

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

### ***Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John***

#### **(SB\_JN18\_Jesus' Betrayal, Arrest and Trials)**

#### **Introduction – The Key Players in this Drama**

Before we explore John's account of the arrest and sham trials of Jesus in chapters 18-19, we need to set the stage with a review of some of the cast in this drama. This session will deal with John 18.1-19.16 with a focus upon the various trials to which Jesus was subjected. First, let's look at some of the cast members.

- ✓ The "detachment of troops" (18.3, 12) – this was most likely a portion of the cohort of Roman soldiers from the tower of Antonia. This cohort of approximately 500 soldiers was kept in the tower to quell any tumult among the people and act as an emergency police force.<sup>1</sup> It was where the Roman governor, Pontus Pilate, stayed during the Passover. The tower of Antonia was really a fortress built by Herod and named after Mark Antony.<sup>2</sup> It was situated to the northwest of the Temple area in Jerusalem. In order to allow this garrison to preserve order in the Temple courts, Herod constructed a secret passage from the fortress to the Temple.<sup>3</sup> It is referred to in Acts as the "barracks" (Acts 21.37) and Paul would make an address from the "barracks" after having been arrested for causing a disturbance on the Temple grounds when he preached Christ (Acts 21.26-22.29).
- ✓ The "officers from the chief priests and Pharisees" (18.3) and "the officers of the Jews" (18.12) – these men were the Temple police under the command of the Jewish council, i.e. the Sanhedrin.
- ✓ The Sanhedrin – (not mentioned specifically in John's account) - a Jewish council that arose during the Hellenizing period of Jewish history (the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Century B.C. where Jews from other parts of the Roman Empire were becoming exposed and influenced by Greek culture) and which was translated into a form of puppet rule under Rome. The Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6) and elders as well as the high priests, those who had been high priests and members of the privileged families from which the high priests were taken. There were 70 members in the Sanhedrin body. The jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin was restricted in the time of Christ to the eleven districts of Judea proper. Therefore, it had no authority over Jesus when He was in Galilee – only when He entered Jerusalem. The Sanhedrin was in effect a supreme court that the Romans allowed to continue to exist.<sup>4</sup>
- ✓ Pharisees (18.3) – a non-priestly group of uncertain origin, generally learned, committed to the oral traditions, and concerned with developing *Halakah* (rules of conduct based on deductions from the law). The Pharisees in the Sanhedrin were laymen in the sense that they were not priests; however, many of them were scribes (i.e. teachers of the law) and thus different from the elders. Both the Pharisees and the Sadducees arose from the

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<sup>1</sup> J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 570 quoted in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ – A Study in the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1981), 457-8.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Antony was the friend and, for a period, co-successor with Octavian to the Roman Empire after Caesar's death (44 B.C.). Mark Antony became jealous of Caesar's chosen heir, Octavian, and he was defeated by Octavian in 31 B.C.

<sup>3</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 84.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 1126-28.

- ranks of the scribes and priests of Israel after the Babylonian captivity (i.e. after the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem in 516 BC). The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul through a resurrection. They also believed in the existence of angels and the providential sovereignty of God.<sup>5</sup> Their name means “separated ones” and they prided themselves on their strict observance of every detail of Jewish law. This zealous attitude and behavior was driven by their devotion to preserving Jewish traditions and practices that set them apart from pagan culture. This led to an extreme intolerance of people whom they considered ritually unclean. As such, they held a certain degree of respect from the people.<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ Sadducees (not mentioned specifically in John’s account) – arose from the ranks of the priests of Israel after the return from captivity and were viewed as more aristocratic in nature than the Pharisees. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection and did not believe in angels. They acknowledged only the written law (the Pentateuch) as binding and rejected the oral tradition developed over the centuries. As a result, on many occasions, the Sadducees took a stricter interpretation of the Law than did the Pharisees. The Sadducees put great stress upon human freedom and minimized God’s sovereignty in relation to man’s free will.<sup>7</sup> Many of the Sadducees practiced the sophisticated manners and fashions of Greco-Roman culture and took Greek names. They controlled the Sanhedrin, but they had little influence among the common people.<sup>8</sup>
  - ✓ Elders - this group was mostly lay nobility and primarily Pharisees most likely.<sup>9</sup>
  - ✓ Scribes – this group probably had its origin as the king’s secretaries under David and Solomon (2 Sam 8:17; 20:25; 1 Ki 4:3; 2 Ki 12:10). Later, Hezekiah supported the growth of a body of men whose task was to transcribe old records or to put in writing that which had been passed down orally (Prov 25:1). Under Hezekiah, the title “scribe” began to convey more significance than just the king’s secretary. They began to be seen as a class of students and interpreters of the law who boasted of their wisdom (Jer 8:8).<sup>10</sup>
  - ✓ Annas (18.12-14, 19-23) – high priest from A.D. 6 to 15. He secured from the Romans the prerogative of appointing his five sons followed by his son-in-law, Caiaphas, to the position of high priest. Annas owned the “Bazaars of Annas” which created a monopoly on the sale of animals for the sacrifices and stalls of the money changers. It was this set of vested interests and cliques that Jesus forcefully addressed on two occasions in which He “cleansed the Temple.”<sup>11</sup>
  - ✓ Caiaphas (18.13, 24) – the son-in-law and successor to the position of high priest after Annas. It was Caiaphas who stated that it was expedient that one man die for the people (Jn 18.14). This statement provides clear evidence of the beneficial relationship with the occupying powers that were enjoyed by such “religious leaders” as Caiaphas and Annas. It was expedient because Jesus threatened the financial and political benefits that Annas and Caiaphas derived from the Bazaars.

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<sup>5</sup> Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 997-8.

<sup>6</sup> Bruce L. Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language* (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1982, 1995), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1109-12.

<sup>8</sup> Shelley, *Church History in Plain Language*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 343-44.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1141-43.

<sup>11</sup> Shepherd, *The Christ of the Gospels*, 573-575.

- ✓ Pilate (18.29ff) – the governor of the Roman Empire’s province of Judea and appointed to that position by Tiberius in A.D. 26. (Tiberius, a.k.a. Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar, was the second Roman emperor after Augustus. Tiberius reigned from A.D. 14 to A.D. 37).<sup>12</sup>

### **Jesus’ Betrayal and Arrest in Gethsemane (18.1-11)**

There are only a few things in this passage that I’d like to highlight since it is primarily an historical narrative of events that night.

- ✓ It is important to note that Jesus could have easily avoided capture that night and escaped with His disciples to Galilee or somewhere else.
- ✓ Jesus had already steeled His mind and will to yield to the Father’s will; therefore, He allowed Himself to be subjected to arrest and the sham trial that would follow.
- ✓ *Principle:* To insure that we make the right decisions at critical junctures in life, it is so important to decide beforehand what course our decisions will take.
- ✓ *Principle:* For the believer, prayer is the mechanism to invoke God’s power to strengthen and embolden us to do that which is consistent with God’s will.
- ✓ Quote from Jonathan Edwards – “I want to live my life as I wished I had lived my life when it comes time for me to die.”
- ✓ When Jesus identified Himself in verse 5 (before Judas had even betrayed Him with a kiss), He used the phrase “I am.” Sometimes when Jesus identified Himself as the “I am” it was interpreted as a statement that He was co-equal with God – thereby deity. However, in this setting, it may be that the soldiers were shocked that the person they thought they might have to hunt was surrendering with such a composed and commanding presence. While it is possible that the soldiers interpreted this as a manifestation of deity and they were thrown to the ground as a result, we may never know for certain.
- ✓ The sword that Peter wielded must have been one of the two swords that the disciples carried (perhaps for self defense against animals and maybe robbers as they fulfilled their commission – see Luke 22:38).

### **The First Trial – Before Annas (18.12-14, 19-23)**

Annas was basically a religio-political mafia leader. Because Annas was no longer the high priest, he was not a judge. As high-priest emeritus, he retained a large place of influence in the meetings of the Sanhedrin. The fact that Jesus was brought before Annas points to the gang-like mentality that existed in Jewish religious life during Jesus’ day.

As noted in the introduction, Annas essentially controlled who was appointed to the office, thus he wielded great influence over that office without either the responsibility or the restraints imposed by the office. His wealth was derived by exploiting religion to his advantage – the “Bazaars of Annas.” He could use that wealth to buy influence and even decisions on the part of the occupying powers.

When Jesus threw the money changers off the Temple grounds in an effort to restore the proper focus upon the purpose of the Temple and the associated rituals (while a popular move among the exploited masses), it roused the anger of the religio-political power base to the point of committing murder to do away with this threat from Jesus. Church history and secular history is full of similar scenarios whereby a corrupt power base is shaken by the righteous and courageous actions of a few so that the corrupt power base resorts to evil in the name of good in order to re-establish its power base and crush any who oppose it. One example which comes to mind in Church history is the Reformation period with its many martyrs at the hands of a corrupt religio-political institution called the Roman Catholic Church. The persecutors acted in the name of preserving the “true” church, yet were guilty of gross atrocities against those of contrary opinions which in now way were justified, but which in fact were extremely evil.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 1009-1010, 1280.

### **The Second Trial – Before Caiaphas (18.24)**

John makes the briefest mention of this second trial of Jesus before Caiaphas. The other Gospel accounts deal with this trial in more detail (see Matt 26.57, 59-68; Mk 14.53, 55-65; Lk 22.54a, 63-65). There were several illegalities associated with this trial (as with the others).

- ✓ The trial had false witnesses, which made it illegal (Matt 26.59-61). Not only were they false witnesses, but they were witnesses who had been pursued specifically for the purpose of testifying falsely.
- ✓ The testimony of the false witnesses did not agree (Mk 14.56), so their testimony should have bore no weight since it was not supported by two witnesses.
- ✓ The only testimony that was supported by the required number of witnesses was the false testimony regarding Jesus' statement. "We heard Him say, 'I will destroy this temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.'" (See Mk 14.58 cf. Jn 2.19)
- ✓ There was no defense attorney.
- ✓ This trial took place in the wee hours of the morning (i.e. at night) which made it contrary to Jewish practice.

Matthew provides some additional insight into this trial. Even though the high priest was fully aware of what Jesus had claimed regarding His nature (i.e. that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God), the high priest wanted to force Jesus to make these claims under oath, thereby establish a basis for His guilt under the Mosaic Law, i.e. blasphemy. Of course, Jesus could have only been guilty if His claims were not true, but the sham nature of the trial is revealed in the fact that the prosecution should have had the obligation to prove these claims untrue. Jesus' reply was essentially that in the future the tables would be turned and they would all appear in judgment before Him. Jesus' righteous sarcasm did not go unnoticed. The high priest tore his clothes, an act that was specifically forbidden to a priest in the Mosaic Law (Lev 21.10). Jesus was declared guilty of blasphemy by the high priest and the Sanhedrin concurred (see Matt 26.62-65) and pronounced a sentence of death.

### **The Third Trial (not in John)**

This trial was held early the next morning by the Sanhedrin Council just before they passed Jesus off to the Romans and is covered in Luke 22.66-71 (see also Matt 27.1 and Mk 15.1). This trial was mostly for the purpose of ratifying what had been decided earlier that night. It is interesting to note that for this many "religious" leaders to meet between midnight and 6 a.m., there had to have been advance coordination of a conspiratorial nature. No religio-political group of this size ever meets between midnight and sunrise on an impromptu basis.

In this trial, they once again pressed Jesus to confess to being Christ. In the earlier "trial," a much smaller group had been assembled. However, by early morning as the sun began to rise, it is quite likely that virtually all of the Sanhedrin and other religious leaders had assembled. Jesus replied to their accusation that "hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God," a clear reference to Psalm 110.1. When they pressed Jesus further by asking "are You then the Son of God?" Jesus replied – "you say that I am." They took that as a confession of deity, thus blasphemy – a crime punishable by death. However, what is most interesting is the fact that they said nothing of this charge of blasphemy when they presented Jesus to Pilate for sentencing. They knew that blasphemy was not a crime that Rome would recognize as deserving of death.

### **The Fourth Trial – Before Pilate (18.28-38)**

This civil trial is covered in all four Gospel accounts (Matt 27.2, 11-14; Mk 15.1b-5; Lk 23.1-5). With unrivaled hypocrisy, the religio-political Jewish leadership wanted to keep their hands clean so that they might eat the Passover that night (Jn 18.28). In addition, they feared the

very people they led because of Jesus' rising popularity among the masses as He pointed out their hypocrisy and thus threatened their power base (cf. Matt 26,5; Jn 11.45-57).

*An important aside:* It is important to note that Jesus' popularity among the masses was perhaps in large part related to the fact that He provided an outlet for the cynicism toward those in authority rather than an acceptance of His claims to be the Messiah and Son of God. This is why the masses are so fickle – cynicism is essentially a manifestation of authority arrogance that can always find a justification for its attitude toward those in authority regardless of whether the authority is in fact corrupt or free of corruption. After all, someone must be blamed for the injustices that are experienced by the cynical even though injustice is like rain – it falls upon the righteous and the unrighteous alike. The religio-political establishment recognized the popularity of Jesus, but Jesus knew the reversionistic and fickle hearts of the masses. Had Jesus ascended to the throne as they had desired, their cynicism borne of an unbelieving heart would have only redirected their anger toward the new leadership given time. After all, at the end of the Millennial reign of Jesus on earth, the number of unbelievers will be staggering in spite of perfect governmental rule and they will join forces with Satan when he is released at the end of the 1000 years to lead the Gog and Magog revolt. What greater manifestation of cynicism could there be!

Knowing that they could not use the charge of blasphemy to justify a death sentence request to Pilate, the religio-political leadership accused Him of treason by “perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Lk 23.1). Of course this was a lie (see Matt 22.21). The mention of Caesar must have had a very chilling effect upon Pilate since only the year earlier, Pilate had been rebuked by the Emperor Tiberius for having set up Roman shields in Herod's palace which strongly offended the Jews by reminding them of their subjugation.<sup>13</sup> At this point, Pilate's attempts to secure the release of Jesus abated.<sup>14</sup> The precarious situation that Pilate now faced for himself was factored into God's plan and timeline from eternity past.

When Pilate questioned Jesus whether Jesus was king of the Jews, Jesus replied in verse 34 – “Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?” What Jesus was really asking was whether the charge of treason was Pilate's own idea or whether others accused Jesus of treason. Pilate found no basis for charging Jesus with treason or any other crime. Pilate recognized that Jesus' kingdom was not a threat to Rome and Jesus could not be condemned on a charge of treason. In God's plan, Jesus could not have a kingdom in this world (John 18:36) until Satan's strategic defeat at the Cross.

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<sup>13</sup> “...Pilate nearly drove the Jews to insurrection; the first, when he hung in his palace on Mt. Zion golden shields inscribed with the names of deities. The shields were removed only by an order from the emperor. The second was when he appropriated the revenue of the Temple, arising from the redemption of vows, for the building for the building of an aqueduct. To these acts must be added the slaughter of certain Galileans (Luke 13:1), who seem to have been slain while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple.” (See Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1009). These insults to the Jews followed an earlier incident of a similar nature. Shortly after his appointment as governor of Judea, Pilate moved the headquarters of his army from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Contrary to the precedent of his predecessors of respecting the Jewish hatred of images, Pilate's soldiers carried the standards which bore the image of the emperor into the city of Jerusalem. The Jews were so enraged that they declared themselves ready to submit to death. Pilate acceded to their demands and ordered the standards to be returned to Caesarea. (See David Smith, *The Days of His Flesh* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1911), 477-480 quoted in Pentecost, *The Life and Works*, 468-470.

<sup>14</sup> The precedence for compromise and acquiescence to the demands of the religio-political faction by Pilate was set in his compliance with the demands of the Jews. It was fatal to his authority thereafter especially in light of the Emperor's rebuke. See David Smith, *The Days of His Flesh*, 477-480 quoted in Pentecost, *The Life and Works*, 469.

### **The Fifth Trial – Before Herod (not in John)**

This trial is not recorded in John, but is recorded by Luke in Luke 23.6-12. When Pilate discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, he seized the opportunity to possibly avoid ruling on the charges by sending Jesus to Herod. Herod reaffirmed Pilate's declaration of innocence by sending Jesus back to Pilate. This was the second declaration of innocence by Roman authorities.

### **The Sixth Trial – Before Pilate Again (Jn 18.39-19.16)**

This sixth trial is documented by all four Gospel writers (see also Matt 27.15-26; Mk 15.6-15; Lk 23.13-25). Before submitting Jesus to scourging, Pilate brought Jesus before the Jews and declared Him innocent (Lk 23.13-15). This was the third time that Jesus was declared innocent by Roman authorities.

Pilate tried to exhaust one last option – offer another known criminal to be crucified in lieu of Jesus. Barabbas was in custody because he was a robber (18.40), a murderer (Lk 23.19) and a rebel leader (Mk 15.7). Pilate sought the release of Jesus for at least two reasons: 1) Pilate knew that the Jews had handed Jesus over to him out of envy and 2) he had been warned by his wife to avoid becoming implicated in the Jewish plot.

Before this scene was over, Pilate would declare Jesus innocent on at least two more occasions – 1) after the scourging and 2) in response to the mob's cry of "Crucify Him!" In response to Pilate's reticence to crucify Jesus (19.6), the mob inferred that they would accuse Pilate of treason if he did not crucify Jesus. The Jews would have had grounds for these charges if Pilate had refused to deal with Jesus, who had been accused of treason. This would have meant that Pilate would have been removed from office, have his property confiscated, possibly be tortured. Etc.

The people chose to be led by the religious leaders who no doubt were being used of Satan. In an ironic way, Satan didn't want Jesus to go the Cross and it was likely Satan who was behind the dream of Pilate's wife (see Matt 27:19). Thirty years after the Jews cried out "His blood be upon us and on our children," judgment would be pronounced against some of these very Jews. The house of Annas was destroyed some years later, Caiaphas was deposed a year after the crucifixion, and Pilate was soon after banished to Gaul where he allegedly committed suicide. When Jerusalem fell, so many of her citizens were crucified around her walls that there was almost a lack of space for additional crosses.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Shepard, *The Christ*, 591-592 quoted in Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, 476.