

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – Luke 23

(Lesson SB_LK23 – Jesus Tried in Kangaroo Court and Executed)

Introduction – Jesus’ Six Trials

Each of the Gospel writers emphasized different aspects of Jesus’ last days. Luke records four of the six trials in Kangaroo court to which Jesus was subjected. Of the six trials that are recorded in the Gospels, two were held before Pontius Pilate. All four gospels record the fourth and sixth trials. The first three trials (before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin) were religious trials and the last three trials (before Pilate, Herod, and Pilate) were civil trials. It is interesting to note that in the trials before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin Jesus is accused of 1) threatening to destroy the temple and 2) blasphemy. The charges before Pilate were 1) subverting the Jewish nation, 2) opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar, 3) claiming to be king and 4) sedition.

The First Trial (John 18:12-14) – Before Annas

- The “officers of the Jews” were a part of the Temple Guard.
- The “band (detachment) and the captain” were Roman soldiers.
- Annas was the former high priest and the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the sitting high priest (Luke 3:2 mentions both Annas and Caiaphas as high priests and Acts 4:6 even calls Annas the high priest).
- It is very probable that Annas’ age, abilities and influence as well as being the father-in-law of Caiaphas practically made him the high priest even though his son-in-law held the office.¹
- Because Annas was officially no longer the high priest, he was not a judge (see 18:24). The fact that Jesus was brought before Annas points to the gang-like mentality that existed in Jewish religious life during Jesus’ day.
- Annas was an extremely wealthy Sadducee (see comments below). He was safe in his world of political/religious influence. He wasn’t troubled with any special convictions nor with Jewish fanaticism and he was able to buy off any who might oppose him. His influence with the Romans was due to the non-offensive religious views he held, his open partisanship with the foreigner, and his enormous wealth. His family most likely derived immense revenues from the temple booths that Jesus had just purged.²
- According to Jewish law the office of high priest was for life. The Romans did not like the concentration of power in one person, so they frequently changed high priests.³
- This first trial is developed further in John 18:15-24.

The Second Trial (Matt 26:57-68) – Before Caiaphas

- Caiaphas had inadvertently prophesied the death of Jesus as recorded in John 11:50 when he stated that “it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”

¹ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 80.

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 460.

³ Edwin A. Bloom, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 335.

- Caiaphas was a practical man who realized that a scapegoat for the anti-Roman activities that abounded in Israel needed to be found. He knew that Rome would demand that such activities be rectified and if Israel herself cleaned up such matters, then all the better.
- This trial took place in the wee hours of the morning (i.e. at night) which made it contrary to Jewish practice.
- The trial before Annas was in effect a delay tactic that gave Caiaphas time to assemble the “Sanhedrin” quickly. From this point forward, the Pharisees are not directly mentioned in connection with the events surrounding Jesus’ trial and crucifixion. The Sanhedrin was in effect the supreme court and administrative body of the Jews and consisted of 71 members, including the high priest. Most of them were Sadducees. The Sadducees and the Pharisees were very distinct and even opposing groups in Jewish religious/political life. The Sadducees can be characterized as follows:⁴
 - A disbelief in bodily resurrection and a denial of the existence of angels or spirits (Pharisees believed in both)
 - Loyalty to the Roman government (the Pharisees were opposed to the Roman government)⁵
 - A desire to maintain the status quo
 - An association with the wealthy or aristocratic class (Pharisees were mostly laymen)
 - An adherence to only the Pentateuch (Pharisees committed to oral traditions also)
- This trial had false witnesses, which made it illegal (Ex 20:16).
- There was no defense attorney.
- Matthew 26:62 represents a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7 – *“He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth, He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.”*
- Jesus knew the principle of Romans 12:19 – *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*
- Matthew 26:67 is a fulfillment of Isaiah 52:14 – *“So His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men”* and 53:3 – *“He is despised and rejected*

⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, John F. Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 362.

⁵ We have previously studied some of the group dynamics involved in the Jewish religious/political environment at this time. See notes SB_MT15. A recap of some of the points follows:

Pharisees – 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 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.

Sadducees – 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.

Sanhedrin – a Jewish council that arose during the Hellenizing period of Jewish history and was translated into a form of puppet rule under Rome. The Sanhedrin included both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6) and elders.

Elders – this group was mostly lay nobility and primarily Pharisees.

by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.”

The Third Trial (Matt 27:1-2; Luke 22:66-71) – Before the Sanhedrin

- This trial was held early the next morning by the Jews just before they passed him off to the Romans.

The Fourth Trial (Matt 27:11-14; Mk 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38) – Before Pilate

- This trial is covered in all four Gospels.
- The Jews wanted to keep their hands clean so that they might eat the Passover that night.
- Luke 23:2 records the Jews response to the Roman governor, Pilate. The Jews falsely testified that Jesus had refused to give tribute to Caesar.
- This was a lie (see Matt 22:21 – “...render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s...”).
- Jesus could not have a kingdom OF this world (John 18:36) until Satan’s strategic defeat at the Cross.
- The Jews really put the pressure on Pilate when he declared Jesus innocent (see Luke 23:5).
- When Pilate realized that Jesus was Galilean (Luke 23:6), Pilate passed Him off to Herod who ruled over Galilee.

The Fifth Trial (Luke 23:8-12) – Before Herod

- In times past, Pilate and Herod were virtual enemies; however this event brought them together.
- Herod was responsible for Galilee.

The Sixth Trial (Luke 23:13-24; John 18:39-19:12) – Before Pilate

- Pilate declared Jesus’ innocence again.
- The Jews wanted the crown and a king, not the Cross and a suffering Messiah.
- The people chose to be led by the religious leaders who no doubt were being used of Satan. Satan didn’t want Jesus to go the Cross and it was Satan who was behind the dream of Pilate’s wife (see Matt 27:19).
- Pilate did not want to place himself in a position in which he could be accused of opposing Caesar; therefore, he followed the politically expedient route of crucifixion.

Jesus is Delivered to Pilate (23:1-5)

This is the fourth trial of Jesus. The religious/political mob transported Jesus back to Pilate, the governor of Judea. Pilate was responsible for collecting taxes and keeping the peace. It may be that he was in Jerusalem for judicial hearings, a procedure called an assize. The fact that others were crucified with Jesus makes this very possible.⁶

Jesus’ first Jewish trials had occurred in the night time as we have studied in our review of the six trials of Jesus. Also, as we noted, Jewish law required that trials be conducted during the day. Therefore, the religious leaders of Israel knew that an official trial was necessary since they did not have the power to execute Jesus (John 18:31). Pilate was the governor or procurator of Judea and Samaria from A.D. 26-36. Judea was a senatorial province and the procurator was

⁶ Earl D. Radmacher, gen ed, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1747.

responsible for administering the region and collecting taxes for Rome. Pilate's home was in Caesarea (to the north and on the coast), but at this time of the Passover, he was in his Jerusalem palace.

Isn't it interesting that the Roman empire took note of the significance of the Passover holiday. No doubt even Rome knew the story of Israel's departure from Egyptian bondage, the significance of the lamb's blood on the doorposts, the Law's sacrifice and ordinance requirements associated with Passover, the leadership of Moses, and the conquering history of Israel over the Canaanites under the leadership of Joshua. The Gentile nations were not without witness to the one true God – Yahweh. The most notable example of belief in Yahweh within the Roman empire was the centurion of Matthew 8:5-13. Another example is Cornelius in Acts 10.

We obtain a little more insight into the religious leaders' activities on this occasion through the writing of the apostle John. John 18:28 informs us that the religious leaders did not go into the Praetorium (the governor's residence) lest they be defiled for entering the house of a Gentile. They feared not being able to eat the Passover. Evidently Jesus' last supper the night before was not the Passover meal. It is also interesting to note the hypocrisy of religion. In the name of religion, none more innocent than Jesus Himself have been murdered while the murderers hid behind the laws and rules of their religion.⁷

Jesus Before Herod (23:6-12)

Herod had no real interest in the judicial issues involved. He only wanted to be entertained by seeing Jesus perform a miracle. Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate without passing any judgment in the case.

Jesus Takes the Place of Barabbas (23:13-25)

Pilate had assumed that the Jews would certainly choose a well-known insurrectionist and murderer (John 18:40 and Mark 15:7) for death instead of one who had only done good. Perhaps Pilate thought that only the religious leaders were jealous of Jesus and the rest of the Jews would love Him. The crowd only threatened to report him to Caesar (John 19:12) and that only spelled great trouble for Pilate since his record with Caesar was not good.⁸

Only Matthew records the dream of Pilate's wife. It is most likely that Pilate's wife was an unbeliever. Therefore, the source of this dream was most likely Satan. If this is correct, it is my opinion that this was Satan's last attempt to keep Jesus from going to the Cross. Satan knew what was at issue on the Cross.

The King Placed on a Cross (23:26-43)

Crucifixion was considered by the Romans to be the cruelest form of execution since it took some time for the person crucified to die. Sometimes the victim died after two or even three days of agonizing pain and suffering that included thirst and asphyxiation. Many times, the death was as much the result of attack by animals since the person being crucified hung much closer to the ground than is sometimes depicted by artists.

Obviously, Jesus was unable to carry His own cross beam after what He had already endured. Therefore, the Romans required a Simon of Cyrene (located in North Africa and the

⁷ See notes in Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 1009-1010.

⁸ See previous comments by Unger.

home of many Jews)⁹ to bear the burden. All three of the synoptic Gospels identify Jesus' cross bearer as Simon of Cyrene, but only Mark adds that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Paul greets a Rufus in Romans 16:13. It is possible that Simon became a believer as a result of this experience; however, there is no Scriptural evidence of it.

The soldiers offered Jesus sour wine (vinegar) and myrrh to numb the pain, but Jesus refused. The offer of vinegar was in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21. Today, we take the making of wine in abundance for granted; however, it has not always been the case. In addition, storage mechanisms for wine were not as plentiful as today. Wine turns to a form of vinegar as it goes bad. No doubt, Jesus wanted to be in complete control of His senses as He fulfilled prophecy and uttered His final and very important words on the Cross. The soldiers also cast lots for His garments in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18. He was crucified with two robbers in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12.

The Romans, at the direction of Pilate, placed a sign over Jesus' head on which was written "Jesus, the King of the Jews." John noted that Pilate had the sign written in Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (Jn 19:20). Even while on the Cross, Jesus was an object of their viewing pleasure and subjected to verbal torment from by-passers. This was in fulfillment of Psalm 22:6-8; 35:21; and Zechariah 12:10. Even the robbers who were being crucified joined in the verbal abuse. However, one of the robbers believed in Him (23:39-43).

Jesus Dies on the Cross (23:44-49)

Mark indicates that the crucifixion began at the "third hour" (Mark 15:25) or at 9:00 am. Matthew indicates that from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3:00 pm), there was darkness over all the land. During this three hour period, Jesus suffered spiritual death and became the sin offering for the world (John 1:29; Ro 5:8; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pe 2:24; 3:18). So, Jesus really died twice on the Cross – once spiritually to pay for sin and once physically for himself. Jesus made the connection between His physical and spiritual suffering on the Cross and the prophetic message in Psalm 22 when He cried out "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46 cf. Psa 22:1). The Father had to make a judicial decision regarding His Son and turn from Him (Ro 3:25-26).

When the Bible refers to the blood of Christ as the means for such provisions connected with salvation as redemption (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Pe 1:18-19), justification (Ro 5:9), sanctification (1 Co 1:30) and propitiation (Heb 13:12), it is referring to His spiritual death and not His physical blood or His physical death. When His spiritual death was completed and before He died physically, He cried out "It is finished" (John 19:30). Jesus was referring to the fact that His work of paying for the sins of mankind was finished. At the moment He spoke these words He was still alive.

Matthew and Luke record several phenomena that occurred simultaneously with Jesus' death. The curtain that separated the holy place and the holy of holies in the temple was torn in two. This curtain was as thick as a man's hand is wide and its dimensions were about 60 feet long and 30 feet wide.¹⁰ In addition, the sun was darkened. Next, Matthew records that there was an earthquake and many graves were opened in connection with the earthquake so that some of dead who had been believers were resuscitated (like Lazarus), came out of their graves after

⁹ J. W. Shepard, *The Christ of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1946), 594 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 478.

¹⁰ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, Volume 2* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1912), 589 in J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, A Study of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 488.

Jesus' resurrection and appeared to many. They could not have received a resurrection body prior to Jesus since He is the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18; Re 1:5) and the first-fruits of those who are asleep (1 Co 15:20, 23). Most likely, these people so raised had been contemporaries of those still alive at the time of Jesus' death. All of these things greatly impressed the Roman soldiers to the point of exclaiming that Jesus must have been a deity. However, their statement doesn't necessarily indicate a saving faith.

Jesus is Buried in Joseph's Tomb (Lk 23:50-56)

Joseph of Arimathea was a disciple of Jesus. Arimathea was approximately 20 miles northwest of Jerusalem. It is interesting to note each of the Synoptic Gospel writer's accounts of this man.

- Matthew 27:57 – “a rich man”
- Mark 15:43 – “a prominent council member, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God”
- Luke 23:50 – “a good and just man”

These descriptions of Joseph of Arimathea should dispel any notions that Jesus taught that a rich man could not enter the kingdom (see Matt 19:23-24). Joseph was a member of the Sanhedrin council who, according to Luke 23:5 “had not consented to their decision and deed.” Therefore, he was one of the many disciples of Jesus who had accepted Jesus' claim that He was the Messiah of Israel and that as the Messiah and Son of God, the kingdom of God/heaven was at hand (see Matt 10:5-7).¹¹ For Joseph to have asked Pilate for the body of Jesus placed Joseph in opposition to the Sanhedrin and identified him as a follower of Jesus.

Once again, we see fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in connection with Jesus' death. Isaiah 53:9 states that “they made His grave with the wicked [the two robbers], but with the rich [Joseph of Arimathea] at His death.”

The “women” (v. 55) were most likely the two Marys mentioned in Matthew 27:61. They were also mentioned in Matthew 27:56 as having observed Jesus' crucifixion from afar. Mary Magdalene is named after the town from which she came. Magdala is on the northwest shore of Galilee and one of the largest lakeside towns.

The first three Gospels give little evidence of Mary's character. Only Luke comments that ‘seven demons had gone out’ of her, but there is no evidence that Jesus had exorcized her and she was probably an epileptic, for epilepsy was commonly attributed to possession by evil spirits. This reference in Luke's Gospel immediately follows the story of a sinful woman who anointed the feet of Jesus during a meal at the house of Simon the Pharisee. The tradition of the Church has from early times identified Mary of Magdala with the woman living an immoral life in the city. Rightly or wrongly, Mary has become for all Christians the type of passionate penitent.¹²

¹¹ Of course, Jesus' and His disciple's teaching that the kingdom of God/heaven was at hand did not mean that if Israel had accepted Jesus as her Messiah/Savior that there would have been no Cross. As we have previously discussed, it was quite to the contrary. The Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah's sufferings (e.g. Psa 22; Isa 52-53) would still have been fulfilled. Rome would have most certainly crucified as a criminal any Jew who claimed to be Israel's king, especially had that person been accepted by Israel en masse.

¹² Ronald Brownrigg, *Who's Who in the New Testament* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 299. [See Luke 7:44-50 for the situation to which Brownrigg refers.]