

In our last lesson we studied the events surrounding Jesus' betrayal and arrest, as well as His initial trials before the Jewish religious leaders. In this lesson we will take a look at His trials before the civil authorities, as well as His crucifixion, death, and burial.

**Read Mark 15:1-5, as well as the parallel passages in Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Luke 23:1-5, 13-16; and John 18:28-38.**

1. As we studied last time, following His arrest Jesus was taken first to Annas, and then to Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. These proceedings took place during the night (in violation of Jewish law). The following morning, the religious leaders convened again. This gathering was not so much a trial, for Jesus had already been declared guilty of blasphemy in their eyes, but a meeting to execute the next steps. Blasphemy against the God of Israel was not a charge that would be recognized in a Roman court, thus the religious leaders had to have a charge that would stand under Roman law if Jesus was going to be put to death "legally". Mark and Matthew give very brief accounts about the hearing before Pilate, but Luke gives us more detail. According to Luke 27:1-2, what charges do the religious leaders bring before Pilate? What is their intent in bringing these charges, i.e. what picture of Jesus are they trying to paint?

Are the charges true?

2. John records another interesting detail about Jesus' trial before Pilate. From John 18:28b, what is this detail? What is ironic about it?
3. As with Jesus' trials before the Jewish authorities, the Gospel writers record differing details of Jesus' trial before the Roman authorities. However, all four Gospels do record the main question that Pilate asked Jesus. What was it?

All four Gospels also record Jesus' response to Pilate. What was it?

Jesus' response may seem a little enigmatic to us. However, John's account gives some deeper insight into His response (John 18:33-38). What is Jesus saying here?

4. Matthew and Mark record that the Jewish religious leaders made many accusations against Jesus, but that He made no answer to these accusations, much to the amazement of Pilate. Why might Pilate have reacted in this way?
  
5. Luke alone records that when Pilate found out that Jesus was a Galilean, he sent Him to Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12), who was the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. Write down some of the significant details of this encounter.

What was the end result of this hearing before Herod?

Jesus then was returned to Pilate. What was Pilate's assessment? (Luke 23:13-16, John 18:38b)

**STUDY NOTE:** Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of Judea, serving under the emperor Tiberius. His official title was that of prefect, and he ruled from 26 AD to 36 AD, making him the longest serving governor of the province. His duties were primarily military in nature, with his troops serving as the police force, but he also had other duties extending into civil affairs. He was head of the provincial justice system, with the authority to inflict capital punishment; he also had responsibility for the collection of taxes and tribute, and the disbursal of those funds, including the minting of coins. His primary residence was in Caesarea Maritima (on the Mediterranean coast, see your map). During the Jewish feast days, Passover in particular, his presence in Jerusalem was required, as these had often been occasions for rebellion against Rome.

Though Pilate is familiar to us from the Gospels, little is known about him from history. The primary sources are the Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (*Embassy to Gaius*) and the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities; The Jewish War*), both writing in the first century AD. His name Pontius is the *nomen gentilicium*, or the family name according to Roman naming conventions, indicating that he was a member of the prominent Pontii family of the Republic and early Empire. His *praenomen*, or personal/first name, is not known with certainty. Pilate is his *cognomen*, which served either as a nickname or a hereditary name used to identify a particular branch of a family or clan. The *cognomen* "Pilatus" may indicate that either Pilate himself, or perhaps his father before him, acquired the name due to military skill.

Pilate's interactions with the Jews could be characterized as insensitive, stubborn, and occasionally brutal, though both Josephus and Philo note that his Jewish subjects were as equally stubborn and defiant. On one occasion, Pilate introduced military standards bearing the emperor's image in Jerusalem, violating the Jewish ban on images. A mass of Jewish protestors traveled to Caesarea (70 miles away) and camped out (nonviolently) at his residence for several days. Pilate gave orders for the protestors to be slain, but when they bared their throats to welcome death rather transgress the Jewish law, Pilate relented from his order and withdrew the standards. On another occasion, he used temple treasury funds to build an aqueduct, a move met by protestors objecting to the use of temple money for public works projects. Pilate ordered the protests to be quelled, and in the ensuing melee many were slain by soldiers exceeding their orders, or trampled to death under hoof as they fled. Luke 13:1 tells us that Pilate killed Galileans who had brought offerings to Jerusalem, mixing their blood with their sacrifices. A final episode occurred when Pilate had armed Samaritans -- who were looking for artifacts buried by Moses -- slain near Mount Gerizim, and this incident led to his removal by the emperor Gaius Caligula.

Pilate's fate after his removal from office is the subject of much debate and conjecture. Some hold that he was sentenced to death by Caligula, either by execution or forced suicide, around 39 AD. Others hold that he was sent into exile and committed suicide of his own accord. Still others hold that he retired to civilian life and lived out his days uneventfully. Still others contend that he converted to Christianity, a belief held in the Eastern Orthodox church where he has been canonized.

**Read Mark 15:6-15, along with the parallel passages in Matthew 27:15-26, Luke 23:17-25, and John 18:38b-19:16.**

6. All four Gospels tell us that Pilate found no guilt in Jesus and sought to release Him. Rather than simply letting Him go, though, Pilate sought to use the established custom of freeing a prisoner during the feast as the means to secure Jesus' release. What do you make of this? Why might Pilate have chosen this course of action?

According to Mark 15:10, what was Pilate's personal view of the religious leaders' motive for bringing accusations against Jesus?

What additional interesting detail do we find in Matthew 27:19?

7. When given the choice between the release of Jesus and the release of Barabbas (a convicted insurrectionist and murderer), the crowd called for Barabbas to be released. Who was mainly responsible for this? (Mark 15:11, Matthew 27:20)

How does this show their hypocrisy?

8. John's account tells us that during the course of this exchange between Pilate and the crowds, Pilate took Jesus away and had Him flogged/scourged (John 18:39-19:1). The Synoptic Gospels refer to this as well (Matthew 27:26, Mark 15:15, Luke 23:16). Flogging/scourging was commonly used prior to Roman crucifixion. Using resources available to you, write down some details about Roman scourging.
  
9. Mark and Matthew tell us a little more about the Roman soldiers' interactions with Jesus. Read Mark 15:16-20, and the parallel passage in Matthew 27:27-31. Make a list of the cruelty inflicted upon Jesus, and briefly describe and/or comment on each one.

Look again at your list. Do these things sound familiar? Where have we heard this before? What prophecy does it fulfill?

10. Jesus was then returned to Pilate, and John also relates some of the political intrigue between Pilate and the religious leaders/crowd. What tactic did they employ to try and force Pilate's hand? (John 19:12)

In their zeal to be rid of Jesus, the chief priests declare "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15c) What sin, and what irony, do you see in their statement?

11. Mark 15:15 tells us that Pilate finally capitulates to the crowd's demands. What additional detail about Pilate's response does Matthew give us in Matthew 27:24? Does this absolve Pilate of guilt?

How does the crowd respond to Pilate's gesture? (Matthew 27:25) Does this absolve Pilate of guilt?

**All four Gospels give accounts of the crucifixion of the Lord. Mark's account is the shortest, while Matthew, Luke, and John add additional details. Read Mark 15:21-32, Matthew 27:32-44, Luke 23:26-43, and John 19:16b-27.**

12. Crucifixion was a shameful and horrific punishment in the ancient world. It is believed to have been of Assyrian or Babylonian origin, and it was known to be used systematically by the Persians in the sixth century BC. Alexander the Great brought it from there to the Mediterranean world in the fourth century BC, and the Phoenicians brought it to Rome a century later. Though the Romans did not invent it, they are credited with having perfected it (if you can call it that) over the course of 500 years, until it was abolished by Emperor Constantine I in the fourth century AD. Using resources available to you, record some facts about this barbarous method of execution.

13. Those under sentence of crucifixion were required to carry their own *patibulum*, the cross-piece to which their hands would be tied or nailed and which would eventually be attached to the *stipes*, the permanently erected upright post at the site of crucifixion. John tells us that Jesus initially carried His own *patibulum* (John 19:17), but at some point a stranger was pressed into service to carry it for Him (Mark 15:21, Matthew 27:32, Luke 23:26). Who was this stranger, and what do we know about him?

**STUDY NOTE:** All four Gospels note that Jesus was taken to Golgotha (Place of a Skull) to be crucified. All four Gospel writers use the Greek word *Kranion* to designate the place where Jesus was crucified, and though it is generally translated "skull" in English, it more accurately means "cranium", the rounded part of the skull enclosing the brain. In Latin *Kranion* is rendered *Calvariae*, from which our English word "Calvary" derives. Its exact location is debated. The traditional site is located in the Christian quarter of the Old City, which would have been outside Jerusalem's walls at the time of Christ's crucifixion; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands on this site today. There is archaeological evidence that lends support to this area being the authentic site, but other sites have been proposed, including a hill situated in the opposite direction just outside the Lion's Gate (also known as the Sheep Gate) on the eastern side of the Old City. From the Gospel accounts it is clear that this was a well-known place in Jesus' day; John notes that it was "near the city", readily accessible to passersby (John 19:20), and that there was a "garden" there that contained the tomb in which Jesus was eventually laid (John 19:41).

14. In his account, Mark mentions four different groups of people involved in the crucifixion. For each set of verses, write down each group and what they are doing as Jesus is dying:

vv. 22-26 (see also Matthew 27:33-37, Luke 23:36-37, John 19:23-24)

vv. 27 and 32b (see also Luke 23:32-33, 39-42)

vv. 29-30 (see also Matthew 27:39-40)

vv. 31-32a (also Matthew 27:41-43, Luke 23:35)

15. In these accounts we notice that no one passes up the opportunity to mock Jesus. But while He is enduring incredible physical and emotional suffering -- being gawked at, insulted, mocked, spit on, publicly and ruthlessly humiliated -- what do we see Jesus doing? (Luke 23:28, 34, 42-43; John 19:26-27)

16. Mark 15:26 states that the inscription of Jesus' charge read, "The King of the Jews". What additional information do the other Gospels give us about this?

What irony do you see in this inscription?



**STUDY NOTE:** Mark's timing of the crucifixion ("third hour" on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, i.e. Friday, Mark 15:25) differs from John's ("about the sixth hour" on "the day of Preparation of the Passover", i.e. Thursday, John 19:14). Several possible resolutions have been suggested. Some commentators suggest that John uses Roman reckoning of time in his account, which would place the "sixth hour" at 6:00 a.m. since the Roman civil day began at midnight. This is unlikely for two reasons: elsewhere in John the sixth hour represents noon (4:6), reflecting Jewish reckoning; also, even if John were using a Roman reckoning in 19:14, it still would not resolve the issue, as the times between the accounts would still differ. Other commentators suggest that Mark's notation of "the third hour" is a later editor's insertion and was not part of Mark's original document. This is possible, especially given the fact that Matthew and Luke -- who had copies of Mark's account as a source -- do not have this time designation. Though this is a plausible resolution, it is by no means universally accepted among scholars. Still other commentators suggest that John presents the events with theological considerations, rather than strict chronology, in mind. According to this view, John structures the events of Jesus' crucifixion and death so as to coincide with the slaying of the Passover lambs in the temple (on Thursday, rather than Friday), pointing to the significance of Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). This certainly accords well with the high Christology of John's Gospel and his emphasis on OT feasts and institutions finding their fulfillment in Christ. Still other commentators suggest that John's designation of "about the sixth hour" is used as a general timeframe, and that his use of "the day of Preparation of the Passover" actually refers to the Friday of Passover week. There is evidence from antiquity in both Jewish and Gentile cultures that days were sometimes considered in four divisions, which were called "hours": the "first hour" being from 6:00 to 9:00, the "third hour" from 9:00 to 12:00, the "sixth hour" from 12:00 to 3:00, and the "ninth hour" from 3:00 to 6:00. In this reckoning, Mark's "third hour" and John's "about the sixth hour" would be within the same general timeframe. Regarding John's designation of the day of the week on which the crucifixion took place, these commentators note that there is no precedent in Jewish history or writing for the daylight hours preceding Passover (which began at sunset on Thursday) to be called "the day of Preparation of the Passover." There is much evidence, however, for the daylight hours preceding the Sabbath (which began at sunset on Friday) to be called the day of Preparation. Thus, in this view, John's reference to the "day of Preparation of the Passover" would mean the day of Preparation for the Sabbath that occurs during the Passover week, which would then align with Mark's Friday chronology. John appears to use this meaning in 19:31 and 42. And still other commentators suggest that Mark's "third hour" was the time that the scourging and final decision of Pilate before the crowd took place, and that after His procession through the streets and arrival to Golgotha, John's "about the sixth hour" was the time that He was actually nailed to the cross and hung for crucifixion.

19. Mark tells us that Jesus then "uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last" (v. 37). Comment on the additional information found in Matthew 27:50, Luke 23:46, and John 19:30. What significance do you see in these things?

20. What miraculous event took place at the moment of Jesus' death (v. 38)? What is its significance? (see Exodus 26:31-35 and Leviticus 16 for the OT backdrop)
21. What was the reaction of the Roman centurion who witnessed Jesus' death and the events surrounding it? What is significant about this?
22. All four Gospels note the presence of certain women at the crucifixion. Who were they? Include Scripture verses in your answer.

Why is this a significant detail?

In contrast to the women present, who was noticeably absent?

**Read Mark 15:42-47, Matthew 27:57-66, Luke 23:50-56, and John 19:31-42.**

23. All four Gospels tell us that Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body; John adds that Nicodemus went with him. What do we know about these men? What is significant about the fact that they came openly to claim the body?
24. Pilate was surprised that Jesus was already dead (v. 44), so he confirmed it with the centurion. From John's Gospel, what measure was taken to verify Jesus' death? Why are these important details?
25. According to the Gospels, who witnessed the burial of Jesus? Why is this an important detail?
26. From Matthew's account, what extra measure did the religious leaders take following Jesus' burial? Why is this an important detail?