

They could not interpret the arrest and trials as minor incidents on His way to the Throne at the center of the moral universe by the only route that could take Him there (Rev. 5). *This night*: The relative calm with which they had enjoyed the Passover supper and Jesus' subsequent instruction and prayer must not disguise the suddenness and fury of the tempest that would break around them within a few hours.

*All ye shall be offended in me this night.* This important text sharpens our understanding of what it means to cause others to stumble. Jesus clearly warned His men that *He Himself* would be the cause of stumbling for them. However, *He did not swerve from His path of duty to accommodate their scruples and points of view that were the true cause of their shock.* He had done everything in His power to correct their misapprehensions and misguided expectations as to His kingly Messiahship. Their minds remained largely unchanged. Now, however, He must do the will of God, even if His conduct caused them to stumble. (Cf. Paul's refusal to circumcise Titus because of Christian's prejudices and his circumcising of Timothy because of Jewish feelings. Gal. 2:1-5; Acts 16:3 in the context of Acts 15! Paul continued to proclaim the Gospel, even though it was scandal to the Jews. I Cor. 1:23.) This understanding frees us from guilt when we do proclaim the will of God and, to our chagrin and deeply-felt anguish, cause hard-headed, unconvincible people to declare themselves scandalized. It does not, of course, exonerate us from that gentle sensitivity that seeks to protect the weak conscience of the ignorant (I Cor. 8:7). It does free us from slavery to the opinionated who would impose their prejudices on believers. (See notes on 26:10.)

He must awaken His much-loved companions to their vulnerability. To see Jesus overpowered by His foes would severely tempt them to question whether He were God's Anointed or not.

1. To steel them for the blow soon to strike them, He predicted their downfall. This pessimistic outlook counselled them to take appropriate measures to resist the shock. His meek, voluntary surrender to His enemies must not come upon them unexpected.
2. But because they would desert Him anyway, He must point to the way back from their debacle. So doing, they would not drown in despair, because He Himself will have already shown them His forgiving spirit. That He foresaw everything and still did not reject them, warms them with His love, leaving them the hope, hence, the power to repent and repair the damage of their desertion.

3. The knowledge that the Scriptures too had foreseen their failure would actually rebuild their sagging faith and rekindle their courage, because, if the Scriptures were right about their failure, the Bible could be trusted about their ultimate victory too and dependable to lead the stunned disciples back to reasonableness and faith.

*I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad* (Zech. 13:7). *I will smite* is a free quotation from the Hebrew, since the Hebrews imperative ("Strike the shepherd") is reworded as a simple future, changing from God who orders the striking, into the one who does it. What one does by means of an agent may correctly be said to have done for himself. The result of this alteration is to affirm even more clearly that God is in full control of the events, even if it would appear that evil men are authors of what must appear to the disciples as inexplicable chaos surrounding Jesus' death. History is in God's hands, so everything will proceed according to His design, even if men cannot understand or accept it. Pointing to Isaiah, Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 913) justifies Jesus' rewording:

It was Jehovah himself who 'laid upon' the Mediator 'all our iniquities' (Isa. 53:6). It was he who 'struck him down, "bruised him," put him to grief,' 'made his soul an offering for sin.' . . . It was God the Father who 'spared not his own Son' (Rom. 8:32).

That the smitten *shepherd* in question is the Messiah, is amply sustained by an examination of Zechariah's larger context (Zech. 9-13). The King who came to Israel meek and riding on an ass (Zech. 9:9) is the Shepherd they detested and priced at 30 pieces of silver (11:12f.), the one who was pierced (12:10ff.) in whose day a fountain of cleansing from sin and impurity would be opened (13:1). Most convincing is the identification of "my *shepherd*" as the direct companion of the Lord Almighty (Zech. 13:7a).

### Family reunion in Galilee

**26:32 But after I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee.** Whatever else this promise means, it sings of Jesus' forgiveness for their foreseeable desertion. He thus empowers them to recover themselves, believing that their cowardly unbelief was not beyond help or hope. "Though you desert me, I will not desert you." When they later reflected on their bad showing and His loving warning, they would be stronger and able to gather around Him once again.

*I will go before you (proàxo humàs)*, just as would a Shepherd (John 10:4). This touch is reminiscent of the second part of Zechariah's prophecy whereby those who survived the severe trials God would bring upon them would belong to Him in the closest fellowship imaginable (Zech. 13:7b-9).

*I will go before you into Galilee* suggests three things:

1. They would naturally return to Galilee after the feast, because it was home, but this time, instead of slinking ashamedly back to their homes like beaten men, they would return with high heads and singing hearts, as old friends to a long-awaited rendezvous. Jesus deliberately gave them an appointment to meet their risen Lord as a hope to steady them during the emotional earthquake of the cross. (Cf. 28:15; John 21 and possibly I Cor. 15:6?).
2. Why *Galilee*? Because it was home for Jesus too. With stunning cheerfulness in the face of impending disaster, He challenged them to believe that He Himself would enjoy that comforting joy of returning home among the loved and familiar before they would. It was as if He said, "Don't let the intervening crisis shake you so: I'll be back home in Galilee before you are!"
3. Did He prefer Galilee because the area around Jerusalem in Judea would be too turbulent to permit calm teaching after the resurrection and in consequence of it? (Cf. Acts 1:3; 10:40, 41.)

Why didn't Jesus mention also His appearances to them at various times in and around Jerusalem first on the very day of the resurrection? The point here is that He encourages them to believe that, despite the shock, sadness and horror of the crucifixion and entombment, the time would come when they would all walk together in the fresh air and sunlight of Galilean springtime as truly as they had done in happy days gone by. Just when they were crushed by their own unbelief and timidity, He rallies them with thoughts of home!

### The grave danger of self-confidence

**26:33 But Peter answered and said unto him, If all shall be offended in thee, I will never be offended.** Just as Peter took the initiative to confess Jesus as Lord, he impetuously pledges his loyalty. And just as before, he launches an entirely unjustified protest against Jesus' revelations (16:22). When Jesus Christ says something, no disciple has any right to object, demur or protest, because, even when Jesus puts

our loyalty in doubt, to disagree with Him is to prove Him absolutely correct in His evaluation! So, why did Peter protest so?

1. He was *prejudiced*. If he intended to cheer Jesus out of what must have seemed to him a dark, despondent mood, then it only proves how far he rejected the divine necessity of Jesus' death and to what extent the scandal of the cross menaced him personally. Peter would fail because his expectations of what Jesus would do when confronted by death were false. Peter could not foresee,—nor if told, accept—, the drastically changed conditions into which Jesus was even then moving. Like anyone else, he assumed that everything would go on as normal, Jesus would conquer all opposition and tomorrow would be another day like this. Hence, neither he nor the others could imagine what they must soon undergo. Nothing could be the same, because Jesus' hour had now finally come.
2. His overconfidence is grounded in his *self-reliance*. Of all men could he alone survive the avalanche of temptations that would bury all others? Although to be shocked at Jesus is not equal to betraying Him, yet it is no cause for bragging about one's faithfulness. What overconfidence and presumption to believe himself alone able to surpass the loyalty of everyone else! Only blind self-conceit kept him from confessing his own weakness and dependence upon God's grace. Earlier, along with the others, he had asked in severe self-examination, "Lord, is it I?" Now, however, he considers himself above the fears of common mortals. *Though they all fall away . . . I will never.*

In these horrified reactions of a zealous disciple whose loyalty has just been questioned, Alford (I,270) sees evidence that the following warning is not the first Jesus had given Peter. Hence, the warnings sounded in Luke 22:31-34 and John 13:36f. had possibly occurred before. He argues that Peter's anguished disjoining himself from the others so as to distinguish the level of his faithfulness above the rest, suggests that this is not the first time his reliability has been questioned that night. This explains his growing vehemence.

### Cowardice in the crisis

**26:34 Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crows, thou shalt deny me thrice.** Although the fisherman-Apostle was self-convinced that he must succeed better

than he understood himself, must inform him that he would do worse. Peter committed the common fallacy of trusting a heart unsustained by grace: his own. Peter had boasted, "Never!" but Jesus warns, *This night, before the cock crows*. Peter had said, "Not I!" Jesus retorted, *You!* Peter protested, "Not once!" but Jesus specifies, *Three times*. Not by hasty, thoughtless speech, but deliberately, hence with aggravated responsibility.

*This night*: although Luke (22:34) has "this day," there is no contradiction, because "this day" had already begun with sunset, therefore at the beginning of *this night*. Mark (14:30) reports both of these expressions together (*sémeron taùte tê nuktì*).

*Before the cock crows*. Where Matthew, Luke and John imply that Peter would deny the Lord before the rooster crowed even once, Mark's citation states "before the cock crows twice." This implies that the cock would crow, then Peter would deny the Lord, then the cock would crow a second time. Several explanations have been given:

1. The first cock crow might have occurred around midnight, the second about three or four o'clock in the morning. Between the two the denials would occur. Most people in a profound sleep at midnight would not hear the first cock and so would consider the second one as the first, whereas there were literally two. Problem: why did not Peter hear this first cock and be reminded of Jesus' words and repent?
2. Before the cock would have had opportunity to crow twice, Peter would have denied the Lord. Further, the night was divided into various watches (cf. 24:43; 14:25), one of which was nick-named "the cock-crowing" (cf. Mark 13:35 *alektorofonias*). In this way Jesus indicated the approximate hour of the denials. The pre-dawn stillness of the city would permit anyone awake to hear the rooster, making this a particularly precise signal to Peter.

Consider the high wisdom of Jesus: He planted in Peter's mind the very signal that would be the means of pricking the man's conscience at the appropriate moment and save him. However, who but a true Prophet could foresee that *this* humble fowl would crow at the right time and stab the moral sense of the fallen Apostle? This is the third time an animal would speak to Peter of Jesus' control over nature. (Cf. Luke 5:1-11; Matt. 17:27; cf. II Peter 2:16.) And yet, the precision with which Jesus predicted Peter's denial neither persuaded him nor dissuaded him from confidently depending on his own strength.

Imagine his shock when he heard that cock lustily crowing out the literal fulfillment of Jesus' solemn prediction! (For the fulfillment, see on 26:74.)

### Lavish, impossible promises

**26:35 Peter saith unto him, Even if I must die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.** Stubbornly, Peter continued insisting both emphatically and excessively (Mark 14:31). Unquestionably, this warm-hearted man means what he says, because true love is genuinely hurt to hear its sincerity put in doubt. Further, Jesus' astonishing predictions must have seemed absolutely incredible to him. Only the sad fulfillment of the prediction would finally convince him of Jesus' accuracy.

*Even if I must die with thee* accurately measures the strength of the temptation. He admits death's power to question one's willingness to abandon his integrity at the cost of his life. Peter's bold affirmations, however, are not made while looking death in the face. Too easily he, and all the others with him, suppose themselves capable of doing anything. Too readily they feel offended when informed that they cannot do it and that their good intentions are no substitute for facts. But without the power and grace of the Spirit, without Jesus, what could they do (John 15:3, 5)? Earlier (John 13:38), Jesus questioned Peter's ability to surrender his life for His sake. Still the man continues to consider himself equal to his Master, not knowing, as does Jesus, "with what reluctance and struggle a life is laid down, and what a hard task it is to die. . . . His Master Himself struggled when it came to this, and *the disciple is not greater than his Lord*" (Matthew Henry, V,1106).

*Likewise also said all the disciples.* Earlier, when Jesus spoke of Peter's denials, the others, who believed Peter as solid a disciple as anyone, must have been astounded but remained silent at this disclosure of his weakness, since they themselves were not involved. Now, however, when Jesus repeated the puzzling prediction, implicating them too, they join Peter's fervent protest by ardently reaffirming their own undying loyalty. However, people are least prepared morally when—and precisely because—they believe themselves most incapable of failure. (Cf. I Cor. 10:12.) Believing themselves unable to betray Jesus, they feel themselves also safe against being shocked at anything He did or that happened to Him. All of them were unquestionably ready to follow Jesus in a patriotic power struggle for glory at

the head of the nation. This vision did not prepare them to walk in His footsteps down the footpath of humiliation and frailty. It was quite beyond them to welcome insults, scourging and death without being able to retaliate.

Although these sincere, earnest men immediately abandoned Jesus, just as He predicted, in later life, however, they heroically kept these inconsiderate promises. According to tradition, most did give their lives for Christ. John lived and served unflinching until a venerable age. But they triumphed not in their own strength, but in that of the Holy Spirit and by the grace of God, and not unlikely because of Jesus' pre-crisis admonitions here.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. When and where did Jesus predict the disciples' approaching failure: before they all left the Upper Room or after? Or both? Defend your answer.
2. Define the expression: "offended in me." What other texts help interpret it?
3. What prophecy (book, chapter and verse) predicted the scattering of the flock upon the overwhelming of the shepherd? Show how it rightly applies to Jesus and the disciples.
4. According to the above-mentioned prophecy, who would strike the shepherd in question? How would this feature serve to encourage the sheep to remove the despair from their souls?
5. In what picturesque way did Jesus guarantee the certainty of His victory over death?
6. What was Peter's reaction to Jesus' announcement?
7. How did Jesus treat Peter's reaction?
8. What was the reaction of all the other disciples?
9. What time of day is "cockcrowing"?

### SECTION 67

#### JESUS PRAYS IN GETHSEMANE

(Parallels: Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46)

TEXT: 26:36-46

36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.

37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled. 38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; abide ye here, and watch with me. 39 And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt. 40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour? 41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. 42 Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done. 43 And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. 44 And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words. 45 Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. 46 Arise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Jesus *needed* to go to Gethsemane? Could He not have remained in Jerusalem to pray just as well? Why go there, then?
- b. Why do you think Jesus set the disciples as sentinels to watch and pray?
- c. If Jesus knew that He had come to earth for precisely this hour, why do you think He prayed, in a sense, that the Father save Him from it? (Cf. Mark 14:35; John 12:27ff.)
- d. Why did that "cup not pass away," contrary to Jesus' request?
- e. Why do you think He requested the presence of Peter, James and John? (1) How would that help Him? (2) How would it help them?
- f. What does Jesus' falling on His face to pray indicate about His feelings?
- g. If Jesus always knew and did God's will (cf. John 8:29), why, if He suspected His suffering inevitable, did He request to be exempt therefrom? What good did He really believe praying might do?
- h. Why did the disciples keep falling asleep, despite the fact that Jesus requested that they stand watch with Him?



- i. In what sense would they have “entered into temptation,” if they did not watch and pray? How does watching and praying keep one out of temptation?
- j. Is it true of us that “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”? What *should* we do about it? What *do* we do about it?
- k. Do you think it is ever right to pray the same prayer twice? What about using the very same words to repeat the prayer? Why do you say that?
- l. How do you think Jesus addressed the sleeping disciples, “Sleep on now, take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed . . .”? Was He angry, irritated, astonished, or what? What did He mean?
- m. Do you think Jesus’ prayers were answered? If so, when or how?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then with His disciples Jesus went over the ravine of the Kedron, as He usually did, to a piece of land on the Mount of Olives where there was a garden called “Gethsemane” a word which means “the oil-press.” When they arrived there, He told them, “Sit down here while I go over there and pray. Pray that you may not walk right into temptation.”

Taking with Him Peter and Zebedee’s sons, James and John, He began to show His grief and the deep dread He felt. Then He commented, “I am so completely overwhelmed with grief that I could die right here! Stay here and keep watch with me.”

Walking on a bit further by Himself about a stone’s throw away, He knelt down. Then He threw Himself face down on the ground and began praying, that, if it were possible, He might not have to face the impending ordeal. He kept saying, “My Father, if it be possible—everything is possible for You. . . . if you are willing, take this painful destiny away from me! However, it is not my will, but Yours, that must be done!”

[Then an angel from heaven appeared to Him, encouraging Him. Being deeply anguished, He prayed more urgently. His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground.] When He arose from praying, He returned to the disciples and found them sleeping, exhausted by sorrow.

“Simon,” He addressed Peter, “are you asleep? Could you men not stand watch with me a single hour? Rise, stay awake and pray,

that you may not be unnecessarily exposed to temptation. Your spirit is certainly willing, but your human nature is frail."

Once more, for the second time, He went away to pray, repeating the same words, "My Father, since it is not possible for my destiny to be changed without my undergoing it, Your will must be done."

When He came back, He found them sleeping again, because they could not keep their eyes open. They did not know what excuse to give Him. So, leaving them again, He went back and prayed for the third time, uttering the same words. When He returned the third time to the disciples, He chided them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! Look, the time has come for me to be turned over to sinful men. Get up, let's get going! Look, here comes my betrayer now!"

## SUMMARY

At the gate of the garden Jesus left eight disciples so as to be able to pray relatively undisturbed. Taking with Him His "Inner Circle of Three," Peter, James and John, He urged them to stay awake and pray with Him during His intense crisis of soul. Leaving them, He walked deeper into the garden to pray that God's will might be done without the suffering. Nevertheless, He acquiesced and submitted Himself to accept God's choice. Three times He prayed this and three times He returned to find His men sleeping, not praying. Finally, He roused them once more to go to meet the foe.

## NOTES

### THE TEMPTATIONS IN THE GARDEN

Many a man has defeated pleasure's allurements only to be broken on the wheel of pain and fear of death. Finding Jesus at His most vulnerable moment, Satan could perceive that his most favorable opportunity had returned. (Cf. Luke 4:13.) The temptation to deviate from the path of obedience and devotion to God was present in *this* garden no less than in the Garden of Eden. The devil could well sense that the destiny of mankind was to be decided in this garden no less than in the first. Contrast the methods and results of the first Adam with those of this last Adam. (Cf. I Cor. 15:22, 45.) It is not surprising, then, that Satan should be present with Jesus in Gethsemane no less than during the wilderness temptations. (Cf. John 14:30.)

## THE RIGHT WAY TO SUFFER FOR THE TRUTH

**26:36 Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples, Sit ye here, while I go yonder and pray.** On the western slope of the Mount of Olives across the Kedron Valley from Jerusalem was a piece of ground locally called *Gethsemane* which means "olive press." Since the entire hill was famous for its olives, a press would be needed to process them. Was this Jesus' usual camping place during the feast? (Cf. Luke 21:37.) If so, Judas could easily find it (John 18:1f.).

Upon arrival Jesus divided His men into two groups: eight to sit at the entrance and the other three to enter with Him deeper into the olive grove. Was this division to serve His own needs or that of the disciples? Would it have been too shocking for the eight to see His anguish? Or, did they serve as an early warning barrier against premature disturbance? Both groups were charged with the responsibility of praying so as not to fall into temptation (Luke 22:40).

*While I go yonder and pray:* Jesus Himself attacked His problems, not by anxious pondering or human reasoning, but on His knees. Coming away the Victor, He taught His men the road to triumph. (See Heb. 5:7-10 as Scripture commentary.) What a revelation of their overconfidence: they can sleep, prayerlessly oblivious to the danger. By contrast, the Son of God is so conscious of His own frailty under stress that He must approach temptation with nothing less than concentrated prayer! Jesus' true humanness was never clearer than when He expressed His felt need for prayer.

He set this physical distance between Him and them for one or more of the following reasons:

1. He expected no substantial help from them.
2. He believed their own susceptibility to shock so great that it would be better for them not to observe His struggles.
3. He desired intimacy with the Father which only the distance of isolation could offer.

### The loneliness of the struggle

**26:37 And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and sore troubled.** Until now Jesus had spent all His energies encouraging and instructing the disciples so as not to burden them beyond their strength. Now, however, in the

privacy of the garden with only His inner Three present, He gave way to the deep dread He felt and *began to* express it as never before. These who had been privileged to witness His transfiguration glory (17:1) and His power over death (Luke 8:51; Mark 5:40) must now behold Him horror-stricken, filled with dread and intense emotional agony in the shadow of the cross.

*He took with him:* Although human companionship is not incompatible with seeking God's fellowship, He obviously felt a loneliness that no other human being could fully share. That He specifically selects these three out of a desire for human sympathy in the midst of suffering, points to a closeness of fellowship and affectionate understanding between the men chosen and Himself.

What are the starkly real temptations Jesus faced that night?

1. If in the wilderness temptations He was allured to end His bodily hunger by acting outside of God's will, could not His human sensitivity to pain recoil from submitting to the torture of crucifixion?
2. He could have called down heavenly fire to destroy all His enemies, indeed all men and cancelled our redemption as a bad idea. Were not the Father's heavenly legions instantly available at His word (26:53)? He could easily have been spared (26:53; John 19:11).
3. He could have taken advantage of the night shadows to flee from Jerusalem, taking refuge in some distant secret hermitage and living out His earthly life in relatively sweet tranquility.
4. He could have completely justified His refusal before any human court. What just human law would have sentenced the Innocent to die for the brutal wickedness and ingratitude of human unbelief?

### The fellowship of his suffering

**26:38 Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with me.** *My soul* = "I myself in the frailty of my human nature." In a true sense, His whole earthly life had been characterized as one "of sorrows and familiar with suffering," (Isa. 53), but now there is an intense concentration of His affliction. No longer could He say, "My hour is not yet come." Instead, He must now face being publicly branded as a false pretender to the dignity of Messiahship and brutalized as a common criminal. This epitomized His rejection by His own people, Israel. He faced also the shameful penalty for the sins of the whole world. *This* is the vision that overwhelmed Him with sorrow to the point

of death, almost as if He meant, "My spirit is so deeply burdened with sorrow it almost kills me!" If psychological anticipation of death can produce physiological conditions that bring about death, this may explain why God met His Sons's psychological need (Luke 22:43). This crushing agony of anticipation suffered in the garden may also explain why, when some victims of crucifixion linger for days, Jesus died so swiftly on the cross.

In simply coming to earth had He not already endured psychological pain and moral struggles that would have crushed any unblessed mortal? What was the capacity for pain of this sensitive, noble Man? The more sensitive the Sufferer, the more terribly felt the suffering. Beyond mere dread of death common to all fallen man, He was *earth's only Unfallen Man* about to be sentenced undeservedly to the death of a sinner before God's righteous sentence as if His were the accumulated guilt of all our sin. Unfairly and largely unappreciated, He would suffer under the curse of sin, the just for the unjust (Gal. 3:13; I Peter 2:22ff.; 3:18).

But why did He disclose this weakness to His men? While He did not make a great show of His private prayers, neither did He scrupulously and totally hide them, when the witnesses could be taught thereby and share with Him. They must see that His deeply-felt dread proves that He had no ambitious claims to the High-priestly position. Rather, He meekly submitted to His being called by God, qualified and anointed for the task (Heb. 5:4-10). His was the suffering of a real Man. In retrospect, He gave them a model of how rightly to suffer for righteousness.

*Watch with me:* while they are to pray for themselves, His concern is that they stay awake with Him. Even though these men were no real protection for Him against what He feared, He could derive some comfort simply from knowing that they were watching the approaching storm with Him. By expressing His need of human fellowship, He proved how deeply He is aware of our need for it too (Heb. 4:15). In this meager request we see His sense of isolation which had already begun (John 6:66) and would soon grow (Matt. 26:56) until His abandonment by God (27:46).

### The battle with self

**26:39** And he went forward a little, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me:

**nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.** To fall on one's face denotes particularly deep earnestness of soul. (Cf. Num. 16:22; II Sam. 12:16; II Chron. 20:18; Neh. 8:6.) To understand this agonizing struggle we must compare His brokenness and prostration here with His poise and power on every other occasion!

By addressing God as *my Father*, Jesus expressed two tremendous truths:

1. His unique relation to the Father: He is a Son of God in a way not shared by any other human being or angel. To Jesus, God is "**My Father**," not "our Father." (Cf. 6:9 notes.) Even though *abba* in Aramaic might be used for both (see Kittel, art. *Abba*, J. Jeremias, *Supplemento al Grande Lessico dei Nuovo Testamento*, Paideia, Brescia, 1968), all of Jesus' revelations of His unique relation to the Father argue that His meaning here is again His unique Sonship.
2. He revealed that His relation to the Lord of the universe is that of a close family. Because "Abba" is Aramaic for "Daddy," this term belonged to the familiar, daily conversation of little children talking with their father. In fact, Jesus' choice deliberately intends to reveal a concept of sonship, and consequently, of fatherhood, that is absolutely new, unheard of in Judaism (J. Jeremias, *Abba*, *op. cit.*). In so doing, He revealed the heart of our Creator. He is not merely an icy-willed Supreme Being, but *my Father*, Abba, the highest possible encouragement to approach the Governor of the universe with all the confidence, tenderness and loving trust of a Person whose welcome and audience with God is unquestioned.

*If it be possible:* Mark has "All things are possible to thee." Luke has "If you are willing." It is easily conceivable that Jesus should have uttered all three expressions, since they are the kind of formulation to be expected of a person suffering and yet praying in earnest, such as He. Because Jesus fully comprehended both the physical and psychological pain awaiting Him (Jn. 18:4) and the great purpose of His entire incarnation, this proviso means, "If there is a way consistent with my mission whereby man can yet be saved." Never did He plunge to the nadir of demanding absolutely and unconditionally that He be exempted. Because He loved us more than Himself, there could be no other way!

God's holy character *could* not and His love *would* not permit any deviation from redemption's pain. Out of this submission come three awe-inspiring conclusions.

1. While Jesus' human instinct of self-preservation is deeply shaken by the dreadful prospect of suffering, His firm resolve to do God's will remains steady, determined. His would be a free-will offering.
2. To save man there is no other way, but the cross of Christ. Had there been some other option, may it not be legitimately argued that His loving heavenly Father would have used it?! This realization uncompromisingly cancels all hope of salvation by any name, law, method, talisman or religion other than Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Gethsemane settled it once and for all: He is God's only way back home (John 14:6).
3. If God thought Jesus must endure such engrossing moral pain, then our salvation was neither easy, painless nor cheap. Woe to the Christian who expects his own discipleship to be somehow exempt from risk, sorrow, pain or expense!

*Let this cup pass away from me.* The *cup* is a Semitism referring to one's lot, whatever God sends be it good or bad. (Cf. Ps. 16:5; 23:5; 75:8; Isa. 51:17-21; Matt. 20:22; Rev. 14:10.) Two views of *this cup* are possible:

1. That awful hour of human weakness and temptation to surrender to His desire to save Himself from the menacing suffering. However, other, later martyrs would show more fortitude and composure than this, fearlessly facing death without flinching.
2. Because He came to "taste death for every one" (Heb. 2:9), He means the entire Passion: Judas' betrayal, the mockery of justice, the pain of scourging and crucifixion, death and burial. It was the intolerable knowledge that most men would not either appreciate His act nor avail themselves of it (Matt. 7:13f.; Luke 18:8). So that we might not have to suffer sin's penalty, He must take our sins in His own body, as if He Himself had committed them (II Cor. 5:21). No human ever suffered this moral pain, nor ever will, because He alone was without sin. To be separated from the Father by this load of guilt would be for Jesus what Hell means to us. (Cf. Isa. 59:2; Eph. 2:1, 12; II Thess. 1:9.) No wonder He begged the Father for the privilege of exemption!

Undoubtedly McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 230) is right to sense a pause in Jesus' prayer between His cry of self-preservation and His

sublime self-renunciation: "there is a pause—a solemn and momentous pause freighted with the destinies of a world." Do we dare believe that our salvation might not have been? Here is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ!

*Nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt.* This alone is true faith. He trusts God's wisdom alone to know what is best for the race and for Himself. One believes very little about God, if he believes himself most qualified to know what is most needed in every circumstance. Jesus is willing to let God be God and rule His, (Jesus') universe with righteousness and supreme wisdom. His submission both defines and exemplifies true godliness and reverence (Heb. 5:7). Our Lord claimed no special privileges of sonship, but meekly submitted as should any son. And when the Father said "no," He accepted it. Prayer is not a motor for twisting God's arm to overcome His unwillingness, but a transmission that links us to His power to drive us on His missions.

The secret of His victory consists in deliberately choosing to subject His human desire to that of the Father. The victory over death on the cross began with this victory over self, because in it He submitted to the will of the Giver of life. Hence, He marched to the cross, not as victim, but as Victor. His ability to pray this mighty prayer was not the result of a last-minute heroic emotion suddenly blossoming there in the garden, but the set purpose of His whole life (John 5:30; 6:38). *Nevertheless:* with this solitary word He defied the supposedly absolutely compelling demands of circumstances and the undeniable pressures of the world and crucified His own right of self-determination!

How His will could be truly separate from that of the Father shall remain forever a mystery to mankind whose own ignorance of the interrelation between body and spirit does not permit full understanding even of itself. Nonetheless, the distinction between Jesus' human desire to be liberated from His impending suffering and God's will that He die, is a real one. His deity could not interfere with the will of God. Hence, what is manifest in this titanic struggle is Jesus' human instinct of self-preservation wrestling against His desire to do God's will, even if it meant death. Though He was divine, it was in the manner of an entirely human being that He suffered (Phil. 2:5ff.). Therefore, let us not attempt to explain what may well go far beyond our poor powers, but love Him for the great love that bound Him to us enough to go through that ordeal for us.



## When best friends do not understand

**26:40 And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?** That He *findeth them sleeping* speaks of His discovering what He did not previously know. This fact evidences the limitations of His human knowledge. Had He foreknown each time that they were asleep, He could not have discovered their failure. Even this insight into His limitations increases our appreciation of His suffering.

*Sleeping* "for sorrow" (Luke 22:45) indicates, not their indifference to Jesus, but their deep love for Him. Grief and the battle fatigue of previous days of campaigning alongside the Lord now took their toll. They could not guess what He was really suffering. The late night hour, coupled with the nervous strain brought on by that evening's heart-breaking revelations, conspired to lull these emotionally exhausted spiritual sentinels to sleep.

Nevertheless, Jesus' reaction proves they could have stayed awake, if they had but besought God for power to overcome the grief that drained them so. *What?* expresses Jesus' disappointment and His words hit home. Although Peter had sworn to stand beside the Lord in prison or in death, he was anything but a Rock now. (See on 16:18; cf. John 1:42.) Shortly after, he would lunge wildly forward in a mad suicidal defense against a superior military force. Now, however, he lacked the stimulation to prove dependable in an isolated prayer vigil when Jesus really needed him. Already warned of his approaching failure, Jesus warns him once more. But none of the others (*ye*) proved steadfast either.

## The problem and its solution

**26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.** He personally knew what a deadly peril *temptation* was. If He, earth's Perfect Man, senses His own human frailty when face to face with the strain of the supreme demands of obedience to God, how much more so should His drowsy disciples! So He urgently repeated to the inner Three the admonition to the eight disciples upon leaving them at the garden gate. (Cf. Luke 22:40.) Although theoretically, they now hear it twice, to their own damage they failed to heed it even once. *That you enter not into temptation* means "that you not walk right into unexpected trials without realizing you find yourself in such a situation." Their susceptibility to trials could be tragically fatal to their discipleship. (See on

26:31.) Hence, He graciously points to the source of their collapse. Therefore, staying away from temptation is dependent upon the close cooperation of two factors:

1. *Watch*: personal alertness which recognizes one's own vulnerability in time and consequent need for grace. Otherwise, one begins to entertain temptation as a welcome guest, until the will to resist is itself overcome. "Constant vigilance is the price of liberty."
2. *Pray*: dependence upon the leadership, power and protection of God. It also involves the constant submission of one's desires—temptation's target (James 1:14f.)—to the will and direction of God. Such prayer is not intended to eliminate all temptation *per se*, because this would mean to compromise man's freedom to desire. Rather, it pleads for strength to overcome what cannot be avoided. In the present case it was the disciples' own imperfect understanding of Jesus' Kingdom that was the source of their failure. Therefore, such praying must reorient the mind to let God's wisdom decide their worldview. Had the disciples done this, they would not have been scandalized by Jesus' apparent inability to save Himself from what they assumed was a one-way trip to disaster. He wants them safeguarded by concentration on God, just as He was.

His justification for this admonition lies precisely in the vulnerability and tension created by man's complex nature: *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*. (Cf. Gal. 5:17.) By *spirit* Jesus means our intellect, emotions, will and conscience. *Flesh*, then, refers to the basic instincts and emotions of our bodily human nature. (Remember Isa. 40:6-8; cf. *sàrx* in I Cor. 1:29; Gal. 2:16.) These men were not sleeping because of indifference, but due to emotional and physical strain. Hence, we are tempted to believe that, because our *spirit* is eager to do the right, we are necessarily *completely* committed to it. Unfortunately, our emotions, our body needs, our instincts, especially the basic instinct of self-preservation, may easily override our spiritual commitment. This weakness of *the flesh* regularly exposes us to temptations that overrule our most ardent commitment to the most truly orthodox convictions.

In this explanation of human vulnerability, can it be doubted that Jesus also included Himself, speaking of His own *spirit* and *flesh*? (Jesus has no total depravity doctrine in mind. For Him, *the flesh is weak*, not utterly dead.) Just as He had met decisive temptations at the beginning of His ministry, He must again meet

this last, decisive assault which pitted the natural instincts of His *flesh* against the commitments of His *spirit*. Just as the disciples' *flesh* was overcome by emotional weariness despite their protestations that their *spirit* was faithful, His *flesh* was rebelling against pain and death itself, even though His *spirit* was perfectly ready to do God's will. So, in His incarnation He faced problems and temptations common to us all. This imposed on Him the limitations of our human predicament too. So, if the Son of God needed such spiritual power to overcome, how much more do mortals such as we?!

Some see His gentle rebuke as Jesus' loving apology for their human weakness. He, the offended One, mercifully covered their offense with an explanation that in itself is amazingly helpful and edifying. Even so, His warning must not be an excuse for our indifference, but a bracing warning to be alert.

In these two verses are brought into play three elements of His own prayer model (6:9f.): 1. God is addressed as *Father*. 2. *Thy will be done*. 3. "that you enter not into temptation" echoes "Lead us not into temptation."

He who stood firm against the temptation to do or be anything but God's man in the crisis that night was the only one who watched and prayed. The others panicked and fled.

### The victory over self

**26:42 Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it, thy will be done.** He repeated the substance of the previous prayer (Mark 14:39). But in stating His former prayer negatively; there is now a subtle distinction in meaning. Jesus now assumes as settled that *this cannot pass away*. And, since He could have no doubt that the Father heard Him (John 11:42), the fact that His suffering was continuing already answered His first prayer, *as you will*. God had responded in the negative. Therefore, in His consenting to the impossibility, Jesus begins to drink the cup on this note of true, self-denial, not out of the bitter resignation of a false martyrdom but because it was the Father's will.

While Jesus rightly prayed, "All things are possible to you," the Father's range of options was not limitless, because of the moral nature of God and man, the requirements of divine justice and the

consequent redemption. God could not do absolutely all things, because He had limited Himself. How agonizingly painful it must have been for our Father to have to say "No," His own heart broken by the choice between sinful man and His own dear Son!

But if His submission is already totally settled, why, then, did He yet pray a third time? He was reiterating and confirming to Himself and God what He had so resolutely decided earlier.

**26:43 And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy.** His continuing to return to them proves His longing for friendly support. Undoubtedly, He was also anxious that they overcome through prayer and be valiant during the trial about to break upon them. Evidently, Jesus spoke again, but "they did not know what to answer Him" (Mark 14:40; cf. Mark 9:6).

**26:44 And he left them again, and went away, and prayed a third time, saying again the same words.** Just as Paul prayed the same prayer three times and received a negative response from God with the assurance that "My grace is sufficient for you" (II Cor. 12:8ff.), so also Jesus chose to glorify God through weakness. When Jesus appeared weakest because of insults, hardship, persecution and calamity, the power of God shone most brilliantly in Him. This *saying again the same words* has nothing to do with repetition of empty, fixed liturgical forms in prayer. (Cf. 6:7.) His complaint was against words empty of meaning and hearts unaware of God. Rather, His own repetition here is precisely the opposite, expressing deep intensity of His feeling as He continues to deal with the same soul-piercing problem. (Cf. I Kings 17:20f.)

**26:45 Then cometh he to the disciples, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.** The command in 26:46 to rouse themselves stands in direct opposition to this (supposed) command to the disciples to *sleep on now and take your rest* (v. 45), because there, Jesus argues that they should get moving, rather than go to sleep. How should we interpret the verb form in question? Further, Mark (14:41) inserts a short word at this point (*apéchei*) that challenges translators and leaves our quandary basically unsolved. Two major interpretations seem appropriate:

1. "It is enough" from a commercial technical term meaning "to receive a sum in full and give a receipt for it" (Arndt-Gingrich, 84).
2. "He (or perhaps: it) is distant." (See Johnson-DeWalt, *Mark*, 424.) Whatever danger for which they should stay awake is far enough away to justify a short rest before it arrives.

*Sleep on now and take your rest*, expressed in Greek as a second person plural verb, is ambiguous, because the form of the verb could be either indicative or imperative, i.e. either a statement, even expressed as a question, or a command.

1. If it is a command, the circumstance indicated by Jesus in the last half of the verse makes it sadly ironic: "Try to keep asleep *now* and get a good night of rest! It just so happens that I am going to be betrayed in the next 15 minutes!" Their indifference to their own spiritual danger as contrasted to their alertness to physical peril shown in their reactions merits this rebuke. Accordingly, Mark's expression may mean: "Enough of my scolding you for past weakness! We have other problems now. Here come Judas and his cohorts."

Similarly, others would see this expression as a sad question expressed in the indicative mood: "Are you continuing to sleep, although I have urged you to wake and pray?" Mark's expression, then means, "Enough [of your attempts to sleep and my efforts to wake you]!"

2. Another view sees this as a paradoxical concession: "Go ahead and sleep now, because, so far as I am concerned, I can no longer use you to watch with me." This accuses them of indifference to Jesus' needs. Mark's expression then means: "Enough [of your watching with me]. I cannot use your help any longer, because the time has passed for that."
3. McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 231) believes in the first phrase Jesus concedes, while in the second, having just noticed the near arrival of the enemy. He rapidly changes the subject. This is the expression of strong emotion that looks at the question first from His point of view, then from theirs.
4. Others, sensing the strident contrast between His comforting them to sleep and His two urgent statements: *Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners*, posit an unstated, undefined lapse of time after Jesus' *Sleep on now, and take your rest*, or perhaps after 26:45. This is a real concession to their weakness, as if He meant, "There is a bit of time left for getting some rest before the storm" (*kathēudete tò loipòn*: "Sleep for the remainder of the time"). So they drop off to sleep again. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 920f.) marvels over Jesus' compassion:

The Shepherd, who has been asking the disciples to watch with him, is now tenderly keeping vigil over them. His own victory

having been won, perfect peace has been restored to his own heart. He has been strengthened through prayer. To be sure, the three men had failed him. But never, no never will his love fail them! What we have here, accordingly, is one of the most touching pictures in the Gospels, and one, moreover, that is entirely in harmony with the sympathetic character of the Savior.

He may have sat quietly thinking while they slept on until the coming of the soldiers. Then, to give them the common courtesy of facing their foe awake and on their feet He aroused them with Mark's expression, "It is enough," meaning that their period of rest was finished.

Either way, they had missed their unique opportunity to be of any use to Jesus at His greatest hour of need for human help. His moment of frailty has passed. Their moral support is no longer needed, because He is now serene and self-possessed, ready to meet death face to face and win.

The son of God goes forth to war  
a kingly crown to win

**26:46 Arise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.** Our Lord, fully aware of what would befall Him, boldly presented Himself to be our sacrifice! Such tranquility and courage proves that Jesus' prayer was answered. Rather than remove His suffering, God gave Him strength to bear it. He arose from cringing and crying to face the grim battle of the ages. This is the purpose of praying: that while kneeling before God we may find the marvelous resilience and moral power to attack life's problems head-on. Only after such prayer comes victory.

*Behold, he is at hand that betrayeth me.* The bobbing pinpoints of torch-light may have become discernible in the distance as the numerous arresting party poured out of Jerusalem. Perhaps Jesus could already hear the hushed murmur of voices, the clank of weaponry and the tread of boots on the rocky pathway leading to the garden. So He speaks with urgency, lest the drowsy disciples be totally unprepared for what must follow.

In an age where even religious activities are geared to stroking our feelings and coddling our sentiments in order to make us feel good in

our sins, we must look to Jesus! In a day when we are instructed to find a life-style that feels good, we must remember that He could say "NO!" to His impulses in order to save us from our certain destiny. When, in order to assuage our sense of guilt, sentimental songs of self-congratulation take the place of God-centered hymns, when chummy pep-talks feebly supplant life-changing messages that exalt the living God and stir us to responsible action, we must look to Jesus! He did not *feel like* going to the cross for anyone. It is to *this* role-model that we are called (Rom. 8:29; I Peter 2:21; I John 2:6; John 13:15).

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. List the events that led up to the prayer in Gethsemane.
2. By what general route did Jesus arrive in the garden? Locate Gethsemane. What does this word mean?
3. How did He organize Himself and His men in order to achieve premium opportunity for prayer?
4. What various emotions are attributed to Jesus during this scene?
5. What personal admonitions did He give the disciples for their spiritual protection?
6. Explain the meaning of "watch with me."
7. List and explain the various petitions Jesus included in His prayer.
8. What "cup" did Jesus ask the Father to remove?
9. What reproof did Peter deserve from Jesus?
10. Explain the relationship between watching and praying, then indicate how these protect a person against temptations.
11. How does one "enter into temptation"?
12. Explain why the disciples' "eyes were heavy."
13. How many times did Jesus repeat His prayer?
14. What final rebuke did the disciples merit for their sleeping?

### SECTION 68

#### JESUS IS ARRESTED

(Parallels: Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)

TEXT: 26:47-56

47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief

priests and elders of the people. 48 And he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he: take him. 49 And straightway he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Rabbi; and kissed him. 50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, *do* that for which thou art come. Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him. 51 And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear. 52 Then saith Jesus unto him, Put again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. 53 Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? 55 In that hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves to seize me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and yet took me not. 56 But all this is come to pass, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him, and fled.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. What evidence of meticulous preparation do you see in this arresting party? Why so many armed men needed?
- b. How does Jesus' attitude in this section differ from that expressed during His agony in Gethsemane?
- c. Why does each of the Gospel writers entitle Judas "one of the twelve" as if their readers had never heard of this man already well-introduced earlier in every one of the Gospels? Are they merely copying a stereotyped tradition, or is there some other reason that made this formula necessary?
- d. To arrest a teacher believed heretical, how many men are needed? What does the number of armed men with Judas indicate about their attitude toward Jesus?
- e. The Synoptics relate that Judas *immediately* approached Jesus to betray Him, but John completely ignores the betrayal kiss and gives attention to Jesus' overawing the arresting party. Is a harmony of these facts possible? How should we treat the Gospels when one or more of them does not relate facts chronicled in the others? Are they completely unaware of information related by others?
- f. Why do you think Judas needed to give a sign of recognition?



Was not Jesus already well known? If so, why need the kiss to point Him out?

- g. Why did Judas call Jesus “Rabbi”? Did not he know His personal name?
- h. Who do you think Judas thought he was betraying: Jesus or the authorities? Do you think he really hated Jesus? Why did he betray Him?
- i. Why did Jesus call Judas, “Friend”? Was He appealing to him or rebuking him or something else? What effect could this title produce in Judas?
- j. If Judas had already given the betrayal sign by kissing Jesus, how could Jesus then say, “Friend, do that for which you are come”? Is not this nonsense? Or do we have a correct translation of Jesus’ words?
- k. Why do you suppose the well-armed men of the arresting force had not attacked Jesus before, or at least when Peter started slashing with his sword?
- l. What does Peter’s violent reaction reveal about the man?
- m. In what way(s) was he so wrong for using the sword?
- n. What impression did Peter give others of Jesus’ teaching that night?
- o. What should everyone have understood when Jesus claimed the protection of an innumerable host of angels to avoid this arrest? That angels really exist? Would the Sadducean hierarchy have agreed with Him? Do you?
- p. What should people have understood when Jesus asserted that the Scriptures foretold even this arrest? How would this help the Apostles?
- q. Why did Jesus not hesitate to condemn the cowardly attack by His foes?
- r. Why did the disciples abandon Jesus? Do you think that the soldiers would have arrested the disciples too?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Now Judas, who betrayed Jesus, also knew about the Garden of Gethsemane, for He had often met there with His disciples. So Judas procured a Roman detachment of 600 infantry and some subalterns of the Temple police dispatched by the chief priests and Pharisees. These went there equipped with lanterns, torches and weapons.

Just as Jesus was still speaking about the near arrival of His betrayer, Judas, one of the Twelve appeared, accompanied by a great crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent by the clergy, theologians and rulers of the nation. Then Jesus, with full awareness of all the things that were going to happen to Him, stepped forward and addressed the mob, "Who are you looking for?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered Him.

"I am He," Jesus told them. (Judas, the traitor, was standing there with them.) When the Lord said, "I am He," they lurched backward and fell all over themselves. Once more He questioned them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they repeated.

"I already told you that I am your man," Jesus responded. "So, if I am the one you want, let these other men go." This was how the word He had prayed came true, "I did not lose a single one of these You gave me."

Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, "The man I greet with a kiss is your man. Arrest him and lead him away well-guarded." Going at once to Jesus, he said, "Hello, Teacher!" and kissed Him affectionately.

But Jesus challenged him, "What are you doing here, friend? Judas, would you use a *kiss* to betray me, your Messiah?"

At this they stepped forward, grabbed Jesus and held Him tight. When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they shouted, "Lord, shall we use our swords now?" At this point Simon Peter, one of those who stood by Jesus, reached for his sword, drew it and slashed at the high priest's slave and sliced off his right ear. (The slave's name was Malchus.) But Jesus stopped Peter, "Sheath your sword! Killing only leads to more killing! Those who wantonly take justice into their own hands and kill, rightly deserve death. Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to my Father or that He would not instantly place more than 72,000 angels at my disposal? On the other hand, how could the Bible texts be fulfilled, that say it must happen this way? The Father has given me a cup of suffering to drink; shall I refuse to drink it?"

(To those who held Him, Jesus said,) "Let me do this much at least." He then touched the man's ear and miraculously restored it.

At that point Jesus said to the chief priests, the Temple police and the elders who were there to arrest Him, "Did you have to march out heavily armed to capture me, as if I were a dangerous outlaw?"

Day after day, when I was in your reach, sitting in the Temple courts teaching, you never laid a finger on me. But this is the hour you choose and the authority darkness gives you! Yet all this has occurred just like the writings of the prophets said it would."

Then the Roman detachment and their colonel along with the Jewish subordinates took hold of Jesus and tied His hands. Then all the disciples deserted Him and escaped. But a certain young man, wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his naked body, was following Him. They grabbed him, but he slipped out of the linen cloth and escaped naked.

## SUMMARY

Judas led a large contingent of men armed with weapons and judicial authority to arrest Jesus. However, He overwhelmed them by offering Himself up to them. When they regained their composure, Judas brazenly gave the betrayal signal. This moved the authorities to action, but also unleashed the armed disciples. Peter started carving with his sword, but Jesus blocked any further action and healed the wounded man. Further, He attributed all that was happening to the express will and planning of God. He then reproached the authorities for their moral cowardice evident in this night arrest of a man whom they could easily have taken in broad daylight. But this too was foreseen in Scripture. Jesus permitted them to bind Him and lead Him away, while His followers made good their escape, that is, all but one who "barely" made it.

## NOTES

### THE MAN WHO REFUSED TO FIGHT

Jesus, our model of forbearance and restraint

#### I. THE AUDACIOUS, ALL-OUT ATTACK BY EVIL MEN (26:47-49)

**26:47 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people.** Matthew does not state when Judas left the Apostolic band to begin his evil mission, but simply presupposes what John records, that he rushed away from the Pass-over supper (John 13:30).

Why continue to call *Judas, one of the twelve*, when he was already well-known to Matthew's reader? (Cf. 10:4; 26:14.) Rather than term this expression "a stereotyped, traditional formulation," there are simpler solutions:

1. *Judas* shared this common name with hundreds of Judases in first-century Israel. (Cf. 13:55; Acts 1:13; Jude 1; John 14:22; Acts 5:37; Acts 9:11; 15:22.) Since Matthew had not reported Judas' hasty departure from the apostolic group at the Passover supper (John 13:30), he must now identify the posse's guide as the *Judas* who was *one of the twelve*. And precisely because of the commonness of names, would not the Synoptics identify the man all the more carefully, lest confusion arise in later years? But could the treachery of *Judas* Iscariot ever be mistakenly laid at the door of any other Judas?
2. This descriptive, *one of the twelve*, repeated here also has the flavor of shame and anguish that such a betrayal by one of His chosen disciples could happen. (See on 26:14.) Cannot Matthew register his shock more than once? Is this any stranger than repeating the list of conspirators, "*chief priests and elders of the people*," which, for the godly in Israel, must have been just as unbelievable, because these leaders might be presumed to welcome, not crucify, God's Christ (26:3, 47, 57, 59; 27:1)?

Judas could be surer of a decisive strike because Jesus habitually used this olive grove as a camping spot (Luke 21:37) and possibly also a meeting place (*sunéchthe*, John 18:2). This detail points to Jesus' consistent efforts to convince Jerusalem (23:37f.; Luke 19:41ff.; 23:27ff.; John 2:13ff.—3:21; 5:1ff.; 7:10—10:39). Because Jesus knew Judas knew this, He facilitated the arrest for Judas by going there.

*Great multitude, swords, staves*, "lanterns, torches and weapons," (John 18:3), ropes or chains (John 18:12) were prepared and *Judas* came as guide with his pre-arranged signal. That so many armed men were detached to bring in an itinerate Rabbi, Jesus Himself will term irresponsible overkill (26:55). From this critics could reject the Gospel report as grossly overstated. However, looked at from the viewpoint of the Jews, every precaution underscores the thoroughness of their preparation, their fear of resistance or rescue by Jesus' many friends then in Jerusalem, or their fear that He might simply elude them, as on previous occasions. (Cf. John

7:45f.; 8:59; 10:31, 39.) So, if Judas were not totally trusted, or if a Zealot ambush were feared, or if personal misgivings about attacking a miracle-working prophet, should paralyze the manliest among them, perhaps they could find psychological strength in numbers.

Although the mob was *from the chief priests and elders of the people*, i.e. representing the entire authority of Israel including the Pharisees (John 18:3; see on 26:3), the ecclesiastical leaders themselves came along. (See on 26:55.) Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 922) suggested that, because Jesus hurried Judas out into the night aware that his plot is discovered, he must have alarmed the authorities to take instant, decisive action lest the entire operation be compromised by some unpredictable reaction on Jesus' part. Further, a secret night raid, when Jesus' supporters were least expecting it, had a better chance of success, because any eventual resistance could be overcome more easily. Did the Jews among them simply not observe their Passover supper due to their primary preoccupation with capturing Jesus, or were they summoned away from it, being already alerted to assemble at a moment's notice?

Matthew's estimate, *a great multitude*, does not exaggerate the size of the contingent, because John specifies that the conspirators had been satisfied with bringing nothing less than "the cohort" (*labòn tèn sepeían*, note the article). This military detachment, a tenth part of a legion, usually consisted of 600 men under the command of a Roman tribune or chiliarch (John 18:3, 12). That Romans garrisoned the Castle Antonia during feasts to maintain order and quell riots is well-documented by Josephus (*Ant.* XVII,10,1; XX,5,3; *Wars* V,5,8). John's language seems to distinguish the cohort from the Jewish officers, the Temple police (*hoi huperéti tôn Ioudaion; strategoús toû hieroû*, John 18:3, 12; Luke 22:52). Because Jewish officers had been swayed by Jesus' discourses before (John 7:45f.), implacable Romans are added to guarantee arrest this time.

Nevertheless, because *speira* is also used in the ancient authors to refer to the Latin *manipulus*, a detachment of 200 men. John may not mean the entire Roman cohort, since this would leave the fortress undermanned and the city dangerously unguarded, if Pilate had brought only a 600-man cohort for this feast. Even so, 200 Romans with their officers, not counting the Levitical guards and other Jews, still amounts to a *multitude* involved in the arrest of a teacher! However, if the authorities feared popular resistance and if the rest of the legionaries remained in the

fortress, the larger number would by no means be thought exaggerated, and the Roman officers would lead a detachment adequate to meet the supposed need.

Therefore, the Romans were involved in Jesus' arrest. But their participation at this early stage means that the Roman involvement began much earlier than the hearing of Jesus' case before Pilate. Would not this, in turn, imply that the elimination of Jesus had already been decided by common agreement between the religious and political authorities, by the Sanhedrin led by the priesthood as well as by Pilate? Are Pilate's attempts to save Jesus, then, to be written off as a farce? Again, one must explain the "disappearance" of the Romans during the Jewish trials of Jesus, as well as from the Synoptic accounts. Attempts to solve this mystery are varied:

1. THE SYNOPTICS REWROTE HISTORY. Some attribute the Roman's absence from Jesus' Jewish trials as due to a tendency in Christian tradition to transfer guilt for Jesus' death from the Romans to the Jews. But by what right can "theological interest of the Evangelist" justify *inventing fact*? Such tampering with truth undermines confidence in any other "fact" they report, leaving nothing certain. Further, if Roman soldiers were needed only for the arrest which succeeded, why should they be further required to continue what Jewish guards can now safely handle?
2. JOHN EXAGGERATED. Others, taking the opposite point of view, say that John simply added the Roman participation at Jesus' arrest for good measure to emphasize the numerical strength and superiority of Jesus' enemies. John is thought to argue that this big multinational force needed to take Jesus could not capture Him, had He not turned Himself over to them spontaneously (John 18:1ff.). Further, Pilate's question suggests that he knew nothing about the cause of Jesus' arrest (John 18:29). Hence, he could not have ordered his men to collaborate with the Jews in effecting it. Therefore, John too rewrote history. But Pilate's purely formal question merely opens the trial and says nothing of what he himself already knew. (See also below.)
3. THERE NEVER WERE ANY ROMANS INVOLVED IN THE ARREST. Perhaps John used the military terms "cohort" (*speira*) and "tribune" (*chiliarchos*) in a non-technical sense to indicate the size and organization of the Jewish band. Luke used "captains" (*strategoï*) in a similar way, and by adding "of the Temple," indicates their

strictly Jewish character. However, by calling the Jewish Temple police *huperétai* (John 7:32, 45; 18:12). John seems to distinguish them from the Roman cohort.

4. PILATE ENTRUSTED A COHORT TO CAIAPHAS. Is it not plausible that, in the interests of prejudicing Rome against the Nazarene. Caiaphas request a cohort from Pilate to capture a dangerous revolutionary? By not specifying further the exact character of Jesus' movement the wily priest could avoid "complications." Perhaps Caiaphas need not even address his request to Pilate, but to the tribune. Was not such a guard at Jewish disposal at other times (cf. 27:65)? However, is it unthinkable that Pilate should have granted it personally, on the assumption that political co-operation in this unthreatening way could relieve tension in Judea? And would not Pilate's otherwise inexplicable availability early the next morning be more credible, if his men reported to him on their unusual activities the night before (27:1f.)? His reactions during the trials point to high-quality intelligence reports concerning the true character of their so-called "dangerous subversive" and indicate he possessed a good grasp of events (cf. 27:18, 23f.; Luke 23:4, 14f., 22).

### The audacity of hypocrisy

**26:48 Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that is he: take him.** The kiss is decidedly part of the plot, not an afterthought on Judas' part. With many Paschal pilgrims crowding around Jerusalem, in case of a fight they ran the risk of arresting the wrong person in the dark. Why select *this* signal? Because this type of salutation was common among orientals when friends meet after a long absence, especially when a disciple greets his beloved teacher. However, it is unnecessary to think that the betrayer would select a signal as far as possible from his true sentiment, so as better to mask his perfidy. By contrast to the commentaries, the Gospel writers are surprisingly subdued in describing Judas and his betrayal kiss.

1. If the kiss were thought not absolutely necessary for the success of the plot, was this choice the backlash of vengefulness? Could not Judas have pointed Jesus out to the authorities without committing himself so openly, remaining in the background? Does not this hypocritical greeting prove that Jesus' friend had been transformed into a mortal foe? If so, rather than be either revolting

or repulsive to Judas, would not such a kiss be but part of the deep satisfaction of his demand for revenge? However, for men grimly determined to succeed, some definite, unmistakable sign of recognition was necessary in the semi-darkness to eliminate confusion and mistakes. So it is more likely that the kiss was selected, because it permits the betrayer to approach the victim for the most positive identification possible.

2. Was it that he was trying to assuage whatever in his conscience yet accused him of acting in a manner untrue to himself? Was this habitual act of formal respect and affection intended by Judas to hide from himself the full impact of his sin while doing it? Not too likely, because he may not have considered his act a sin in the final analysis, especially if he viewed the ensuing crisis as merely a crucial step in the final exaltation of Jesus to the Jewish Messiahship with its material throne, economic power and political clout. (See notes on 26:14.)
3. In harmony with his own warped views of Messiahship, this kiss was but an essential step toward the mistaken goal he envisioned. It was, thus, neither hypocritical nor vengeful, but simply part of the mechanism necessary to make his plan work. He himself could hold Jesus firm, distract Him and give the guards time to grab Him. At the same time, did Judas expect the kiss to have even a *positive* effect on Jesus, persuading Him of Judas' loyalty despite the fierceness of the crisis now beginning? Judas stood to gain, if Jesus were convinced of this. Thus, *for Judas, the kiss is not a betrayal of Jesus but of the enemies who stood in the way of Iscariot's Kingdom of the Messiah.* What Judas said publicly to the enemy (26:15, 48) may have no relationship to his own secret motives. Here is his hypocrisy.

This agrees better with Judas' consciousness of Jesus' many miracles, even if he forgot the Lord's ability to read the motives of his heart. This refusal to read baseness in Judas' manner is not to clothe the man with motives more or less respectable, but to understand how a common disciple like me could ever become capable of committing so terrible a sin as turning the Savior of the world over to His enemies. In fact, "The worst opponents of Christ are still those who betray with a kiss—such as those who oppose His claims while affecting to revere His character, and deny His Saviourship while acknowledging the excellence of His doctrine" (*P.H.C.*, XXIII, 543).

**26:49 And straightway he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, Rabbi; and kissed him.** *Straightway* should be understood in a relative sense,



i.e. "immediately" in reference to what? Did Judas, instantly upon arrival at the garden, walk right up to Jesus, give Him the betrayal kiss and turn Him over to His enemies who immediately hauled Him away, with the sole interruption of Peter's defense? John, however, clearly remember Jesus' bold self-surrender to the mob, an act that so overpowered them that He almost had to insist that they take Him (John 18:4-9). Solutions are related to the respective locations of Jesus, Judas, the apostles and the various components of the arresting party inside or outside the garden:

1. Would Jesus' bold challenge have had the startling moral ascendancy that it did, if Judas strode *straightway* up to Jesus, as the mob expected him to, and gave the prearranged signal in a manner obvious to all? On the other hand, in the shadows cast by the flickering torches and the Paschal moon, Judas may have acted prematurely. If, in his eagerness to betray Jesus, he forged ahead of the mob, he may have approached Jesus directly and awkwardly betrayed Him with a kiss before the main body of troops and authorities could make out what he had done. (The same effect would occur, if, out of fear of Jesus, the troops and authorities held back somewhat, and consequently in the half-darkness missed Judas' signal.) After Judas' designation, then, Jesus identified Himself to the mob, majestically challenging them to arrest Him and free His men. Some prefer this view because Jesus' regal bearing and unexpectedly bold challenge could still shake the sternest of men even after Judas' kiss and *precisely because they knew Him to be* their quarry. See Lenski on *John*, 1181f., for his own and Luther's arguments in favor of a miracle.
2. The PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY presents the view that Jesus, alone and unarmed, anticipated Judas' betrayal. Complete master of the situation, He offered Himself before Judas could act. This moral supremacy focused all attention on Him and avoided a universal round-up of His men. Then, to complete his part in the plot, Judas, who hitherto had been standing with the posse (John 18:5), blundered forward to give the now practically superfluous confirming kiss that signalled for anyone yet in doubt that Jesus is the one to arrest.

However, this gesture was neither totally worthless nor without effect. If the soldiers took the foreground, leaving the priests who knew Jesus behind them, for those officers who did not know Jesus

of Nazareth personally, His self-identification might have been interpreted as shielding the real insurrectionist they sought. If the Romans had orders from their superiors to arrest only the man whom Judas identified by the kiss, they would not have acted until he did. Further, by daring to approach their Foe and touching him, Judas broke the spell of whatever fear they had of His divine majesty or of some terrible miracle He might use to defend Himself from them. (Cf. John 18:4-7.) This emboldened them to act.

By kissing Him with particular fervor (*katephilesen*) as opposed to a simple kiss (*phileso*, v. 48), some believe Judas merely prolonged the unrepeatable sign to assure the guards of Jesus' identity. This would be consistent with his ostentatious, *Hail, Rabbi*. (Cf. 26:25, not "Lord, but 'Rabbi.'") Some see in this his conscience and affection that struggle with a stern will to get it over with. However, the kiss expressed strong emotion not inconsistent with his secret soul which he never sold out to Jesus' enemies. Dreaming only of future wealth, how would he treat the man who is his ticket to incalculable wealth and power? After all, he does not suspect that he is really turning Jesus over to His death. (Cf. 27:3; see notes on 26:14.)

## II. HIS CHALLENGE TO MORAL SENSE (26:50)

**26:50 And Jesus said unto him, Friend, do that for which thou art come. Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.** Addressing Judas as *Friend* (*hetaïre*), Jesus treats the man, not as a beloved "friend" (*philos*, cf. John 15:14f.), but holds him at the briefest of distance, "Buddy, mate." As in English, *Friend* can be used to address "someone whose name one does not know" (20:13; 22:12; Arndt-Gingrich, 314). Depending on context, *hetaïros* refers to one's companion or comrade in arms, one's mate on ships, at table, in slavery, etc. Consequently, it can also mean "lover, disciple, follower, adherent, partisan, body-guard" (Rocci, 776).

Reminding Judas of all that they had shared together, this exquisite word combines a rebuke of Judas' treachery with a touching appeal to his heart and conscience to dissuade the man from his determination. After all, Judas has not yet killed himself: he could yet repent as would Peter. This view harmonizes with the words whereby Jesus also challenged and shamed Judas, "Would you betray the Son of man with a kiss" (Luke 22:48)? By calling Judas' act by its real name, betrayal, His words were calculated to shock the man with the real

enormity of his sin. These words should haunt him, if he would but abandon his own mistaken views of Messiahship, while the gentleness of Christ's pleading could not yet arouse his conscience, break his heart and lead him to repent and ask forgiveness. Over Akeldama the noose was not yet tied for Judas Iscariot. . . .

*Do that for which thou art come.* Translated this way, this sentence is nonsense; for, by betraying Jesus with a kiss, Judas had *already* done that for which he had come. Jesus could know that his role in the entire procedure had just been played. So, why should the Lord still urge his betrayer to carry out his mission? Further, since the verb "*do*" does not appear in Greek here, the phrase (*hetaïre, eph' ho pâirei*) really breaks off suddenly, leaving His thought incomplete. Therefore, something must be supplied to complete it.

1. Some, like the RSV, treat it as a question: "Friend, for what are you come?" or, "Friend, what are you doing here?" Robertson (*Word Pictures*, 1,215) believes Deissmann "has proven conclusively that it is a question, *eph'ho* in late Greek having the interrogative sense of *epi ti* (Robertson, *Grammar*, p. 725). . . . Most of the early translations (Old Latin, Old Syriac) took it as a question." However, *ho* is not normally an interrogative pronoun, but a relative-demonstrative. Arndt-Gingrich (588) admit the possibility that the relative be used to take the place of the interrogative pronoun in a direct question but confess that the only example of this construction in our literature, i.e. Matthew 26:50, is much in dispute. Arndt-Gingrich (587) suggest as missing words, "friend, (are you misusing the kiss) for that (purpose) for which you are here?" or perhaps "in connection with that (= the purposes), for which (= for the realization of which) you have appeared (do you kiss me)?"
2. Blass-Debrunner (§ 300) term it . . .

"Controversial Matthew 26:50 . . . : hardly a direct question 'For what?' The easiest solution is to take it as a painful, ironic reminiscence of a toast like the one attested on a goblet from Syria: . . . 'Enjoy yourself! for that's why you are here.'"

It could be viewed as an sad exclamation, almost a groan: "What you are here for!" Judas, Jesus' companion, was on the wrong side, so the Lord's reaction compels him to grasp the outrageousness of what he is doing.

Either way, because Judas hid his dream of self-aggrandizement from Jesus, the Lord rightly rejects this apparently real affection as expressive of Judas' true motive.

*Then they came and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.* Matthew and Mark present this seizure before Peter's attack, while Luke and John appear to place it afterwards. However, the latter give general summaries of the night's activities, not a calculated refutation of their colleagues' affirmations. No one included a precise notation of the time or sequence. Accordingly, upon Judas' signal, when guards began to seize Jesus, Peter dashed in, his sword flashing. This temporarily halted the arrest. When Jesus halted Peter, the guards finished what they had begun. Then, as everyone turned his attention on Jesus, the disciples were permitted to escape with greater safety.

Having given His consent to suffer what He Himself had predicted and the Scriptures foresaw, declining every form of rescue whether from earth or heaven, He now willingly accepted those bonds that would be removed only to nail Him to the tree. But the only bonds which would or could hold Jesus, were not the puny chains of human manufacture, but love: "He loved me and gave Himself up for me."

### The interruption by violence (26:51)

**26:51 And behold, one of them that were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and smote the servant of the high priest, and struck off his ear.** Some other armed disciple (Simon the Zealot?), misinterpreting Jesus' earlier remark about buying swords (Luke 22:35ff.) and ignoring Jesus' demand that the disciples be permitted to leave (John 18:8), and recognizing the imminent danger in which Jesus now stood, cried out, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" (Luke 22:49). Not waiting for the answer and possibly emboldened by Jesus' overpowering His would-be assailants (John 18:6), the dauntless Peter drew his sword and rushed to attack a superior force single-handedly. With the courage of the desperate, he was determined to take out as many as he could before getting killed himself. He would show Jesus here and now the sincerity of his earlier promises of loyalty unto death!

But in doing so, he struck an ill-considered blow for worldly Messiahship, the same dangerous concept that drove Judas to create this crisis for Jesus. Peter's violence reflected against the Lord Himself by justifying His enemies' fear that the Lord was the revolutionary

head of a band of cut-throats. He was robbing Jesus of His right to claim, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my officers would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place" (John 18:36). Lenski (*Matthew*, 1050) wrote: "Peter acts as though Jesus meant none of the things he said. His love does not listen and obey. . . ."

We too fall for Peter's temptation when we put our trust in material weapons for the advancement of the Church of Christ. Wealth, political influence, power-plays and materialistic world-views that secularize in order to popularize, are methods that possess no divine power to save. However well meaning, these attempts to grab a larger slice of power and prestige in a power-hungry world are but the same violent slashing of swords. It denies Jesus' true goals and spiritual methods, and if unhindered, renders Scripture useless and effectually shuts the Kingdom of heaven against men. Such a program is as much an embarrassment to Jesus' cause now as Peter's violence was to Him then. (Contrast II Cor. 10:3-5.)

*Smote Malchus* (John 18:10) *the servant of the high priest*. This slave was a trusted personal agent of the high priest, a fact that explains his intervention to arrest Jesus. *Struck off his ear*: unquestionably, Peter aimed a deadly blow that could have split the skull of Malchus, but the servant's instinctive sidestep foiled Peter's thrust, so he lost only his right ear (Luke 22:49; John 18:10). If the slave wore armor, the blow harmlessly thudded into his shoulder armor. Peter really intended to kill the man.

The indefinite description of Peter as *one of them that were with Jesus* (John 18:10) furnishes incidental evidence of the early dating of Matthew's document. In the darkness the soldiers did not learn the identity of the one who took up arms to resist arrest. To name him while he were alive could have meant unnecessary trials for the man who not only resisted in Gethsemane but also continued to be a thorn in the side of the Sanhedrin which was still ruling when the Synoptic Gospels were penned. (Mary of Bethany is a parallel case, 26:7.) Should Matthew's book, supposedly current only among Christians, contain information that informers among false brethren could transform into vicious arms against the Church? (Cf. notes on 24:10.) But John, who alone names him, wrote long after Peter's death under Nero sometime before 68 A.D. (Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* II,25; III,24).

Alford's refutation of this hypothesis is ill-founded, because in the high priest's courtyard Peter's recognition as the assailant

of the servant had lost its sting, precisely because Jesus had healed the man. Thereafter none could complain without admitting Jesus' supernatural power to heal hence His God-given right to say what they rejected.

### III. HIS CALL FOR RESTRAINT

#### A. The Law That Forbids Violence (26:52)

**26:52 Then saith Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into its place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.** If the use of violence in defense of Christianity were ever justified, this is the moment to establish its appropriateness. Nevertheless, Jesus moved decisively to block His defenders. What did He mean here?

1. He did not proscribe the legitimate use of weapons of their ownership. It remained *your sword* to be *put again into its place*. However, some interpret these words as expressing Jesus' repudiation of ownership of any sword and of every use of it as having nothing to do with His cause. However, Jesus never demanded that Peter *throw it away*, as if He had a policy of *absolute* non-resistance, for this would be a contradiction of Luke 22:36. Rather, His defense is not the cause, time nor place to use it.
2. Nor does He repudiate the appropriate use of the sword in human justice (Rom. 13:4), as if He hereby threatened constituted authority. To the contrary, Jesus' words may be considered as a legal sentence pronounced, not as a simple future, but as the imperative future (Alford, I,278). Thus, His maxim becomes a virtual parallel to Genesis 9:6 to justify capital punishment: "Those who wantonly take justice into their own hands and kill, rightly deserve death." Thus, Jesus stood up for the maintenance of law and order, even if His own trial would be illegal and its sentence unjust.
3. A divine law of retribution? "Use the sword against men and God will similarly destroy you." In this violent spirit there is no time for mercy or forgiveness (18:21-35). Despite their evil use of the legal system, these are "little ones" whose importance to God must not be despised (18:6-14). They know not what they do!
4. A practical consideration? "Killing leads only to more senseless killing. You cannot avoid escalation. Success in eliminating some does not mean destroying all. You too may be killed." (Cf. Sirach

3:26.) Ironically, this futile, bloody course was followed by many demagogues in Israel in their last desperate bid for freedom from Rome, and received what they deserved in blood.

5. An ethical principle? The use of bloodshed or violence, militarism and inquisitions to advance Christ's Kingdom, is hereby forbidden. (Cf. John 18:36.) If even saving the King, the supreme justification, is interdicted, how much less justified is the use of force to defend its lesser interests? Otherwise, Christianity's foes will take up the sword to attack the Kingdom, question its motives, block its interests, hinder its progress and silence its message,—all in reaction to sword-swinging Christians. The only way to transform the course of history is through loving persuasion, not through belligerence and bluster.

So, Jesus commanded Peter to sheath his sword, not because all use of the sword is wrong, since Jesus Himself did not believe this, but because all taking the law into one's hands by violent measures is wrong. Because the rule applied to every instance of private vengeance, Peter's was a case in point and required correction.

### B. The Heavenly Might That Protects Him (26:53)

**26:53 Or thinkest thou that I cannot beseech my Father, and he shall even now send me more than twelve legions of angels?** This reproaches His rash follower: "Do you really suppose I could not escape if I wanted to?" If a Roman *legion* was comprised of 6000 soldiers, He had 72,000 *angels* at His command. This potential Heaven-sent defense force provides two excellent reasons for not fighting to defend Jesus:

1. Peter's feeble efforts are absolutely unnecessary and worse than useless in light of the virtually unlimited, formidable fire-power at His disposal, should He choose to use it. If little children are watched by the angels (18:10), how much more God's only Son? If God's prophets are protected by heavenly might (Remember II Kings 6:8-17: Elisha surrounded at Dothan!), how much more so His Son?
2. The mob's efforts to take Him against His will could avail nothing. It is immaterial whether or not Jesus' overawing the soldiers (John 18:4-6) be a supernatural expression of His divine power and

majesty, no number of men on earth could touch Him, unless He permitted it.

If the Lord willingly surrendered, one arresting officer was enough. If He really resisted, all the world's armies would never suffice! The irony of *twelve* defenders (Jesus and the eleven Apostles) against a multitude of Roman soldiers is only surpassed by the incomparably greater defence by *twelve legions of angels* whom Jesus sees ready to march but whom He refuses to summon. So He would die, not because unprotected or because a single foe got behind His line of defense, but because He deliberately abandoned His protection.

### C. The Bonds That Hold Him (26:54)

**26:54 How then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?** Here is another argument against fighting: Any kind of deliverance was completely irreconcilable with the destiny predicted for the suffering Servant of Jahveh (Isa. 53; Ps. 22; Zech. 12:10). Therefore, by attempting Jesus' defense, anyone who agreed with Peter was rejecting the deliberate purpose of God stated in *the Scriptures*.

In a critical moment such as this, a man's character and his confidence in his religion are revealed for what they are. The hardest character trait of all to duplicate is a patient, long-suffering love that quietly submits to this outrage. But unfaked godliness is born of confidence in Scripture: *it has to be this way, because the Bible says so*. Despite the fact that those prophetic Scriptures predicted His suffering and revealed that His death was absolutely necessary, Jesus does not hesitate to point men to them as true and God-sent. (See on 26:56.) We trust the Old Testament, because our Lord did, even though it meant death for Him to believe it.

## IV. HIS REPROACH OF COWARDICE (26:55)

### The Moral Inconsistency of Their Tactics

**26:55 In that hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves to sieze me? I sat daily in the temple teaching, and ye took me not.** The specific group addressed is "the chief priests and captains of the temple and elders, who had come out against him" (Luke 22:52). The presence of these dignitaries in this night raid is not at all improbable. They would have come to



direct the arrest and make instant decisions, if such became necessary, as well as to give this lynch mob a show of legitimacy (Luke 22:52f.).

Because *lestés* also means "revolutionary, insurrectionist" (Arndt-Gingrich, 474), *as against a robber* suggests two interpretations:

1. He draws an ironic contrast between His own conduct as He sees it and the way they see Him: on the one hand, a Jewish rabbi quietly lecturing in the Temple and, on the other, a dangerous terrorist engaged in subversive activity to support a revolution! Fully the Master of Himself, He scorns the crude arms to which they must now resort, since *they have no other*. Quiet Dialogue, convincing Scriptural argument, intelligent, fair-minded debate and honest, free decision are weapons they do not possess. But these are the arms with which He met His foes and with which He would have us promote His interests. (Cf. 28:18; II Cor. 10:3ff.; II Tim. 2:24f.; Titus 1:9ff.) It is one of the paradoxes of history that, whereas Jesus' enemies feared that He might be a dangerous revolutionary challenging the Establishment's power structure, Judas probably betrayed Jesus precisely because He had refused to do just that!
2. *As against a robber* alludes to their manner of arrest, a night foray with its ridiculous show of force, that treated Him as a rebel leader and fugitive from justice, as if His privacy in the garden were an attempt to escape from His well-deserved fate as a nationalist guerilla who justified his lawlessness in the name of patriotism. Jesus was no Barabbas (Mark 15:7; Luke 23:19; John 18:40). On the contrary, His daily teaching the way of truth and righteousness in broad daylight in the most public place possible, the Jerusalem Temple in the very heart of Judaism, proved that His was no clandestine, guerilla movement of opposition to the Roman regime, but one that was open, fearless and honest. He had made no effort to conceal Himself or flee. In fact, of His own accord, He had just come forward to turn Himself over to them. And yet they call out the army just to cope with a *teacher* (cf. 26:47)?

Unless Jesus refers exclusively to the events of the Last Week, *I sat daily in the temple teaching* points to a considerable ministry in Jerusalem, incidental Synoptic confirmation of John's reports (John chaps. 2, 5, 7-10). *Ye took me not*. These treacherous leaders had made no public move to arrest Him and when they attempted something, their men returned empty-handed (John 7:45f.).

At His trial Jesus would again expose this cowardly attack launched in the absence of people who could more honestly judge of its injustice (cf. John 18:20f.). While the corruption, cowardice and malice of Jesus' accusers do not prove His innocence, that He has such as enemies is circumstantial evidence in His favor and suggests further examination of His character and claims.

Some criticize Jesus' rejection of their tactics as vengeful and unworthy of Him. On the contrary, His dignified protest reveals their sin to their face, that they might repent of it. That they did not immediately do so does not mean that His self-possessed, godly manner did not affect any of them or would not haunt them until their death and serve as their condemnation at judgment.

#### V. HIS SOURCE OF CONFIDENCE: EVERYTHING ACCORDING TO PLAN (26:56)

**26:56 But all this is come to pass, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples left him, and fled.** Jesus calmly accepted the indignity of it all, because He was convinced that His suffering was part of a larger picture painted, even if in dark colors, by the prophets. This conviction of the true significance of His suffering tended to calm His spirit. His resignation here is tantamount to saying: "Let the Scriptures be fulfilled" (Mark 14:49). Let God's Word be true, even if it means a cross for me! Lenski (*Matthew*, 1055):

"Here are the real forces at work in what is taking place this night: God is carrying out his prophetic plans, Jesus is thus voluntarily putting himself into his captors' hands. That and that alone is why this army is scoring such a huge victory against a single humble man!"

The hand that moved events that night, was not that of evil men but the divine purpose of God. Plummer (*Matthew*, 375) asks:

Did this serene statement of His reason for submitting without resistance convey to the disciples, and in particular to Judas, any impression of Christ's confidence that His cause would in the end be triumphant? Here may be the turning-point in the attitude of Judas from greed and resentment to remorse. He [i.e. Judas] had been absolutely successful; and, at the very moment of his success, his Victim claims, with unruffled assurance, to be

fulfilling the prophecies respecting the Messiah. . . . It is certainly remarkable that Judas is nowhere said to have borne witness against Jesus at any of the trials before the Sanhedrin or Pilate or Herod. And he could have quoted utterances which would have told against Christ in a prejudiced court; e.g. His predictions of His coming again in glory, and of the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. . . . What was it that withheld him from doing so? Some change apparently had begun.

However, if Judas were already hoping for Jesus' supernatural victory, whereby the betrayer manipulated God's power for his own promotion, he would never desire to testify against Him, only for Him. Hence, Judas could believe in Jesus' victory *as he himself understood it*, but would not change until his own dream were crushed by Jesus' being sentenced to death (27:3).

*Then all the disciples left him, and fled.* These courageous men had not fled. A word from their Commander would unleash their attack. But if they are not permitted to resist Jesus' arrest, they are strangely unneeded. Stunned by His order prohibiting all resistance, they stood paralyzed by His inexplicable inaction. They lost their will to resist because He apparently had none, blindly convinced that Scripture justified the arrest. Since the soldiers were uninterested in the disciples, the temptation to flee now became imperious.

The disciples' abandoning Him appears somewhat less cowardly in light of Jesus' request of the authorities that the disciples should be permitted to go (John 18:8). Further, their flight was less culpable than it was providential, because of what might have happened, had some of them been caught and tried either with Jesus or separately. Stunned more deeply than Simon Peter, they might not have stopped with denying Jesus. They might also have been shocked so irreparably that nothing could have saved them. Like the remorseful Judas, they might not have lived to see the resurrection nor be transformed by its victory. By opening the door for His disciples to leave—whether by precipitate flight or by prudently and quietly fading back into the protective cover of surrounding darkness—Jesus lovingly shielded them. This is one sense in which Jesus' prayer found fuller realization: "Of those whom you gave me, I lost not one" (John 18:9; 17:12).

However, He was abandoned by human friends, God's Lamb in the hands of the wolves. The "scandal" they had earlier repudiated as unthinkable had just taken place, and they abandoned Him. They dismissed His promise to meet them in Galilee, unaware that

it guaranteed their preservation and victory as much as His. As faithfully as he would record any triumph, Matthew records his own dishonorable failure in faith with absolute honesty. He too ran. . . .

What may be learned about ourselves in this section? How short-lived is human steadfastness, even when bolstered by earnest promises! How self-deceptive is the intention to promote one's own happiness while making loud protestation of loyalty to Christ! Religious noises do not equal costly submission to God's will. Of what inconceivable wickedness are even godly men capable!

What may be learned about Jesus? Gone is the spiritual turmoil of His earlier agonizing over the cross. He is possessed by the peace of God that passes understanding. There is not even a hint of rage or contempt in His demeanor. Fully Master of Himself, He reigns as Lord of the situation. He responds to Judas with marvelous mildness. Peter's wild onslaught is halted with remarkable decision. With reasonableness and effectiveness, without bitterness and spite, He exposed this night attack by the authorities as cowardly. Despite every attempt to humiliate Him, His every move reflects the majesty of God and the authority of Scripture in His life. Just as at His baptism, His every move says, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." God's will is the only thing that counts. Barclay (*Matthew*, II,388): ". . . the man who would not fight is enthroned for ever in the hearts of men."

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. State in detail what happened at the arrest of Jesus giving the correct order of the events.
2. How was the arresting force composed? Were Romans involved in it?
3. How did Judas act during the arrest?
4. What was Jesus' reaction to Judas? Explain the meaning of "Friend."
5. In what other ways should we translate "Do that for which thou art come"? Why?
6. How successful was Peter's attack? What did Jesus do about Peter's results?
7. What is the meaning of "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword"?
8. To what Scripture(s) did Jesus allude which were fulfilled by His enemies' ungodly attack on God's Messiah?
9. With what words did Jesus rebuke the arresting party? What did He mean?

## SECTION 69

## JESUS IS "TRIED" BEFORE CAIAPHAS

(Parallels: Mark 14:55-65; Luke 22:63-65; John 18:24)

TEXT: 26:57-68

57 And they that had taken Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were gathered together. 58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end. 59 Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death; 60 and they found it not, though many false witnesses came. But afterward came two, 61 and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and build it in three days. 62 And the high priest stood up, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? 63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God. 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. 65 Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy: 66 what think ye? They answered and said, He is worthy of death. 67 Then did they spit in his face and buffet him: and some smote him with the palms of their hands, 68 saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ: who is he that struck thee?

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why were so many of the Jewish leaders available to meet in the middle of the night?
- b. Do you see any indication in the Gospels that the Jews considered what they were doing in any sense a formal "trial"?
- c. If everyone is so sure Jesus must be put to death, why could no unimpeachable witnesses be found to testify against Him? What does this tell you about (1) the Sanhedrin and priesthood of Israel? (2) about Jesus?

- d. Was it really the authorities' true purpose to find *false* witness? Did they seek no true witnesses at all?
- e. Is there any sense in which the following testimony is true? "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' " What part is true and what is false?
- f. Do you think the Sanhedrin would really crucify Jesus for predicting the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem? Should not they simply wait out the fulfillment before acting against Him? How could this charge ever become a lever powerful enough to move Pilate to crucify Him?
- g. Why did the high priest challenge Jesus to speak in His own defense? Was he interested in hearing Jesus' position?
- h. Why did Jesus remain silent during the attacks against Him? Did He not have anything to say? Is not His silence evidence of guilt?
- i. Do you think Caiaphas understood what his own question meant? What do you think he meant by "Christ" and "Son of God"?
- j. Did Jesus admit to being "the Christ, the Son of God"? What did He mean by saying, "You have said so"? Is not this ambiguous? Why not just come out and say "yes" or "no"?
- k. Why did not Jesus work a mighty miracle there in the presence of the Sanhedrin to substantiate His claim to divine Messiahship? Would not this have avoided the charge of blasphemy? Or would the Sanhedrin have accepted this God-given testimony to His true identity and authority?
- l. Jesus asserted that the Sanhedrin would see "the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven. How would this (a) reveal His true identity and right to speak for God? (b) warn those elders of the judgment of God upon them?
- m. How did Jesus' affirmations constitute a basis for their judgment of "blasphemy"? What was there about His statement that in their mind justified this conclusion?
- n. Why did they not need to seek any witnesses after His confession to being the Christ, the Son of God?
- o. How did their judgment that He was guilty of "blasphemy" justify their verdict of death?
- p. How does the demand that Jesus prophesy reveal the beliefs of those who struck Him? Who were they? What were their beliefs?
- q. What does this section teach us about the violent energy of prejudice and party spirit?

- r. Why bother to study the illegal trials of Jesus? Has not the resurrection turned all this into a bad episode that is better forgotten? If so, then, why did the Gospel writers dedicate so much space to Jesus' Passion that someone could describe all the Gospels as "a Passion account preceded by an extremely long introduction"?
- s. What does Jesus' conduct before the Sanhedrin tell you about Him?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Then those who seized Jesus led Him away to the residence of the high priest, first to Annas, because he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it was in their interest that one man be sacrificed to save the people.

[At this point John records Jesus' preliminary hearing before Annas (John 18:19-23). Luke teaches that Peter's denials, *recorded* by the other Synoptics after Jesus' arraignment before the high priests, were taking place simultaneous with it.]

Annas then sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. All the Jewish clergy, the scholars and ruling elders were assembled there. Now the chief priest and the whole Sanhedrin began trying to find evidence against Jesus, however false it might be, on which a death sentence could be based. However, they were not finding any. Even though many "witnesses" volunteered, their statements did not agree. Finally, two came forward to submit this deposition against Him, declaring, "We heard this guy say, 'I can tear down this man-made temple and build another in three days that is not made by man.'" Yet even so, their testimony was conflicting.

So the high priest stood up in his place among the other members of the council and questioned Jesus, "Are you not going to answer? What is this evidence these men bring against you?"

But Jesus remained silent and offered no answer.

Then the high priest demanded point-blank, "I am ordering you on your oath by the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of our Blessed God!"

"That's right: it's just as you say," Jesus replied, "I am! Nevertheless, I can assure you that, in the future, you will all see me, the 'Son of man seated at the right hand' of Almighty God and 'coming on the clouds of heaven.'"

At this point the high priest tore his robes and cried, "He has blasphemed! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, you are all witnesses to His blasphemy! What is your verdict?"

They unanimously condemned Him, "He deserves death!" Now some of the men who were holding Jesus began to make sport of Him, spitting in His face and beating Him with their fists. Some slapped Him. They also blindfolded Him and teased, "Show us you are a prophet, you 'Christ!' Guess who hit you!" Even the guards who took charge of Him, beat Him and made many more insulting remarks against Him.

## SUMMARY

After His capture, Jesus was arraigned before Annas and Caiaphas for questioning. They hoped to establish His guilt upon objective evidence, but despaired of finding any, Caiaphas put Jesus on oath to confess His position. Unequivocally Jesus announced His divine Messiahship before the highest court in the nation. His announcement, however, became the accusation upon which they sentenced Him to death for blasphemy. His captors then began to mistreat their prisoner.

## NOTES

Why study the Passion stories? Has not the resurrection turned them into a bad episode to forget? However, the Gospel writers do not relegate these facts into second place, because the resurrection actually drives us to re-evaluate the Lord's suffering. As we pour over these facts, incredulous, we exclaim: Jesus loved us this much! Further, if in the death of Christ the love of God is made manifest, then our grasp of His magnificence is affected by our grasp of these chapters. It affects the way we think about God. Further, the scandal of the cross affects our self-consciousness as the Church and as individual believers. How do we participate appropriately in the suffering of Christ? (I Peter 2:21ff.; 4:13ff.; Phil. 3:10; II Cor. 1:5ff.; Col. 1:24), unless Christ's way of living and dying becomes our way?

### 1. THE HEARING BEFORE CAIAPHAS BEGINS

**26:57** And they that had taken Jesus led him away to the house of Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were



**gathered together.** Many note a number of technical violations of Jewish jurisprudence surrounding these hearings (cf. Mishna, *Sanh.* 4.1), illegalities which point to a deliberate intention to deny Jesus basic justice. Sadly, on the basis of these judicial anomalies the accuracy of the Gospels has been questioned on the assumption that our authors deliberately create a story critical to the Jews, since the Sanhedrin must be supposed to have acted in full consciousness of its high duty according to its laws. However, the Synoptics, writing while that high tribunal was yet functioning in Israel, presuppose the notoriety of the facts they recount. Hence theirs is the duty of recounting those details that affect our understanding of Jesus, yet without declaring inexactitudes easily refuted by the well-informed. Again, because opposition to Him did not begin that terrible night, no objection to the historicity of the Gospels can be raised that is not ultimately resolved in harmony with the well-known purpose of Jesus' enemies. (See Farrar's masterful expression, *Life*, 588f.) Again, what may be known of their existing laws comes from later times that may describe the ideal more than the real, what should have been more than what was (Edersheim, *Life*, II,553f.). So, if the Gospels are not to be impugned, should this mockery of justice be dignified with the title of "official trials"? What did these elders of Israel themselves think they were doing? Two positions are possible:

1. **THERE NEVER WAS AN OFFICIAL JEWISH TRIAL.** It might be argued that because the Romans had, with one notable exception (*Wars*, VI,2,4), deprived the Sanhedrin of the power to execute the death sentence (John 18:31; cf. *Wars*, II,8,1; *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Y. Sanhedrin* I,18a.34; 7,24b,41), it is therefore more probable that in capital cases this court practically functioned as would a grand jury. They could examine accusations against Jesus, and if the evidence warranted, bring formal charges on which He could be tried by the Roman judicial system. Accordingly, this Supreme Council was not intending to try Jesus according to their judiciary procedures. Hence, the judicial injustices that are usually mentioned in connection with Jesus' hearings before the Sanhedrin are simply irrelevant. However, the Jews' argument that Pilate's insistence that they try Jesus is pointless (John 18:31), is not merely a demurring on the ground that they are not competent to try capital cases. It implies, rather, that *in some sense they had already officially judged Jesus* and that He must be executed on their findings, hence Pilate's authorization is the only requirement lacking before the already decided execution can occur.

Perhaps the reason they do not stone Jesus outright, as in the case of Stephen (Acts 7) or murder Him as the 40 conspirators planned to do with Paul (Acts 23)—all without Roman blessing—is Jesus' far greater popular support which could touch off riots, if they dared suppress Him with violence.

2. THERE WAS A JEWISH TRIAL OF SORTS but what occurred that night is not its main deliberation, but its culmination. In every segment of the national leadership a groundswell consensus against Jesus had been growing for months. When an objective voice of protest had been raised in the Senate against this railroading, it was ruthlessly stilled (John 7:51). Accordingly, what took place this night was but a final hearing to create a case whereby Jewish responsibility for Jesus' death could be placed on Pilate's shoulders, exonerating the Sanhedrin and priesthood of blame before the people. Witnesses were called, evidence heard and a vote taken to legitimize the proceedings, but no effort was made to follow strict procedure to protect Jesus' rights, since His execution was already a settled matter. However, *did the Hebrew legislation have no appropriate procedure for conducting these hearings?* Finally, the special morning session for the final sentencing is damning evidence of their intention to legitimize their act (27:1 = Mark 15:1 = Luke 22:66—23:1). Whatever may be said about their procedure, the Jewish leaders themselves treated their own acts as official, legitimized by certain apparently indispensable formalities (witnesses, testimony, voting). Even if they are not acting as the Sanhedrin in regular session or even a quorum thereof, it is certainly not as private citizens. So, before Pilate, they argue as representatives of the Jewish people who have already properly investigated, judged and condemned Jesus (John 19:7; cf. 18:30f.).

Therefore, rather than assault the Evangelists' accounts as inaccurate, we should treat these sessions as a religious heresy trial masked as *a preliminary investigation with reference to the Roman trials*. It really counted.

What does it matter, if *no* legal procedure is respected, when the avowed purpose of its perpetrators is not strict adherence to rules of evidence but to eliminate Jesus? Men who instigate a judicial murder are not models of consistency nor quibble over technicalities when they sense victory within their grasp. (Cf. the procedure at Naboth's crooked "trial." I Kings 21:7-14). Was it that they scrupulously

avoided calling it a trial according to the rules, but, by a twisted concession to justice, observed some of the forms to absolve themselves before the nation, if that ever became necessary? By what canon may it be determined that the Sanhedrin under no condition would violate its own judiciary procedure, if a sufficient number of its members considered the eliminating of a dangerous, false Messiah, to be politically more crucial than strict adherence to its own legal conventions?

So, if Jesus' judicial murder were already decided (John 11:45-52), why need a "trial"? Because they must yet formulate some official justification that would satisfy the people and secure the indispensable cooperation of Pilate. To justify to the Jewish people the arraignment of a Hebrew before a Roman court, they must first judge and excommunicate him as a transgressor of Jewish law.

*Caiaphas* and the other authorities were not the first to question Jesus, since John clearly names Annas, the political boss and deposed high priest (cf. *Ant.* XX,9,2), as the man before whom the first preliminary hearing took place (18:13ff.; cf. Luke 3:2; Acts 4:6 calls Annas "high priest"). Perhaps this semi-private, unofficial hearing aimed at uncovering some line of accusation or juridical pretext that would sway the Sanhedrin. Further, this examination gained time to assemble both the witnesses and jurors. Without getting much satisfaction, Annas then sent Him bound to his son-in-law, *Caiaphas the high priest* (John 18:24). Apparently this palace complex was constructed around a central courtyard open to the sky, surrounded by the various apartments on different floors (cf. *aulé*, 26:58, 69; Luke 22:55). If Annas and Caiaphas lived in separate apartments in the same building, this move could be easily accomplished without going out into the street of the City. Peter and the others remained in the same courtyard for the second hearing (26:58; John 18:15f., 28).

*Caiaphas the high priest . . . the scribes and the elders were gathered together.* (See notes on 26:3.) Even if the language might admit of a few exceptions (were Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea summoned?), this constitutes "the whole council" (*tò sunédrión hòlon*, 26:59). For this closed session they are not met in regular court session in their official council chamber, as they would next day (Luke 22:66), but *in the capacity of* Sanhedrin members acting as a more or less official caucus (Matt. 26:59). Matthew and Mark report the substance of this main session, without repeating it during the "official ratification" next day in the regular meeting-place of the Sanhedrin (27:1 = Mark 15:1 = Luke 22:66).

Does "the whole council" stand for an official quorum of 23? (Bemidb. R.1, cited by Edersheim, *Life*, II,555.) Although the Sanhedrin was composed of 71 members, to decide a death sentence, the presence of 23 judges was sufficient. Some would exonerate the gentler Pharisees from the injustices perpetrated. Flusser (*Jesus*, 159, citing *Mishna Sanh.* 4,1; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XX,9,1) argued that a Sadducee-packed quorum could have sentenced Jesus to death whereas the more equitable Pharisees would have brought about the dismissal of the high priest, Annas, claiming that this Sanhedrin session was illegal, having been called without the governor's consent. This bypasses the following considerations:

1. In his case cited it appears that Flusser overstates his case by giving Pharisees this honor, but, granted his conclusion, it would not prove Pharisean favor to Christ, because the case cited served purely political interests of the Pharisees by putting the Sadducees in disfavor with Rome and proved themselves better subjects of Caesar than the high priest.
2. The arresting party was also sent by the Pharisees (John 18:3). The Pharisees were alarmed about a supposed "faked resurrection plot" (Matt. 27:62). Did they abandon their cause during the hearings?
3. Luke calls the morning session "the assembly of the elders of the people gathered together with the chief priests and scribes" (*sunéchthe tò presbutérion toû laou, archiereîs te kai grammateîs*). Cf. Luke's use of *sunédriou*, Acts 4:15; 5:21, 27, 34, 41; 6:12, 15; 22:30; 23:1, 6, 15, 20, 28; 24:20, as a general expression for the Supreme Sanhedrin of Israel: Mark has: "the chief priests and the elders and scribes and [*kai* = even?] the whole council." By what logic would Pharisees have been excluded from this?
4. Nor can it be concluded that absence of all reference to the Pharisees in the trial of Jesus meant that "they were too small a minority to have an effective role in the courts, least of all in the Great Sanhedrin." (So Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees*, 42.) Does not this completely underestimate the influence of the great Gamaliel (Acts 5:34ff.)? Further, if the Sadducees must follow the traditions of the Pharisees, then were not these latter a highly influential part of that body that must decide on points of law and tradition? *Mishna Yom.* 1.8 [= *Bab. Talm. Yoma* 19b; = *Pal. Talm.*

Yoma 1.5] Acts 23:6-10) The Pharisees dominated the national leadership from early times. (*Ant.* XIII,15,5—16,2 [= *Wars* I,5,1-3] = 78 B.C.; XVII,2,4 = before 4 B.C.; XVIII,1,4 = *idem.*) The bitter hatred of the Pharisees induced them to cooperate with their natural enemies, the Sadducees and the Herodians, to eliminate Jesus (cf. Mark 3:6; John 7:32, 47ff.; 11:57).

That the wiser, more conscientious elders on this high tribunal should have been present and sentenced Jesus to death without raising a single dissenting voice, thus perpetrating this gross violation of justice, is not incredible. The consideration that His elimination in the name of national peace was the less of two evils may have anesthetized the conscience of stricter observers of the Law or of any friends Jesus may have had in the council (John 11:50).

*Gathered:* awaiting the arrival of Jesus after His arrest. That there were so many people available to meet all night long, if necessary to crucify Jesus, should come as no surprise.

1. These men listed are assembled in the crucial session that must conclude the final, authoritative judgment on the Nazarene. Because the ring-leaders are determined to sentence Him to death, they will stop at nothing until their goal is reached. The others recognize the national emergency involved (John 11:45ff.).
2. But that many others, not directly connected with the hierarchy, could be convoked at will, was possible, because *every night of the year* 240 Levites and 30 priests were on guard duty in the Temple (Edersheim, *Temple*, 148-151). Caiaphas could have tapped any one of these for "special duties," should the need arise for false witnesses or mob scenes in this judiciary farce. Edersheim (*ibid.*) wrote,

Perhaps it was on this ground that, on the morning of the Passover, they who led Jesus from Caiaphas thronged so 'early' 'the judgment-hall of Pilate.' Thus, while some of them would be preparing the Temple to offer the morning sacrifice, others were at the same moment unwittingly fulfilling the meaning of that very type, when He on whom was 'laid the iniquity of us all' was 'brought as a lamb to the slaughter.'

## 2. PETER ENTERS THE COURTYARD TO OBSERVE

26:58 This verse will be treated in connection with the next section because it relates directly to Peter's denials.

## 3. THEY SEEK VAINLY FOR WITNESSES

26:59 **Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus, that they might put him to death.** Because divisions among the Jewish parties in the Sanhedrin made confusion in technical procedure inevitable, a clear-cut and unified legal definition of Jesus' guilt was not simple. Consequently, they must cast about to obtain a sufficient consensus on a commonly acceptable charge.

They *sought false witness*? Some suggest that they consciencelessly coached paid "witnesses" to falsify the evidence. If they paid Judas, why not also others? But was this predicable of *the whole council*? From their own point of view, were they not, rather, seeking evidence that appeared plausible enough to stand up in court? However, because their purpose is to secure a death sentence, regardless of the facts, they must seek evidence however flimsy to sustain it. They already had their conclusion: *that they might put him to death*. But, because there was public opinion and a Roman procurator to content, they were now seeking a procedural foundation on which to establish it. This, says Matthew, is tantamount to seeking *false witness*. That they sought *any* witness points to their attempt to give an appearance of legality, hence points to a trial, even if it bypasses almost every rule of their jurisprudence.

The unanimous verdict reached by this session is suspect because no sincere effort was expended to investigate objectively. (Cf. Deut. 19:18.) Why did not they have at least one defender to serve as "Devil's Advocate" to question the majority opinion and speak on behalf of the accused? But this is the injustice of prejudice.

26:60 **and they found it not, though many false witnesses came. But afterward came two.** The Law required at least two consistent witnesses (Deut. 17:6; 19:15). That the critical minds of these theological lawyers *found it not, though many false witnesses came*, is a marvel, because Jesus had been such a prominent, public figure constantly exposed to the careful scrutiny of thousands. They were slightly unsuccessful for several reasons:

1. Consistent *false witnesses* did not exist. His opposition simply could not uncover two men who could testify to a single fault

worthy of the death sentence. This becomes striking presumptive evidence of His innocence. Jesus' challenge to Annas was not help-less flailing but logical and extremely appropriate:

"I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing secretly. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me, what I said to them. They know what I said" (John 18:19-23).

But, because the closed-minded authorities are interested not in truth but in a legal smokescreen that assures the cross for the Nazarene, none of the multitudes would be called to testify. Only those witnesses whose loyalty to the Sanhedrin remained unquestioned could be permitted to testify.

2. *They found it not*, because they must construct a doubly solid case not only according to Jewish jurisprudence to satisfy Jewish public opinion, but that would also stand up in court and convince the Roman governor. It was this kind of false testimony that they could not find, even though many would-be witnesses came forward.
3. Further, the conflict in the witnesses may testify to their own deep uncertainty as to what kind of charge to bring against Him and whether He could be proven to be a rebel against the central authority, despite the authorities' own seriously divided conflicts of interpretation. This uncertainty would lead to the kind of exploratory debate and conflict that kept the witnesses from agreeing, leading to a serious difficulty in obtaining a consensus.

On what basis can they objectively avoid condemnation for a blatant violation of ancient law because they do not punish these who witness falsely against Jesus (Deut. 19:16-21)?

One witness whom they could have called, but who did not offer his own testimony against Christ, was still lurking in the shadows to see how this trial would end. Were there anything compromising in Jesus' doctrine or character that could be alleged against Him as proof that He was nothing but an imposter, Judas Iscariot could have furnished that evidence. But this man who knew Him so well and even turned Him over to His enemies, could not and would not accuse Him of anything wrong, even though his testimony would have vindicated his betrayal. Judas' silence is no proof of Jesus' innocence, because Iscariot's motives undermine his testimony. He

could support a magical Messiah who, despite character defects and doctrinal irregularities, enriched him. (Cf. notes on 26:14, 25, 48-50.) However, his silence indicates that his motives had not been revenge. As far as Judas is concerned, his participation in this crisis has ended. However tardy, he testified to Jesus' innocence (27:3f.).

*But afterward came two*, the legal minimum. Were these two priests who had challenged Jesus' first purification of the Temple (John 2:18f.)?

**26::61 and said, This man said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and build it in three days.** Many see this deposition as (1) deliberately twisted to make Jesus' true statement appear dangerous, or (2) a different version based on their misunderstanding. Paradoxically, however, Jesus could actually have said this, without meaning, naturally, what these two witnesses thought He meant. In fact, this is a free paraphrase of His declaration at the first Temple cleansing (John 2:19). But as on that occasion the Jews thought that He meant the Herodian Temple still under construction, even so now these false witnesses assume He meant that same structure. In fact, Mark's version more clearly reflects their understanding: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'" (Mark 14:58). However, His predictions of Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the temple could also cause the two strains of Temple-prophecy to be blended in men's minds, whereas Jesus referred to two separate objects: the destruction of the Temple and His own death and resurrection (Luke 19:41-44; Matt. 22:7; 23:36-39). Their witness is still *false* because of their added inferences, even if not intentionally wrong as to form.

The great irony of their accusations is that they were substantially correct, even if misunderstood and perhaps somewhat garbled. For if, by *the temple of God*, Jesus intended God's dwelling on earth in its ideal, highest sense, He referred to His own body in which all the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily, (Col. 2:9; 1:19; cf. John 2:21), then He conclusively proved that He was able to lay down His life ("*destroy this temple of God*") and take it up again ("*rebuild it in three days*") (John 10:17f.). And, in His resurrection, not only did He *build it in three days*, but He made possible the construction of an indestructible *temple of God*, formed out of living stones for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:21f., I Peter 2:5).



Thus, if Jesus really did say (as Mark quotes the false witnesses): "temple made with hands . . . another not made with hands," He really did effect this as well. With His death and resurrection our Lord brought to an end the Old Covenant with its earthly temple under construction for already more than 46 years (John 2:20). It would be 40 years more before that building were demolished. Nevertheless, its relation to the program of God ended with the cross. The new, gloriously spiritual Temple, the Church, became an instant possibility when Jesus conquered death (John 2:21f.). Because God dwelt in Him, the new Temple was erected instantly and permanently. Now, in the Church, which was born shortly thereafter, God dwells in all who are in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26f.; Eph. 2:19ff.; Rom. 8:1; Col. 2:10). This Church is "made without hands," just as He is reported to have predicted! (Cf. Dan. 2:34f., 44f.)

The accusation of hostility to the Temple made sense, because, if it could be established that Jesus repudiated the centrality of the Temple and, by implication, its authority, He could be tried as a rebel. Further, the Romans had an interest in assuring the protection of holy places in the Empire as a guarantee of the stability of law and order among the peoples who worshiped thereat. From the political standpoint, therefore, if this accusation proved well-founded, Caiaphas would have a telling capital accusation with which to consign Jesus over to the Roman procurator. Had not Jesus openly attacked the Temple monopoly twice (John 2:13ff.; Matt. 21:12ff.)? If proven, the quoted threat was potentially plausible ground for a capital case with the Romans.

Then, too, His absurd claim to be able to rebuild the Temple in three days smacked of an assertion to possess superhuman power, which, in turn, borders on sacrilege. This consideration may have suggested to Caiaphas another approach to try, the claim of deity, as a more likely accusation with which to eliminate Him (26:63).

#### 4. THE HIGH PRIEST QUESTIONS JESUS UNDER OATH

**26:62 And the high priest stood up, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee?** The agitated pontiff leaped to his feet because he realized that these unprovable and judicially unpunishable declarations are the worst that can be alleged against the Nazarene.

1. The foregoing evidence was so insufficient, distorted and contradictory that no solid conclusion could be based on it. The case could not rest on such flimsy testimony. If the judges themselves remained unconvinced, how could they persuade Pilate?!
2. Jesus' so-called "threat" to destroy the Temple was a reckless boast at worst and certainly not yet fact, i.e. still in the realm of prophecy, hence could not yet serve as a basis of final incrimination. Further, His zeal for the purity of God's Temple, recently expressed in its purification, undermined any supposed intention on His part to destroy it (21:12f.). Again, His promise to rebuild the Temple, while absurd if He could not do it, could be thought to testify against His reputed repudiation of it as a permanent institution.
3. The normal, instinctive reaction of an undefended accused person would be self-defense.

Perhaps the Nazarene could be induced to give the damning evidence inadvertently Himself. The priest's baited question means: "Are you going to give no justification or explanation for these pretentious words attributed to you? Does not this accumulation of testimony deserve a reply?" But this pretense of fairness in offering an opportunity for self-defense against apparently ruinous, unshakable testimony is an ill-disguised trap leading Jesus to self-incrimination. Caiaphas is not simply presiding now but manipulating the session to achieve his own declared purpose (John 11:45-53).

All of the malice of His enemies could not bring forward any sin against Him. Their best effort was a misunderstood repetition of a figurative statement. He must die, if at all, for His most majestic claim, which, proven true by His resurrection, vindicated His life and authorized His teaching.

**26:63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.**

*Jesus held his peace:* Although Jesus may have been able to ignore the more absurd accusations, surely the temptation to respond to and correct misunderstandings of His teachings would have been sorely felt. Here is impressive proof of Jesus' total self-mastery. (Cf. Heb. 12:3; Isa. 53:7.) Though He had the right to answer His accusers, He declined to exercise that right. The key to our Lord's majestic, disciplined silence here may be the combination of various factors:

1. His keen awareness that the real issue is not whether or not He had said this or that. The real question is His *identity* and His consequent right to say *anything* that God wants said.
2. His confidence that the Father, in time and history, would interpret His teaching correctly and prove His claims well-founded. Rather than demand His rights through violent self-assertion, He would achieve His victory through meek self-denial.
3. His certainty that a fair trial was not to be expected. The purpose of this "trial" is not to clear the innocent and punish the guilty, but to punish the innocent and save the guilty. To correct their willful misconceptions is hopelessly useless.
4. His accusers were actually self-defeated, hopelessly entangling themselves in their own unbiased accusations and consequently refuting each other's testimony.

*I adjure thee by the living God:* "I put you on your oath by the living God." Jesus does not quibble with the fuming pontiff about the rightness of swearing in court before the national tribunal. Rather, He tacitly accepts the formulation and proceeds to speak as under oath before God and these witnesses. He does this without any mental reservation about swearing, because He always spoke everything He ever said in the full awareness that His Father is ever present and hears all. His example, then, is proof that swearing is not evil in all circumstances. (See notes on 5:33-37.)

Further, in obedience to God, He must give testimony in court even if it is self-incriminating. (Cf. Lev. 5:1; see Joshua's application of this: Josh. 7:19.) This does not violate the rule that "one witness is no witness" (Num. 35:30; Deut. 17:6; 19:15), because, as Caiaphas observes, by His utterance He made them all witnesses. If there were a juridical principle in Mosaic legislation whereby the accused must not be compelled to incriminate Himself, Jesus waived His privilege and chose to testify.

*Tell us whether thou art the Christ, the Son of God.* Caiaphas knew that Jesus' offence lay, so far as jurisdiction was concerned, in His approach to authority, because in numerous ways He claimed direct authority and power from God. His debates turned on whether He were God's Son and authorized representative or not (John 5:17f., 21-28; 6:29-59; 8:24, 46f., 51, 58; 10:30-38; 12:44ff.). Caiaphas could also guess that, whatever Pilate thought of Jesus' concept of Messiahship, the governor would recognize that, to let Him continue a proclamation which so radically challenged fundamental concepts

of the Jewish system, meant that He could disrupt the delicate balance among the holders of political and religious power in Israel. Hence, Pilate could sense a political threat. So, if the Galilean could be induced to repeat His claims in court, He could be crucified for sacrilege and rebellion.

That Caiaphas had to resort to this blunt procedure establishes several things all favorable to Jesus:

1. It proves how desperate he was to find some telling evidence on which to establish the death sentence. The clumsy prosecution has failed, and Caiaphas knows it.
2. It measured how completely Jesus' imperturbable calm nettled the cunning priest. There was really nothing to criticize in His dignified behavior under fire, even though it thwarted their purpose and plotting.
3. It suggests how well-established and thoroughly embarrassing to them were His majestic miracles. Each miracle inevitably brought only glory to God and blessing to men or was connected with some grand Messianic declaration or claim to Deity and established His right to make those declarations. So, to bring up *any* of His claims was a tremendous risk for Caiaphas, because to do so would inevitably bring up also the unquestionably supernatural proof of their validity.

*The Christ, the Son of God.* Old Testament passages revealed the divinity of *the Christ* (Ps. 2:7; Isa. 7:14; 9:6; Zech. 12:10; 13:7; cf. Dan. 7:13f.). So, if the charge of blasphemy is to be based on a human claim to equality with God with divine authority and rights, then the terms of Caiaphas' question must be somewhat equivalent, even if some Jews failed to equate them.

That Caiaphas, in this night session, formulated his question so that *Christ* and *the Son of God* refer to the same person, whereas in the formal morning trial these terms are separated into two distinct questions (Luke 22:67, 70), does not prove we have two contradictory reports of one questioning. In the night trial Caiaphas is more succinct, combining the two potentially separate claims into one self-incriminating answer. In the morning the court proceeded successive steps to establish an unshakable conviction of Jesus' guilt.

To be *the Son of God* is tantamount to being "equal with God" (John 5:18). Were *the Son of God* merely a Jewish paraphrase for

*the Christ*, they could not have accused Jesus of blasphemy. The claim to be the Messiah was, alone, not strictly punishable with death nor considered blasphemy per se. This claim, even if proven groundless, did not sully the honor of God. But to claim to be *Son of God* meant deity, and, if untrue, was blasphemy. Jesus claimed it, they reject it and Jesus does not correct their understanding. They understood Him, and He them. Unquestionably, Caiaphas formulated this last-ditch challenge, knowing that Jesus made these claims (John 5:17f.; 10:30-39; Matt. 21:37-46; 22:41-46). He thus forced Him to repeat them before the council to convince them of the charge that must unequivocally lead to His condemnation for blasphemy.

That Jesus will go on trial before Pilate for His confession to being *the Son of God* does not come out in the early stages of Pilate's interrogations. Nonetheless, this claim was a key issue on which a later phase of the trial turned, because Pilate, upon hearing this claim, lost his nerve (John 19:7f.). Unquestionably, the Jews did not unveil this issue in the original charges, because such a claim could bring only a laugh from the hardened Roman, not a death sentence. However, launched at the appropriate moment, it shook the governor. His claim to be *the Christ* offered a more volatile issue with politically dangerous overtones which would instantly carry substantially more weight with the Procurator.

## 5. JESUS CONFESSES HIS DEITY AND MESSIAHSHIP

26:64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven. The appropriate answer to unjust accusations and crumbling testimony had been silence earlier. Now, because the truth is at stake, silence would be a denial of His true identity on which everything else hinged. To affirm His deity with clarity and conviction would offer the testimony which these men needed to hear, not merely to convict Him, but to be told that truth, His Messianic self-consciousness, for which He was willing to die. During His public ministry, because of common misconceptions of Messiahship, He had maintained His Messianic reserve, often masking His true identity in public and avoiding publicity. Now, however, all reserve must give way to unhesitating affirmation before the competent authorities of His people. Of all His public declarations, this is the most decisive, emphatic affirmation.

His answer is a model of succinctness, because He could have argued His case, citing miracles without end. Instead, His statements are three, composed of His initial confession followed by two supporting statements:

1. *Thou hast said* (*sùeipas*) expresses a sense of reservation about the affirmation: "The words are yours." Blass-Debrunner (§441, 3) note the emphasis on the personal pronoun (*sù*):

"You say it yourself, not I" (§277,1, for emphasis or other contrast) in which there is always something of an implication that the statement would not have been made had the question not been asked. . . . Cf. Matt. 27:11; 26:25; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; in John 18:37 *sù légeis, hòti* (not 'that,' but 'because, for,' . . . *basileùs eimi*, cf. Luke 22:70 *humeis légete, hòti egò eimi*).

*With this Arndt-Gingrich (225) substantially agree: "As an answer sù eipas sc. autò = you have said it = Yes. (BI-D . . . §331,3. Not a simple affirmative ans., but one that is forced: Const. Apost. 15,14,4 ouk eipen hò kùrios 'nai', all'hòti 'su eipas'."* However, what should be made of Mark's version with its unequivocal answer, *egò eimi*? (See below.)

The *you have said* must not be misinterpreted to suggest that Jesus' confession of His own Messiahship was unclear and equivocal. Rather, because the concepts of Christhood and divine Sonship in the mind of the high priest and of the Sanhedrin were as unclear and equivocal as those held by so many others in the first century who were ignorant of God's true planning, with respect to Caiaphas' formulation Jesus MUST formally demur. The content of the high priest's words—as the Sanhedrin understood them—may not precisely coincide with the content of Jesus' confession. Nevertheless, lest anyone conclude that He were *not* "the Christ, the Son of God" in *any* sense, He could not actually say "no" to Caiaphas' formulation. Hence, before saying, "Yes, I am," He lodged a mild objection based on His own well-founded doubt about the acceptability of the formulation proposed. This He did in the well-known words, "*You have said*. The words are yours; however, yes, in a sense that you have not understood and with reservations about what you think these terms mean, yes, I am the Christ, the Son of God."

To affirm that *Thou hast said* is an idiom for "I am" is not proved by Mark 14:62. Mark's version simply eliminates the subtle reservation Jesus expressed, and gives His general meaning. For Mark's presumably Gentile readership, the Messianic concept would be less garbled by Jewish nationalism than for Matthew's Jewish audience for whom Jesus' mild taking exception would be especially edifying, hence reported verbatim.

*Thou hast said*, however, does not mean "You yourself affirm what is true," as if Jesus saw an unconscious or unwilling tribute to His divine authority and identity in the words of *the very man whose denial of it drove him relentlessly to crucify Jesus*. Caiaphas fully understood what he meant by his own question and repudiated Jesus' claim to being anything near what Caiaphas thought his question meant.

Further, the violent reaction of the high priest (v. 65) and of the court is fully justified from their own view, only if we correctly understand Jesus' answer to be unequivocally positive because sustained by the comment that follows it. It is highly unlikely that the Jewish clergy would have cried "Sacrilege!" or "Blasphemy!" if their Prisoner's total answer ultimately hid behind ambiguities.

*Nevertheless* continues His mild objection to mistaken connotations in the popular use of these terms. Rather than simply admit to being the *Christ* in any political revolutionary sense, Jesus proceeded to interpret His Messiahship in terms of God's definitions. He knew quite clearly what He was doing, because in refining His answer, He went even further than the priest asked.

*Henceforth ye shall see:* from this moment at the beginning of His suffering they could discern His royal Lordship by His accession to the Throne. This glorification actually began with His betrayal (John 13:31). The manifestation of the triumph and Lordship of Jesus was even then becoming evident in the world, and needs not await some eschatological realization at the end of the world, for it had already begun with His Passion. Rather than defeat Him, His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension represent the very means of His accession to power and glory. His earthly humiliation is about over: the way of the cross leads home. Shortly, He would return to the Father, the Holy Spirit would

be given, His Church would be started and the Jewish State would live to see the vindication of Jesus' daring claims!

*Henceforth ye shall see:* Jesus' sustaining argument, that demonstrates the truthfulness of His former claim, is composed of two unquestionably Messianic Scriptures. (For further notes, see my Vol. II, pp. 446-449: "The Coming of the Son of Man." See notes on 24:29-31.)

2. *the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power* (Ps. 110:1). This masterful concept of a *Man* seated on God's glorious throne as supreme King and Judge of all the world is the sort of self-consciousness one would expect of someone who considered Himself the Lord's Elect, the Servant of Jahveh, His own unique Son who alone knows the Father. It is this very self-awareness of His own deity that gave Him the courage, when on trial for His life, to identify Himself unequivocally as the Messianic *Son of man*. *The right hand of Power* is an idiomatic Hebrew paraphrase for "God's almighty right hand."
3. *the Son of man . . . coming on the clouds of heaven* (Dan. 7:13ff.). This refers to Jesus' ascension and incoronation. For this concept, see full notes on 24:29-31 esp. 30. That this has nothing to do with the Second Coming is established by Jesus' time-schedule: *henceforth you shall see*. . . . They would not have to wait in line two millennia to get a glimpse of it.

Because in Daniel *the Son of man comes TO GOD* to receive His Kingdom and He must rule, as David writes, until His triumph is absolute and total, Jesus prophesies His exaltation and triumph over His enemies.

Thus, just as before Pilate Jesus declared Himself to be the King of a Kingdom not of this world (John 19:36f.), so also before the high priest He declared Himself to be *the Son of man*, God's universal King of whom Daniel spoke. Jesus prophesied that they would live to see the fulfillment of these prophetic truths realized in Himself. Unless they repented, their roles would rapidly be reversed: He would be their King and Judge; they the judged. His heavenly glorification would eclipse them in every way, and His vindication exclude them from that glorious Kingdom which He coming must usher in. This dramatic vindication occurred just forty years later when He poured out terrible, punitive judgment on them, their City and their Temple.

With the crucifixion, they would suppose the Nazarene question closed. Instead, not four days later the religious clique discovered



they had not heard the last of Jesus of Nazareth. Less than two months later, shaken by a flourishing spiritual movement that threatened their religious hegemony, they arraigned before their council a couple of ex-fisherman, saying to them, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and are determined to make us guilty of this Man's death" (Acts 5:28). What is the significance of this complaint? The Sanhedrin and the priesthood were just beginning to reckon with Jesus the Christ ascended to the throne of the universe. Everything they attempted to stop His growing movement utterly failed. He had won. And His victory song went on. . . .

The Apostles hammered on this concept (Acts 2:33-36; 3:13; 5:31f.; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3f., 13; 10:12f.; I Peter 3:22). The Christians found their hope and power in it (Acts 4:24ff.; 7:55). As they went through their trials, they looked up, not only for the coming of Christ, but to the Christ now reigning in heavenly majesty.

## 6. JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH FOR BLASPHEMY

26:65 **Then the high priest rent his garments, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy.** Jesus had neither yielded nor evaded, but His confession turned the course of the trial. *Rent his garments:* among Orientals this was the customary way of expressing extreme shock, dismay and indignation. This was accomplished by gripping the garment at the neck in front and tearing it a bit. May we not judge our own sense of God's high holiness by how profoundly we are shocked by a blatant case of treating God with disrespect? (Cf. Isa. 36:22 where men appropriately tore their clothes at hearing blasphemy; cf. 1 Macc. 11:71; Josephus, *Wars*, II,15,4; Acts 14:14.) *Rent his garments*, i.e., not his official dress, which was worn during his official functions as high priest, but his personal "clothes" (pl. *himátia*; *chitônas*, Mark 14:63) as president of the Council. Although a high priest was prohibited from expressing personal grief in this way (Lev. 21:10), he protests in his official position against what he considers blasphemy (*Sanhedrin* 7,5). According to Rabbinical rules the judges must be "standing on their feet, rend their garments and not sew them up again" (*P.H.C.*, XXII,587).

So, in theory, the high priest was expressing holy grief at this profanation of the honor and holiness of God. In reality, however,

because Jesus' self-incrimination was more thorough than expected, Caiaphas was neither grieved nor shocked, but greatly relieved at surpassing so easily what had appeared an impossible obstacle. Inwardly he was fiercely jubilant. With imitation horror and hidden malice the cunning Caiaphas prejudiced the Council vote by his dramatic cry of *blasphemy*!

*What further need have we of witnesses?* The previous trouble with conflicting witnesses is now obviated. The whole council is now itself a witness to Jesus' assertions, hence all of them could now testify to the nation as to the crime for which the Nazarene would die. Paradoxically, they had found but one faithful Witness (Rev. 3:14). Although they repudiated His testimony, yet they intended to sentence Him on the basis of His word alone!

*Blasphemy:* For a man not to substantiate His claims to divinity when on trial for His life is to stand self-convicted. But they ignore how many hundreds of times Jesus had already validated His Messiahship and divine Sonship by incontestable supernatural proof during His ministry (John 7:31; 10:38; 12:37; 14:10f.). Since all previous evidence in favor of Jesus is excluded a priori, only what occurs at this trial counts. However, they suppose they must judge Him here and now on the sole basis of arguments in the trial. So, His present answer is treated as an assertion unsupported by immediately evident proof. Lacking this support, His judges must pronounce it *blasphemy*. So Jesus is defeated in the eyes of His enemies. By claiming to be, in some sense, divine, He appeared to attack the basic tenet of Israel: monotheism, for how could there be but one God (Deut. 6:4), if He were somehow God too? This realization would strike the unthinking unbeliever with tremendous impact.

However, the issue is clear: either Jesus was divine or He was not. If He was not, He spoke blasphemy and deserved to be condemned. If He spoke the truth, He was God's Son and they deserve death who condemned Him. If He lied, it was the greatest folly ever committed because done in full awareness that this deception would send Him to the cross. If false, we could perhaps excuse His claim as that of a deluded fanatic. However, if His claim to be divine is true, do we worship Him?

**26:66 What think ye? They answered and said, He is worthy of death.** The triumphant Caiaphas charged the obsequious jury to do its duty. Ramming through a quick voice vote, he finally obtained his consensus of action in this unanimous verdict (Mark 14:64). Since

*death* was the normal penalty for blasphemy (Lev. 24:15f.), for being a false prophet (Deut. 18:20), a seducer (Deut. 13) or a rebel (Deut. 17:12), Jesus had no chance and could be considered *worthy of death*, indicted on whatever count His enemies found pragmatically successful. Formal sentencing would follow early the next morning (27:1 = Luke 22:66ff.). That later trial simply marks this one as informal and exploratory in character and its test vote the expression of a legal opinion. Even if not the formal *de jure* determination of the Sanhedrin met in regular session, Jesus' condemnation and death were the *de facto* product of its members. They expressed the decision and aims of a significant cross section of Israel's leadership and its supreme tribunal. (See on 26:3.)

Their superficial judgment is totally incomprehensible, if we suppose that they condemned Jesus for claiming to be a Messiah on the strictly political level, for there were later, openly political messiahs in abundance whom the Sanhedrin did not bring to trial as they did Jesus. (See on 24:4f., 11, 23-26. Was that only because those political messiahs were so often halted by Roman might, hence the Sanhedrin did not have to deal with them?) On the contrary, Jesus' claim to Messiahship consisted in supernatural identity, His claim to be the Son of God. In this *He was a threat to them*.

## 7. FRENZIED DISPLAY OF HATRED

**26:67 Then did they spit in his face and buffet him: and some smote him with the palms of their hands:** Since their Prisoner had not defended Himself by a devastating display of supernatural might, they viewed Him as innocuous and their courage returned. Before covering His face, *they spit in his face*. To the legal injustice they add insult and shame. (Cf. Num. 12:14; Deut. 25:9; Job 30:10.)

Who really abused Jesus? *They* points to the Sanhedrists, whereas Luke 22:63 mentions the guards. But the latter did not have Jesus yet, because "they received him with blows" after the Councilors themselves had begun the mocking (Mark 14:65). However, it matters little, because the shameless brutality of their lackeys proved they had the full approval of their masters. These savagely attack their defenseless Victim. This inhumanity shames those who showed it, not Him who tolerated it.

**26:68 saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ: who is he that struck thee?** Without a piece of information from Luke's Gospel (22:64),

some unfriendly critics might judge this sentence a piece of absurdity, since if the smiter were then standing before Jesus, what purpose could he have had in taunting Jesus by challenging: "Tell us who struck you!" Luke, however, reports that they had blindfolded Jesus to keep Him from seeing who His attackers were. McGarvey (*Evidences of Christianity*, 92) wrote:

If Matthew had been making up his story, he would probably have been on his guard against such omissions; but as he was conscious of writing only the truth, he left his statement to take care of itself.

Did the Jews cover their Prisoner's face to symbolize the death sentence? (Cf. Mark 14:65; Esth. 7:8.) If so, this would rationalize the blindfolding by His tormentors. This man had claimed to be a prophet. Let him prove it. Because He could not see who hit Him, any faked prophecy would be impossible, if He were no real prophet. *Thou Christ* sneers at His Messianic claims in much the same way the Romans insulted Jesus by allusion to His supposedly political position (27:27-29).

Jesus chose to ignore these challenges, not because He could not prophesy, but because this was not the time for proof and answers but for death and reconciliation. He tolerated far more than these insulting gestures and painful blows. As Edersheim (*Life*, II, 562) put it:

. . . these insults, taunts, and blows which fell upon that lonely Sufferer, not defenseless, but undefending, not vanquished, but uncontending, not helpless, but majestic in voluntary self-submission for the highest purpose of love—have not only exhibited the curse of humanity, but also removed it by letting it descend on Him, the Perfect Man, the Christ, the Son of God.

But, ironically, to accept this suffering is not the mere exercise of moral grandeur that dwarfed those who thus abused Him. In a world gone awry where the purest of the race is mocked, for Him to suffer is to triumph, because God's plan, salvation made possible by His death as an atonement for sins, is progressing right on schedule. Again, He took this cruel mockery not merely because it too was foreseen in prophecy (Ps. 22:6f.; Isa. 50:6; 52:14; 53:3). Unjustly accused, unfairly tried and unkindly insulted, Jesus bore the unjust accusations, the unfair trial and the unkindly insults patiently, because He was committed to US. It was because He was committed to do God's will

that He loved us so. This same “divine toughness” can be ours, to the degree to which we turn ourselves over to God in the same way He did: “Not my will, but yours be done.”

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to what logical procedure would it be normal for Jesus to be taken first to Annas, as John says, rather than to Caiaphas, as the Synoptics report? What prior right(s) did Annas possess?
2. What was the difference between this session before Caiaphas and the one before Annas recorded by John (John 18:19-23)? How does it differ from that of Luke (22:66f.)?
3. Who constituted this jury that judged Jesus' case? What reasons justified each man's or group's opposition to Jesus?
4. State briefly what was charged against Jesus at this stage of His trial. What is the fundamental accusation back of all the Sanhedrin's deliberations that justifies their resistance to Jesus?
5. Were the witnesses against Jesus at His trials few or many? What was the character of the witnesses who came forward?
6. On what occasion(s) did Jesus affirm what they report?
7. In what way does this Synoptic's report of the false testimony about the destruction of the temple corroborate the testimony of John?
8. Did Jesus answer any of their accusations? If so, which and how?
9. Was there anything illegal about the high priest's putting Jesus on oath to speak: 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God'? Prove your answer.
10. What was Jesus' reply? What is the source and meaning of the language He used?
11. What is meant by Caiaphas' tearing his clothes?
12. Define “blasphemy” as this is used by the Sanhedrin to describe Jesus' crime. Then, show why Jesus was not guilty as charged.
13. What was the Mosaic punishment for blasphemy and for being a false prophet? Where are these laws stated? (book and chapter)
14. What sentiment is expressed by spitting in Jesus' face? Who did it?
15. On the basis of what specific law did the rulers decide Jesus must die?
16. List every evidence of Jesus' moral stature as His trial before Caiaphas reveals this.

## SECTION 70

## JESUS IS DENIED BY PETER

(Parallels: Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54-62;  
John 18:15-18, 25-27)

TEXT: 26:58, 69-75

58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end.

.....

69 Now Peter was sitting without in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. 70 But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. 71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another *maid* saw him, and saith unto them that were there, This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. 72 And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. 73 And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also are *one* of them; for thy speech maketh thee known. 74 Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew. 75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Peter was introduced into the courtyard because another disciple was known to the high priest (John 18:15f.). Which disciple do you think could really be an acquaintance of Jesus' archenemy and gain entrance for himself and Peter too without arousing suspicion?
- b. How could Peter be *inside* the palace of the high priest and yet be sitting *outside*, as Matthew affirms?
- c. On what principles may the supposed contradictions between the four Gospels' accounts of Peter's denials be resolved?
- d. Would you say that Peter was on trial as much as Jesus? What similarities between the two trials do you see? What differences?
- e. Do you think Peter really *had* to answer everyone's questions, when none of them were authorized to quiz him so? On what principle? Should he not simply have kept people at their distance, held his tongue or brushed past them as if he had not heard?

- f. (1) How did Peter's speech expose him as a disciple of Jesus?  
(2) How did his many denials actually expose him too?
- g. Why did Peter now go out and weep bitterly?
- h. How would Jesus' exhortation to "watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" have helped Peter avoid this debacle?
- i. Have you ever denied the Lord or your relationship to Him when people were trying to press you for a commitment? Did you ever do it by silence?
- j. Are there common things like the crow of a cock in our lives today that recall us to our duty?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Following Jesus at a safe distance, Simon Peter got as far as the courtyard of the high priest's residence, and so did another disciple. However, because this latter was known to the high priest, he went on into the courtyard along with Jesus, while Peter halted outside at the door. So the disciple known to the high priest stepped out and spoke to the maid on duty at the door, and brought Peter right into the courtyard too.

Now the servants and other subordinates had kindled a charcoal fire in the center of the courtyard, because it was cold. They were standing round it, warming themselves. Peter too was standing with them, keeping himself warm. They sat down around it, so Peter, to see how it would end for Jesus, crouched down among them, warming himself at the fire.

While Peter was sitting downstairs in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest—the maidservant who kept the door—came by and saw Peter warming himself as he sat turned toward the firelight. She came up close to him and, looking at him closely, declared, "You are not another of this man's disciples too, are you? You too were with that Jesus, the Galilean from Nazareth!"

But he denied it before them all, "I am not. Lady, I do not know Him. I neither know nor understand what you are talking about!" He arose and went out into the gateway, [and a cock crowed].

There another girl saw him and began telling the bystanders, "This fellow is one of them. He was with Jesus of Nazareth." A little later someone else saw him standing there warming himself and challenged him, "You are too one of his disciples!"

He continued to deny it a second time, adding an oath, "Man, I am not! I do not know the man!"

About an hour later the bystanders went up to Peter and insisted, "Unquestionably, you are too one of them, because you are a Galilean: your accent gives you away!" One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of Malchus whose ear Peter had sliced off, spoke up, "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?"

Again Peter denied it, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" He began to call down curses on himself and to swear, "I do not know this man you are talking about."

He had no sooner said this when the rooster crowed a second time. The Lord turned and looked searchingly at Peter. Then Peter remembered the prediction the Lord had made to him, "Before the rooster crows twice today, you will disown me three times." He then went outside and broke down, weeping bitterly.

## SUMMARY

Peter and John followed the arresting party as far as the high priest's residence. John, because of his acquaintance with the high priest, gained admittance for himself and Peter too. Peter, however, because of his brogue, was recognized as a disciple of the Man now on trial, and so drew attention to himself. Various people tried to get him to admit his belonging to Jesus' following, but he steadfastly denied all connection. At last, Peter heard the cock that Jesus had predicted. A heart-searching gaze from Jesus brought Peter to his senses, sending him out, shaken and penitent, to weep the bitter tears of the guilty.

## NOTES

Many note discrepancies among the versions of this incident our Gospels furnish. However, Alford (I,282ff.) rightly argued that simple differences are not a threat to faith but positive support for it, in that these

furnish one of the clearest instances of the *entire independency of the four Gospels of one another* . . . (1) supposing the four accounts to be entirely independent of one another, we are not bound to require accordance, nor would there in all probability be any such accordance, in the recognitions of Peter by different persons. These may have been many on each occasion of denial, and independent narrators may have fixed on different ones



among them. (2) No reader . . . will require that the actual words spoken by Peter should in each case be identically reported . . . the substantiative fact of a denial remains the same whether *ouk oîda ti légeis*, *ouk oîda autòn*, or *ouk eimì* are reported to have been Peter's answer. (3) I do not see that we are obliged to limit the narrative to three sentences from Peter's mouth, each expressing a denial, and no more. On three occasions during the night he was recognized,—on three occasions he was a denier of his Lord: such a statement may well embrace reiterated expressions of recognition, and reiterated and importunate denials, on each occasion. . . . In narratives which have sprung from such truthful independent accounts, they [the readers] must be prepared sometimes (as e.g. in the details of the day of the Resurrection) for discrepancies which, at our distance, we cannot satisfactorily arrange: now and then we may, as in this instance, be able to do so with something like verisimilitude:—in some cases, not at all. But whether we can thus arrange them or not, being thoroughly persuaded of the holy truthfulness of the Evangelists, and of the divine guidance under which they wrote, our faith is in no way shaken by such discrepancies. We value them rather, as testimonies to independence: and are sure, that if for one moment we could be put in complete possession of all the details as they happened, each account would find its justification, and the reasons of all the variations would appear.

The accusations and Peter's negations are the sort of conversation that is real: not calm, neat and orderly, but ragged, repeated and bunched into successive rounds or groups of attacks and denials. Each probably said what our Gospels report, without the Evangelists' believing that any one said neither more nor less than the brief phrases cited. The Evangelist that quotes more includes the report of him who cites less, while he who quotes less does not deny the fuller report. Some are talking about Peter, while others accuse him directly. Sometimes he answers the one; sometimes the others, each group of denials being considered one total event.

## THE DOWNWARD, PROGRESSIVE ROAD OF SIN: PETER IN THE LIONS' DEN

For a believer who unquestionably loves the Lord, Peter's denials furnish us a New Testament case history of an unexcelled opportunity:

to stand up for Christ in an unsympathetic environment. But it is highly instructive, being also the narration of what can go wrong for anyone. His strangeness to that environment turned everyone's attention on him, thus giving him an audience. Could he not simply identify himself as one who sincerely loved Jesus, even though completely stunned that He had not fulfilled his expectations? Surely these palace servants could understand this and, at worst, scorn Peter's folly, imprison him for a few days or, at best, even commiserate him who frankly admitted this. Then what went wrong?

### THE BOLD IMPRUDENCE OF FERVENT LOVE

**26:58 But Peter followed him afar off, unto the court of the high priest, and entered in, and sat with the officers, to see the end.** The PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY summarizes the sequence of events. (Cf. parallel Gospel texts.) *The court of the high priest*, see on 26:57, 69. In *following afar off* Peter shows a mixture of love for Jesus and fearfulness of being implicated too. So far from an informed, holy boldness, this attitude reflects his unbelief in Jesus' doctrine of the cross and his perplexity at seeing Jesus defeated. *The officers* are the Temple police, not Roman soldiers who, no longer needed, would have returned to their quarters in the Castle Antonia. (See on 26:47.) When the other disciples forsook Jesus and fled, they kept going. Peter, at the risk of his personal safety, *followed*.

Why was Peter there? Earlier, Peter had shown the spirit of a fighter, capable of plotting a daring rescue. Meanwhile, however, he had been stunned to witness Jesus willingly led away as a lamb to the slaughter, strictly forbidding him to use the sword. All this notwithstanding, Peter was absolutely unwilling to desert Him. A less docile Judas could hope for divine intervention or some violent escape, but it is at least doubtful that Peter saw himself as a spy who must prudently retain his identity secret at all costs to reconnoiter and renew the struggle later. His stated purpose for being there was *to see the end*.

*To see the end* means that Peter's denials occurred contemporaneously with Jesus' hearings before Annas and Caiaphas. Sadly, while Jesus was courageously facing hate-filled accusations with masterful poise, Peter was shamefully cracking under hostile pressure. *To see the end* is not idle curiosity but ardent love for his dear friend Jesus and intense anxiety to learn the outcome of his trials. All the enemies' challenges were unable to drive him out or break down his bold front

and make him confess. At all costs he was determined to stay inside that palace and learn the trial's outcome.

### SATAN'S SIFTING OF SIMON

**26:69 Now Peter was sitting without in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.** The *court* in question is not the hearing chamber where Jesus was being tried, but an open courtyard. Thus, Peter was *sitting without in the court*, because the high priest's palace itself surrounded this central, open-air courtyard. So, he was both *within the palace but also outside*, i.e., not in one of its rooms. In reporting that "Peter was below in the courtyard," (Mark (14:66) suggests that the courtyard in the heart of the palace was on a lower level than the chamber where Jesus' hearings were taking place. Because it was early morning in Jerusalem's higher elevation in early spring, these rugged men felt the chill of the night air in the stone courtyard open to the sky and kindled a cheering fire while they waited the hearings' outcome. While John calls it a charcoal fire (John 18:18), during the process of burning more highly combustible material to ignite the charcoal, more light was given off by the fire. (Cf. Luke 22:56, *tò phôs*.) That John pictured Peter as standing while the Synoptics record his *sitting* only more graphically depicts Peter as moving gradually into place, first standing then sitting near the fire.

*Sitting* means more than near the warmth of the fire. For Peter's deliberately *sitting* among them implies the nonchalance of a man who, like them, is against the Nazarene and on the side of the high priest. *Sitting* also betrays his sense of false security.

Unquestionably, concern for Jesus drew him here, but he was seriously blind to the high risk of being in this company so spiritually unprepared.

That a *maid* "who kept the door" (John 18:17) and other servants were on duty in the high priest's palace so late that night indicates the extraordinary events that were occurring. The girls would not only be involved in serving food but even keeping the door. (Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* VI,2,1; Acts 12:13.) The portress apparently did not ask Peter her embarrassing question immediately as he entered, but later when she too left the door area and approached the fire where she could see Peter's face more clearly in the firelight (Mark 14:66f.; Luke 22:56). That a person known to be a *disciple* (John 18:15) recommended Peter's entrance may have suggested Peter's connections

to her. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1070) suggests that she was moved by self-importance, wanting these men to realize "that she knew something they did not know. Here they were talking about Jesus and about what had just taken place and yet did not know that right in their own midst sat one of Jesus' own disciples."

*Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean.* Because it was a known disciple who got Peter in, *Thou also* links Peter with discipleship. She insinuates a conclusion: "You are not one of this man's disciples too, are you?" (John 18:17). For Peter, this maid's inquisition is mitigated only in form, since her words expected a negative answer, a factor that facilitated his denial. However, she motivates her inquisitiveness by an incriminating, if yet unproven, observation: "You too were with Jesus." Even so, there is yet no criticism implied in her oblique allusion to John's discipleship. So, why should Peter be so anxious to deny his own? Hendriksen (*John*, 393) sees her as maliciously ironic, because in her heart she already knew the answer to her question. Whether malicious or not, beneath her words lurked a terrible threat to Peter's security and he must answer.

## 1. VAGUE NEGATION

26:70 **But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest,** stammering, "I am not. Lady, I do not know Him. I neither know nor understand what you are talking about" (Mark 14:68; Luke 22:57; John 18:17)! Her unexpected disclosure, made in the presence of people (*émprosthen pànton*) among whom Peter considered himself relatively safe, caught him by surprise. In his panic his first impulse is self-preservation. He timidly denied even knowing Jesus, much less a follower. After faking complete ignorance and neutrality on the question, he eased away from the fire and walked to the forecourt or gateway, as if he had other business that required his presence elsewhere (Mark 14:68).

Mark reports the crow of a cock here (Mark 14:68). Although there are some manuscripts that do not contain this nor its later reference (Mark 14:72, see *A Textual Commentary*, 115f.), however, if it really crowed at this point, it would seem that Peter did not hear it, else he would have been conscience-struck sooner. Mark is not merely indicating the time, but the fulfillment of Jesus' word as he reported it (Mark 14:30). See note on 26:74.

26:71 And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and saith unto them that were there, This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. About an hour before the third denial (Luke 22:59), or about two o'clock, Peter went out into the porch (*tòn pulôna*; cf. *tò proaullion*, Mark 14:68), the gateway or arched passageway leading from the central courtyard to the street. Peter has no time to shake the fear brought on by the first challenge. Another maid: Matthew and Mark describe the second accuser as a girl, whereas Luke unquestionably mentions a different man (Luke 22:58; *héteros* . . . *ánthrope*). This apparent discrepancy may be resolved by seeing the crowd at Caiaphas' palace as large. There are now at least two girls, the original portress (Mark has the article: *he paidiske*, "the girl mentioned before," Mark 14:66) and one other (Matthew: *álle*). It is not clear whether the second denials occurred at the porch leading to the gate or at the fire. Perhaps the pressure began at the porch when the doormaid initiated this second attack by exposing Peter to another girl and a man standing around in the entranceway (Mark 14:69). Peter, to avoid it, retreated back to the fire only to find himself the center of attention at the fire where the others took up the chase (John 18:25). Thus, his return to the fire was not the dogged courage of love but the risky solution of the desperate.

*This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth.* Peter could not ignore the girl's approach, because her accusations continued to splatter around among men. It is noteworthy that neither Matthew nor Mark affirm that Peter answered the maid directly, but merely report that "he denied" to the bystanders, and only Luke quotes Peter as addressing the man, without denying that the maid had instigated this second exposure. While several people accuse him, this second denial is made all at the same general time as the result of this psychological build-up of pressure from various points. Would not hasty departure in this uneasy situation now confirm their suspicions? Again, he must answer.

## 2. CLEAR DENIAL SUPPORTED BY A FALSE OATH

26:72 And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. (Note Mark's imperfect tense: *ernewto*; Luke 22:58; John 18:25.) "He kept denying," evidence of a number of phrases not recorded. The tragedy when he lied (cf. 16:16; John 6:68f.) was worsened when he backed it up with an oath. This is perjury. Deeply shaken, Peter unnecessarily exaggerates, because many of Jesus' enemies knew Him

all too well, yet were not His disciples. How could anyone, so obviously Galilean as this Peter, live in Galilee, without at least *knowing the man*?! The man protests overmuch, if he is really indifferent to the Nazarene or about his own reputation. Further, what was Peter doing *among the high priest's servants*, if he could not admit to them his reason for being there? His very denials give him away.

**26:73 And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also art one of them; for thy speech maketh thee known.** Luke (22:59) notes the passage of time as "about an hour later," a fact that gives more reality to this scene:

1. It indicates how long it was taking the authorities to find an adequate basis upon which to establish a basis for the death sentence for Jesus. (See John 18:19ff.; 26:59ff.)
2. It lulled Peter into a false security that feared no more inquisitions.
3. It gave bystanders time to mull over Peter's strange nervousness and his regional dialect and uncover further proof of his falseness.

Just when Peter thought his ordeal over, some men who had been discussing Peter, confront him directly, *Of a truth thou art one of them*. Peter's lying had not accomplished anything. Rather, now firmer than ever, this conviction of his true loyalties had a two-fold basis:

1. His dialectical pronunciation was typically Galilean, as opposed to the linguistic refinement of the cultured in the capital: "*Your accent gives you away!*" (Mark 14:70; Luke 22:59). Alford, (I, 285, citing Westein) noted that the Galileans could not pronounce the guttural sounds properly and made other changes in Hebrew words.
2. His face was virtually recognized by a relative of Malchus, the man whose ear Peter had sliced off: "Did I not see you in the garden with Him?" (John 18:26). Not just embarrassing, this almost positive recognition is really dangerous.

### 3. LYING UNDER OATH AND SELF-CURSING

**26:74 Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew.** Unable to escape the damning evidence of his own dialect—the more he said, the more he proved their point—, and pressured by this dangerous witness to his sword-swinging in the garden, Peter felt he must now employ the most serious device conceivable to convince these unfriendly, suspicious hearers. In his

frustration and desperation, he began vehemently *to curse and to swear*. Simon Peter was no profane man. His sense of the sacred must not be sullied by misconception on our part. *He began to curse*, i.e. to call God's wrath down upon himself, if what he was saying were untrue; *and to swear*, i.e. invoke God as witness of the truthfulness of his affirmations. His sin lay not in the act of cursing or swearing, because as proven before (see notes on 26:63), neither is sin and both may be absolutely right and necessary. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 936) rightly contrasts Christ's oath (26:63F.) and Peter's (26:72, 74): "the former confirms the truth; the latter sanctions the lie!" So, his loss of the sacred, his sin, consisted in *invoking God's approval upon what he knew was not true*.

*I know not the man*. Paradoxically, this is his first true statement. Had Peter truly *known* Jesus, he would not have worried about Jesus' final destiny, because he would have believed His every prediction of victory as the unshakable word of God. Instead, in his frantic self-defense he has almost completely forgotten the Lord whose honor he would defend.

*And straightway the cock crew* about three o'clock Friday morning. Jesus' hearings continued through the night from his arrest apparently until this moment (Luke 22:61).

### WHOSE CHICKEN WAS THIS?

If it be objected that the Jews did not keep roosters in the city, let it be answered that this particular rooster belonged to foreigners over whom the Jewish rules could not claim obedience. Nor would Sadducees feel bound by unwritten traditions that, without Mosaic sanction, forbid such fowls in the City. Were not Annas and Caiaphas chiefest among the Sadducees (Acts 5:17)?

Further, the two cock-crowings cannot be explained as the sound of the Roman *buccina* sounding the changing of the guard, because, whereas the 3 a.m. blast of the trumpet might be called *gallicinium* or "cock-crow," would the *midnight* trumpet also be termed thus? The two cock-crowings mentioned by Mark are only an hour or so apart (cf. Mark 14:48, 72 with Luke 22:58-60), hence not the sounding of the *gallicinium* which only occurred every three hours, i.e. at midnight and at 3 a.m. Peter heard a real rooster.

## The Lord's power over Peter

**26:75 And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.** (See notes on 26:34.) That cock crowing meant nothing to anyone but Peter. His mind's eye vividly saw the earlier scene with his forgotten, rash promises and Jesus' sad, strenuously discarded predictions. Did he also remember Jesus' other word: "He who denies me before men, him will I deny before my Father who is in heaven" (10:33)? He broke down not only because of the cock-crowing, but, just as significantly, because, at that moment, "the Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" (Luke 22:61). Many see this moment as a transfer of Jesus from one chamber in the high priest's palace to another where He would be held until the morning session. Therefore, while Peter's attention was diverted by this new movement, Jesus could pause, turn and look meaningfully and understandably straight into his heart. Tolbert (*Good News From Matthew*, 231): "This is the moment when grace can begin its work—when a man is stripped of his arrogance and stands before God naked in his need."

*Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said.* Memory, that gift of God, pierced his self-deception, mistaken shame and terror, convincing and condemning him. It reminded him of Jesus' love and broke his heart, leaving him ashamed, self-condemned and agonizing over his dishonoring the lord he loved. Here is the point of the Scriptures and the Lord's Supper: to save us by vivid God-given reminders that can pierce our soul and bring us to repentance. (Cf. II Peter 1:12-15, 3:1.)

*And he went out, and wept bitterly.* While the others moved to their duties in the changed situation and Sanhedrinists went home for the night, Peter, blinded by tears, could stumble out the front gate together with them, hardly noticed. *He went out, and wept bitterly*, because he could no longer face himself. Unworthy even to be near Jesus, the perjured disciple has no further justification for being there. Where all the hostility of others could not tear him from his determination, one unspoken word, the eloquent, anguished look from the injured Master, broke him down completely. He is ashamed, because it has now dawned on him that he has just done that of which he believed himself completely incapable. He, Jesus' privileged apostle and dear friend, had really done this to Him! (Cf. Ps. 55:12ff.)



So why did Peter deny his relation to Jesus? Peter's failure is not merely the product of a unique combination of elements in his character and temperament which exposed him to be tempted in precisely this way, as if these temptations were meaningful only to Peter or those of a personality like his. Rather, are not these elements characteristic of all of us at one time or another?

1. Physically exhausted and shivering in the early-morning chill, Peter's thoughts ran to creature comforts (cf. Mark 14:54; John 18:18), rather than to the nearness of temptation and the spiritual battle to be fought. (Cf. 26:41.) His resistance and presence of mind to meet challenges were worn down by the emotional drain of excitement and sorrow of the preceding day. So far from spiritual preparedness, he was hardly ready physically for this battle.
2. Unjustified self-confidence: he presumptuously ignored warnings of this peril. A synonym of self-trust is faithlessness. He did not believe Christ's predictions either of his own failure or of Christ's victory without his own ill-conceived help. This amounts to rejection to Christ's revelations whereinsofar they clashed with Peter's views. Further, to arm himself against all trials he trusted his own emotional enthusiasm for Jesus, rather than an intelligent determination to do God's revealed will at all costs.
3. Rashness: he was deliberately sitting among Jesus' enemies, self-exposed to the very temptation against which he had been warned. He certainly was not thinking of denying Christ, yet like us in an unguarded moment, he was *simply not thinking*, but plunged into ill-considered activity.
4. The temptation's unexpectedness: he was distracted because his gaze was directed toward the trials and Jesus. He was neither watching nor praying to avoid temptation when he was suddenly confronted with the challenge.
5. Initial timidity that feared men rather than a holy boldness based on the fear of the Lord and a firm, correct knowledge of God's will. He feared reprisals and cost to himself. His confidence, that when God decides a thing victory is guaranteed, was severely shattered when he saw Christ arrested like a common criminal without defending Himself. His earlier boldness was now replaced by a wary, instinctive self-protectiveness which tempts a person to resort to *any means*, even falsehood as a way of avoiding trouble.
6. His sense of purpose and direction is damaged, for what could he actually do for Jesus here that would not be judged out of order

by the Lord Himself? He wrongly assumed that serious temptations could be courageously met with swords, ingoring the subtler, more deadly trials of a servant-girl's question.

7. Evil companions may also be a factor. Granted, they were unsympathetic to Christ's cause, and their pressuring hurried him to sin. But the least they could have done was laugh at him in their unbelief or arrest him for a day or so; the most, let him keep his promise to die for Jesus. But they were the least significant element, because, looked at from the Lord's point of view, these servants were only trying to get Peter to say what he really and deeply believed.

What Peter did after this moral break-down, the Gospel writers omit. Their last words leave him a humbled, brokenhearted man who must struggle with his lostness, overwhelmed with shame and grief, until thrilled by the stirring news of the resurrection morning, "The Lord is risen!"

What is our lesson? Without the grace of Christ, how strong is the bravest man? Peter's humiliated self-confidence challenges the best of disciples among us: who would dare trust himself to believe that he *could not* do the most abominable deed (I Cor. 10:11-13)? Further, the gravest threat may not always come from a Christian's weak points, but from what he considers his strength. This Satan succeeds in twisting against the Christian himself. On the other hand, how great is the spiritual power of God's grace and forgiveness in believers! Consider Peter's restoration to become the great pillar of the Church. Peter's grief had led to life through repentance, because he listened to the appeals of his own smitten conscience (II Cor. 7:10). Judas' fall, on the other hand, was a deliberate choice matured in harmony with his mentality. Peter's was the accidental fall of a good man, a real disciple, truly touched by his sense of sin and of the Lord's rightness. This explains his rapid rehabilitation as opposed to Judas' suicide.

That Jesus could so accurately foresee the various forces that would produce Peter's breakdown and even the timing proves even more remarkably His divine knowledge. That He foresaw it *and let it happen anyway*, points to the deep respect God has for the human will. He let this sincere but rash believer go wrong to reveal his weakness to him, break his overconfidence and teach him dependence on Himself. But He never ceased to intercede for Peter. The same Jesus who forewarned Peter and interceded before God for him, whose look restored Peter's sense of guilt, later freely forgave and re-established him,

offers us mercy and pleads our case before God, however deep our sin (John 6:37; Rev. 22:17; Heb. 7:25). Should not this exalted concept of His graciousness stir our hearts to grateful worship?

We easily identify with the sins of the great Bible characters, such as David and Peter, *but can we repent with them?* With loyal hearts and deep devotion do we abhor sin and weep over it before God like they? Oh God, when I have debased your Name, played the fool and denied my discipleship, send me a Nathan, a rooster, anything, to call my wandering heart back to you! May I hear all the voices in Creation and in your Word that call me to repentance (Ps. 19: Rom. 1:20)!

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. What elements led to Peter's denials?
2. Explain how Peter gained entrance to the courtyard of the high priest.
3. Mark states that Peter was "beneath in the palace," whereas Matthew affirms "without in the palace." Harmonize these expressions.
4. What was Peter's motive(s) for being there?
5. Why did Peter join the men seated there at the fire lit in the high priest's courtyard? What time of year was it? Would it have been cold enough for a fire?
6. Who first accused Peter?
7. Who accused him the second time?
8. How much time elapsed during Jesus' trials and, consequently, Peter's? About what time of night did the third denial occur?
9. What clues demolished Peter's anonymity in the eyes of the bystanders?
10. What method(s) did Peter use to defend his assertions?
11. Explain the proposition: "Peter was not a profane man, just lying." In what sense did he curse and swear?
12. How many cocks crowed that night? Prove your answer.
13. What did Peter remember when he heard the cock crow?
14. What elements do the Gospels furnish that permit us to discern time connections between the denials of Peter and the trials of Christ?

## SECTION 71

### JESUS IS CONDEMNED BY THE FULL SANHEDRIN

(Parallels: Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66—23:1; John 18:28)

TEXT: 27:1, 2

1 Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: 2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that the early morning hour of this consultation held by the authorities of Israel exposes their intentions as evil? Why?
- b. What relationship is there between this consultation and the others held during the night? If those were definitive, why bother to hold another now?
- c. Is there any evidence that the *entire* decision-making body of Israel was not assembled in plenary session to deal with Jesus? If so, give the proof.
- d. How does this hearing resemble the earlier, night sessions as to strategy? How does it differ? What is repeated? What is omitted?
- e. Why do you think the Jews did not kill Jesus outright themselves? After all, they stoned Stephen. Why take Him to Pilate now?

### PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Very early, that is, as soon as morning came, the national council of the elders was immediately convened so, all the chief priests and theologians led Jesus away from there to their council chamber. This entire Sanhedrin held a consultation to decide the best procedure for getting Jesus executed.

"If you are the Christ," they demanded, "tell us so!"

But His reply was, "If I tell you, you will not believe me. If I ask you a question, you will not answer. But from now on I, the Son of man, will be seated at the right hand of Almighty God!"

Then they all asked, "Are you God's Son, then?"

He said to them, "You said it. I am!"

"What further testimony do we need?" they asked. "We have heard it ourselves from his own mouth!"

At this, the whole assembly rose, tied Jesus' hands and led Him from Caiaphas to the Praetorium and turned Him over to Pilate the governor. It was still early.

## SUMMARY

To ratify the results of the night hearings, a brief show-trial is held before a hastily convened full Sanhedrin. Only the principle issue guaranteed to produce a unanimous verdict of guilty was raised: Jesus' allegedly false claim to be God's Son, hence, to be deity despite His obvious humanity. The tactic succeeded in its intent and a relatively united senate sentenced Him to death. To accomplish this, they must work through the Roman governor, to whom they now go.

## NOTES

**27:1** Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. It was Friday *morning*, Nisan 15. The Synoptics picture the plotters as astir at daybreak as soon as possible (*Proïas genoménes*; Mark 15:1: *euthùs proi*; Luke 23:1: *hos egéneto heméra*). Even after a hurried-up morning session, their arrival at Pilate's headquarters could still be described as "early" (John 18:28: *proi*). Contrary to the opinion of some, their haste is not dictated by the supposed need to complete everything before the afternoon slaying of the Paschal lambs which had actually taken place the day before. (Cf. on 26:17.) Rather, it was to dispose of Jesus speedily before His supporters could get wind of it and block everything by a riot (26:5).

*And the chief priests and the elders of the people.* (For terminology see notes on 26:59.) Mark's expression (*kaì hòlon tò sunédrión*) is simply explanatory, "even the entire Sanhedrin." Perhaps because Matthew had already named the entire Sanhedrin, he left it to the discernment of the reader to deduce that the same authorities who began the trials would certainly conclude them (26:59, 65f. = Mark 14:55, 63f.). However, the full Sanhedrin is explicitly named (Mark 15:1 *hòlon tò sunédrión*; Luke 22:66 *eis tò sunédrión autôn*). Mark's expression confirms the impression that this is no mere sectional interest or party tribunal but a plenary session of the national Sanhedrin itself. Luke's explicit "the assembly of the elders of the people . . . led him away to their council" (Luke 22:66) excludes the supposition

that there is a contradiction between John and the Synoptics as to the location or participants of the morning trial. (See below on 27:2.)

The brevity of this *pro forma* session must not lead to discount the importance of what did or did not occur there. Here again all respect for legal conventions was subordinated to what these leaders judged a higher consideration: the speedy removal of the Nazarene. If judgments of Jewish capital crimes must be unanimous, who heard the objections of Joseph of Arimathea and probably of Nicodemus (Luke 23:50f.)? Further, the arguments that (1) the unanimity must be obtained by a quorum of 23, not necessarily all 71 members, and that (2) they could have hand-picked the jury without informing some of the meeting, are obviated by Mark who unequivocally declares that the priests, elders and scribes present constituted "the whole Sanhedrin" (Mark 15:1; cf. Luke 2:66: *tò presbutérion toû laou*; Acts 22:5). The absence of a few notable councillors does not alter the criminal responsibility of the resounding majority vote against Jesus. This determination of Jesus' death by the supreme council of Israel harmonizes precisely with His many predictions (16:21f.; 20:17ff.).

That the perfunctory questioning of Jesus at the morning consultation was in some details similar to that of the night meetings, is to be expected. Those former hearings were preliminary. This is the formal trial to keep up the appearance of justice (two hearings in serious criminal cases; day-time sentence, etc.). Thus, because the night sessions would not be considered final, even though the previous testimony of Jesus counted against Him, the main issue of His claims would be repeated for confirmation in the daytime session.

*Took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.* For a skeleton transcript of the central issue, see Luke 22:67-71. Because His fate is already determined, this brief, formal session is held to plot the most effective means of executing their sentence. No mention is made of witnesses or testimony, because the fiasco of the previous night must not be repeated (26:59-61). Because only Jesus' self-incrimination as divine Messiah could swing the jury against Him, this is the exclusive tactic followed by the morning questioning. And yet, because blasphemy would not be a criminal offense in Roman jurisprudence, all their night-time activities would accomplish nothing until Pilate approved their judgment. Therefore, the most persuasive way of stating the case must be found that would convince Pilate to cooperate in confirming their verdict to execute Jesus. They faced the live possibility that Pilate would not simply ratify their verdict, and demand to try Jesus' case himself. From the results of their deliberations, it appears

that they were unable to establish a clear case (John 18:29f.), hoping that turning Him over as an evil-doer to Pilate would have been sufficient bluff to convince Pilate to rubber-stamp their verdict without opening the case. If pressed, they would emphasize the political impact of Jesus' religious pretenses. So, to make Jesus out to be a threat to the Roman political machine, the trumped up charges decided upon are (1) perverting the nation; (2) forbidding to give tribute to Caesar; and (3) claim to be an anointed king (Luke 23:2, 5; John 18:14, 19:12).

**27:2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him to Pilate the governor.**

When the Jews rejected as king over all Palestine the wicked Archelaus, latest scion of Herod the Great, they sought direct Roman intervention (*Ant.* XVIII, 13,1-3; *Wars*, II,6,1; 7,3; 8,1). Procurators were appointed as civil and military *governor* of Judea and Samaria with their usual residence located at Caesarea, the Roman administrative capital of Palestine. (Cf. Acts 23:23, 33; 25:1, 4, 6, 13.) This latest, Pontius *Pilate*, ruled from 26-36 A.D. (For further study on *Pilate*, see Josephus *Ant.* XVIII,3,1-2; 4,1-2; 6,5; *Wars* II,9,2-4; Tacitus, *Annals* XV,44; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* I,9,10; II,2,5,7 Philo, *De Legationem ad Caium*, c. 38.) However, because of the extremely highly volatile concentration of people of Jewish feasts when nationalistic sentiment ran high, Roman troops accompanying the governor rolled into Jerusalem to preside personally over the maintenance of order. Although Jesus had been sentenced to death, Israel's authorities did not at this time possess the right to execute the death penalty (John 18:31; cf. *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Wars* II,8,1). So, the decision of the Sanhedrin to hand Jesus over to Pilate was, politically, a foregone conclusion. To avoid having to stone Jesus publicly and risk civil war with His massive popular following, the remaining obstacle to carrying out their plan consisted in convincing Pilate.

When *they delivered him to Pilate*, as John has it, "they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium," i.e. from where Caiaphas' authority as God's high priest was supreme (*apò toû Kaîa*) to the Praetorium (*eis tò praitèion*), the Roman jurisdiction of Pilate (John 18:28). Unless the high priest's palace were the temporary meeting place of the Sanhedrin, they did not depart from Caiaphas' *palace* (as many read John's wording), because they already left his palace that morning to take Jesus into their council for the final trial (Luke 22:66: *sunéchthe tò presbutèrion toû laou . . . kai apégagon autòn eis tò sunédriion autòn*).

However, it is also possible that the Sanhedrin met in Caiaphas' Palace and walked from it to the Praetorium. There are cryptic Jewish reports that the Sanhedrin did not meet in its rightful meeting place for forty years before the fall of Jerusalem. (Cf. *Y. Sanhedrin*, 1,18a,34; 7:24b,41; *Abodah Zarah*, 8b, cited by Barrett, *John*, 445.) Was this due to the curbing of the Sanhedrin's power by Rome, or by Herod earlier, or both? In that political environment possibly a large room in the palace of Caiaphas was utilized more or less regularly in this capacity. In this case, Luke's language (22:66) means that Jesus was led away from His overnight prison to this *ad interim* meeting place of the full Sanhedrin in the high priest's palace. Either way, however, John does not confuse trials, locations or contradict the Synoptics, as he has been charged.

So, this confirmatory session occurred in the relatively normal chamber for such decisions, the meeting place of the Sanhedrin. In a body (Luke 23:1) they walked from the council to the Praetorium. Even this impressive display of moral force may be intended as part of a bluff to impress Pilate with the gravity of trying the rabble-rouser they bring before him.

### FACT QUESTIONS

1. At what time of day did this consultation occur?
2. Who attended it? Specify who constituted this council.
3. Where was this session held? Prove your answer.
4. Explain why the chief priests and elders would need another session, if they had already sentenced Jesus to death the night before.
5. Why would questions that were already answered the night before be repeated at this session?
6. What specifically was the council deciding about Jesus? On what charge(s) was He arraigned before them?
7. Was their decision unanimous concerning Jesus? (Cf. Luke 23:50f.; John 19:38)
8. What action did they take immediately?
9. Who was Pontius Pilate? Why did the Jews deliver Jesus to him when they themselves had pronounced His death sentence?



## SECTION 72

## JESUS' BETRAYER COMMITS SUICIDE

TEXT: 27:3-10

3 Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, 4 saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? see thou *to it*. 5 And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he sent away and hanged himself. 6 And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood. 7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. 8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. 9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom *certain* of the children of Israel did price; 10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think Judas expected Jesus to be condemned to death?
- b. How would you differentiate between the repentance of Peter and that of Judas? Of what value to the modern Christian is a detailed study of Judas Iscariot?
- c. Do you see any value in the testimony Judas gave to Jesus' innocence? If so, what value is there? If not, why not?
- d. Do you think that in testifying to Jesus' innocence, Judas shows any love for Him?
- e. What was it that so completely crushed Judas and drove him to suicide?
- f. What does the priests' scruple about the proper use of the blood money indicate about them?
- g. When the priests' called it "blood money," do you think they unconsciously admitted Jesus' innocence? If not, what would this expression mean to them?
- h. Why do you think they selected a potter's field? Did God direct their choice or was this simply the only land available or what?
- i. Why do you think Matthew attributed the prophecy quoted to

Jeremiah instead of to Zechariah whose words more nearly resemble it? Did Matthew forget who wrote the prophecy?

j. Why do you think Matthew recorded the death of Judas?

### PARAPHRASE

When Judas, Jesus' betrayer, realized that He was really condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver money to the chief priests and elders. "I have sinned in betraying an innocent man to his death," he said.

"What has that got to do with us?" they retorted. "That is your problem!"

He then hurled the money into the sanctuary and left. Then he went off and hanged himself.

The chief priests, however, picked up the coins, arguing, "It is not legal to put this money into the temple fund, because it is tainted with blood." So, after discussing the matter, they used this sum to purchase the "Potter's Field," as a cemetery for foreigners. This is why that field has been called "The Field of Blood" ever since. In this way the words of the prophet Jeremiah came true:

They took the thirty pieces of silver, the amount some Israelites had established to pay for him, and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord had ordered me.

### SUMMARY

Incredibly for Judas, Jesus was condemned. Shocked, the betrayer attempted to make amends but was rudely rebuffed by heartless hypocrites. After hurling the money into the Temple's Holy Place, Judas committed suicide. On a scruple, the priests did not put the money into the treasury but purchased a piece of land as a burial ground for foreigners. Unintentionally on the part of the Jewish authorities, they hereby enacted the ancient prophecy.

### NOTES

#### A SHATTERED LIFE: FUTILE REPENTANCE AND RESTITUTION

**27:3** Then Judas, who betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself. *Then (tôte)* synchronizes Judas' awakening

with Jesus' consignment to Pilate immediately following the condemnation by the Sanhedrin (27:2). For the first time he grasped the horrible result of his betrayal: they were dragging the Lord off to His death! It is unclear just where or how Judas learned of the sentence. Unlike Peter, however, Judas would have had no public motive to distrust Jesus' foes. So, he could have witnessed the entire morning trial, hence did not need to wait until after Pilate's condemnation to hurry to the Temple to plead with the returning priests alone. Instead, Judas returned the money *to the chief priests and elders*, i.e., to the Sanhedrin, since Matthew's expression contextually refers to that body (26:3, 47, 57; cf. 26:59; 27:1 = Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66). Therefore, he stood before members of the supreme council, because, if Judas considered the Jewish sentence definitive, it being only a matter of time until Pilate carried it out, it is conceivable that, to halt this avalanche, he interrupted them even as they were preparing to go to Pilate.

Edersheim (*Life*, II, 573) notes that during the trials before Pilate a definite break occurred when Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, after which the governor had to reconvene Jesus' accusers (27:17; Mark 15:8; Luke 23:13). So, it is alternatively possible that Judas' intervened with the individual *chief priests and elders* on Jesus' behalf during this recess.

*Judas . . . repented himself (metameletheis)*. He felt profound regret (21:30; II Cor. 7:8; Heb. 7:21). He was driven by circumstances to renounce the view that, we believe, stood at the base of his plot to betray Him, i.e. that Jesus *must* defend Himself. The unexpected consequences of his crime throw him into deep remorse, but do not save him. True repentance takes the sinner *to* the Lord, *not away* from Him to an improvised gallows. He found his fearful responsibility unbearable. (Cf. Cain's reaction, Gen. 4:13f.)

However, some say this verse is not proof that he had not planned for Jesus to suffer, because a person can regret the consequences of his act, even if he clearly foresaw them. Accordingly, Judas could have intended Jesus' death, but now regrets it. While study of his motives is a matter of considerable conjecture on our part, nevertheless, his confession (v. 4) need not militate against the view that the condemnation took him by surprise. In fact, what one plans for what he conceives of as good may smash back with terrific force, convincingly revealing itself as evil. To betray an innocent man *to*

*death* was not necessarily his purpose, but simply to betray an innocent man *to get Him to act on His own behalf to escape death*, although high-risk planning, is also compatible with Judas' shock.

*Judas . . . brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders.* Because his deed burdened him with intolerable guilt, he wanted desperately to reverse his disastrous bargain. Naturally, he would return the money, but he could not hope to redeem Jesus from his enemies with this miserable sum, but by courageous, public testimony to Jesus' innocence. Did he hope that, if he offered new testimony after sentencing, they must hear Jesus' case again? Even if they took him for a necessary but despised tool in their plans and an unwelcome intrusion, they must hear him out.

### The betrayer's testimony

**27:4 saying, I have sinned in that I betrayed innocent blood. But they said, What is that to us? See thou to it. I have sinned** is the shocked reaction of a man unnerved at seeing the totally unexpected enormity of his blunder. Whatever the glamor of his former ambition, the enticement of what he imagined has now vanished. Only grim reality holds him in its grip, leaving him broken by remorse. His is the anguish of a man who would turn back the clock to rid his soul of this haunting hour. (Cf. Esau's grief, Heb. 12:16f.) Admirably, Judas took personal responsibility for his actions. He blames no one but himself. Yet this is not the repentance of a man who would fling himself at the foot of the cross to beg forgiveness of his Victim. Turning to Him is just not Judas' way.

Is it true that in testifying to Jesus' innocence, Judas shows no love for Him? His had always been that kind of self-interested friendship that manipulated his true Friend. Unquestionably, his shock is deep and genuine. Was he revolted only by the *consequences* of his act and not also at the heinous sinfulness of it? Yet, stark awareness of the abominableness of our sins, alone, does not break our hearts and lead us, repentant, to Jesus. Only undiminished confidence in God's gracious forgiveness can convince us to do that. Despite his long discipleship under Jesus, Judas did not believe this.

*I betrayed innocent blood* is the soul-cry of a tormented conscience seeking elementary justice for Another. However, *innocent blood*, as a Mosaic legal term (Exod. 23:7; cf. Deut. 27:25), would not have halted those heartless judges or procured a stay of execution for

Jesus. They refused to reopen the case, because Jesus was sentenced for blasphemy and Judas' defense did not refute the accusations on which it was founded. However, Judas' anguished pleas disprove the later Talmudical claim that for 40 days a herald went through Israel inviting anyone to come forward to defend the Nazarene, but none came. (Cf. Bab. Talmud, *Seder Nezikin*.)

Sadly, these anguished cries do not mitigate Judas' guilt, because, however innocent of all wrong-doing he considered Jesus, he never personally surrendered to the practical ramifications of Jesus' self-understanding, never bowed to His Lordship, never accepted the doctrine of the cross. (See notes on 26:14, 25, 49f.) Rather than confess his sin to these calloused priests, had he thrown himself upon the mercy of Jesus, he could have been forgiven. For pardon this frenzied soul turned to the wrong people.

*But they said, What is that to us?* They treat his belated testimony as immaterial, because they condemned Jesus for a claim they themselves heard and rejected as false, whereas Judas' generic defense seems to concern only Jesus' general good character against which they had no specific complaint. *See thou to it* translates two words, *sû ôpsei* (future indicative of *horào*), capable of two meanings:

1. If they intended a simple future tense, then they say: "What is your testimony of Jesus' innocence to us? He is guilty and you yourself (*sû*) shall see it."
2. Because in the Hebrew a future indicative can communicate an imperative sense, many render it as the ASV: *See thou to it*, "You will take care of the problem yourself!" (Cf. Acts 18:15, *ôpses the autoi*.)

They had achieved the only goal that mattered. Rather than point this pitiful man they had used back to God as his hope from despair, they heartlessly tossed aside their despised, now useless tool.

### The appalling power of unresolved guilt

**27:5 And he cast down the pieces of silver into the sanctuary, and departed; and he went away and hanged himself.** So, if Jesus were taken from Caiaphas' palace (see on 27:2) somewhere on the *south* side of the Temple, to Pilate's quarters in the Antonia castle on the *north* side, Judas, failing to stop them, took a short-cut through the Temple and disposed of the money, while the others took Jesus to Pilate.

Shattered, the friendless traitor entered the Temple. The "reward of his iniquity" burned his hands and his agonized soul. Attempting to obtain relief, he entered the Temple and in an insane gesture of spite against the priests who rejected his attempt to save Jesus, hurled away this concrete reminder of his guilt. Two views of his act are possible:

1. He simply cast the money down at the priests' feet in any part of the Temple. (Some manuscripts have *en tō naō*.) Plummer (*Matthew*, 385) affirms that Josephus uses *naōs* "of the collective Temple-buildings," so our author could have too. However, Matthew does not affirm that Judas did this in the presence of priests. Yet, if he senselessly hurled it into the "treasury," his vindictiveness at being repulsed by the authorities is clearer: if they would not listen to his claim to justice for Jesus, now they must take back the money, wanted or not.
2. Judas could have hurled (*hripsas*) the coins with violent force through the open doors of *the sanctuary* into the Holy Place. (Better manuscripts have *eis tōn naōn*.) The arrangement of the Temple which makes this act possible demands that he stand in the Court of the Women at the Nicanor Gate at the top of the fifteen steps leading to the Court of the Priests. (Cf. *Wars*, V, 5, 4.)

*He . . . departed (anechōresen)* but apparently did not seek the understanding fellowship of other disciples. In the solitude of his self-counsel, did he believe them incompetent to help him?

*He went away and hanged himself.* No man commits suicide casually. There is a strange consistency in Judas' final act. Because his root-motivation seems to have been selfish ambition that clamored for instant solutions, he would not hesitate to eliminate anyone or anything that hindered his happiness.

Was Judas' final act of self-oblivion the attempt to escape the curse for betraying the innocent for a bribe (Deut. 27:25)? Or did he even think of this? Did he remember Jesus' fearful prophecy 26:24)? Was it not the frenzied desperation of a man so tortured by his own conscience that he would rather become his own executioner than tolerate its accusations? Even so, did he not curse himself by hanging himself (Deut. 21:22f.)? The sad irony is that salvation for Judas was as close as Jesus, had he but believed it—and Him!

Judas, according to Matthew, hanged himself. Luke says, however, "he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled

out" (Acts 1:18). The alleged contradiction is resolved by noting that, whereas Luke describes the result of Judas' suicide, our author documents the way he died, i.e. by hanging. Whether Judas' decaying body remained suspended several days and either the limb or rope would not support his weight, or whether these broke when he fell headlong and his body was grotesquely impaled on a sharp rock from which he could not extricate himself, the conditions are supplied to harmonize both testimonies. Thus, the Acts account incidentally supplements Matthew's.

### LAUNDERING CRIMINAL MONEY: CALLOUSNESS ABOUT JUSTICE BUT SANCTIMONIOUS SCRUPULOUSNESS ABOUT TRIVIA

**27:6 And the chief priests took the pieces of silver, and said, it is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is the price of blood.** Judas' unanticipated move left these legalists a dilemma. Possibly founded on Deuteronomy 23:18, their argument may have concluded that nothing abominable to God be considered acceptable as a proper offering (*eis tôn korbanân*: "given to God"; cf. Mark 7:11). *The treasury*, cf. Mark 12:41; Luke 21:1; John 8:20; Josephus, *Wars*, II,9,4.

Is calling this money *the price of blood* the unwitting admission that they purchased the death of an objectively *innocent* man? From their point of view, no, because these sophists could call it *the price of blood* merely from its connection with a person's death which they completely justify. Their scruple is morally frivolous, because they had been ready to withdraw it perhaps from the holy treasury itself to secure the death of Jesus, but were unwilling to accept it back when it has been used for its intended purpose!

**27:7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.** This purchase may have occurred after the crucifixion, in which case, Matthew recorded it ahead of time, to avoid breaking into the story following. Because the land in question is described as *the potter's field*, some deduce that its value was too clayey for agriculture, hence suitable only for stripping its clay for pottery. Because the priests buy it for a cemetery, its clay may already have been depleted, leaving only an abandoned excavation good for nothing. Hence *the potter* would sell the worn-out land for such a low sum.

*To bury strangers in* seems to express a warmly humanitarian, religious purpose: non-Jews would not now have to be buried together

with the Hebrews. However, rather than to Gentiles, *strangers* (*xénois*) may refer merely to Jewish pilgrims whom death overtook at Jerusalem, hence would not have a proper burial place. Either way, the unscrupulousness of these priests is nicely buried under the guise of long-neglected civic responsibility. The blood money has now been laundered by this act of charity.

The supposed contradiction between Matthew and Acts relative to the reason for renaming the field, *the field of blood*, is without foundation. (Cf. Matt. 27:6-9; Acts 1:18f.) In both accounts the same money, "the reward of [Judas'] iniquity," purchased the field. In both cases it was Judas who furnished both the situation and the means whereby this purchase took place, even if others legally acted in his name and with money that remained his even though he were dead. (Cf. other examples of deeds by representative agents, John 19:1; Acts 2:23.) Nowhere did Luke state that Judas kept the money and with it personally bought the field. Even if reading Acts alone seems to suggest this view, Luke's original readers could have compared it with Matthew's account and harmonize them to get all the facts, if they wished, just as we today.

**27:8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.** This verse explains the source of a traditional place-name. However, does this make its facts *untrue*, as alleged by some? Matthew and Acts furnish two valid, not irreconcilable reasons for calling the field "Akeldama," *the field of blood*: in both the *blood* in question is primarily that of Christ, for whose betrayal by Judas the *blood* money ("the reward of his iniquity") has been spent. Luke however furnished an additional gory reason to call the terrible place "Akeldama." He revealed a fact Matthew omitted: that the field in question was, by an ironic twist of history, the very one where Judas himself came to a violent end (Acts 1:18f.). Luke's parenthetical remark merely summarizes for his reader's what was already well-known, without disputing Matthew's narrative.

The priests denominated this area "a field to bury strangers in," but popular sentiment, aware of the life-blood which that field represented, gave it a truer name, *The field of blood*, a perpetual reminder that the authorities had not buried their injustice after all.

*Unto this day* dates the writing of Matthew's Gospel as quite some time after the resurrection, time enough for this new local tradition ("Akeldama") to take root in the popular language. However, if the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. may be thought to have



obscured place names as the sites themselves were obliterated under debris, *unto this day* whispers that the Gospel was not penned after that event.

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF—ONLY MUCH LOUDER

27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom certain of the children of Israel did price. No such text can be found in *Jeremiah* and the evident source of the concept is Zechariah 11:12f. as a comparison of Matthew with Zechariah will show:

### Matthew:

They took the silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me.

### Zechariah:

And the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord to the potter.

That the genuineness of Matthew's quotation cannot be questioned is proven by the surprising observation that its apparent clumsiness vouches for its historicity. A clever forger would have been more careful not to include such palpable blunders as attributing to *Jeremiah* what Zechariah wrote. He would have smoothed out the wrinkles. Attempts to explain why Matthew attributes the prophecy to *Jeremiah the prophet* are various.

### 1. A TEXTUAL EMENDATION IS INVOLVED

- a. Matthew always omitted the name of Zechariah when citing his writings (21:5; 24:31; 26:31). Why not also here? Some ancient translations do not name any prophet at this point. So, perhaps some extremely early, ill-informed scribe, remembering "the potter-passages" of Jeremiah (18:2; 19:2, etc.) inserted *Jeremiah the prophet* by mistake, and this reading became common among the majority of manuscripts. However, see b.
- b. Similarly, some suggest an extremely early scribal error accomplished by a misreading and consequent substitution of only two Greek letters: an "I" for a "Z" and an "M" for an "R." Compare: *ZRIOY* and *IMIOY*, the abbreviated

forms of "Zechariah" and "Jeremiah" respectively. However, the reading, *Jeremiah*, is believed to be firmly established (*Textual Commentary*, 66).

2. A QUESTION OF JEWISH TRADITION IS INVOLVED

- a. Circulating in Matthew's time was a genuine quotation of a now lost writing of Jeremiah himself or perhaps an unwritten, traditional statement attributed to him, i.e. Zechariah recorded oral tradition of Jeremiah's preaching. Accordingly, Matthew finally documents this, pointing not to the man who recorded it, but to him who first pronounced the prophecy. Jewish tradition said, "The spirit of Jeremiah is in Zechariah." Or, vice versa it represents a Jewish deletion of this passage from the canonical Jeremiah (Eusebius, *Dem. Ev.* X,4).
- b. The scroll on which Zechariah was copied bore the name of *Jeremiah*, its leading book. The Talmud calls this roll "Jeremiah," even though it contains Zechariah among the other books. Thus Matthew quotes not an author but a *section* of the Old Testament. (See critical introductions to the Old Testament.) This is a less likely solution, because Matthew wrote, *Jeremiah the prophet*, an expression that would seem not to refer to the organization of the Old Testament on numerous scrolls, but to the man himself.

Whatever the final solution to this problem, despite our present uncertainty as to which is the true explanation, nevertheless, since a number of alternative hypotheses are available, *not charge of contradiction or lapse of memory can be proven against Matthew*. Until a more clearly definitive solution arises, we can simply confess our limitations and await further information.

Perhaps the most satisfactory solution is to see this quotation as a Targum or free paraphrase by Matthew who utilized ideas drawn from both prophets, because of a common key word or subject matter, to summarize both, but attributed the whole to the more important (or better known?) of the two. Rightly Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 948) asked, "Where in Zechariah is there mention of a plot of ground, used for burial purposes, which became known as 'the Field of Blood,' because innocent blood had been shed?" He notes the following parallels from *Jeremiah* 19:

- a. Judah and Jerusalem have shed innocent blood (Jer. 19:4; Matt. 27:4).
- b. Chief priests and elders are mentioned prominently (Jer. 19:1; Matt. 27:3, 6, 7).
- c. A potter is mentioned (Jer. 19:1, 11; Matt. 27:7, 10).
- d. Topheth, that is, the valley of Hinnom—the very valley where, according to tradition, the Potter's Field was located—has its name changed to "the Valley of Slaughter," which is about the same as "the Field of Blood" (Jer. 19:6; Matt. 27:8; cf. Acts 1:19).
- e. And this valley becomes a well-known "burial place" (Jer. 19:11; Jer. 7:32; Matt. 27:7).

Also possibly parallel to Israel's repudiation of Jesus is Israel's rejection of God's prophet's troublesome preaching of repentance and their attempt to eliminate him on false charges (Jer. 18:15-17).

Perhaps, by writing *Jeremiah*, Matthew intended to draw the reader's attention to concepts in the major prophet which are resumed in Zechariah and succinctly expressed in this latter prophet's words. Matthew even boiled these down to an apt, interpretative statement that appropriately expressed Israel's memorializing its shameful rejection of Christ. In this case Matthew is not so much interested in finding a direct prophecy in Jeremiah 18, 19 and 32 as in pointing out how *both prophets spoke of Israel's contempt for God shown by the nation's ungratefulness for God's blessings, sins which are even more significantly repeated in Israel's repudiation of God's greatest Prophet, the Messiah.*

So, what is Matthew teaching us? From one point of view, the enacted prophecy of the prophet's hurling the miserable sum to the potter is possibly a symbolic forepicturing of the priests' hurling Judas' miserable wages to the potter to buy his field. However, only an amazing correspondence is pointed out between the prophetic words in Jeremiah and Zechariah and the historic event in Jesus' time, without intending a literal fulfillment. (See notes on 2:17.) Accordingly, Matthew finds in this event a *situation* which tragically resembles and culminates the earlier *situation* of God's prophets.

Honing this concept even further, we see that Matthew gives an *interpretative paraphrase* of the prophecy. Rather than quote it verbatim, he explains its meaning, i.e. that Jesus' contemporaries repeated substantially the same rejection of God's prophets as had any previous generation. (Cf. 21:33-39; 22:1-6; 23:29-37.) In Zechariah,

specifically, Israel paid no more than thirty pieces of silver for God's Shepherd. When Israel's authorized representatives similarly valued Jesus at the price of a slave, they merely repeated Israel's chronic shameful contempt for God. The pitiful sum given for the Good Shepherd stands in dramatic contrast with His true value and the high estimation that Israel should have set on Him. They characteristically undervalued God's guidance, hence this insulting wage was once again paid for the services of God's Shepherd, but, in this case, it was God's Son. Nevertheless, it was returned with disdain to the Lord's House. And, by another ironic twist of history this lordly sum went again to pay the potter!

*Thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was priced, whom certain of the children of Israel did price.* Not insignificantly, in Israel it was a priestly function to decide what people were worth (Lev. 27:8). The value the nation, in the person of its authorized representatives, the priests, placed on the services of God's prophet was the ancient, legal price of an injured slave or a woman (Exod. 21:32; Lev. 27:4). So Israel's contempt for the Lord is again repeated in their crass devaluation of His Son. They hated Jesus because they hated the Father who sent Him (10:40; Luke 10:16; John 15:23; 16:3). The treatment of the prophet-shepherd was not accidental, but a true, moral preview of Israel's treatment of the prophet's Lord, Jesus.

**27:10 and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.** Both in the prophecy as well as in the fulfillment God disposed of the money through agents. Because this money was found in the house of the Lord, it was as if God Himself had received it, and the priests, by purchasing the field, unconsciously were throwing His 30 shekels to the potter whose field it was. Their disposition of the money produced an astonishing evocation of the ancient words all in accordance with the will of the Lord. Rather than disappear into the oblivion of the treasury, that blood money was memorialized in the purchase of "the field of Blood," until unbelieving Israel should be destroyed in a City of Blood.

Matthew does not chronicle Judas' death to establish him as a classic example of evil, a monster of wickedness or a man apart. Rather, Judas' is the tragic story of a double-minded disciple who followed Jesus for the wrong motives, whose discipleship was blocked by his refusal to let Jesus be Lord in everything.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. In what sense did Judas "repent"? Contrast the repentance of Peter and that of Judas, showing why one led to life and the other to death.
2. What was it that convinced Judas to repent?
3. By whom had Jesus been condemned when Judas saw it and repented?
4. Where and how did Judas return the betrayal money? Where were the priests when he approached them? Defend your answer.
5. On what Scriptural basis could the priests have established their decision to refuse to accept the blood money into the temple treasury?
6. Who were the "strangers" for whom the potter's field was bought as a cemetery? Why should a special cemetery for them be needed?
7. Indicate the source of the prediction Matthew cites as fulfilled here. Who wrote the prophecy? Deal with the supposed contradictions connected with this question.
8. How does the book of Acts report this account? What differences distinguish the two accounts? How harmonize these divergencies?
9. Why was the field called "the field of blood"?

## SECTION 73

JESUS IS TRIED BY PILATE,  
CONDEMNED AND SCOURGED

(Parallels: Mark 15:2-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28—19:16)

TEXT: 27:2, 11-31

2 and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor.

.....

11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. 12 And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. 13 Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearst thou now how many things they witness against thee? 14 And he gave him no answer, not even to one word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly. 15 Now at the feast the governor was

wont to release unto the multitude one prisoner, whom they would. 16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. 17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, whom will ye that I released unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? 18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him up. 19 And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. 20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. 21 But the governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas. 22 Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ? They all say, Let him be crucified. 23 And he said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified. 24 So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye *to it*. 25 And all the people answered and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children. 26 Then released he unto them Barabbas; but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered unto him the whole band. 28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. 29 And they platted crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! 30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head. 31 And when they had mocked him, they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments, and led him away to crucify him.

### THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where did Pilate get the idea Jesus claimed to be a King of the Jews?
- b. Even though the authorities charged Jesus with perverting the nation, refusing to give tribute to Caesar and claiming to be a king, why do you suppose Matthew limited the interrogation by Pilate to the latter accusation?

- c. Why did Jesus say, "You have said so" instead of answering frankly "Yes" or "No"?
- d. Why did not Jesus answer the charges laid against Him?
- e. What made Pilate marvel at Jesus' silence?
- f. What do you think caused Pilate to decide so rapidly that Jesus was innocent, even though He admitted to being a king?
- g. Why was a choice offered between Jesus and Barabbas? If Pilate really wanted justice for Jesus, why refer so important a choice to a mob like that?
- h. Why do you think Pilate limited the choice of prisoners for release just to these two?
- i. How do you suppose the governor learned the true, secret motive for the leaders' determination to eliminate Jesus?
- j. If Pilate knew Jesus were innocent, why did he not acquit Him immediately and throw the hierarchy's case out of court?
- k. What is your opinion of Pilate's wife's dream? Was it from God? or the natural result of her own perplexity about Jesus? What effect do you think her urgent message had on Pilate's judgment?
- l. In the shouts of "Crucify Him! Away with Him!" do you see any evidence of fickleness in the crowds? Are these the same people who a few days before yelled, "Hosanna to the Son of David"?
- m. Why do you think Pilate finally gave up trying to defend Jesus' right to a fair trial? Why would he have been so anxious to please the Jewish people? Was it his nature to be conciliatory?
- n. What could have caused the riot that Pilate so deeply feared?
- o. The crowds yelled, "His blood be on us and on our children." Do you think God gave them their wish? In what way(s)?
- p. Do you think Pilate's act of washing his hands before the multitude really freed him from responsibility for Jesus' political assassination?
- q. Why did Pilate scourge Jesus, if he was so sure of His innocence? What would he have done to Him if he thought he were guilty?!
- r. Why did the soldiers cruelly mock Jesus? Does not even a condemned man have rights?
- s. What does Jesus' behavior under fire reveal about Him? How does His example help you?
- t. How does Pilate's behavior under fire differ from yours when called upon to stand up for truth and righteousness? In what shameful ways are we tempted to repeat his moral spinelessness?

- u. Despite the fact that the political charges against Him were false, do you think Jesus was a politician in any sense? Did He intend to form public policy? To what extent?
- v. Since the major responsibility for Jesus' death lies with the people of God, what lessons come out of this realization?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The entire Sanhedrin stood up, tied Jesus and led Him from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor and turned Him over to Pilate. It was early in the morning. They personally did not enter the governor's palace, so as to avoid ceremonial uncleanness and be able to eat the festal meals of the Passover week. So Pilate went outside to them.

"What charge do you bring against this man?" Pilate began.

"If this guy had not done something wrong," they snapped, "we would not have handed him over to you!"

To this Pilate retorted, "All right, YOU take him and judge him under your own law!"

To this the Jews objected, "But we are not permitted to execute anyone." (This is how Jesus' words came true when He predicted the nature of His impending death.) They opened their case against Jesus, alleging, "We discovered this fellow subverting our nation, opposing payment of taxes to Caesar and asserting that he himself is an anointed king."

Pilate re-entered the palace and summoned Jesus. When He stood before the governor, Pilate put this question to Him: "Are YOU the King of the Jews?"

"Are you using the word 'king' as YOU would use it (to mean rebel against Roman authority)," Jesus countered, "or as others would use it (to mean Hebrew Messiah)?"

"I am not a Jew, am I?" Pilate objected. "It was your own people and the hierarchy that turned you over to me! What have you done anyway?"

"I am not an earthly king," Jesus responded. "If I were, my men would be fighting to prevent my being handed over to the Jews. My kingdom, however, does not have its source in this sort of thing."

Pilate pressed Him, "So you ARE a king?"

"Yes, you may say that I am a king," Jesus responded. "The very reason I was born and the task for which I came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone who is open to truth listens to me."



“What is truth?” Pilate mused. So saying, he went back outside to the Jewish authorities and the crowd and announced, “As far as I’m concerned, I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

The religious authorities began multiplying accusations against Jesus. Confronted by these charges, He made no defense. So Pilate questioned Him once more, “Have you nothing to say for yourself? Do you not hear all the accusations they level against you?”

Nevertheless, He offered no rebuttal, not even to one single charge. The governor was completely astounded. But the priests persisted, “He’s a rabble-rouser, teaching all over the land of the Jews. He began in Galilee and has come all the way here!”

When Pilate heard “Galilee,” he wondered whether Jesus might be a Galilean. Upon ascertaining that He came under Herod’s jurisdiction, he referred the case of Herod, who was personally present in Jerusalem at that time. When Herod saw Jesus, he was uncommonly pleased, because he had been wanting to have a look at Him for a long time. He had been hearing about Him and was even hoping to see Him perform some miracle. Although Herod plied Him with many questions, Jesus completely ignored them. The hierarchy and the theologians stood by, violently pressing their accusations. Then Herod and his soldiers treated Jesus with contempt and made fun of Him. Then they dressed Him in an elegant robe and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Herod and Pilate became personal friends. Previously, in fact, they had been mutual enemies.

Pilate reconvened the religious and civil authorities and the people. “You have brought this man before me,” he began, “on a charge of subversion. Here I have examined him in your presence, but I find him not guilty of any of your accusations against him. So did Herod, so he referred him back to us. Clearly, he has done nothing to deserve death. I propose, therefore, to have him whipped and released.”

Now at every Passover festival it was customary for the governor to grant amnesty to one prisoner, anyone the crowd chose. However, among the revolutionaries in jail for assassinating someone during the uprising, there was a notorious prisoner, called Jesus Barabbas. So when the crowd went up to petition Pilate to grant them the usual privilege, Pilate said, “You have a custom that I should release one man for you during the Passover festival. Whom do you want me to release for you? Jesus Barabbas or Jesus the so-called Christ, ‘the king of the Jews’?” (In fact, he well knew that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous.)

While Pilate was sitting on the tribunal, his wife sent him a message that read, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man. In fact, I have suffered a great deal today because of a dream I had about him."

Meanwhile, however, the religious and civil authorities instigated the mob to demand the release of Barabbas to them and to demand Jesus' execution. So, when the governor repeated his question, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" they all yelled with one voice, "Not this guy! Get him out of here! We want Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a brigand who had been imprisoned for an insurrection that had broken out in the city and for murder.

Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate addressed them once more, "But in that case, what am I to do with Jesus, the man you call Christ, the King of the Jews?"

Again they all roared back, "To the cross with him! Nail him to a cross!"

For the third time Pilate argued with them, "Why? What harm has he done? I have found in him no basis for the death penalty! I repeat: I will just punish him and let him go."

At this Pilate took Jesus and had Him lashed with a scourge. The soldiers twisted a thorny wreath and crowned Him with it, and threw over Him a reddish-purple cloak. They came up to Him repeatedly, saying, "O King of the Jews, we salute you!" then slapped Him in the face.

Pilate went out again and addressed the Jews, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to show you that I find him not guilty!"

So Jesus came out, wearing the thorny crown and the purple robe. Pilate proclaimed, "Here is the man!"

When the chief priests and their henchmen caught sight of Him, they roared, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate, exasperated, retorted, "YOU take him and do the crucifying! I find him NOT GUILTY!"

"We have a law," the Jews returned, "and by that law he ought to die, because he claimed to be God's Son."

When Pilate heard this, he became deeply alarmed. He went back into the palace again and quizzed Jesus, "Where ARE you from anyway?!"

Jesus, however, gave him no answer. So Pilate continued, "You refuse to talk to me? Don't you realize that I have the authority to set you free and the authority to nail you to a cross?!"

"You would have no authority over me," Jesus began, "if it had not been delegated to you from God. This is why the people who handed me over to you are guilty of the greater injustice."

From this point on Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let that man go, you are no friend of Caesar! Anyone who claims to be a king defies Caesar!"

When Pilate heard this, he had Jesus brought out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place called "the Stone Pavement." (*Gabbatha* is the Hebrew word for it.) The time was now about six o'clock in the morning on Friday of Passover week. Pilate announced to the Jews, "Here is your King! But they kept insisting, shouting all the louder and demanding, "Take him away! Get him out of here! Hang him on a cross!"

"Shall I crucify your king?!" demanded Pilate.

"We have no king," the chief priests replied, "but Caesar!"

So, when Pilate realized that he was getting nowhere and a riot was brewing, he took water and washed his hands in the presence of the crowd, affirming, "I am not responsible for this man's death. It is your concern."

At this all the people shouted back, "We'll take the responsibility for his death—we and our descendants!"

Their shouting won the battle. Pilate decided to grant their demands. Desiring to satisfy the people, he released the man who had been imprisoned for terrorism, the one they wanted, even Barabbas! Having already scourged Jesus, he surrendered Him over to them to be crucified just as they desired.

Then the governor's soldiers led Jesus away into the courtyard of the barracks (i.e. the governor's headquarters). There they mustered the entire battalion before Jesus. Next they stripped Him and robed Him in a scarlet mantle. Weaving a wreath of thorny branches they put it on His head, and placed a reed staff in His right hand. They bowed low before Him in mock salute: "Long live the King of the Jews!" They spit on Him and took the reed and began beating Him over the head with it. After this mockery was over, they stripped Him of the purple cloak, and dressed Him in His own clothes and led Him out to be crucified.

## SUMMARY

After all-night trials before Jewish authorities, in the early morning hours Jesus was tried hurriedly by the entire Sanhedrin, hauled before Pilate who quickly recognized Jesus' innocence of the charges of political insurrection. This verdict was confirmed by Herod and a

dream of Pilate's wife. Pilate drove for an easy compromise by proposing to release Jesus under the Passover-amnesty, and then by trying to arouse sympathy for Jesus by scourging Him. None of this dallying worked to convince the adamant Jewish opposition to Jesus. Rather, the mob howled for the release of a terrorist and for the execution of Pilate's uncondemned prisoner, Jesus. Before the final verdict Pilate wavered toward outright sympathy for Jesus, but at last crumbled before political blackmail. Jesus was mocked by Pilate's and Herod's men. Throughout the barrage of Jewish accusations and Roman crudity, Jesus maintained a majestic calm, His spirit under God's control, saying nothing more than absolutely necessary to affirm His true mission and identity.

## NOTES

### THE JUDGE ON TRIAL

Our Lord who will judge the world in righteousness permitted Himself to be tried and condemned before such sinners, even though "He had done no violence nor was any deceit in his mouth" (Isa. 53:9). He knew where this was all leading, and was prepared to go to the limit undeservedly!

For Jesus' consignment to *Pilate*, see on 27:2. Pilate was both *procurator* and *prefect*. An agent of the emperor to whom he was directly responsible for the management of the financial affairs of the province, he was *procurator* (Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 44). As administrative official and magistrate over the province of Judea, he was *prefect*. (Concerning *Pilate*, cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 2, 2; 3, 1f.; 4:1f.; *Wars*, II, 9, 2-4.) His long administration was due more to Tiberius' negligence than to Pilate's virtue as a ruler (*Ant.* XVIII 6, 5).

Prefect he was; perfect he was not. That he was given to maladministration was no secret. Philo of Alexandria wrote a letter to the Emperor Caligula for Herod Agrippa I, characterizing this procurator as "inflexible, merciless and stubborn." Among the defects of his administration are cited "fraud, violence, theft, torture, insults, frequent executions without due trial and a constant, intolerable cruelty" (*De Legatione ad Caium* § 38). Even though the Jews considered Pilate cruel, when it is their turn to be crude and cruel, they need him. Often visible in Jesus' trial is an abandonment of strict justice in favor of expediency that seems to be characteristic of the man. Even though he was not given to compliant accommodation, his

political wisdom would demand he be no more provocative than necessary. In fact, the priestly aristocracy had few serious problems with Pilate, since in the ten years of his mandate (26-36 A.D.), he never substituted Caiaphas, high priest from 18-37 A.D. But an uneasy calm does not mean peace or agreement when it is merely a cease-fire and the protagonists continue to maneuver for supremacy. So it must not be supposed that Pilate would *willingly* collaborate with the aristocracy to eliminate Jesus as a favor to them.

The Jewish rulers knew their man and the strategy to use to break him. They simply pressured him constantly until he cracked. That he would crumble was never in question, the only uncertainty being how soon. On both sides, when one tactic failed, another was introduced. The Jews simply had more flexibility, more determination to achieve their goal and more audacity.

Summarizing, Matthew focuses on the main points of Pilate's interrogation, without specifying, however, what the Roman knew about the case or the reason for his questions. While Jesus was hauled inside the Praetorium, His legalistic accusers, refusing to enter a contaminating pagan building, piously waited outside. There Pilate, deferring to their scruples, met them to learn the nature of the charges lodged against Jesus (John 18:28f.).

PLAN A: They attempt to bluff the Prefect into signing Jesus' death warrant without opening the case. Labelling Jesus an "evil-doer" they both imply they have already judged Him by due process of Jewish law and that Pilate should simply rubber-stamp the verdict of their court. Grasping their insinuation, he implied that, if the obvious Jewishness of the question rendered it so difficult of explanation before a Roman tribunal, they themselves should try the case. (Cf. Acts 18:12-15.) He did not wish to embroil himself in a local religious quarrel. Since he did not foresee a capital sentence involved, it is clear he had no secret agreement with Caiaphas to eliminate a mutual Enemy, as some suspect. The rulers are thus forced to uncover their own judiciary impotence: legally, they themselves cannot execute the death penalty (John 18:29-32). Even if, as some affirm on the basis of texts such as *Ant.* XX,9,1; *Wars* VI,2,4; Acts 6:12—7:60; 22:30; 21:28f.; 22:30; 25:9-11; possibly *Mishna*, *Sanh.* 7.1f.; *Gemara* 52b; *Tosephta* 9.11, the Sanhedrin could pronounce a death sentence in *religious* cases, they had cut the ground from under themselves by referring Jesus' case to Pilate on a strictly *political* charge.

The same authority that had stripped this high council of the power of the death penalty also required the Roman judges to examine capital

cases, not privately, but publicly; not on vague suspicions but on specific accusations. In harmony with the essentially public character of Roman justice (cf. Acts 16:19f.; 17:6; 18:12, 17; 25:6f.; *War* II,9, 3; II,14,8), this Roman magistrate justly refused to hand down a death penalty in a case untried by him. So, he rightly chose to open and try the case himself.

PLAN B: They are forced to prefer formal charges on which to proceed legally against the Defendant: "We found this man subverting our nation, He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar, and claims to be Christ a king" (Luke 23:2). These three accusations rise in a crescendo from a generic indictment of subversion to two specific counts of hostility to Roman authority, that culminate in His claim to be an anointed monarch (*christòn basiléa*). The real charge, blasphemy, is carefully kept out of sight, lest the Procurator throw their case out of court without even hearing it (cf. Acts 18:14-16).

The clergy's procedure is completely unprincipled. There is no objective validity in their blatantly political accusation that Jesus claims to be *king of the Jews*, because they attribute to Him their own subjective views as to what Messiahship means. If, as they conceived it, political and military power were wrapped up in Messiahship, then, for Jesus to claim to be "Son of David," hence truly *king of the Jews*, is tantamount to claiming to be supernatural Ruler, the Son of man and Son of God and claiming the right to exercise His regal power on behalf of Israel against all her enemies, now particularly Rome! So, from their own standpoint, it is not completely correct to say that the Jews radically transformed their own religious quarrels into political accusations of such a nature as would interest the governor, because, for them, the true Messiah would be both religious, political and supernatural. They had astutely formulated an indictment large enough to convict Jesus before any court, Roman or Jewish.

### Two judges meet

**27:11 Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. In the Praetorium now, Jesus stood before the governor.** Anyone, whose scruples permitted him to enter, could witness this interrogation.

This experienced governor knew men and could sense that this quiet, dignified man before him was perhaps a harmless religious fanatic, but certainly no wild-eyed revolutionary or rival claimant to Caesar's authority. The situation was too unreal for Pilate to take the charge seriously, but, for form's sake, he must ask this ridiculous question. Selecting the main thrust of the accusations, Pilate perhaps meant, "Do YOU, who lack every indication of proud ambition and the other marks of world power, claim to be the Jew's king?"

However, this question contains an unfortunate misunderstanding. *King of the Jews* smacks of a state title as compared with the more intimately religious expression, "the King of Israel" (27:42; cf. John 1:49). So, before answering it, the Lord must clarify the issue, "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me" (John 18:34)?

1. The question is not Pilate's own desire to know about God's Messianic Kingdom. This is but the opening gambit of the trial. The personality of Jesus had not yet begun to produce any effect on Pilate. Instead, he is repeating only the Jewish charges.
2. Further, if the question were Pilate's own, the title, *the King of the Jews*, would suggest seditious connotations, but if Jewish, Jesus could explain its true Messianic connotations.

Although Pilate comprehended Him, as a Roman he denied sharing Jewish expectations, implying no personal interest in such things. He had based this question on strictly Jewish premises. Then, to clarify the indefinite, blanket accusations, Pilate tried a direct approach, pressing his Prisoner to talk about His activities. Jesus explained simply that the essentially unworldly character of His royal authority excluded any earthly political ambitions, Jewish or Gentile. This excludes the use of contemporary world power to establish the universal supremacy He envisioned. That no military uprising had materialized to rescue Him was circumstantial evidence that His dominion is not a thing of this world. Still perplexed, Pilate came back, "So you are a king after all" (John 18:33-37)?

*Thou sayest* implies, therefore, "The words are yours. I must qualify the terminology, inasmuch as it does not accurately reflect my own view of my identity. I cannot answer your question with an unqualified yes or no, but I shall answer it, Yes, with reservations." (See notes on 26:64.) Some editors see Jesus' answer in all four Gospels (*sù legeis hòti basileùs eimi*) as a question: "Would you say sō

[that I am a king]?” Using Pilate’s own definition of “king,” Jesus challenged him to decide on the basis of the knowable facts of His life, ministry and movement. To interpret Jesus’ answer this way neither considers it a “doubtful answer” nor ambiguous, as if the doubt were His, but to show by what route Jesus amply removed the doubt concerning the meaning of Pilate’s words. To clarify a doubt does not create ambiguity, but removes it.

Next, the Lord proceeded to explain of what sort kingdom He is ruler. The sovereignty of truth, rather than military might or political acumen, is the basis of the Kingdom over which He was born to rule (John 18:37, 38). His Kingdom’s universal character denied exclusively Jewish privilege and was open to “everyone who is of the truth [and] hears my voice” (John 18:37). Although the superficial Pilate, governed by a worldly realism, failed to see how idealistic, absolute truth could have anything concrete to do with earthly rule, he correctly grasped that this divine realism was the true sense in which Jesus claimed to be *King of the Jews*. (Cf. Zech. 9:9; Isa. 9:6; Ps. 2:6; 110:1, etc.) In this light, Pilate could only acquit Jesus of being a political agitator.

At this point Pilate went out to the Jews and announced Jesus’ acquittal (John 18:38). The trial should have been over, but Pilate lacked the decisiveness and conscience of a Claudius Lysias to throw Roman power into the equation and save Jesus. (Cf. Acts 23:16-35.) There followed no order to release the Nazarene, no dismissal of the throng, nothing. Pilate’s first judicial error was perhaps perceived essential to avoid turning his audience into bitter accusers before Tiberius.

He apparently took Jesus outside with him (John 18:38; cf. Matt. 26:12f.). This afforded him opportunity for a direct confrontation between the accusers and the Accused. Furious over the Roman acquittal, the chief priests opened fire, unleashing an avalanche of imputations (Mark 15:3). Perhaps they poured out details to support the initial charges (Luke 23:2): “He stirs up the people teaching through all Judea, from Galilee even to this place” (Luke 23:5). The thrust of these furious efforts would be to establish the widespread character of His defiance toward the authorities, their traditional law and leadership, pointing to a rebellious spirit toward authority capable of deep hostility toward Roman supremacy.



## Majestic silence

27:12 **And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered them nothing.** Jesus' attackers are one solid front: *elders*, i.e. Sanhedrinists, *and the chief priests*. Matthew's one article treats both groups as one unit. For both of these holders of religio-political power Jesus was a danger because in various ways He put in doubt some of the fundamental tenets of traditional Judaism (12:8; 15:1-20; John 4:21; Mark 7:19, etc.). His preaching of the Kingdom of God, even if theoretically the hope of the aristocracy too, could be interpreted as a threat to their political and social position.

Having already answered the one question on which His testimony was required, *He answered them nothing*. Why should He participate in a mindless debate where only irreligious political considerations are paramount, its sinister charges false and no one is seriously interested in the truth? (Cf. Isa. 50:6-9.) Here is exemplified the moral power of a God-controlled life under fire: "when they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly" (I Peter 2:18ff.).

## Magnificent imperturbability under strain

23:13 **Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?** Having observed the Lord's un-fanatical, deep sincerity and wisdom, the procurator recognized how unfounded were the charges, but, as dispassionate magistrate, he could not appear to favor the accused by answering them himself. It was up to Jesus to refute them. Pilate had never concluded a trial where there were no counter-arguments. Had Jesus answered the charges, He would have relieved Pilate of the responsibility.

Jesus, the man who had a brilliant comeback for everyone, should be worshipped not only for His treasured sayings, but also for His marvellous silence in the presence of people who prejudged Him and whose only principle of truth and justice was a calculating pragmatism. Such prejudice and expediency has no taste for final truth. Neither takes the Lord seriously, so why should He talk?

## The might of meekness

27:14 **And he gave him no answer, not even to one word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.** Pilate is surprised and perplexed

by Jesus' adamant silence, because He had been so pleasant and helpful before. Why not talk now? Was he above all fear of death? He was certainly not the political trouble-maker of wild-eyed demagogue the authorities had described Him to be. The judge sees Him as the victim of a vicious plot, admirably unmoved by the ferocity of His enemies and patient to a fault.

Yet His mysterious suffering in silence is not the dumbness of stupidity but the discipline of self-possession. His consciousness of mission gave Him moral power immeasurably superior to His seemingly powerful accusers. While everyone around wavered or plotted, Jesus continued to keep His mind on what was really happening:

1. Jesus knew that, without His making a strenuous personal defense, Pilate could discern for himself the falseness and ill-disgusted malice of the charges. No rebuttal is so powerful as that which arises from arguments supplied by the opposition.
2. Without disrespect for this court, Jesus need not answer charges which its judge had already recognized as unfounded (Luke 23:4; John 18:38). Did Pilate's former verdict mean nothing?
3. Would Pilate have had the moral courage to free Him, had He satisfactorily silenced every charge?
4. Even if arguments and counter-arguments could keep such dead-end investigations going for months, Jesus is not here to win the debate or be justified, but to give His life for the sins of the world. He would not now frustrate the reason for His whole earthly mission (20:28; John 12:23-33).
5. Jesus could wait for His truer, worthier justification in the Father's approval (John 5:41, 44; 7:18). Pilate could not guess, however, that Jesus' impressive silence had already been decided long before (Isa. 53:7).

The prefect was bogged down in the uncomfortable dilemma of doing his duty as an objective magistrate in which case he must anger the Jewish high council and commit political suicide or please the Jews, corrupt his office and commit moral suicide. Just then the chance word, "Galilee," in the prosecution's desperate harangue suggested a possible escape: the embarrassing Prisoner is a Galilean, therefore, under the jurisdiction of Herod to whom He could be referred (Luke 23:5-12). This is another error, because why, after acquitting Him, send Jesus to Antipas? The trial has started to slide into bargaining and maneuvering that will become uncontrollable.

However, Pilate was to learn that his clever little master-stroke of diplomacy only half-succeeded. Even if the petty king deeply appreciated the unexpected courtesy (cf. Luke 9:9) and became his ally, nevertheless, this shrewd politician bounced the responsibility back into Pilate's court. Unfortunately for Pilate, the delay of sending Jesus to Herod gave the hierarchy time to regroup and organize their strategy to demand the release of Barabbas (Mark 15:8).

Nevertheless, the interrogation before Herod, reported in Pilate's summation (Luke 23:14f.), served to underscore Jesus' innocence recognized by all magistrates to whom His case was submitted. (It is unlikely that jealous Antipas would have returned a really guilty man to his Roman rival with whom he appears to have had a jurisdictional dispute.) As protectors of the innocent, both Herod and Pilate were obligated to acquit Jesus without hesitation. But because both men declined to save Jesus despite the falsity of the charges against Him, history rightly charges them with moral complicity along with the Sanhedrin and priesthood (Acts 4:25-27).

In fact, Pilate was on the point of releasing Jesus when he wavered. First, he inconsistently expressed willingness to scourge an innocent man to pacify the priests. These, however, discerned that a magistrate who offered to concede this much might yet be pressured to give the death sentence (Luke 23:16). To break him, all they needed was patience.

Next, the idea of liberating the Nazarene gave him another idea: why not liberate Him as an act of clemency?

## THE BLOCKED EMERGENCY EXIT

**27:15** Now at the feast the governor was wont to release unto the multitudes one prisoner, whom they would. Of apparently Jewish origin (cf. John 18:39: "You have a custom"), this practice was continued by Roman rulers to foster political good-will toward Rome in this occupied, restless nation, by releasing *one prisoner* among the Jews' countrymen. (Cf. *Ant.* XX,9,3.) *At the feast* (*katà heortēn*: "feast after feast") seems to be a general expression for the celebration, not necessarily to the supper itself. (Cf. "at the Passover" John 18:39.)

Was this custom first appealed to by Pilate as an excuse for releasing Jesus (cf. John 18:39), or by the Jews who, upon hearing Pilate's proposal to release Jesus, are reminded of this yearly custom and

so appeal to its usual terms to get what they want? Or was this mechanism urged by a disciple in a futile, desperate effort to save Jesus, which His enemies twisted into a weapon against Him? (Cf. Mark 15:8; see the PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY for my tentative sequence of events.) Whatever the sequence, it is clear that, to deflect their unreasoning fury from Jesus, Pilate promptly seized upon this suggestion, hoping to appeal to the best in these men by presenting a prisoner already sufficiently punished as the candidate for liberation this year. However, this gave the people, rather than the governor, the right to name the man to be released. Even so, Pilate is prepared to take this risk, because it would verify his suspicion that Jesus' popularity, rather than treason, lay at the base of the jealousy of the ruling class.

Although the *official* antagonism to Jesus had turned up nothing concretely treasonable, Pilate's political sixth sense may have detected further developments possible in the case. What did *the people* think about a political king? Pilate would not be as much interested in whether Jesus or anyone else considered himself a political messiah, as in *whether* the people thought He was and *why*. So, if they chose to follow this harmless Teacher, as Pilate imagined they would, Rome would have no problems from Him or them. If they chose the true terrorist instead, real trouble was ahead for Roman authority. In this event Barabbas would serve contemporaneously as a test case to measure this danger and as a means to save Jesus.

## THE TRUE ALTERNATIVE TO JESUS CHRIST

27:16 **And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.** A *notable prisoner* indeed! The chance pawn in this dirty game was apparently one of several notorious terrorists who had "committed murder to the insurrection" (Mark 15:7) which "started in the city" of Jerusalem (Luke 23:19, 25). Further, John (18:40) indicates: "Now Barabbas was a robber" (*leistés*). Although *leistés* certainly is a "robber, highwayman, bandit," this term also depicted a "revolutionary, insurrectionist" (Arndt-Gingrich, 474; Rocci, 1144). When the campaigns of the underground do not enjoy adequate financial backing, its clandestine activities must be financed by banditry. (Cf. Josephus, *Wars* II,12,5; cf. *Ant.* XVIII, 1,1; XVII,10.)

While both Roman and Jewish authorities agreed that upsetting the status quo was as unwelcome as it was dangerous, they would not

necessarily have agreed on *what* should be done with these insurrectionists or *when*.

1. The Roman governor could consider it his duty to crucify these terrorists, making it indisputably clear by this show of Roman justice who is really in power and what happens to those brazen souls that dare defy the Empire. The maximum effect could be gained by such exemplary executions especially on a feast day when Jerusalem would be crowded with pilgrims from all over the Empire. (Cf. Varus' iron-fisted approach: *Wars*, II,5,2.)
2. The Jewish authorities could well surmise that other Jewish terrorists would vindicate the death of its popular patriotic heroes, and the escalation must explode in revolt. (Cf. *Ant.* XVII,6,2-4; 9:1-3.) Therefore, the charged atmosphere of a feast like the Passover was the worst possible moment for eliminating elements subversive even to the Jewish authorities themselves. (Cf. *Wars* II,12,1.)

Consequently, even though the Sadducean priesthood, because of its virtual dependence upon Rome, was favorable to the execution of all subversives, since an explosive Jewish Palestine Liberation Organization threatened the delicate balance in the political and economic interests of Caiaphas and company, these latter must have clearly discerned that, to avoid touching off an explosive grass-roots rebellion, *they must save the life of Barabbas almost as much as they must eliminate the Nazarene*.

### A chance pawn in a dirty game

**27:17 When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?** The Jews' gathering together suggests two situations that are not mutually exclusive:

1. A temporary recess had been called while Jesus was sent to Herod (Luke 23:7-16). The elders, chief priests and their henchmen are now reassembled. Their numbers could qualify as a "crowd" (Mark 15:8).
2. A crowd is beginning to gather outside the Praetorium as word of the trial spreads over the city (27:17; Mark 15:8).

So, if Pilate grasped the political tensions which dictated the choices of the Jewish politicians, he could pit their own fears against them and save the Nazarene rabbi. Pilate was no fool. He too sensed that the

charged atmosphere of a popular feast was no time to make an exaggerated display of Roman force by crucifying the insurrectionists without risking the very peace he was charged with maintaining.

His ploy is to play these two radically contrasting types of men against each other in the hope that the Jews themselves would have understood that there is no serious reason to execute Jesus. By presenting the Jewish public with a relatively easy either/or choice, they would be morally bound to request the release of Jesus. Further, he perceived that if he could succeed in dividing the Jewish public from their leadership—had not the masses enthusiastically acclaimed the Galilean a few days earlier?—he could hope these popular supporters could out-shout the rulers and rescue Jesus. This would free Pilate to crucify Barabbas later and Roman justice would be satisfied.

Some manuscripts write the terrorist's name "Jesus Barabbas." (Cf. *A Textual Commentary*, 67f.) It would appear that Barabbas' personal name was Jesus, and was suppressed by Christian scribes out of reverence for Christ. Whether Pilate understood it or not, Jewish listeners could catch the striking word-play in the governor's options: Jesus (= "Savior") *Barabbas* (= "son of a father") or *Jesus* (= "Savior") *who is called Christ*, who had called God His Father.

*Jesus who is called Christ* is not Pilate's sarcastic invention nor the dreamed-up conviction of his wife, but the authorities' original accusation (Luke 23:2). That Mark and John substitute "the King of the Jews" for *Christ*, suggests that these terms were in some sense synonymous and echo the authorities' charge. Further, by using this title, he reminded any friends Jesus had in the crowd of His claim to be Messiah, expecting them to react positively to the Man who just a day or so before was thus acclaimed by so many. It also handed Pilate the advantage of sounding out the crowd's attitude toward a title which their rulers considered a terrible insult when applied to Jesus. This choice had all the advantages. So what could go wrong? But Pilate was not to crawl out of his dilemma so easily.

### The real motivation

**27:18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him up.** The requirements of his office demanded that Pilate cultivate informers among the Jews to keep him abreast of events and current opinion. He

was aware that the Galilean's real crime was not insurrection, about which the rulers would be considerably less concerned, but the intolerable competition of His wide popularity and influence as a teacher. The prefect could guess that, if Jesus were really guilty of the crimes attributed to Him, He would not be the object of such violent hatred as these Sanhedrinists and priests manifest. The simplest explanation for their behavior is that they were uncontrollably jealous of Him.

### An unsolicited vote for Jesus

**27:19 And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.** Pilate has taken his place on the judge's bench (*béma*) located at "the Pavement" (John 19:13). His own conclusions reassured by Herod's favorable finding, the Prefect launched his "easy alternative," and now awaits the Jewish answer. At this point he is interrupted by an urgent note from his wife.

Her husband had arisen early to open the Roman tribunal for justice. Sleeping late, she was shaken by a vivid dream so convincing that she felt compelled to warn Pilate against trifling with the guileless Jesus. Whether or not this Roman gave particular credence or signs as from God, this ominous message clearly confirmed the conclusion to which he himself had already come: Jesus is innocent.

But his wife's advice was to prove impossible. To *have nothing to do with that righteous man* was something Pilate could *not* do. Although he must decide, he was trying every means to escape his responsibility as judge. He should simply have thrown the case out of court, but he chose not to.

Is it significant for Matthew's readers that, beside Pilates' feeble efforts, the only voice raised in Jesus' defense in that terrible hour was that of *a Gentile woman*? Did God speak to her as to the other Roman, Cornelius (Acts 10)? Was the timing planned to be God's merciful second warning to Pilate to beware of trifling with truth and to defend Him in justice? Why record this weird, eventually ineffectual dream? Did God wish the guiltlessness of His Son established beyond all doubt, even defended by *a Gentile woman*?

When in doubt, let others do your thinking

**27:20 Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.** While it is

unquestionably *the chief priests* and their associates who lead the drive for Jesus' destruction, *the elders* "of the people" (cf. 26:3, 47, 57, 59; 27:1, 3, 41, 62?; 28:12) are as much involved in *persuading the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus* as are the ecclesiastics. The united shout of these august elders of Israel in the front row alone would effectively sway the others. Taking no chances, they and their henchmen also actively infiltrated the crowd to advise and intimidate, inciting it to act. (*anéseisan* > *se io*, "shake up, stir up, instigate." cf. Mark 15:11). As the crowd grew, every new-comer could be "instructed" how to vote when the issue was raised. With what arguments? A vote for Barabbas was a vote for nationalism and freedom. As for the Galilean prophet, had not the nation's highest tribunal itself heard His "blasphemy?" No one is allowed to see the contradiction that Jesus is accused before Pilate of the same crime for which they recommend Barabbas to the people.

Were there any present who, just a few days earlier, had shouted, "Hosanna"? Although it is quite possible that, at this early morning hour, few if any of Jesus' Galilean followers were stirring or had yet learned of His betrayal, arrests and trials, nevertheless, in a city where the many transfers of Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate to Herod and back would not be missed and the excited word-of-mouth news of His trials must have sent a shock-wave of horror among His followers, why would they not appear? But if some disciples came, their shock at seeing their presumed Messiah dragged around as a beaten man in the hands of a pagan prefect may have proved too much. How could that poor beggar be the true Christ of God? Again, lately He had not acted much like a world leader, refusing to use His supernatural power to obliterate opposition to His program. So their own deep doubts and disillusionment, the unrelenting pressure of the priests' partisans and the anonymity of the crowd conspired to counsel this radical shift of loyalty, making them quite ready to yell for the "imposter's" death.

However, the suspicion that the crowds were fickle may itself be unjust. Granted, Sunday's hero may become Friday's criminal in the popular ratings. But that crowd at the Praetorium and those shouting Hosanna at the Triumphal Entry *may not be the same people*, because Matthew clearly distinguished the Jerusalemites from Jesus' supporters (21:10f.). Who can deny that the voices of any friends of Jesus would have been totally ignored, shouted down or completely unheard in the roar of the multitude?



## The moment of truth

27:21 **But the governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas.** Perhaps bringing out the two men together in the prevailing juridical confusion, Pilate called for a decision. But under the influence of the hierarchy, the crowds bypassed Pilate's candidate in favor of Barabbas, perhaps even admired by the baser elements of this mob. In a wall of sound his answer came back, *Barabbas!* (Luke 23:18). Although true before, now as never, our Lord "was despised and rejected by men" (Isa. 53:3).

## The inescapable question

27:22 **Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ? They all say, Let him be crucified.** Pilate found himself, not with a neat political solution, but obligated to release a dangerous criminal and with Jesus still on his hands for judgment. In addressing them once more Pilate desired to release Jesus (Luke 23:20).

Some attack Pilate's question as devoid of historical authenticity, because it could hardly be admitted that a Roman governor would submit the choice of punishment for the prisoner *not* to be released. He could dicker with them over *which* prisoner to release, given the annual custom to liberate one. But by what rule would he barter with them over the *sentencing* of the other? But is this the correct question? Granted, Pilate appears incredibly willing to leave the fate of Jesus to their caprice. But does this simply prove that the man fell beneath the responsibilities of his high office? Many anomalies in this trial find their explanation in Pilate's character.

*They all say, Let him be crucified.* Their repeated, vehement reply is unmistakable, unanimous rejection (Mark 15:13; Luke 23:21). Over any other form of execution, they demand the prolonged shame and cruel torture of a Roman crucifixion. (Cf. Num. 25:4; Deut. 21:22f.; II Sam. 21:6; Wars VII,6,4.) However even a Jew had crucified Jews before (*Ant.* XIII,14,2; Wars, I,4,6). Such a sentence would resoundingly crush all suspicion that the Nazarene were Israel's Messiah. Hanging Him on a tree would leave Him under the stigma of being, not the Chosen of God, but the Cursed of God (Deut. 21:22f.; Gal. 3:13). "Christ crucified" would always be a scandal to unbelieving Israel (I Cor. 1:23). Further it would deflect all bitterness

over His death to the Romans and significantly defuse the possibility of a grass-roots uprising against Jewish leaders among His followers.

When truth is on the other side, yell louder

**27:23 And he said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified.** Two opposite views of Pilate's earnest protest are possible:

1. Unwilling to believe their unjust popular choice, Pilate stubbornly and quite unstrategically continued a verbal duel with a mob after it expressed its will. It would have been easier to tame a hurricane with a lullaby!
2. Pilate combines frankness and subtlety by openly implying Jesus innocence while learning whether the crowd really believes the position they have taken.

Either way, this question represents the third clear expression of Pilate's conviction of the groundlessness of their charges and that Jesus has done nothing deserving death. (a. Luke 23:4 = John 18:38. b. Luke 23:14f. c. Luke 23:22.) John registers two more attempts of Pilate to convince the Jews of Jesus' juridical innocence (John 19:4, 6).

Exasperated by this non-trial, Pilate tried another tack by scourging Jesus: the tender mercy of lashing a man half to death (Luke 23:22; John 19:1ff.; see notes on 27:26)! To appeal to their humanity, he brought out the pitiful Figure. But the well-oiled religious machine rolled over compassion and demanded Jesus' crucifixion. Again Pilate threw the case out of court (John 19:4, 6). "Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him" (John 19:6).

Even this answer is attacked as having no historical truth, because the Jews, if they could carry out the death sentence, would have stoned Jesus (as the penalty for blasphemy) or they would have strangled Him (as penalty for false prophecy). Consequently, these protestations of Jesus' innocence on the part of Pilate are viewed as an artifice of the Evangelist to place the blame more firmly on the Jews. But the criticism itself is invalid, in that Pilate's language is spoken in his own idiom in terms of his own Roman penal code ("crucify him"). He talks like a Roman, not intending to express himself in harmony with the Jewish penal code (strangulation or stoning). Others see his words as simply ironic, since Pilate knew they had no right to crucify anyone.

The prefect finally determined to release Jesus, only to find himself blocked by blackmail: "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar" (John 19:12). Pilate should have answered that Jesus had convincingly proven that His kingdom in no way imperiled Caesar. However, no longer reasoning calmly, the governor began to react out of brute fear, because the Jews had touched a sensitive nerve in this time-serving petty politician.

John times this moment as 6:00 a.m. Friday morning of Passover week (John 19:14 = 6th hour from midnight, sometimes referred to as Roman time). Mark notes that Jesus was on the cross three hours later, at 9:00 a.m. (Mark 15:25 = 3rd hour reckoned according to Jewish time from 6:00 a.m.; cf. Mark 15:33 = Matt. 27:45 = Luke 23:44). This early hour was facilitated by the opening of Roman tribunals at daybreak (Westcott). Their time notices were estimated relatively, i.e. by the sun, not measured by Swiss watches or Roman buglers.

Pilate dramatically sat down on the judgment seat, brought Jesus out before the mob, and with obvious irony announced, "Here is your King" (John 19:13f.)! Suggesting that this victim of Roman justice is the only king the Jews are likely to have, his vengeful taunt only infuriated the mob. But, Pilate, like Caiaphas, uttered an unintended truth: this representative Man shall yet be shown to be the only true King of the people of God.

*But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified.* Despite Pilate's repeated efforts to be reasonable, the authorities have no intention of reasoning or letting others do so. To cover their lack of proof and verifiable arguments, they substitute the angry shouting of the death chant.

Perhaps stunned that Jesus had no friends, when every earlier indication suggested otherwise, Pilate countered, "Shall I crucify your king" (John 19:15)? This may not be sarcastic, because by calling Him "your king," he makes one final stab at the conscience of anyone who might rise to claim Him. But because it suited their purpose, *the chief priests* made a most self-degrading declaration, "We have no king but Caesar." This claim of loyalty to Caesar constitutes the definitive heresy of the official representatives of theocratic Israel: in their desperate bargaining, they surrender the fundamental truth that God is their true King. (Cf. Judg. 8:23; I Sam. 8:7; 12:12.) Whether they intend it or not, their claim denies their own faith and

irresponsibly cancels Israel's theocratic position under the immediate sovereignty of God and, consequently, its nationalistic hopes. Although God's kingship would be unfailingly present with the Davidic dynasty (cf. II Sam. 7:12-16), they publicly renounce the hope that another would arise to set up the Kingdom of the Messiah. Casting themselves on the loving kindness of Caesar rather than on God's covenant promise, they unwittingly sealed their destiny. In that generation the legions of their chosen king, Caesar, invaded Palestine to wipe out their Temple, their City and their nation (Luke 19:41ff.; 23:27ff.).

The pressures of the practical,  
the immediate, the tangible

**27:24 So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it.** This visual demonstration had a double value:

1. It returned crowd control back to Pilate. Their increasingly violent shouting had made it abundantly clear that he must act decisively to get the situation back under control. By this deliberate theatrical gesture, he got their attention. Curious, they stopped yelling.
2. Not only used among Gentiles, but also possibly part of Pilate's cultural awareness of Jewish practice, this ceremony was clear to the Jews in that it claimed innocence of a crime perpetrated by others (Deut. 21:6-9; II Sam. 3:28; Ps. 26:6; 73:13; cf. Acts 20:26). Pilate's solemn act did more than disclaim all responsibility for the judicial murder of their man, Jesus. It communicated to Israel not only his intention to exonerate his court but also the clear message that no tribunal would dare continue to demand sentence of death. In this thoroughly Jewish idiom he washed his hands of the case, not merely of the guilt of Jesus' crucifixion. Everyone should have dropped the question right there.

In reality, however, this unjust judge could not so easily exempt himself from real responsibility, because (1) no less than five times he had declared Jesus innocent. To permit this execution now is tantamount to murder. (2) Although it was the Jews alone who demanded Jesus' death, he was a magistrate! As representative of the constituted authority in Palestine with the power of life and death

at that time, he could not, on the basis of law and justice, turn Him over to them. *See ye to it* attempts to dump blame on others for acts that stain his own hands. (Cf. the rulers' disclaimer to Judas, 27:4.) The mistakes in his career plus the compromises on this day rose up to block his desire to save the most innocent victim of injustice in his career. He had sinned so long he could not now do right.

Here is written the moral paralysis of one supposedly powerful man. What brought about Pilate's surrender?

1. The emotion-driven mob is in an ugly mood. The governor had every reason to be nervous, because he had provoked bloody riots in similar circumstances during his administration. (Cf. Luke 13:1f.) His mission was to maintain the peace in the provinces, but he had already several unforgiven, unforgotten incidents on his record. With upwards of three million Jews in and around Jerusalem and only a cohort with which to maintain order, violence was Pilate's least defensible option. (Cf. *Wars* II,XIV,3; VI,9,3 for Passover crowd estimates in 65 and 70 A.D.)
2. When it finally surfaced, the real, root charge bewildered him: "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God" (John 19:7; Lev. 24:16). Since Roman authority was committed, wherever possible, to respect Jewish laws and traditions, Pilate was trapped between two legal codes, the Roman, which acquitted Jesus, and the Jewish, which would execute Him.
3. The rulers pressured Pilate by insinuating that they could ruin him politically by accusing him before a suspicious Tiberius for appearing to condone treason (John 19:12).
4. Mark uncovered another motivation, "wishing to satisfy the crowd . . ." (Mark 15:15). Political opportunism pure and simple.
5. Pilate jumped to the unwarranted conclusion that Jesus' popularity had evaporated. So why should anyone risk his own neck by throwing his weight behind a friendless wretch?

So, in Pilate's battle with his conscience, obedience lost out to expedience. Rather than risk his own political future, the now cowardly Pilate would sacrifice an innocent man. What is one Galilean more or less—especially if his own people are clamoring for his elimination? Little could any of them guess that this expedient not only temporarily saved people's lives by quenching a revolt in the making, but procured eternal salvation for all humanity!

Portentious words with  
far-reaching consequences

**27:25 And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.** In the mind of Matthew what sense or value would the expression, *all the people*, have? Does he mean to inculcate the entire Jewish nation, when, as is likely, only a small, probably hand-picked minority of the people were present in front of the Praetorium that morning? *All the people*, as a technical phrase, may refer to the normal method of judgment and execution among the Jews. Whereas the witnesses cast the first stones, the death of the condemned is accomplished "by the hand of *all the people*" (Lev. 20:2, 27: 24:14; Num. 15:35f.; Deut. 13:9; 17:7; 21:21). In the sense that this cry is instigated by Israel's highest authorities acting in their official capacity, it becomes tantamount to inculcating the whole nation.

They who had maneuvered so long to bring about His death could smell victory in the air at last. Nothing can stop them now, so they recklessly utter this fearful self-curse. *His blood be on us, and on our children.* Blood on someone's head means "guilt for the life and death" of either that person or someone else (II Sam. 1:16; 3:28f.; cf. 14:9; Jer. 51:35; Acts 18:6). Eagerly seizing Pilate's "it is your responsibility!" (v. 24), the authorities and their supporters welcome the fearful responsibility for Jesus' execution.

Was their proud death-wish realized? In reality, it became an unintended, self-fulfilling prophecy. It would be one more of the paradoxes of this awful history, that, having preferred a violent terrorist over the Son of God, they would be destroyed by violence (22:7; 23:34ff.; 24:15ff.; *Wars*). Witness the deposing, banishment, suicide and death of the protagonists, Annas, Caiaphas, Herod, Pilate. Others would be crucified sooner or later (*Wars* II, 14, 9; V, 11, 1). All those who did not submit to Jesus' Lordship suffered the terrible war. (Cf. 24:15ff.) *And on our children*: how long this awesome fate must hang over their descendants, God only knows, because only He could know their individual responsibility and attitude toward His Son. (Cf. Deut. 5:9; I Thess. 2:14ff.) Complete release from this terrible curse was offered all Israel from the very next Pentecost onward (Acts 2; 3:17-26). Each person evidenced his personal repudiation of the rulers' sentence by his own conversion to Jesus (Acts 2:40; 3:26; 5:31; Heb. 10:29).

And yet, this assumption of full responsibility for Jesus' death was only a hypocritical gambit to obtain an immediate objective, because,

the outraged priests accused the early Gospel preachers, "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood" (Acts 5:28).

But the inclusion of this mob-rule outcry on the part of Matthew is not a Christian effort to heap undeserved guilt on Israel, for Matthew paints Pilate in dark colors too. (See on 27:26.) Who, except on the basis of mere assertion, can prove that this supposed "apologetic interest of Matthew" is his tardy, prejudicial rewriting of history rather than the product of objective reporting? Must his facts be doubted, solely because they lead to conclusions distasteful to modern critics who, in the name of ecumenicity and tolerance, seem determined at all cost to diminish Jewish responsibility for this execution? In the name of justice, modern Germans can exercise a mature self-criticism that rightly condemns their nation's Jewish holocausts. Is it asking too much that everyone, including the Jews and their modern apologists, rise to the same objectivity to recognize and rectify the judicial farce perpetrated against Jesus so long ago? Further, God's punishment of Israel does not preclude mercy and forgiveness to everyone who turns in penitent faith to Jesus, be he Jewish or Gentile. Certainly, the Holy Spirit could never intend this verse to justify racial hatred or anti-Semitism. But it will do no good toward racial understanding to attempt to rewrite the facts on this ugly page of history. They can only be admitted and forgiven.

So far from being an anti-Jewish diatribe, Matthew's testimony preaches that the only way the stain of blood-guiltiness can be taken from any of us is through the mercy of that One Jew the power of whose blood can cleanse us from all unrighteousness (20:28; 26:27).

### The unjustifiable sentence

**27:26 Then released he unto them Barabbas; but Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.** So he collapsed, the tool of a race he despised, forced into a deed with which he had no sympathy. Is this gutless capitulation by Pilate a formal sentence? After Pilate's repeated protestations of Jesus' innocence (Luke 23:4; John 18:38; Luke 23:14f.; Matt. 27:23 = Mark 15:14 = Luke 23:22; John 19:4, 6; Matt. 27:24), it would seem juridically impossible that any death sentence could be given. Luke seems to affirm that "Pilate gave sentence that their demands should be granted" (Luke 23:24; *kai Pilátos epékrinen genésthai tò aítēma autôn*).

Even though *epikrino* can mean "decide, decree, choose, judge" (Rocci, 717), Arndt-Gingrich (294f) render Luke 23:24 "he decided that their demand should be granted."

This does not appear to be formal condemnation of Jesus on the basis of law, but merely the authorization required for crucifixion, extracted under duress. He only did what was necessary to get them off his back. Pilate's "frequent executions without preliminary sentencing" suggest that he might not have given formal sentence here either.

Symbolically, the prefect handed Him over to the priests (John 19:16) to the will of the people (Luke 23:25) but literally to the soldiers who did the will of the priests and people (27:27). *But Jesus he . . . delivered to be crucified (paradidomi)*. How many times Jesus was consigned to others: by Judas to the Sanhedrin, to Pilate and now to the soldiers! But none could have touched Him, had not God consigned Him to suffering and death (Isa. 53:4, 6, 10, 12).

*But Jesus he scourged and delivered to be crucified.* One must twist the facts to assert that the Gospel writers, living in a Roman world, tended more and more to excuse the Romans and incriminate the Jews with whom they had less to do. Although Pilate could and should have saved Jesus, it is an uncontestable fact that he, speaking for Caesar who spoke for the civilized world, sitting on a Roman tribunal and acting as a Roman judge, turned the uncondemnable Jesus over to Roman soldiers for a Roman-style execution.

But having *released unto them Barabbas*, Pilate must now take seriously the position of Jesus, whether he wanted to or not. He had played his last card and lost. His remaining choice is to *scourge and deliver [Jesus] to be crucified (tòn dè lesoûn fragellôsas parédoken hina staurothêi)*. Does this argue that the Romans *scoured Jesus twice*?

1. The participle (*phragellôsas*) could be translated as the ASV. However, because this rendering unnecessarily creates the impression that Jesus was scourged twice, it is better rendered, "having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified." Thus, Matthew and Mark merely summarize Jesus' tortures, rather than affirm that He was scourged again at this point, i.e. twice. (Cf. John 19:1-4.) Despite their postponing mention of the scourging until now, Matthew and Mark incidentally confirm John's account. Lenski (*Matthew*, 1097) argues that because Pilate's plan was to release Jesus after the mocking and scourging, it is less likely that these two events were repeated after the trial, but go together during it. He thinks John's sequence definitive and exclusive.



2. If it be thought that crucifixion is the paramount concern of the Jews, therefore, of Pilate, then perhaps care was taken not to exaggerate the scourging, lest the victim die under it before he could be crucified, then would not a second lashing in the same day be thought detrimental to this goal? Scourging intensified the poor wretch's suffering and hastened his death. On the other hand, Jesus' cross was carried by another: was He already too weakened to bear it Himself? Further, the prefect marvelled that Jesus died so quickly . . . (Mark 15:44).

*Jesus' he scourged.* A degrading punishment in itself, scourging, often if not always, preceded crucifixion. (Cf. *Wars* II,14,9; V,11,1; *Livy* xxxiii,36 cited by *I.S.B.E.*,2704.) Many died from this brutal torture inflicted by a whip made of leather thongs loaded with pieces of bone or metal. (Cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* IV,15,4.) The only worthwhile comment and explanation of this wholly unjustifiable act is Isaiah's: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (53:5).

Some view this scourging as reason for doubting the historicity of the account, because juridically absurd. In fact, despite one declaration of Jesus' innocence after another, Pilate ordered Jesus *scourged* and permitted his soldiers to torment Him?! (Luke 23:22; John 19:1-4!) If Jesus was innocent, why *scourge* Him? If guilty, why not crucify Him without hypocritically protesting His innocence?! Several reasons:

1. Scourging prior to the verdict even for innocent people was not at all thought irregular in that cruel era, being justified as part of the regular preliminary investigation to extract confessions or information (Acts 22:24; Eusebius, *loc. cit.*). Unsurprisingly, Pilate reiterated Jesus' innocence *after* the flagellation (John 19:4).
2. Jesus was not totally innocent: He had created what the rulers defined as disorders in Jewish society. For these, scourging would be judged an adequate penalty, from Pilate's point of view.
3. However, as the lesser of two evils Pilate unjustly subjected Jesus to a terrible scourging to bypass the worse death sentence, hoping that the crowd, moved to pity, would be content with this and allow His release (Luke 23:22; John 19:1-8). By presenting a battered, ridiculous clown-king, Pilate could argue the absurdity of thinking this contemptible dreamer able to foment the revolution with which they accused Him.

Neither understanding his Prisoner nor His accusers, Pilate could not have been more wrong: they would settle for nothing less than His death.

## ROMAN SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

**27:27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered unto him the whole band.** Is this a second mocking, the first having taken place earlier at the time of the scourging (John 19:1-3)? Or, should this paragraph be considered parallel to that earlier event, i.e. only one mocking, taking place in connection with the scourging? One must not assume that evil men bent on mocking God's Son must stop, satisfied with only one session of ridicule! That Luke (23:11) reports the derision by Herod and his men does not exclude a renewal of this crude sport by Pilate's men.

To face His accusers Jesus had been brought out of *the Praetorium*. (Cf. John 18:28; 19:13.) Now they return inside the open courtyard (Mark 15:16: *aulês*; cf. 26:69). *The whole band* (*hòlen tén spefan*) would normally number 600 men. (See on 26:47.) Here, the expression presumably includes everyone not on duty elsewhere. The number would be large because it is more than likely that the detachment would be confined to their barracks during the Passover, ready for action but keeping a low profile to avoid unnecessary incidents. Naturally bored by confinement, they were ready for any diversion these circumstances afforded.

*What* these Romans did may not be as significant as *why* they did it. Because Jesus was a condemned "King of the Jews," however misunderstood His own position thereabouts, these pagan Romans (some think they were Syrians in the service of Rome) waste no time to show contempt for the subject people by ridiculing the Jews' Messianic expectations. (Cf. *Wars* II,12:1f.; Philo of Alexandria, *In Flaccum*, 36-39, recounted a similar mockery by the Greeks during a visit of King Agrippa to Alexandria. Later, after the ill-fated Bar-Cochbah uprising in 114-117 A.D., Romans in Egypt did a similar burlesque. Flusser, *Jesus*, 172.)

Further, although Jesus was condemned to death, did He have no rights? Could these soldiers do with Him as they pleased? Here is exposed the seamier side of Roman justice and crude barracks life among the glorious Roman troops. Were such activities encouraged by their superiors to keep morale high and the troops merciless and

hard? That Pilate tacitly approved is suggested by there being no evident punishment of its perpetrators and by his publicly presenting Jesus costumed by the soldiers. To make a buffoon of the object of Jewish hatred furthered his purpose too (John 19:5). He may have simply ordered his men to "show the Jews what sort of a king their Jesus was" (Lenski, *Matthew*, 1100).

### The Jewish clown-king ridiculed

**27:28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.** Was He a king? Let him be *stripped* of his peasant rags and robed worthily of his office! Was this Herod's gorgeous mantle (Luke 23:11), or, as is more likely, the common maroon-colored cloak of the soldier in imitation of the royal purple? On His bruised, bleeding back, anything would be rough.

**27:29 And they platted a crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!** A thorny plant close at hand is rapidly twisted into a rude wreath. Whether it was their purpose to scoff or to wound him with the *thorns* is unimportant since, by weaving Him a wreath (*stéfanon*) of such *thorns*, they achieve both. Its leaves consciously imitated the laurel crown of the Emperor. The scepter *in his right hand* was but a *reed*. Who could guess that He would turn this *reed* into a rod of iron with which to rule the nations (Rev. 12:5; 19:15; Ps. 2:9)?

*They kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!* Their sarcastic, pretended reverence for a crowned king is hardly aimed at Jesus personally about whom they may have known very little, much less personally hated. He is a thing, a symbol, not a real man before them. The rude mockery of these Romans aimed to degrade the Jews as a people for whom they had little love.

**27:30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed and smote him on the head.** As the time for His crucifixion drew near, the already rough game becomes more sadistic. The blows drive the crown of thorns further onto His head. Redemption is expensive! God's program, however, remained unchanged: Jesus must become Master *through* the caricature of His royalty which He endured (Heb. 5:8ff.).

**27:31 And when they had mocked him, they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments, and led him away to crucify him.**

Did Jesus wear the crown of thorns to the cross? Although Pilate presented Jesus as a clown-king with robe and crown to the chief priests and officers (John 19:5), the purpose of the mocking is past. *If they took off from him the robe, and put on him his garments*, then the scarlet cloak and thorn-crown may have also been tossed aside, now useless.

What is to be done with Jesus Christ? Ever since Pilate asked it, everyone must confront this fateful question. Despite the falsity of political charges against Jesus, His message is far more political than the threatened armed revolution of the Zealots. Even if Christianity is no nationalistic rival to constituted authority, its uncompromising message of first loyalty to God and its impartial treatment of all men is far more radical and dangerous to the lords of this earth than that of small-time revolutionaries (18:1ff.; 20:25-28; Luke 22:25-27). It is an immature comprehension of the Christian message that fails to see how profoundly far-reaching Christ's demands are. This is not to foresee a City of God overtake the whole earth before Christ's return. It is to recognize how deeply all His claims on our allegiance and service reach into human society to transform it.

How many situations have we faced when, like Pilate, we should have defended Christ against a surging mob of unbelievers, and failed? Let us return in the grace of Christ, unashamedly determined to stand by Him no matter the cost. Let us dare to be the Christian our conscience demands. But poor Jesus took that mockery, because He loved us unto death and could foresee how it would break our hearts to see Him endure it.

These sufferings of Christ must awaken in us more than repugnance and indignation toward those who perpetrated them. Instead, they must stir in us a hatred toward those sins of our own that made this suffering necessary.

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. From available sources prepare a file on Pilate.
2. Although Matthew does not state it, what must have been the charge brought before Pilate against Jesus? On what reasonable basis could Pilate have known to ask this?
3. Describe the political ramifications of each segment of this trial before Pilate, showing the pressure points involved.
4. Discuss: Pilate had as much political motive to crucify Jesus as

did the Jews themselves, and his attempts to save Jesus are a fabrication of the Gospel writers.

5. To what question did Jesus answer "Thou sayest"? What did He mean?
6. Explain how Jesus could confess to being a king, but Pilate would never consider it treason.
7. List the various efforts which Pilate made to release Jesus or to get out of condemning Him.
8. Was Pilate the first to remind the Jews of the political favor granted them of releasing a prisoner during the feast? How do you know?
9. When did Pilate's wife report her dream to Pilate? When did she have it? What was her testimony to Jesus' character?
10. Explain why Pilate's effort to trade Barabbas off for Jesus' release did not work.
11. Explain the people's expression: "His blood be on us and on our children."
12. When was Jesus scourged? Was He scourged more than once?
13. Where, when and how was He mocked by the soldiers? How many participated in this?
14. Give good reasons why Roman soldiers, who presumably would have no personal spite against Jesus, could be so cruel.
15. List every evidence of Jesus' moral stature as His trial before Pilate reveals this.

## SECTION 74

### JESUS IS CRUCIFIED AND BURIED

(Parallels: Mark 15:20-46; Luke 23:26-54; John 19:16-42)

#### DID MATTHEW FORGET THE PROPHECIES?

Anyone who has followed Matthew this far has encountered a formidable array of prophetic quotations that establish Jesus' divinely authenticated Messiahship. By contrast, Matthew now strangely omitted a number of prophetic fulfillments surrounding the crucifixion. Perhaps this is because this master writer knew that his Jewish readers would be so permeated with Psalm 22 that Jesus' Aramaic cry on the cross would, alone, be sufficient to suggest the details of the entire Psalm. (Could this have been Jesus' own purpose for shouting these specific words rather than something else?) Further, Isaiah's Servant of Jahveh may be discerned in every part of this entire section (Isa. 53). Simply to underscore every allusion of word of the Psalmist or

Prophet fulfilled in some phase of Jesus' crucifixion is to produce the startling effect of a well-underlined page.

Matthew's confidence, that the unshakeable certainty of his facts possessed persuasive didactic power, may have prompted him to tell them simply, letting their own eloquence speak convincingly to the Jewish heart. Thus, his readers' own conclusions about Jesus, the fine result of their personal reflections on God's Word, would be far more powerful than had Matthew spelled them all out. However, since the prophecies would be less well-known to the non-Jewish readers of other Gospel writers, these latter rightly cited them for their extremely significant didactic value.

## ON THE WAY TO GOLGOTHA

TEXT: 27:32-34

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go *with them*, that he might bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull, 34 they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink:

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Do you think that Jesus carried His entire cross or merely the crossbeam?
- b. Why do you think the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry Jesus' cross? Had Simon done something wrong or did Jesus simply need this help?
- c. Do you think they suspected him of being a secret follower of Jesus and intended to make him share His humiliation?
- d. Why was Jesus crucified outside of town?
- e. Why, if Matthew is writing for Jews, did he feel it necessary to translate the term "Golgotha," which any of them could have understood without the translation? Did he simply copy from Mark, as some assert?
- f. Why did someone offer Jesus some wine to drink? Was this normal?
- g. Why do you think Jesus refused it?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

So the soldiers took Jesus along, leading Him out to crucify Him. He went out, carrying His own cross. As they were leaving the city, they happened upon a man named Simon. (He was a Cyrenian, the father of Alexander and Rufus.) He was passing by on his way in from the country. The soldiers seized him and pressed him into service. They made him shoulder the cross to carry it behind Jesus.

Also following Him was a large number of people, including grief-stricken women who were weeping for Him. Jesus, however, turned to them to say, "Women of Jerusalem, do not cry for me. Weep, instead, for yourselves and for your children, because, remember, the time is coming when the wail will be, 'How fortunate are those women who never had any children, never gave birth to babies or nursed them!' That will be a time when people will begin to cry to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Hide us.' For if people do this when the wood is tender and green, what will happen when it is old and dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were led away to be executed with Him. The soldiers brought Him to the place called "Skull-place." (In Aramaic it is called "Golgotha.") There He was offered wine drugged with myrrh, but, after tasting it, He refused to drink it.

## SUMMARY

Jesus carried His cross to the edge of Jerusalmē where it became apparent He could bear it no more. The Romans impressed a Cyrenian, forcing him to carry it out to Calvary. Jesus' suffering excited the compassion of women but He refused it as misdirected. On Golgotha He also rejected a compassionate anesthetic. His humiliation was increased through "guilt by association," since He was to suffer with two criminals.

## NOTES

Shame converted to glory

**27:32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross.** Whether or not condemned men normally shouldered an entire cross—either already assembled or the unjoined beams—or merely

the horizontal cross-arm to the place of execution, John described Jesus as going "out bearing his own cross" (John 19:17; cf. 27:32; Luke 23:26). Jesus' attempt to bear His own cross gives character to His challenge that we take up our cross and follow Him (10:38; 16:24).

At the edge of Jerusalem, utterly exhausted from His trials and the pain of the scourging, He apparently collapsed under its weight, unable to continue. However, the soldiers' duty was to guard the condemned men against escape or liberation. Because they dare not expose themselves to attack by helping him, a substitute is required to carry Jesus' cross. Seeing Simon just then coming into town, the soldiers requisitioned his services to carry it, following Jesus to Calvary. (So, the Synoptics.) The impressment of Simon's help implies that his strength was needed to bear "the cross," not merely the upper crosspiece.

That *Simon* came from *Cyrene*, an important north African city, does not decide whether this Jew were a resident of the Jerusalem area to be distinguished from hundreds of other Simons by his city of origin, or one of the millions of Passover pilgrims who arrived from Jewish colonies around the Roman world. (Cf. Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20; 13:1; 1 Macc. 15:23; 2 Macc. 2:23; *Ant.* XIV,7,2; XVI,6,1,5; *Against Apion*, II,4.) He is later identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus, men apparently well-known to the early Church (Mark 15:21; Rom. 16:13?) That he was selected out of the crowd for so lowly a service does not prove him a slave, because the Romans would not bother about his social status but judge him on his strength to carry the cross to the place of execution. Impressment or requisition of anyone's service for certain limited service was the Roman right. (Cf. 5:41.)

But that he was "coming in from the country" does not prove (1) that he were a farmer who had been working in the fields that day, nor, consequently, (2) that the day in question were anything but Friday morning of Passover week, as if travelling were forbidden on regular feastdays. To suppose him to be a farmer one must also see him as returning from field work about *nine o'clock a.m.* (Cf. Mark 15:25.) Perhaps out meditating in the glorious morning air of a country springtime, he was just returning for the hour of prayer at the temple.

The death march was composed of a centurion leading probably 12 soldiers divided into three details responsible for guarding the two malefactors and Jesus (Luke 23:32). Wending their way through the crowded streets of the city, they encounter a "great multitude of the people and of women"—probably not His followers—who, out



of well-meaning, motherly sympathy, raised a funeral lament for this popular young man so unjustly condemned to death (Luke 23:27ff.). A death wail of "the wailing women" was customary and would be taken up almost immediately upon death. (Cf. 9:23; Luke 8:52. See Matt. 11:17.) Ever grateful, compassionate and self-forgetful, the Lord paused to warn these unbelieving sentimentalists of their own future desperation when at the fall of Jerusalem, their sons would be massacred by wicked men and their own death would be preferable to their fear and wretchedness. (Cf. 24:19.) Despite the immediate atrocity He Himself must undergo, He could picture His own future as glorious (Heb. 12:2).

### The turning-point of world history

**27:33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, The place of a skull.** Mark's "they brought him" (Mark 15:22: *pherousin autòn*), suggests that, since Jesus' collapse required help in bearing the cross, the soldiers perhaps supported Him, half-carrying Him to *Golgotha* . . . *the place of a skull*. "Calvary" ( *calvus*, "bald, scalp" *calvariae locus*) is simply a Latin word that translates the Greek, *krànion*. (Cf. Latin "cranium.") Matthew translates this Aramaic word, not for his Hebrew readers, but for those who read only Greek. (Cf. 27:46.)

Hebrew law and practice placed executions outside of the camp of Israel or its towns. (Cf. Lev. 24:14-23; Num. 15:35f.; Josh 7:24ff. [?]; I Kings 21:13; Acts 7:58.) Further, Jesus, who is to be the sin offering for the world, is also symbolized by offerings taken outside the camp of Israel (Exod. 29:14; Lev. 4:12, 21; 9:8-11; 16:10, 21f., 27; Num. 19:3, 9). Thus, also Jesus' final torment occurred "outside the gate" of Jerusalem, yet "near the city" apparently near a main road (Heb. 13:11f.; John 19:20; Matt. 27:39). The precise location of this *place of a skull* has been obscured by the following difficulties:

1. The macabre name would be derived, not from unclean skulls lying about (which would require the reading: *kraniòn* gen.pl. *tòpon*), but from some historic or topological reference:
  - a. its proximity to a cemetery of which nothing is stated in the text;
  - b. its regular use as a place for public executions, which is even less supported;
  - c. its shape bore free resemblance to a skull. Luke terms it simply "Skull" (*kranion*, not *kraniou tòpos*), as if this were sufficient to describe the place.

2. Its location may well be affected by the history of Jerusalem:
  - a. Around 44 A.D. Herod Agrippa initiated an ambitious project of urban expansion that may have enclosed *Golgotha* within the city about 14 years after Jesus died there (*Wars* V,4,2f.).
  - b. In 70 A.D. after a devastating siege, Jerusalem was virtually destroyed and sites around it were altered by the war itself.
  - c. After the ill-fated Bar Cochbah uprising, Hadrian rebuilt the already desolated city as Aelia Capitolina, a Roman city constructed on the ruins of the former Jewish capital.
  - d. Any site is affected by the location of the northern wall of Jerusalem in 30 A.D., an archeological puzzle not yet definitively settled.

The traditional site is covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. A more convincing candidate is a hill north of the Damascus Gate, which has two small caves that give the appearance of eye sockets of a skull without a jaw. Discovered by Otto Thenius, this site was popularized as Gordon's Calvary. The quite ancient, apparently unused rock-hewn tomb located in a garden at its base argues favorably for this site, although some date the tomb in the second century. Certainty that this location today resembles its appearance two thousand years ago is, however, lacking. That this tomb was apparently never used nor developed in successive ages is motive to ponder. . . .

**27:34 they gave him wine to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted it, he would not drink.** Charitable Jews and Romans both customarily gave condemned men a heavily drugged drink. The former aimed at deadening the pain. The latter were simply facilitating their work of crucifixion: it is easier to handle a drugged man (*Prov.* 31:6f.; cf. *Plin.* 20, 18; *Sen. Ep.* 83 cited by Farrar, 638).

Matthew says the wine was mixed with *gall*; Mark has "myrrhed wine (*esmurnisménon oínon*)" (*Mark* 15:23). Wine flavored with myrrh was known in the ancient world (Arndt-Gingrich, 766). Perhaps "myrrhed" connotes "spiced" without necessarily specifying "myrrh." So, Matthew indicates the particular drug involved as *gall*. But is *gall* (*cholês*) anesthetic? The LXX used *cholê* to translate Hebrew words for (1) gall; (2) poison; (3) wormwood. (See Arndt-Gingrich, 891.) However, in addition to bitter, poisonous substances, *gall* may have associated with it the idea of anesthetic, especially when the Hebrew word *rosh*, translated *gall*, referred, among other things, to poppy (*papamer somniferam*, *I.S.B.E.* 1167).

Or vice versa, *cholé* often translated *gall*, simply points generically or figuratively to any bitter substance (Lam. 3:15; Prov. 5:4; perhaps also Ps. 69:21), and the particular bitter element added to this wine was myrrh.

They kept trying to give Him the pain-deadener (Mark 15:23: *edidoun*). Jesus' refusal of this kindness had nothing to do with its bitter taste, as if the drink's bitterness were intended as an additional cruelty. Although His was not a stoic refusal to shield Himself from pain, some think that He was determined to experience death at its worst to make Himself like His brethren even in this respect (Heb. 2:9, 17). Others think He refused, that His sacrifice might be conscious. More simply, the price for keeping His mind clear until the last was having to endure pain as any other man. Even though the use of a powerful drug can be justified for others facing excruciating pain and natural death, His refusal illustrates what it means to be alert and on guard, so as not to enter into trials unaware of their insidious temptations and unprepared (26:41).

*When he had tasted it, he would not drink.* If He did not want any, why taste it? Did He not know what it was? He simply did not use His miraculous knowledge when a taste would supply Him the information. (Cf. notes on 21:19.)

Could a Jewish reader see an allusion to Psalm 69:21 in this?

## FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where according to Jewish law must executions occur?
2. Whom did the soldiers compel to carry Jesus' cross?
3. Where was he coming from at the time?
4. Explain why he was compelled to bear Jesus' cross: (a) what right did the Romans have to do this? (b) what need was there to find someone else to carry the cross? (c) how may this incident be harmonized with John's Gospel that affirms Jesus carried His own cross?
5. Define the terms: "Golgotha" and "Calvary." From what language does each word come? For what possible motive(s) was the area called this?
6. Locate the two more famous sites identified for the crucifixion. Explain why identifying the one true location is uncertain at best.
7. Explain the purpose of the wine mingled with gall.

## THE DEATH OF CHRIST

## Crucifixion and accusation

TEXT: 27:35-37

35 And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments among them, casting lots; 36 and they sat and watched him there. 37 And they set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

## THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why remove Jesus' clothes? Only to leave Him naked on the cross?
- b. Why would soldiers even want the second-hand clothing of a condemned man? Are not these pretty meager spoils?
- c. Do you think the soldiers were deliberately crass to roll dice for Jesus' clothes?
- d. Do you think David intended to prophesy the sufferings and death of Jesus in Psalm 22 or was he merely describing his own sufferings caused by his own enemies? On what basis do you answer as you do?
- e. What do the prophecies about Jesus' death tell us about its meaning?
- f. Why would Matthew, who cited so many fulfillments of prophecy in the life and ministry of Christ, suddenly abandon this method during the crucifixion scenes, when so many noteworthy fulfillments were available? Would not his readers appreciate his bringing them up?
- g. Why do you think Pilate formulated the accusation on the cross in precisely those words? Was he expressing his personal contempt toward Jesus or toward the Jews or both?
- h. How do you account for the differences between the Gospels as to the correct reading of the inscription on Jesus' cross? Did the sign say different things? Or did it say only one thing? Decide!
- i. Matthew hardly describes the act of crucifixion itself: the nails, the size and configuration of the cross, the ropes, the raising, etc. What does this suggest about his purpose or view of the matter?

## PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

At Golgotha the soldiers crucified Jesus and, along with Him, the two criminals, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Jesus was in the center. He prayed, "Father, forgive these people, because they do not know what they are doing."

Pilate also prepared the written notice, indicating the charge against Him and had it put on the cross over His head. The title read: "THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS." Many Jews read this sign, since the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city of Jerusalem, and the sign was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek. This is why the chief priests protested to Pilate, "You should not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This guy said, I am the King of the Jews.'"

"What I have written," Pilate answered, "is going to remain that way."

After nailing Jesus to the cross, the soldiers distributed His clothes in four parts, a share for each soldier, rolling dice for them to determine who should receive what. However, His tunic was seamless, woven all the way from the neck down. So they talked it over, "Rather than tear it, let us roll the dice for it to decide who will get it." This resulted in the fulfillment of Scripture, which says, "They divided my garments among them, and rolled dice for my clothes." This is exactly what the soldiers did.

It was about nine in the morning when they crucified Jesus. Then they sat down to guard Him there.

## SUMMARY

On the central cross between two criminals they crucified Jesus who prayed for the forgiveness of His tormentors. Pilate's statement of the charge irritated Jewish sentiment but remained the unchanged declaration of Jesus' Kingship. The platoon in charge of Jesus divided His personal clothing by rolling dice for it, then relaxed on the ground as they guarded Him.

## NOTES

... THEY HAVE PIERCED MY HANDS AND MY FEET.

I CAN COUNT ALL MY BONES:

PEOPLE STARE AND GLOAT OVER ME

THEY DIVIDE MY GARMENTS AMONG THEM

AND CAST LOTS FOR MY CLOTHING. (Ps. 22:16b-18)