and shall crucify him" (Mosiah 3:9). From the Book of Mormon, one may well see his extraordinary power as the proximate or precipitating cause of the death of Jesus.

It was not so much that Jesus posed some kind of political threat, and it was not that some people disagreed with his doctrines, but rather that certain key people considered him to be of the devil. Latter-day Saints can relate. In 1879 an article appeared in the Latter-day Saints' *Millennial Star* comparing the death of Jesus to that of the Prophet Joseph Smith. In both cases, the "chief crime was that he obtained revelations from heaven." In both cases, divine power had been mistaken for some kind of unacceptable contacts with the supernatural.

Political Nervousness

The fear of power united the Pharisees, the Chief Priests, and Pilate. Otherwise political enemies, they were brought together by their mutual, political nervousness.

Indeed, the Pharisees were nervous to the bitter end that Jesus, whom they called a "deceiver" or a "trickster" (*planos*), would indeed rise after three days, as he had prophesied. They worried that this, his last "trick" (*planē*), would be worse than his first (Matt. 27:64). The word *planos*, in other early texts such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Sybilline Oracles, can indeed mean especially one who deceives through evil powers or spirits and thereby fools even the elect and powerful through nature miracles, including churning up the sea or raising the dead. Obviously, being a *planos* could raise serious political as well as religious concerns.

Expanding on the previous discussion of the word *kakopoios*, concerns about numinous powers could easily become a matter of public concern. While certain forms of divining

were not necessarily problematical under Jewish or Roman law—for example, people such as Simon the Magician (see Acts 8:9) and Theudas, another wonder worker (see Acts 5:36), seem to have walked the streets freely—when incantations, spells, or curses were used for improper purposes, political leaders become nervous, and the users of such powers could be severely punished (see, for example, the case of the sorcerer, Bar-Jesus, before the Roman governor Sergius Paulus in Cyprus, in Acts 13:6-11).

These extraordinary powers could destabilize the ruling order. Such behavior could be punished by death under Jewish law (see Lev. 20:27). Deuteronomy 13:1 made it an offense worthy of death to use signs or miracles to pervert or lead people into apostasy, as Caiaphas in John 11 had already determined. Roman law also outlawed certain forms of spell-casting or divination and made them punishable by death. In A.D. 11, Augustus Caesar himself issued an edict forbidding people from prophesying about a person's death. Such conduct had apparently become a serious political and social problem in the Roman world. The main thrust of Augustus's decree was to expand the law of *maiestas* (treason), which had long punished people who harmed the state by actions. Now it was made to include treasonous divination, especially augury directed against the imperial family. This "empire-wide imperial legislation circumscribed astrological and other divinatory activities everywhere," and we know of about one hundred trials for *maiestas* coming from the time of Tiberius alone.

This is not to say that Jesus was crucified for predicting the death of Tiberius Caesar or anyone else, but it may give another reason why the Chief Priests thought they could get Pilate to take action against Jesus. If Jesus—who had been born under an unusual star and visited as an infant by magi (astrologers or sign-readers) from the east—spoke evil predictions against the Temple and against the survival of the Jewish nation, and even prophesied about his own death, perhaps his next target would be to cast spells on Caesar. If that were to happen, letting Jesus go would certainly make Pilate no friend of Caesar. As their final argument, the Chief Priests asserted that anyone who made himself a king necessarily "speaketh against Caesar" (John 19:12). All this looks like an effort to make allegations of *maiestas* or high treason.

And it is ironically painful that the main charge on which the Prophet Joseph Smith was held in Liberty Jail in the winter of 1838–1839 and in the Carthage Jail on June 27, 1844, was also a trumped up charge of treason.

Later Roman law would even specify that the punishment for enchanters or spellbinders was crucifixion. That was the same punishment given to bandits, brigands, traitors, rebellious slaves, and others whose deviance threatened the government's power and the *Pax Romana*. This underlying concern disrupting the public order would especially

explain the puzzles of crucifixion and the lack of legal formalities in the trials of Jesus after his arrest.

And since the publication of the Temple Scroll from the Dead Sea in the 1970s, scholars now acknowledge that hanging on a tree (or crucifixion) could serve not only as a Roman mode of execution but as a Jewish remedy as well. In a notorious case a century before the time of Jesus, 80 witches were hung (or crucified) in Ashkelon without proper trials, because the Jewish court saw the matter as a state emergency.

Ultimately, of course, Pilate found no legal cause of action here, because Jesus claimed that his kingdom had nothing to do with Caesar's world, and Pilate was satisfied that the man from Nazareth had not broken any Roman law. But Pilate was still worried enough by the unsettling threats of widespread riot or tumult that he was willing to take some action to try to control the situation and to go along with Jesus's accusers.

To be concluded . . .

Further Reading

An earlier version of these reflections was published as John W. Welch, "Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus," *Clark Memorandum* (Fall 2000): 2–13.

Day 5: Ultimately Who Killed Jesus?

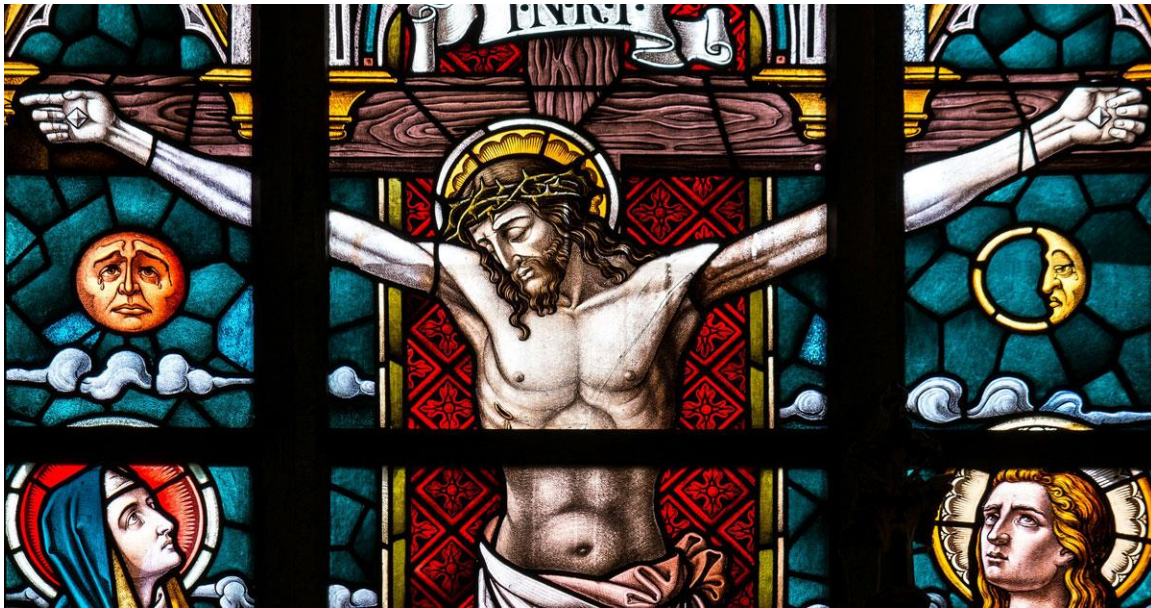


Figure 21 Image by Thomas B. via Pixabay.

The Power of Apostolic Eyewitness Testimony

We now turn to the often-asked question: Who killed Jesus? The answer is not simple, and we can now better appreciate that lots of people were involved in all of this, each in their various way.

To answer this question, we must reflect again on which of the four Gospels one should favor, for on this point in particular the different Gospels emphasize different answers to this question.

In giving weight to statements of all kinds, Latter-day Saints generally favor the words of the highest priesthood authority. In this case, that New Testament person would be the apostle John. Along with Peter and James, John the Beloved was one of the three highest ranking apostles. Matthew was one of the Twelve, but Mark and Luke were not.

Moreover, people most often find great credibility in the testimonies of eyewitnesses. It is not clear how Mark and Luke learned the details that they reported. Luke was clearly not present for any of the proceedings surrounding Jesus' trial and death. It is true that Mark may have learned some things from Peter, but after the arrest of Jesus, Peter "followed [Jesus, being only] afar off" (Matt. 26:58); Peter stayed outside the door of Caiaphas' palace, hoping and needing to remain unrecognized. The apostle Matthew would have been close to many of these events, but he never says so.

The apostle John, on the other hand, was personally present for the duration of these developments. John appears to have been the disciple who "went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest" (John 18:15), right after the arrest in Gethsemane. And then in the Praetorium, John evidently heard the exchange between Jesus and Pilate, which John reports. John was also there at Golgotha when Jesus entrusted his mother Mary into his care (John 19:26–27). Of the spear thrust, John testified: "And he that saw it bare record [gives solemn testimony], and his [testimony] is true" (John 19:35). In this affirmation, John distinctively speaks of himself as the one who saw, claiming for himself special status. Latter-day Saints, therefore, take John's witness seriously.

This is especially so because with John's report of the trial of Jesus is supported and reinforced by the Book of Mormon. A key element in Latter-day Saint doctrine is the knowledge that the sacrifice of the Savior was promised and foreordained from before the foundation of this earth, as is taught in the words of Lehi, Benjamin, Abinadi, and Alma. Likewise, for the apostle John, the death of Jesus was a foregone conclusion from the beginning. It had to happen. It was supposed to happen. "For this cause came I into the world" (John 18:37).



Figure 22 Steps going from the High Priest Caiaphas' residence to the old city in Jerusalem. Photo by John W. Welch.

John particularly wants his readers to understand that Jesus was not killed because of some offense against the Temple or its economy, as many people conclude (especially by giving preference to Mark). But here John is particularly interesting. Unlike Matthew and Mark, the apostle John does not have Jesus ever say either that he is able to or that he actually will destroy the Temple. Rather, John 2:19 reads, “[If you] destroy this temple, . . . in three days I will raise it up.”

People have also long puzzled over the distance that John puts between the cleansing of the Temple and the death of Jesus. For John, the cleansing occurs at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry (see John 2:13–17), not the day after his Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem. Why does John place it there? One reason is to introduce from the beginning Jesus' prophecy of his death and bodily resurrection. Another is to show Jesus working at an already cleansed temple, where he went often throughout his ministry.

Even in discussing the Synoptic accounts, it is something of a misnomer to speak of “the trial” of Jesus. There was a hearing of some kind, and perhaps an inquiry or attempted deposition, and then the voicing of an opinion of how things “appeared” (as the Greek

reads in Matthew 26:66 and Mark 14:64). But it is hard to see any formal trial and verdict occurring in the early hours of that morning. Something different and much bigger was going on here.

Latter-day Saints understand that Jesus, the Holy One, was innocent of any crime. Indeed, in John's good news, Jesus was not convicted of anything by Pilate. In John, rather than actually convicting Jesus after his arrest, the Chief Priests simply move ahead on the strength of the prior decision of the Sanhedrin in John 11:50 that Jesus should be put to death, on the ground that it would be better for one man to perish than for the entire nation to be destroyed.



Figure 23 Potential site of the tomb of Lazarus in Bethany.
Photo by John W. Welch.

Latter-day Saints agree with John that an innocent Jesus died for the whole world, for all mankind, and that the whole sinful world, therefore, in a significant sense brought about the need for the death of Jesus. To drive this point home, in John's account Jesus was arrested, not by just a group of men with torches, as the synoptic Gospels report, but by a cohort of soldiers, Pharisees, and servants of the Chief Priests (see John 18:3), as well as a commander or chiliarchos (see John 18:12), who may be a Roman officer. In other words, the whole world was symbolically there.

This seems particularly consonant with another important revelation found in the Book of Mormon. Nephi prophesied: "And the world, because of their iniquity, shall judge him to be a thing of naught; wherefore they scourge him, [smite him

and spit upon him] and he suffereth it, ... because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards [all] the children of men" (1 Nephi 19:9).

Responsibility of the Chief Priests

If one needs to find the precipitating culprit in all of this, the prime and persistent movers in the final actions against Jesus were probably only the members of the relatively small group of Chief Priests under the control of the High Priest Caiaphas. They were the most powerful and best known officials of Jerusalem. An interesting pattern emerges by

carefully examining every reference to these Chief Priests, as found in the chart that was introduced in the discussion on Day 1 above.

In particular, it was the Chief Priests and Scribes whom Herod asked about the birthplace of the Messiah. When Jesus prophesied about his death in Matthew 16:21, he mentioned only the Chief Priests, Elders, and Scribes as being involved. It was the Chief Priests and Elders who in the Temple questioned Jesus about his authority. The Chief Priests alone sought Jesus's death after the raising of Lazarus. Judas betrayed Jesus to the Chief Priests. The Chief Priests alone demanded Jesus's death before Pilate in Mark 15:3; and in the end, it was the Chief Priests who wanted the placard on the cross to read, "He said, I am King of the Jews" (John 19:21).



Figure 24 Bas Relief sculpture in the Church of All Nations near Gethsemane. Photo by John W. Welch.

Fourteen times in the Gospels and four times in Acts, the Chief Priests act alone against Jesus or against his disciples. Eighteen other times, they act together with the Elders, rulers, captains, or the Sanhedrin. Twenty-one times they are associated with the Scribes. Clearly the Chief Priests and these associates of theirs are the main driving force behind the arrest and execution of Jesus. The Pharisees often debated Jesus and were verbally

denounced by him, but they are mentioned much less often, and they lacked the political muscle of the Sadducean Chief Priests, whose party had a solid majority in the Sanhedrin. It is not hard to see this small group of Chief Priests as the one consistent force that agitated and militated against Jesus and his disciples. Their crowd was not large. Certainly the crowd outside Pilate's administrative office in Jerusalem did not include all the Jews.



Figure 25 View of an olive grove. Photo by John W. Welch.

This subtle but important point is consistent with a significant passage in the Book of Mormon. In 2 Nephi 10:5 it clearly says that it would be “because of priestcrafts [in other words, because of a group of priests interested in trafficking in religion and politics for power and money] and [because of] iniquities, [that] they at Jerusalem will stiffen their necks against him, that he be crucified.” The Book of Mormon clearly does not implicate or condemn all Jews.

In this regard, we should also remember the testimony of Paul. As a student of Gamaliel, Paul would have been well informed about legal events in Jerusalem, and he adds an important corroboration to this Book of Mormon position. The words in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15 speak of Jews who killed Jesus. The punctuation in this verse is crucial. Should it

read “the Jews who killed Jesus,” with no comma between “Jews” and “who” (thus meaning “the particular Jews who killed Jesus”), or should it read “the Jews [comma] who killed Jesus” (thus grammatically saying that “the Jews [all of them] killed Jesus”)? This comma question involves the most famous punctuation mark in the world; when a comma is inserted here, it is known as the “antisemitic comma,” because it operates grammatically to blame all Jews. But based on the Greek construction of this sentence, no punctuation mark should be there, and thus Paul spoke here only of “those particular Jews who killed Jesus.”

Indeed, many Jews accepted Jesus. Peter was a Jew. Mary was a Jew. John was a Jew. Most of Jesus’s early disciples were Jews. Those in the crowds on Palm Sunday were no doubt all Jews. The number of those who rejected Jesus was far fewer. On this point, Pope Benedict XVI has similarly said, “In John’s Gospel this word [the Jews] has a precise and clearly defined meaning: [John] is referring to the Temple aristocracy.”¹⁵



Figure 26 Hell bone of a crucified man from the first century A.D. in the Israel Museum. Photo by John W. Welch.

Still, No One to “Blame”

Finally, especially for John, Jesus was in full control from the very beginning to the very end. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus spoke of his death even to prominent Jewish leaders and others outside his circle of disciples. Speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus said,

¹⁵ Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth Part Two: Holy Week* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 185.

“Even so must the Son of man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Consistently throughout his writing, John reports the death of Jesus with Jesus knowing exactly what was required to carry out the plan. When his hour had come, Jesus knew and “bowed his head, and handed over his spirit” (according to the Greek in John 19:30). I find it significant that this same word is used three times in the story: when Judas betrayed or handed Jesus over to his arresters; when the Jews handed Jesus over to Pilate; and when Jesus handed over his spirit to God. For John, we must never forget that it is God who is voluntarily, purposefully, and knowingly dying as planned.

With this as background, and knowing that much more work still remains to be done, we can now cautiously offer an answer to the question, Who was responsible for the death of Jesus? For John and for Latter-day Saints it would appear that, in reality, the whole world killed Jesus. As Nephi also prophesied, the whole “world” would kill their God (1 Nephi 19:9). And if it is so that everyone was effectively responsible, then, in an important sense, no one was responsible or to blame. And, even if someone specific were to blame, that would seem quite irrelevant for John, the apostle of love.

Of course, iniquity played its part. But, ironically, the Greeks, for whom the gods could be found just about anywhere, were quite accepting of miracle workers as well as the idea that some mortals might have existed who were partially of divine parentage.

The Jewish legal system, however—with its prohibitions against idolatry and polytheism—effectively made the Jews (as the Book of Mormon says) the only ancient culture on earth that could have worried enough about miraculous conduct to have reacted with such categorical hostility and to have “stumbled” against the very presence of their God in their midst, as Jacob says (Jacob 4:15). In 2 Nephi 10:3–6, Jacob wrote that it was “expedient” —meaning pragmatically effective, “tending to promote some good end or desired purpose, expeditiously, quickly, and profitably” —that Jesus “should come among the Jews,” for “thus it behooveth [or was fittingly necessary for] our God.”

Jacob identified that Old World location as “the more wicked part of the world,” with “more wicked” being a comparative between two places. From Jacob’s point of view, the question was whether Jesus should come to the Old World Lehi had left or to the New Land of Promise. His answer was, to the Old, for its inhabitants would be more wicked than Lehi’s posterity. He further explains, “And there is none other *nation* on earth that would crucify their God.” I would hasten to emphasize that Jacob’s statement views this conduct in collective terms. It does not infer that all individuals in that body necessarily agreed with their national leaders on this action. Thus, it should also be noted that Jacob’s broad condemnation of the Jews of Jesus’s day should not be seen as an endorsement of

antisemitism. Indeed, the Book of Mormon explicitly prohibits the persecution of the Jews (see 3 Nephi 29:8; cf. 2 Nephi 29:4–5).

Continuing on, Jacob concludes, “For should the mighty miracles be wrought among other nations they would repent, and know that he be their God” (2 Nephi 10:4). Indeed, accepting Jesus might have been easier for people in other cultures that were more accepting of miracles and divinely embodied beings, but then the promises made to that nation, as well as the need for the death of the Redeemer who alone could descend below all things, including death, and then rise to be eternally in and through all things, would go unfulfilled, unrealized, and frustrated.

Ultimately there may well have been grievous miscarriages of justice in the treatment of Jesus, but Latter-day Saints have many reasons not to think of the death of Jesus primarily in that pathetic way. Neither the apostle John nor Lehi’s son Jacob wanted people to think of the death of Jesus that way. Latter-day Saints do not see Jesus as a victim but as the victor. His death was supposed to happen. It was not a mistake. It had to happen. It was agreed to happen.



Figure 27 View of a potential candidate for Golgotha. Photo by John W. Welch.



Figure 28 Photos by John W. Welch of the Garden Tomb, a possible site for the resurrection.

And perhaps for this very reason, God in his mercy does not come out and place blame on any single person or any particular group of people. Perhaps this is why the writers of the New Testament Gospels left things so ambiguous. They could have been much clearer

about why Jesus was killed and about who killed Jesus if they had wanted to be. But that was not their point. Even in the case of Judas, we do not know what really motivated him. Was he intending or hoping for a different outcome? Things certainly did not turn out the way he expected.

In the final analysis, most people involved had no idea what was really happening and what they were actually doing. Speaking seven weeks later to those very people in Jerusalem who had killed “the Prince of life,” Peter said: “I wot [I know] that *through ignorance* ye did it, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:15, 17, emphasis added).

Jesus forgave people as he hung on the cross, forgiving whom he willed and would. And of Latter-day Saints, the Lord requires that we, on our part, should “forgive all” people (D&C 64:10). Whereas God will judge, we are to “judge not” (Matthew 7:1; 3 Nephi 14:1). Placing blame is not part of this picture.

Masterfully understating all that had happened and all that He had suffered, all that Jesus humbly said as he spoke out of the darkness to the Nephites was this: “I came unto my own, and my own received me not” (3 Nephi 9:16).

Let us not forget that we also reject and crucify Jesus anew whenever we partake of the world and its dark judgmental ways.

By reflecting carefully, cautiously and clearly on the events and causes leading up to the death of Jesus, one may more surely agree, and believe, and know that he is indeed the Son of God, of whom the Book of Mormon and all the holy prophets have ever testified.

In his first general epistle, the apostle John concluded: “And we know that the Son of God is come,” for “we have heard, . . . we have seen with our eyes, . . . and our hands have handled,” “and he hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 1:1; 5:20).¹⁶ Indeed, many people, on at least 20 occasions, likewise have seen the resurrected Son of God and have so testified. The following, final chart conveniently details these witnesses, including their names (as far as are known), scripture references, date or time, place of appearance, a summary of what transpired, and other items of interest. Combining all these very personal appearances together with the times when the resurrected Lord appeared more publically to 500 brethren in the Old World (1 Cor. 15:6), to 2,500 men, women, and children in the Nephite city of Bountiful (3 Nephi 1:1, 15; 17:15),

¹⁶ An earlier version containing several of these final Latter-day Saint reflections was published in John W. Welch, “Latter-day Saint Reflections on the Trial and Death of Jesus,” *Clark Memorandum* (Fall 2000): 2–13.

and additionally in modern times to Joseph Smith and others in New York and Kirtland, Ohio, the Resurrection becomes one of the most witnessed miracles of all the supernal wonders performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

To this I add my personal testimony. I have been privileged to visit many of these sites. I have felt at those locations, and on many other occasions, the Holy Ghost warmly confirming to my heart and soul the truthfulness of the empty tomb and of the reality of the victorious ascension of Jesus Christ. I gladly add my personal witness that Jesus truly rose from the dead on that first Easter morning. All of that truly was, and still is, the amazing work of my true and living Savior, the Divine Redeemer, who graciously fulfilled the eternal will of His—and of our—Father who is in Heaven. I wish you a happy and fully gratifying Easter.





Figure 29 Pictures of the Christus statue by Thorvaldsen in Copenhagen, Denmark. Photo by John W. Welch.

Witnesses to the Resurrection

PERSONS VISITED	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	DATE OR TIME	PLACE OF APPEARANCE	WHAT TRANSPIRED	ITEMS OF INTEREST
Mary Magdalene	Jn 20:1–18	Resurrection, early morning	At the tomb of Jesus Christ	Mary talked with Jesus; she did not recognize him at first but was soon convinced it was him.	
Other women	Mt 28:1–10	Resurrection day, early morning	Somewhere between the tomb and Jerusalem	They held Jesus by the feet and worshiped him.	
Two disciples	Mk 16:12–13; Lk 4:13–32	Resurrection day, afternoon	On the road to Emmaus	They walked, talked, and ate with Jesus, not recognizing him until he broke bread. Their hearts burned within them.	The hymn "Abide with Me; 'Tis Eventide" (<i>Hymns</i> , no. 165) recalls this event.
Simon Peter	Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5	Sometime on the day of the resurrection	Not specified	Not specified	
Ten of the Twelve	Lk 24:36–53; Jn 20:19–24	Resurrection day, evening	A room with shut doors somewhere in Jerusalem	Jesus invited them to handle him so they would know that he had flesh and bone. He ate fish and honey before them.	Although Lk 24:33 refers to "the eleven," it seems certain that neither Judas nor Thomas was present.
Eleven of the Twelve	Jn 20:26–31; Mk 16:14	Eight days after the resurrection	Apparently the same room as above	Jesus showed Thomas his hands and his side; this was convincing evidence for Thomas.	
Seven of the Twelve	Jn 21:1–14	Morning, at a time subsequent to the episode with Thomas	On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee)	After the seven had fished all night and caught nothing, Jesus gave them directions from the shore; they caught a multitude of fish. They recognized him and went to shore. He ate with them.	This is similar to the first draught of fishes (see Lk 5) that accompanies Jesus' call of Peter and others to the ministry.
Eleven of the Twelve	Mt 28:16–20	Not specified	A mountain in Galilee, by previous appointment of Jesus Christ	Jesus appeared to them on the mountain. They talked with him and worshiped him.	
More than 500 brethren	1 Cor 15:6	Not specified	Not specified	No information	This visitation probably took place in Galilee.
James	1 Cor 15:7	Not specified	Not specified	No information	

Chart 10-18 (1)

Figure 30 Welch, John W., and John F. Hall. "Witnesses to the Resurrection." *Charting the New Testament*. Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002, chart 10-18.