

## CFM Luke 22; John 18 – Ep 206



In this outline are a few links to some of my favorite books that have really helped me understand the context and content of the scriptures. [Click here to see all of my favorite books on Amazon](#). As an Amazon Affiliate, I do earn a small commission from qualifying purchases (at no extra cost to you).

### The Last Week of the Savior’s Mortal Ministry

#### Focus: Friday morning

#### 12 Events

1. The hearing before the chief priests (Matt. 26.57-68; Mark 14.53-65; Luke 22.54; John 18.12).
2. Peter’s denial of Jesus (Matt.26.69-75; Mark 14.66-72; Luke 22.55-62; John 18.17-18, 25-27).
3. The soldiers mock Jesus (Luke 22.63-65).
4. The hearing before Caiaphas (Matt. 27.1; Mark 15.1; Luke 22.66-71; John 18.24, 28).
5. The hearing before Pilate (Matt. 27.2, 11-14; Mark 15.1-5; Luke 23.1-6; John 18.28-38).
6. Judas’ remorse and his death (Matt. 27.3-10)
7. The hearing before Herod (Luke 23.7-12).
8. The second hearing before Pilate (Matt. 27.15-31; Mark 15.6-15; Luke 23.11-17).
9. Barabbas released (Matt. 27.15-21, 26; Mark 15.6-15; Luke 23.18-25; John 18.39-40).
10. Pilate washes his hands of the affair (Matt. 27.24-26).
11. Jesus is mocked and scourged (Matt. 27.27-31; Mark 15.15-20; John 19.1-12).
12. Jesus is taken to Golgotha (Matt. 27.32-34; Mark 15.20-23; Luke 23.26-31; John 19.13-17).

In order to faithfully adhere to the chronological order of events as presented in the gospel narratives, we made the deliberate decision to structure our podcast recordings accordingly. We acknowledge that this deviation from the prescribed lesson plans outlined in the Come Follow Me format may pose challenges for those using our podcasts for personal study or lesson planning. Please accept our apologies for any inconvenience. We appreciate your listenership.

#### A Chiastic Literary Pattern

John presents Jesus’ “Passion Narrative” in a chiastic way as follows:

A. Arrested *in a garden*, bound and led to trial (18:1–12)

B. *True high priest* tried; *beloved disciple* present (18:13–27)

C. Jesus, king of Israel, judged by Pilate, rejected by his people (18:28–19:16)

B’ *True high priest* carries wood of his own sacrifice (like Isaac); *beloved disciple* present (19:17–30)

A' *Bound* with burial clothes, buried *in a garden* (19:31–42)<sup>1</sup>

**1. The hearing before the chief priests (Matt. 26.57-68; Mark 14.53-65; Luke 22.54; John 18.12).**

**And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled (Matt. 26.57).**

οἱ δὲ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ τὸ συνέδριον ὅλον ἐζήτουν ψευδομαρτυρίαν κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὅπως αὐτὸν θανατώσωσιν (Matt. 26.59 Greek) “The chief priests and the elders, even [the entire Sanhedrin](#) were looking for false evidence to take against Jesus so that they could put him to death” (my translation).

**The Sanhedrin**

The Gospel of John speaks of a συνέδριον (Sanhedrin) only once (John 11.47)<sup>2</sup>, and there the term seems to refer to an ad hoc council, albeit gathered from among the elite and chaired by the high priest. The leading players in John’s account at this point are simply Pharisees and chief priests.

A συνέδριον was a ruling council, equivalent to a βουλή, or a senate. Cities such as Tiberias had their own ruling senates composed of the leading citizens (Josephus *Life* 64, 69, 169, 313, 381); such assemblies were distinguishable from the larger citizen assembly (*Life* 300). Municipal senates consisted of aristocrats the Romans called *decuriones*, and in the eastern Mediterranean “varied in size from thirty to five hundred members.” The Jerusalem Sanhedrin was in a sense the municipal aristocracy of Jerusalem; but just as the Roman senate wielded power far beyond Rome because of Rome’s power, Jerusalem’s Sanhedrin wielded some influence in national affairs, to the degree that Roman prefects and Herodian princes allowed.

The Sanhedrin may well have held seventy-one members, as tradition indicates; yet if it simply represented a body of ruling elders from the municipal aristocracy, this may have been simply an average figure. It is, in any case, doubtful that all members were expected to be present on all occasions (especially an emergency meeting on the night when people had eaten—or in John’s story world would the next evening eat—the Passover).<sup>3</sup> The Sanhedrin included the high priest, who according to tradition could break ties.<sup>4</sup> According to tradition, they met in the Chamber of Hewn Stone on the Temple Mount;<sup>5</sup> otherwise they met close to the Temple Mount (cf. Josephus *War* 5.144).<sup>6</sup> Our first-century sources, the NT and Josephus, include Sadducees and other groups in the Sanhedrin, under high-priestly control;

<sup>1</sup> Craig Keener, [The Gospel of John](#), Baker Academic, 2010, p 1067.

<sup>2</sup> This term shows up in the Greek text of the New Testament 22 times, and is translated as “council” in the King James Version. Sanhedrin comes from σύν “with,” and ἔδραϊος “a sitting.” Essentially this is a body that sits together and makes decisions.

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Brown, [Death of the Messiah](#), Yale University Press, 1998, p. 348–49, doubts that an exact list of seventy-one members existed in the first century, suggesting that it merely included elders from distinguished families alongside chief priests, representatives of whom were expected to appear.

<sup>4</sup> Ferguson, *Backgrounds*, 453.

<sup>5</sup> *T. Šeqal.* 3:27; *b. Yoma* 25a; *Gen. Rab.* 70:8; *Num. Rab.* 19:26; *Eccl. Rab.* 1:1, §1. A location near the temple is not surprising; at times other peoples’ leaders could use temples (the senate in Cicero *Fam.* 8.4.4).

<sup>6</sup> For bibliography on the Sanhedrin, see Safrai, “Self-Government,” 418 (the section on the Sanhedrin is pp. 379–400).

later rabbis portray the Sanhedrin as an assembly of rabbis.<sup>7</sup> The later portrayals should not surprise us; rabbinic portraits of the Sanhedrin include more striking anachronisms than this, depicting leaders of the Sanhedrin in biblical times.<sup>8</sup>

According to rabbinic (and probably Pharisaic) ideals, judges who proved themselves locally could be promoted to the Sanhedrin (t. Šeqal. 3:27), but in actuality the Sanhedrin in Jesus' day probably consisted largely of members of the Jerusalem aristocracy and wealthy landowners in the vicinity. Rulers could use sanhedrins, or assemblies, the way some politicians today use committees: to secure the end one wants without taking full responsibility for that decision. In Josephus, rulers such as Herod appointed the Sanhedrin members they wished and obtained the results they wished.<sup>9</sup> Before Herod came to power, the Jerusalem Sanhedrin exercised significant authority (Josephus *Ant.* 14.177). In Pilate's time, without Herod the Great's interference and with the Romans expecting local aristocracies to administer the business they could (cf. Josephus *War* 2.331, 405; *Ant.* 20.11), we should not be surprised that chief priests would convene a Sanhedrin (Josephus *Ant.* 20.200), especially since the priestly aristocracy constituted a large portion of it.<sup>10</sup> We should also not be surprised if the Sanhedrin sought to please Rome.<sup>11</sup>

Later tradition recounts that the full Sanhedrin normally met in their special meeting hall in the temple, the Chamber of Hewn Stone; writing in the first century, Josephus suggests that they met instead very close to the temple. In this case, many members of the Sanhedrin hold a secret night meeting without advance notice in the high priest's home, though they are investigating what they will claim is a capital offense. At least according to later Pharisaic legal ideals, such a meeting was illegal on all these counts: capital trials had to meet during the day, and only after a day had intervened might the court render a verdict. Only the worst criminals could be executed at festivals. Pharisaic rules forbade executions at feasts except for the most heinous crimes. But the priestly aristocracy would pay little attention to Pharisaic scruples, and they had to hurry before Jesus' popularity with the crowds forced his release or made him more of a hero. Given the short notice, possibly many members of the Sanhedrin not inclined to consent were not invited. Most ancient ethics prohibited such a sudden, nocturnal trial, but political necessity often trumped legal ethics.<sup>12</sup>

## False Witnesses

**Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; But found none: yea, though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At the last came**

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, *Maccabees*, 156.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., *b. Ber.* 3b; *Gen. Rab.* 74:15; *Exod. Rab.* 1:13; *Pesiq. Rab.* 11:3. Some of the "scribes" may have been Pharisees, but Pharisees were not dominant in the Sanhedrin (Raymond Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 350–52), despite Josephus's possible favoritism toward them (Josephus *Ant.* 18.15, 17; cf. *Life* 1, 12 and *Ant.* passim; Brown, *Death*, 353–56). Brown (p. 352) explains: "The Gospels attribute the Sanhedrin action against Jesus largely to the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes. Presumably some of these scribes would have been Pharisees, learned in traditions that applied the written Law often in a more lenient way. Nevertheless, if there were Pharisees among the Sanhedrin scribes, the Gospels do not stress that allegiance."

<sup>9</sup> See Sanders, *Figure*, 482–83; cf. Josephus *Ant.* 15.173; 20.216–218.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Sanders, *Figure*, 484–87; Josephus *War* 2.331, 336; *Ant.* 17.160, 164; 20.216–217; probably the municipal aristocracy in *Ant.* 14.91, 163, 167, 180; *Life* 62.

<sup>11</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Baker Academic, 2010, p. 1074–1075.

<sup>12</sup> Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Academic Background Commentary: New Testament*, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 117.

**two false witnesses, And said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days (Matt. 26.59-61).**

The virtuous Jewish tradition of diligent cross-examination of witnesses brings the false testimony into question. But once these witnesses had contradicted one another, they should have been declared false and the case against Jesus regarded as fabricated; under Jewish (and Roman) law, in a capital case, false witnesses were supposed to be put to death (see Deut 19:16-21; also the Dead Sea Scrolls). Even though Rome had not given the Sanhedrin jurisdiction to execute false witnesses, the Sanhedrin should have at least disciplined them; that the case continues uninterrupted demonstrates severe bias among the council members gathered there.<sup>13</sup>

**“I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God!” (Matt. 26.63)**

The high priest tries to compel Jesus to speak by appealing to the divine name; thus the phrase “adjure” (KJV, NASB, RSV), “charge under oath” (NIV; cf. NRSV; cf. also 1 Sam 14:24; 1 Kings 22:16). False oaths in God’s name were forbidden in the Old Testament as “taking his name in vain.” From the Jerusalem aristocrats’ standpoint, a false messiah was a threat to peace with Rome, which allowed no kings except Caesar and his approved vassals.<sup>14</sup>

**You will see the Son of Man... coming in the clouds of heaven! (Matt. 26.64).**

Jesus said to *Caiaphas*, *You said so!* *Moreover* I say to you, you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, even coming in the clouds of heaven! (Matt. 26.64, my translation) Gr: λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς *Σὺ εἶπας· πλὴν* λέγω ὑμῖν ἀπ’ ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

“You say so” may indicate that this is their choice of wording and not his. Jesus’ statement here is a claim to be not only a mortal messiah but the cosmic ruler of Daniel 7.13-14, the embodiment of Israel’s call, the one who would come in glory and reign forever; the phrase “from now on” is especially offensive, because he thereby claims this role in the present, which would imply that he is their judge rather than they being his judges. “Power” was one Jewish title for God.<sup>15</sup>

Sigmund Mowinckel’s monumental examination of the Son of Man<sup>16</sup> in Jewish writings brings to light the expectations that Jews in Jesus’ day had for the Son of Man<sup>17</sup>:

1. The Son of Man is a man, meaning he is mortal. He is also called “The Son of God.”<sup>18</sup>
2. The Son of Man was subordinate to God. He was created, his name was named, meaning he had a pre-existence and was known to come and change the world long before he would be born.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>16</sup> Mowinckel, *He That Cometh: The Messiah Concept in the Old Testament and Later Judaism*, Eerdmans, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, pages 346-450.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 369-370.

<sup>19</sup> “He is a divine, heavenly, pre-existent being, who came into existence before all creation, the ‘son’ of the supreme god, or identified with one of the high gods. He has divine qualities and characteristics, and is endued with the divine radiance or glory.” Mowinckel, p. 427.

3. The Son of Man is God's anointed.
4. He was called "Son of the Most High God."<sup>20</sup>
5. He has authority over the ordering of the cosmos, all created order.
6. He knows the secrets of wisdom, because God has given him revelatory experiences related to light, knowledge and divine wisdom.<sup>21</sup>
7. The Son of Man has divine glory, or the power of God.
8. God has clothed the Son of Man in glory and honor.<sup>22</sup>
9. The Son of Man is directly connected to the resurrection.<sup>23</sup>
10. He will be instrumental in establishing God's plan for a perfected world in the end times.<sup>24</sup>
11. The Son of Man will judge all things<sup>25</sup> and no one will be able to lie to him.
12. The Son of Man will sit on the throne of Glory with God.<sup>26</sup>

### **The High Priest rent his clothes... "He has spoken blasphemy!" (Matt. 26.65)**

"Thus one of the greatest ironies in history occurred, for Jesus, the divine Son of God, the one person who could not have been guilty of falsely assuming the power of God, was found guilty of blasphemy! Also, the only person since the fall of Adam who had power over physical death was condemned to die!"<sup>27</sup>

Caiaphas tore his clothes when he heard Jesus answer. Likely, from the high priest's perspective, this was the hoped-for self-incrimination. The tearing of one's clothing anciently was done to convey shock, outrage, or grief—and to signify the death of a member of one's family or community (Genesis 37:34; Numbers 14:6; 2 Samuel 1:11). Perhaps Caiaphas did it to register his outrage dramatically, pretended though it was, and to signal Jesus' death as a foregone conclusion. **Yet, the high priest was not supposed to tear his clothes, according to divine rules for priestly behavior** (Leviticus 21.10).<sup>28</sup> He was now the one who was actually guilty of breaking the laws of God—not Jesus—but he and his associates had the pretext they needed to move forward with their premeditated plan of murder. With only a few more words, Caiaphas forestalled any verdict other than guilty: "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? . . . What think ye?" (Matthew 26:65–66). To Caiaphas's carefully orchestrated manipulations, the entire council responded, "He is guilty of death" (v. 66).<sup>29</sup>

### **What think ye? They answered and said, "He is guilty of death!" (Matt. 26.66)**

These final irregularities encapsulate the entire proceedings. The members of the Sanhedrin, judges of Israel, were supposed to vote on the verdict one by one, yet they spoke in unison. More important, **a unanimous verdict of guilt pronounced on the same day as the trial constituted an automatic acquittal**

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<sup>20</sup> Mowinckel, p. 429.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 429.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 430.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>27</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, "The Greatest Week in History," *Ensign*, Apr. 1972.

<sup>28</sup> And he that is **the high priest** among his brethren, upon whose head the anointing oil was poured, and that is consecrated to put on the garments, shall not uncover his head, **nor rend his clothes** (Lev. 21.10).

<sup>29</sup> Skinner, "Arraignment before the High Priests," *Golgotha*, "Betrayal and Arrest." Deseret Book, 2004.

**and the defendant was supposed to be set free** (Mishna Sanhedrin 4.1). **Why? Because such proceedings, according to ancient rabbinic law, smacked of collusion.** "If you're tried and everybody in the room is against you, then there must be a conspiracy, because that many people can't all agree on one thing" (Kofford, "Trial of Christ," 15). ***Ironically, the very thing Jewish law was structured to prevent—conspiracy—was the very thing that made the law of no effect in the case of Jesus of Nazareth.***

Having accomplished their unwavering goal of convicting Jesus, the council took advantage of the opportunity to vent their anger openly against him whom they regarded as their arch-enemy: the sinless Son of God. Matthew reports that they spat in His face, buffeted (battered) Him, and slapped Him with open palms. Mark and Luke add that they blindfolded Him and then struck Him. This is implied in Matthew's account as well because each of the three Synoptic Gospels indicate that as the members of the council struck Jesus, they also taunted him by commanding him to "prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" (Matthew 26.68). It is not hard to see the sarcasm dripping from the phrase "thou Christ" ...

Jesus bore his tribulation with patience. He suffered his indignity with dignity. He endured scorn and physical abuse by himself. No one was with him. No man defended him. No one spoke on his behalf. No one protected him. He trod the winepress alone. He was rejected of men, truly "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). ***There is nothing anyone can tell him about loneliness or the unfairness of life. He is able to have perfect empathy for each one of us because he experienced all things, even descended below all things.*** Though condemned to death by evil conspirators and premeditating murderers under the most unfair circumstances, the Holy One of Israel willingly surrendered himself in an attitude of perfect meekness. And still the bitter cup was not yet empty.<sup>30</sup>

## **2. Peter's denial of Jesus (Matt.26.69-75; Mark 14.66-72; Luke 22.55-62; John 18.17-18, 25-27).**

### **Location**

Andrew Skinner provides the following:

At the same time the tragic drama of the Savior's inquisition unfolded inside the palace of the high priest, another drama was being played out outside the palace. There the apostle Peter endured an inquisition of his own.

When the other disciples fled as Jesus was being arrested, Peter followed his Master and the arresting party "afar off unto the high priest's palace" (Matthew 26.58). This palace seems to have housed the residences of both Caiaphas and Annas, before whom Jesus was arraigned first. In keeping with his presentation of unique details, John adds that Peter "followed Jesus, and so did another disciple" who "was known unto the high priest." This disciple went into the palace with Jesus and eventually "spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter" (John 18.15–16). It is not known who this other disciple was, but some scholars have suggested it was John himself.

Given that Matthew and Mark clearly state that at some point Peter "sat without in the palace" (Matthew 26.69), or "Peter was beneath in the palace" (Mark 14.66), ***it is likely that Peter was first***

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<sup>30</sup> Skinner, "Arraignment before the High Priests," [Golgotha](#), "Betrayal and Arrest." Deseret Book, 2004.

**admitted to Jesus' arraignment before Annas and later sat out in the courtyard while his Master's next hearing, before Caiaphas, took place in another part of the palace complex.** This surmise accords well with the archaeological evidence of a courtyard set down the hill below the main palace complex.

The traditional, and probably accurate, location of the high priest's palace is high above the Hinnom Valley on the western hill of Jerusalem, then inside the city walls, and later known as Mount Zion. A fourth-century traveler to Jerusalem, nicknamed the Pilgrim of Bordeaux, said: "In the same valley of Siloam you go up to Mount Sion and you see the site where the house of Caiaphas stood" (St. Peter "in Gallicantu," 2). In the fifth century after Christ, a church was built on this site, and the Crusaders later named it *Gallicantus*, "the cock-crow."<sup>31</sup> ***In modern times, a dungeon, scourging room, courtyard, artifacts, and a Hebrew inscription have been unearthed on the site that are consistent with expectations associated with the residence and judicial functions of the high priest.***<sup>32</sup>

Elder Talmage gives the following:

The Lord's reference to His impending separation from them troubled the brethren. Peter put the question, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus answered: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake." Peter seems to have realized that his Master was going to His death; yet, undeterred, he asserted his readiness to follow even that dark way rather than be separated from his Lord. We cannot doubt the earnestness of Peter's purpose nor the sincerity of his desire at that moment. In his bold avowal, however, he had reckoned with the willingness of his spirit only, and had failed to take into full account the weakness of his flesh. Jesus, who knew Peter better than the man knew himself, thus tenderly reproveth his excess of self-confidence: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." The first of the apostles, the Man of Rock, yet had to be converted, or as more precisely rendered, "turned again" for as the Lord foresaw, Peter would soon be overcome, even to the extent of denying his acquaintanceship with Christ. When Peter stoutly declared again his readiness to go with Jesus, even into prison or to death, the Lord silenced him with the remark: "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."

The apostles had to be prepared to meet a new order of things, new conditions and new exigencies; persecution awaited them, and they were soon to be bereft of the Master's sustaining presence. Jesus asked of them: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end." The Lord was soon to be numbered among the transgressors, as had been foreseen, and His disciples would be regarded as the devotees of an executed criminal. In the mention of purse, scrip, shoes, and sword, some of the brethren caught at the literal meaning, and said, "Lord, behold, here are two swords." Jesus answered with curt finality, "It is enough," or as we might say,

<sup>31</sup> See: [Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu](#). Accessed 2.28.23.

<sup>32</sup> Skinner, "Peter's Denial," [Golgotha](#), "Betrayal and Arrest." Deseret Book, 2004.

"Enough of this." He had not intimated any immediate need of weapons, and most assuredly not for His own defense. Again they had failed to fathom His meaning; but experience would later teach them.<sup>33</sup>

### **Why did Peter do this?**

What gives us pause at this point is consideration of Peter's motivation for denying that he knew his Master. ***Why did he deny Him?*** The reasons usually given range from fear of personal harm, to weakness, to embarrassment, to pride, to indecision, or to some other flaw or weakness in Peter's character. Yet ***these reasons seem to contradict everything else we have read about the chief apostle*** in the New Testament, including his bold, unequivocal confession of the Savior's Sonship at Caesarea Philippi, when a diverse set of opinions regarding Jesus was floating about the land, and his single-minded resolve not to allow anyone to harm the Savior.

In every instance when the impending arrest or death of Jesus had come to Peter's attention, he had been both quick and forceful to say that he would not let such a thing happen (Matthew 16.21–23), and he would protect Jesus at all costs, even at the peril of his own life, which is what happened in Gethsemane when the armed forces of the chief priests could not intimidate a chief apostle who was ready to do battle with all of them (John 18.7–12). Now we are to believe that in the face of a challenge initially put forward by a slave girl, the most unimportant person imaginable in Jewish society, Peter denied even knowing Jesus for fear of being exposed as a follower? (The word *damse*<sup>34</sup> used in Matthew 26.69 does not convey the lowly position of Peter's first interrogator, but the footnote to that verse in the LDS edition of the Bible approaches it.)

### **President Kimball's Thoughts on the Matter**

Years ago President Spencer W. Kimball invited us to reevaluate our understanding of Peter's actions in a magnificent address entitled Peter, My Brother. Speaking of his model and mentor, this modern-day apostle asked penetrating questions: Do we really know Peter's mind and heart? Are we sure of his motives? Do we understand the circumstances of Peter's denial as well as we think we do? President Kimball began his discussion with this admission:

Some time ago a newspaper in a distant town carried an Easter Sunday religious editorial by a minister who stated that the presiding authority of the early-day church fell because of self-confidence, indecision, evil companions, failure to pray, lack of humility, and fear of man...

As I read this, I had some strange emotions. I was shocked, then I was chilled, then my blood changed its temperature and began to boil. I felt I was attacked viciously, for Peter was my brother, my colleague, my example, my prophet, and God's anointed. I whispered to myself, "That is not true. He is maligning my brother."<sup>35</sup>

President Kimball discussed the tremendous strength, power, faithfulness, and other apostolic attributes of Peter, including his boldness. Then he said:

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<sup>33</sup> Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 288-289.

<sup>34</sup> The Greek word here is παιδίσκη *paidiske*, meaning a little girl.

<sup>35</sup> Kimball, Peter, My Brother, 488. See: [Peter, My Brother](#).



Much of the criticism of Simon Peter is centered in his denial of his acquaintance with the Master. This has been labeled "cowardice." Are we sure of his motive in that recorded denial? He had already given up his occupation and placed all worldly goods on the altar for the cause...

Is it conceivable that the omniscient Lord would give all these powers and keys to one who was a failure or unworthy?...

If Peter was frightened in the court when he denied his association with the Lord, how brave he was hours earlier when he drew his sword against an overpowering enemy, the night mob. Later defying the people and state and church officials, he boldly charged, "Him [the Christ] . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." (Acts 2:23.) To the astounded populace at the healing of the cripple at the Gate Beautiful, he exclaimed, "Ye men of Israel . . . the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate. . . . ye denied the Holy One. . . . And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses." (Acts 3:12–15.)

Does this portray cowardice? Quite a bold assertion for a timid one. Remember that Peter never denied the divinity of Christ. He only denied his association or acquaintance with the Christ, which is quite a different matter...

Is it possible that there might have been some other reason for Peter's triple denial? Could he have felt that circumstances justified expediency? When he bore a strong testimony in Caesarea Philippi, he had been told that "they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ." (Matthew 16:20.)<sup>36</sup>

***To what, then, might we attribute Peter's denial? Perhaps it could be attributed to Jesus himself—to a request or command he made that Peter should deny knowing him, not to deny his divinity but to deny knowing him as the religious rebel the Jewish leaders saw him to be. Why? To ensure Peter's safety as chief apostle and to ensure the continuity and safety of the Quorum of the Twelve.***

Some may object that God would never command any of his children to do such a thing, but we do not know all that God knows, nor do we know all that went on in this situation. Moreover, we find interesting contradictions, or seeming contradictions, in other scriptural passages that put this episode in a different light. For example, God commanded Abraham that his wife, Sarah, should tell the Egyptians that she was Abraham's sister so that he would be protected, just as Jesus wanted the apostles protected (Abraham 2:23–25). We also remember Deity commanding Nephi to slay Laban in order to keep a whole nation safe spiritually and to bring forth God's righteous purposes (1 Nephi 4:13). The Prophet Joseph Smith taught:

But we cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, and we cannot expect to know all, or more than we now know unless we comply with or keep those we have already received. That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another.

God said, "Thou shalt not kill;" at another time He said, "Thou shalt utterly destroy." This is the principle on which the government of heaven is conducted—by revelation adapted to the circumstances in which the children of the kingdom are placed. Whatever God requires is right, no matter what it is, although we may not see the reason thereof till long after the events transpire. If we seek first the kingdom of

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<sup>36</sup> Kimball, Peter, My Brother, 488–89. See: [Peter, My Brother](#).

God, all good things will be added. So with Solomon: first he asked wisdom, and God gave it him, and with it every desire of his heart, even things which might be considered abominable to all who understand the order of heaven only in part, but which in reality were right because God gave and sanctioned by special revelation.<sup>37</sup>

Remember, by the time of his arrest, Jesus was protective of his apostles, and the safety of the Quorum had become a major concern for him. As we have indicated, in his great high priestly prayer, the Savior prayed for the safety of the apostles. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). When he was arrested in the garden, he said to the mob, "I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way" (John 18:8). Jesus did not want anything to happen to those who were ordained to take over the earthly leadership of the Church. He had already averted wholesale slaughter in Gethsemane when first, in the upper room, he restricted to two the number of swords carried by the apostles (Luke 22:38). Later, while being arrested, he told Peter to put away his sword, "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). It will be remembered that some of the apostles asked, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" (Luke 22:49) while Peter went ahead and lopped off Malchus's ear without waiting for an answer.

Jesus had told Peter at the Last Supper that He had prayed that Peter's faith would not fail—and it did not. As President Kimball stated: "Peter was under fire; all the hosts of hell were against him. The die had been cast for the Savior's crucifixion. If Satan could destroy Simon now, what a victory he would score. Here was the greatest of all living men. Lucifer wanted to confuse him, frustrate him, limit his prestige, and totally destroy him. However, this was not to be, for he was chosen and ordained to a high purpose in heaven, as was Abraham"<sup>38</sup>

Matthew tells us that Peter went to the high priest's palace "to see the end" (Matthew 26:58). The implication is that Peter went as a witness of the last events associated with the life of the mortal Messiah. Had Peter been inclined to cowardice, it seems likely he would not have gone to the palace and put himself in harm's way. How grateful we are to have had Peter there as an eyewitness of that part of the atoning sacrifice.

In sum, it is apparent that Jesus knew of Peter's fearlessness in defending him. He had seen several manifestations of Peter's unswerving, almost reckless, commitment to prevent any physical harm to the Savior. And this was something Jesus knew could get Peter into trouble if it were not tempered. It would put the chief apostle in grave physical danger. Therefore, **it is possible that when Jesus told Peter he would deny him thrice before the cock crowed twice, it was not a prediction—it was a command.** This is, in fact, a possible reading of the Synoptic texts, according to the grammatical rules of Koine Greek, which is the language in which early manuscripts of the New Testament were written. In their accounts of this episode, Matthew (26:34, 75), Mark (14:30, 72), and Luke (22:34, 61) all use the same verb and verb form, ἀπαρνῆση *aparnese*, which can be read either as an indicative future tense or as an imperative (command) tense. One Latter-day Saint scholar of classical languages arrived at the following conclusion:

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<sup>37</sup> *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 256.

<sup>38</sup> Peter, My Brother, 488–89; emphasis added.

When the Lord had informed the eleven who remained with Him to finish the Last Supper that they would soon be scattered, Peter protested that he would never abandon the Savior, but sooner go to his death. Tradition portrays Christ as then prophesying of the three-time denial of Peter to come that very night (Matthew 26:31–35; Mark 14:27–31; Luke 22:31–34; John 13:36–38). However, close examination of the original Greek of John's account (John 13:38) reveals that the phrase "till thou hast denied me thrice" is structured around the verb ἀπαρνῆση, a second person singular future indicative verb form. Virtually the same verb ἀπαρνῆση, in the same second person singular future indicative form, appears in Matthew (26:34), Mark (14:30), and Luke (22:34). Although the tense is future, and may accurately be construed as indicating a prediction or prophecy of Peter's future behavior, it is possible that such a rendering is not at all the meaning of Christ's statement. ***In Greek, a future tense verb in the second person can also be construed to express a command, just as if it were an imperative form of the verb.***<sup>39</sup> This usage is given the grammatical term of the "jussive future." It occurs not infrequently in both classical and koine Greek. Accordingly, if the future in these passages is interpreted as a jussive future, then Christ would seem actually to be giving Peter a command to deny knowing Him, and Peter's protestation would seem to reflect his dissatisfaction about such an instruction. This rendering appears very much in keeping with Peter's natural courage. Restraint would test Peter's faith so much more, for he was being refused permission to expose himself to the tribulations that Christ must undertake alone...<sup>40</sup>

When Christ was taken, instead of acting impulsively, Peter did demonstrate great restraint both in not trying to interfere in the process of Jesus' death and in protecting himself that he might live to fulfill his mission. How he must have wanted to wield his sword and free the Savior! How he must have desired to proclaim Jesus as the Christ to those assembled in the courtyard! Although Peter never denied the divinity of Christ, ***he must have been in tremendous turmoil not to be able to admit to his friendship with Jesus, and could even have felt as if this practically constituted a denial of his friend.*** Each time Peter was questioned as to his association with Jesus and compelled to deny it, seemingly contradicting his own pledge of loyalty unto death, what faith was put into the charge Christ had given him for the future! ***Peter was neither impetuous, nor did he lack faith. Quite the opposite.*** The man who had fearlessly struck with his sword at Gethsemane, was the same man who evidenced fearless and faithful restraint in the courtyard of the high priest. John's telling of the account shows Peter's faith, not his fear.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Wallace talks extensively about the the imperative force of some futures; see *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Zondervan, 1997. Here is an example: Οὐ μοιχεύσεις, Οὐ κλέψεις, Οὐ ψευδομαρτυρήσεις "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness." See also: [Future Indicative: The Imperative Future, New Testament Greek](#), accessed 2.28.23.

<sup>40</sup> This concept, as taught by Hall, as I see it, undo some of what I assert in the podcast where I speak of Christ telling his followers that they will be perfect (Matt. 5:48, see [episode 190](#)). However, the statement "Ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι" can be translated as "Therefore, you will be perfect" or "So you shall be perfect" and is not necessarily a command. In Koine Greek, the future tense verb "Ἔσεσθε" (esesthe) can be used to express a future action or a statement of fact rather than a command. However, the context in which this statement is used could imply a command or a strong suggestion to strive for perfection. For example, if the statement is part of a set of instructions or advice, then it could be interpreted as a command or a strong suggestion. Ultimately, the interpretation would depend on the context in which the statement is used. Because of this, and because of how I see the Savior's invitations in Matt. 5, I see this future indicative as just that, a future and not an imperative. But obviously not everyone translates it this way.

<sup>41</sup> John F. Hall, *New Testament Witnesses of Christ*, Covenant Communications, 2002, p. 65-66, emphasis added.

### 3. The soldiers mock Jesus (Luke 22.63-65).

And the men that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face, and asked him, saying, Prophecy, who is it that smote thee? And many other things blasphemously spake they against him (Luke 22.64-65).

#### Great Power, Great Restraint

"He showed condescension in his patience and restraint when brought before men for judgment.... Imagine the Being whose power, whose light, whose glory holds the universe in order, the Being who speaks and solar systems, galaxies, and stars come into existence-standing before wicked men and being judged by them as being of no worth or value! When we think of what he could have done to these men who took him to judgment, we have a new and different sense of his condescension. When Judas led the soldiers and the high priests to the Garden of Gethsemane and betrayed him with a kiss, Jesus could have spoken a single word and leveled the entire city of Jerusalem. When the servant of the high priest stepped forward and slapped his face, Jesus could have lifted a finger and sent that man back to his original elements. When another man stepped forward and spit in his face, Jesus had only to blink and our entire solar system could have been annihilated. But he stood there, he endured, he suffered, he condescended."<sup>42</sup>

#### The Battle Against the Forces of Chaos

Luke 22.63-65 describes the mocking of Jesus by the temple guards after his arrest, where they blindfolded him, beat him, and challenged him to prophecy who had hit him. There is no explicit connection between this event and the Akitu festival in antiquity, but some scholars have drawn parallels between the two.

The Akitu festival was a major New Year celebration in ancient Mesopotamia, specifically in Babylon. It involved the reenactment of the creation myth, where the god Marduk defeated the chaos monster Tiamat and created the world.<sup>43</sup> During the festival, a mock battle would be staged between the forces of chaos and order, with the victory of order symbolizing the renewal of the world for another year. As the king would have to be humiliated as part of the drama, his accoutrements of kingship were removed, and he would have to make the following negative confession:

[I did not s]in, Lord of the Lands. I was not neglectful of your divinity. [I did not des]troy Babylon, I have not commanded its dispersal, I did not make Esagil tremble, I did not treat its rites with contempt, I did not strike the cheek of the kidinnu-citizens, I did not humiliate them, I did [not]... to Babylon, I did not destroy its outer walls ...

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<sup>42</sup> Gerald Lund, *Latter-day Commentary on the Book of Mormon* compiled by K. Douglas Bassett, p.37.

<sup>43</sup> One of the primary purposes of the festival was the (bi-)annual renewal of the king's mandate, and this aspect of the festival is a feature of day 5. On this day the king was led into the temple of Marduk in Babylon where he underwent a "ritual humiliation." This was a private ritual involving only the king, the high priest and the cult statue of Marduk. It involved the high priest leading the king into the temple of Marduk, temporarily removing the king's insignia (scepter, loop, mace and Crown of Kingship), striking the king's cheek, leading him into the cella in front of Marduk, pulling the king by the ears, and making him kneel on the ground. At this point the king uttered a protestation of his innocence to Marduk, asserting that he has not committed an offense against Marduk, Babylon, the Esagil (Marduk's temple in Babylon), or the privileged subjects (kidinnu-citizens) of Babylon:

After his confession, the priest slaps the face of the king, an act that is meant to cause the king to weep. If the king begins to weep, then the god Marduk is content. “If tears do not flow, Marduk is angry; an enemy will arise and bring about his downfall.”

This ritual is an example of status reversal. The king’s temporary loss of his status is demonstrated to Marduk by the removal of his insignia, the act of prostration, and the striking of his cheek by the high priest. Such acts of prostration and temporary loss of status are also a feature of the *akitu* festival in Autumn, when the king spends the night in a reed “prison” structure outside the city.<sup>44</sup>

Some scholars have suggested that the mocking of Jesus by the temple guards could be seen as a form of mock battle or ritual drama, similar to the Akitu festival. In this interpretation, the guards represent the forces of chaos, while Jesus represents the forces of order. The blindfolding, beating, and challenge to prophecy could be seen as a ritualized contest between the two opposing forces.

While this interpretation is not widely accepted among scholars, I see a clear connection here. I realize that not everyone does, but the more I pull on the threads of ancient temple ritual of many cultures in the Ancient Near East, the more connections I see. I also understand and acknowledge that the mocking of Jesus is more commonly understood as a form of humiliation and abuse, rather than a symbolic ritual. While there may be some superficial similarities between the two events, the context, symbolism, and meaning are fundamentally different, but that does not mean that the author of Luke did not see a connection. Perhaps this is here simply because it was a common form of abuse, but I also acknowledge the possibility that these ancient temple rituals were rooted in prophecy, and that perhaps they are also all connected, as truth has found ways to be manifest in all cultures and myths throughout all time.

#### **4. The hearing before Caiaphas (Matt. 27.1; Mark 15.1; Luke 22.66-71; John 18.24, 28).**

When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death (Matt. 27.1).

To provide legality, the leaders have a brief, early morning “official” hearing to ratify the night’s decision; ***only daylight hearings were legal***. Presumably this meeting was in the Sanhedrin’s regular meeting place near the temple. Jerusalem’s authorities have to bring Jesus to Pilate, because they were not authorized by the Romans to execute the death penalty themselves. Pilate would be available as early as sunrise; like other Roman officials, he would finish his regular public day before noon.<sup>45</sup>

#### **5. The hearing before Pilate (Matt. 27.2, 11-14; Mark 15.1-5; Luke 23.1-6; John 18.28-38).**

And straightway in the morning the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council, and bound Jesus, and carried him away, and delivered him to Pilate. And Pilate asked him, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answering said unto him, Thou sayest it. And the chief priests accused him of many things: but he answered nothing. And Pilate asked him again, saying, Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled (Mark 15.1-5).

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<sup>44</sup> Sam Mirelman, “[The Babylonian Akitu Festival and the Ritual Humiliation of the King](#),” ASOR, 9/2022, accessed 3.5.23.

<sup>45</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, p. 118-119.

### The Jewish Approach to Remove Jesus

Claiming to be the Jewish king, the Messiah, would lead to a charge of sedition and treason against the emperor, especially under the paranoid emperor Tiberius. The only offense for which the Jewish leaders could automatically execute any transgressor was profanation of the temple; to them, Jesus' act in the temple might appear to have at least approached that, **but the leaders know that his claim to messiahship would threaten Pilate more**. Pilate had not been particularly cooperative with these leaders in the past, and they need to have a strong case for him now.<sup>46</sup>

### The Issue with the Praetorium and Uncleaness

**Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover (John 18.28).**

When the priestly leaders bring Jesus before Pilate, John declares that they avoided entering the "praetorium" lest they be defiled (18:28). Some earlier commentators identified the praetorium with the Fortress Antonia, adjoining the temple courts, where a Roman garrison remained on the Temple Mount year-round. Some earlier and most current commentators, however, prefer the old palace of Herod the Great. This palace is somewhat farther from the temple but remained in the wealthy upper city not far from the temple; its lavishness suited it as a temporary residence for the governor (who would undoubtedly take the best quarters available), and it better fits the direct ancient sources concerning where the governor stayed when in Jerusalem. Provincial governors generally chose "for their official residence the home of the former native ruler," and Herod's old palace at Caesarea Maritima was also the Roman governor's residence there.

Houses of non-Jews were ritually impure; by entering this residence, scrupulous Jews could contract Gentile impurity and hence prove unable to participate fully in the Passover (Num9:6). Such sensitivities would not have been unusual for the priestly aristocracy, most of whom had *mikvaot* in their own homes; John Hyrcanus had earlier wanted to avoid Herod bringing non-Jews among the people during the purification before a festival (Josephus *War* 1.229). Roman officials generally sought to accommodate Jewish religious sensitivities; though Pilate initially proved unsympathetic toward their customs (Josephus *Ant.* 18.55), here he is now more inclined to work with the aristocracy (perhaps due to their past threats) and hence comes out to them. John's point, however, is hardly Pilate's generosity; it is the hypocrisy of the Judean elite, who, after they have spent the night ignoring legal ethics to secure the quick execution of an innocent man, now are concerned with ritual purity. Such ritual purity was not high on John's list of virtues (John 2:6–10). This blatant contrast between scrupulous observance of ritual purity and ignoring the law's ethical demands epitomizes Johannine irony, though not unique to the Fourth Gospel. **They wanted to "eat the Passover" but did not understand that, in having Jesus killed, they were slaying the new Passover lamb to be consumed** (cf. 2:17; 6:51; 19:31).<sup>47</sup>

### Jesus and Pilate

<sup>46</sup> Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, p. 171.

<sup>47</sup> Keener, *Gospel of John*, p. 1099-1100, emphasis added.

The Romans usually allowed internal religious matters to be handled by Jewish courts,<sup>48</sup> hence Pilate's reticence to accept the case at first (John 18:31a)... The narrative portrays those who brought the charge as quite insistent that Jesus be executed, and this behavior is hardly surprising given the situation portrayed. **What is instead striking is Pilate's reticence to pronounce sentence**; if no Roman citizens were involved, one would expect most governors to act quickly at the local aristocracy's request.<sup>49</sup> **The Gospels show that Pilate did indeed act relatively quickly, but they also report his reluctance to do so.** Thus some scholars question whether the Pilate of the Gospels is "in character" with the Pilate known to us from other sources.<sup>50</sup> **Pilate executed people without trial; excessive use of capital punishment ultimately cost him his office** (Philo Embassy 302; Josephus *Ant.* 18.88–89).<sup>51</sup> His earlier plundering of the temple treasury to support an aqueduct<sup>52</sup> and particularly his recent issue of coins bearing an insignia of the divine emperor blatantly demonstrated his insensitivity to local Jewish concerns. (Pilate was an ethnocentric colonialist governor, but both the republic and the empire reveal even harsher cases of provincial exploitation and maladministration.)<sup>53</sup> From what Philo and especially Josephus show us of Pilate's character, any reticence to accept the local leaders' recommendation would be more out of spite for them than out of concern for justice.<sup>54</sup>

Yet this reticence need not be unhistorical. As corrupt as the later governor Albinus was, he dismissed Jesus ben Hananiah from further punishment (after a scourging reportedly bared his bones) once he took him to be insane and hence harmless (Josephus *War* 6.305)... Still, the narratives go to great lengths to emphasize that Pilate cooperated with Jesus' execution against his own preference, and this emphasis is understandable for apologetic reasons. Minority sects often validate themselves through reports of praises by those respected among their oppressors; those writing in socially delicate situations also must show proper deference to officials. Thus, for example, **Josephus repeatedly excuses Roman rulers' motives**; for instance, Titus wished to spare the temple, but some soldiers failed to cooperate (*War* 6.254, 258, 260–266), or Titus allowed his soldiers to torture Jews only for good reason (*War* 5.449–451). *The Letter of Aristean* likewise defends the Ptolemaic ruler's motives against the Jews (*Let. Aris.* 14), and Josephus claims that Ptolemy Philadelphus praised the Jewish law (*Ag. Ap.* 2.45–47). In the same manner, early Christians commending themselves to an audience in the broader Roman world might wish to exonerate the Roman prefect<sup>55</sup> or even cite in their own defense Roman officials' reticence to condemn them (e.g., Acts 13:12; 18:14–15). John probably writes for a largely Jewish Christian rather

<sup>48</sup> See Josephus *Ant.* 14.235, 260–261; cf. Josephus *Ag. Ap.* 2.73; Acts 18:13–15; Judge, *Pattern*, 68.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Harvey, *History*, 17; Sanders, *Figure*, 274; for an impoverished provincial condemned to death without trial, cf., e.g., Apuleius *Metam.* 9.42.

<sup>50</sup> Winter, *Trial*, 54–55, 60; Borg, *Vision*, 179.

<sup>51</sup> E.P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus*, Penguin Books, 1996, p. 274. On governors being tried for abusing power, especially executing innocent people (particularly Roman citizens), see Pliny *Ep.* 2.11, in Jones, *History*, 192–95.

<sup>52</sup> Others viewed this act as misappropriation of funds (Josephus *War* 2.175–176; cf. *Ant.* 18.60; *The Suda*, Korbanas, in Sherk, *Empire*, 75); Pilate, however, probably assumed that he followed safe Roman precedent: Augustus and others paid for workmen on aqueducts from public and imperial treasuries (Frontinus *De aquis* 2.89–101, 116–118, in Jones, *History*, 207), and the use of public money would have been expected (Josephus *Life* 199) had it not been from the temple treasury.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., Cicero *Verr.* 1.1.2; 1.4.12; 2.3.22.55; 2.3.28.69; *Sest.* 25.55; many Judean governors as presented by Josephus, e.g., *Ant.* 20.106–117, 162–163, 215, 253–257; *War* 2.223–245, 272–279.

<sup>54</sup> Craig Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 1105, emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, Fortress Press, 1985, 298; Cohn, *Trial*, 326–27.

than Gentile audience and probably depends on early Palestinian Jewish tradition; nevertheless he has ample reason to focus on the guilt of those of his own people who betray his Jewish Christian colleagues to the Romans, rather than on the Roman officials who execute sentences.<sup>56</sup>

#### 6. Judas' remorse and his death (Matt. 27.3-10).

Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What *is that* to us? see thou to *that*. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me (Matt 27.3-10).

Jerome makes this statement about Judas:

Judas took the name "Iscaiot," either from the village in which he was raised, or from the tribe of Issachar so that he was born with a kind of prophecy of his own condemnation. For Issachar translates as "wages," that the betrayer's wages might be signified.<sup>57</sup>

Craig Keener adds this:

Judas's suicide is an act of despair (cf. Saul—1 Sam 31:4; the traitor Ahithophel— 2 Sam 17:23). Roman tradition considered suicide a nobler way to die than letting others kill one. To some Jewish people it was likewise noble if it was performed to avoid falling into the hands of torturers or to avoid being defiled (e.g., in Josephus and in 4 Maccabees, possibly under Greek influence). But Judaism, especially strict Palestinian Judaism, normally regarded it as evil. (Ancient readers would thus view Judas's act in a more negative light than they would view that of the jailer in Acts 16:27.) Hanging was often viewed as a dishonorable form of suicide.

According to ancient thought, if Judas had hanged himself in the sanctuary he would have defiled it (though he may have just "gone away" to locate a more convenient place). Flinging the money in the temple alludes to Zechariah 11:13.<sup>58</sup>

R.T. France writes:

Clearly there was a tradition linking Judas (and his death) with the field called Akeldama, but the link was differently explained, and there seems to be no way of deciding which of the two versions (if either) is the more factual. Attempts to interpret them as literally compatible (involving a suicide attempt complicated by the breaking of the rope or the tree branch) do not inspire confidence, nor do they account for Matthew's involvement of the priests... As we have noted, Matthew's placing of this pericope

<sup>56</sup> Keener, *Gospel*, p. 1106.

<sup>57</sup> [The Fathers of the Church: St. Jerome Commentary on Matthew](#), translated by Thomas P. Scheck, The Catholic University of America Press, 2008, p. 116. see also: Cf. Mt 26.15. See Homily 35 on Ps 108 (109) in FOTC 48, 260

<sup>58</sup> Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#), IVP Academic, 2014, p. 119.



invites the reader to compare Judas with Peter, and to reflect why the one story ends in despair and suicide and the other eventually in the full rehabilitation of the future leader of the church. In both stories there is failure, followed by regret. Peter's bitter weeping does not in itself sound more heartfelt than Judas's "regret," followed by his confession of guilt ("I have done wrong"), his acceptance that he is responsible for the death of the innocent, and his restitution of the proceeds of his treachery. But all this is, it seems, "the worldly sorrow that leads to death" rather than "the godly sorrow which leads to repentance for salvation" (2 Cor 7:10).<sup>59</sup>

### Motivations

The complex motivations behind Judas Iscariot's actions and subsequent suicide have been the subject of intense scholarly debate for centuries. It is possible that Judas's betrayal of Jesus was motivated by his desire for Jesus to initiate his celestial kingdom on earth, rather than a desire to see Jesus killed at the hands of the Roman government. In essence, Judas believed that Jesus possessed the power to overthrow the Romans and establish his divine kingdom on earth, but felt that Jesus was not taking the necessary steps to achieve this goal.<sup>60</sup> When Jesus was arrested and sentenced to death, Judas was devastated by the realization that his actions had led to this outcome. This sense of guilt and remorse was likely a significant factor in his decision to take his own life, as he could not bear the weight of his perceived responsibility for Jesus's death.

καὶ ῥίψας τὰ ἀργύρια ἐν τῷ ναῷ ἀνεχώρησεν καὶ ἀπελθὼν ἀπήγγατο (Matt. 27.5 Greek) "And he cast the silver in the innermost shrine of the temple, withdrew and departing, he hung himself" (my translation).

The Greek word here used (*naos*) is that used to denote the Holy of Holies, the innermost shrine of the temple—pagan temples as well as the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>61</sup>

**"the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood" (Matt. 27.6).**

"They had no qualms about bribing a man to betray his master. They had no qualms about an illegal conspiracy to kill the Savior. But when they received money they viewed as spiritually tainted, they were horrified at the thought of putting it into the temple treasury, because it was blood money."<sup>62</sup>

**"Jeremiah the prophet" (Matt. 27.9).**

The quotation is from Zechariah (x 12-13). The Greek is not that of the LXX, and is a loose translation. We are in no position to determine whether the evangelist's original had Zechariah or Jeremiah. If Allen's suggestion (in his *St. Matthew commentary*, p. 288) is correct, then the confusion may have been

<sup>59</sup> R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Eerdmans, 2007, p. 903-904.

<sup>60</sup> R.T. France opens up this possibility when he writes, "The suggestion that Judas had been trying to arrange a constructive meeting and never intended Jesus to be executed... more likely the actual occurrence of what he had willingly set in motion has at last brought home to him the enormity of what he has done. It is possible that he has heard from his priestly contacts about Jesus' behavior and declaration before the Sanhedrin, and that that has at last convinced him of Jesus' truly messianic character." France, p. 904.

<sup>61</sup> W.F. Albright, *Anchor Bible: Matthew*, Doubleday and Co., 1986, p. 341.

<sup>62</sup> Gerald N. Lund, *Selected Writings of Gerald N. Lund: Gospel Scholars Series*, 175.

introduced by the recollection that Jeremiah purchased a field and also visited a potter (Jer xviii 2fi. and xxxii 6—15).<sup>63</sup>

### **7. The hearing before Herod (Luke 23.7-12).**

The visit to Pilate would be early in the morning (Luke 23.1), because Roman officials met the public only from sunrise to before noon.<sup>64</sup>

#### **Pilate works to avoid making a decision**

**Pilate ... asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time (Luke 23.6-7).**

Pilate apparently understands Jesus' claim in a religious or philosophic rather than a political sense and therefore does not feel that it comes under Roman civil jurisdiction. Further, Pilate's relationship with the priestly aristocracy is known to have been strained.<sup>65</sup>

Herod Antipas would be in Jerusalem for the feast and was probably staying at the old Hasmonean (Maccabean) palace. Pilate had the authority to try Jesus if he had committed a crime in Pilate's area of jurisdiction; but sometimes the right of extradition was allowed, and Antipas might thus be free to try Jesus for a crime committed in Galilee. By refusing jurisdiction, Pilate could take the matter off his own hands.<sup>66</sup>

#### **Jesus before Herod**

***This Herod was the one who had murdered John the Baptist.*** Many people wanted to see signs; in some popular stories (notably a later one in Apuleius), their curiosity got them in trouble with sorcerers. ***Of the four Gospels, only Luke reports two hearings before the governor separated by one before a Herod;*** Acts reports two trials of Paul before procurators with a trial before another Herod, Agrippa II. Ancient Greco-Roman historians liked to point out parallels between related figures in history.<sup>67</sup>

#### **"He answered him nothing" (Luke 23.9).**

James E. Talmage wrote, "As far as we know, Herod is...distinguished as the only being who saw Christ face to face and spoke to Him, yet never heard His voice. For penitent sinners, weeping women, prattling children, for the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the rabbis, for the perjured high priest and his obsequious and insolent underling, and for Pilate the pagan, Christ had words-of comfort or instruction, of warning or rebuke, of protest or denunciation-yet for Herod the fox He had but disdainful and kingly silence."<sup>68</sup>

**The same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves (Luke 23.12).**

<sup>63</sup> W.F. Albright, *Anchor Bible*, p. 341.

<sup>64</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 239.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240, emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, p. 307.

Herod and Pilate had had plenty of opportunities to become alienated; for instance, Antipas had intervened in a matter concerning votive shields (reported in Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 299-300); on another occasion Pilate had pilfered the temple treasury for funds for an aqueduct; even the event of Luke 13:1 could have been the provocation. Giving the ambitious Herod Antipas a sign of influence in Jerusalem would certainly create a “friendship,” which in upper classes often meant a political alliance.<sup>69</sup>

#### 8. The second hearing before Pilate (Matt. 27.15-31; Mark 15.6-15; Luke 23.11-17).

“Do nothing to this righteous man!” (Matt. 27.19).<sup>70</sup>

"There are times-not a few in the course of a life-when men would do well to give heed to the wise counsel of their wives. If ever there was such a time in the life of Pilate, this was it. The Lord in his goodness to her-and also, for his own purposes, that another witness might be borne of his Son-had revealed to this woman that Jesus was Lord of all and that calamity and sorrow awaited those who opposed him. Nor was Pilate unsympathetic to her message; in reality it but confirmed his own feelings and desires."<sup>71</sup>

#### Pilate and Roman Rule – Keeping the Peace

As a clearly violent revolutionary, Barabbas appeared to Pilate to be a greater danger than Jesus. Romans were known for their emphasis on justice, but Romans were also politicians concerned with crowd control: the emperor himself pacified the masses with shows in the arena and free grain, and public outcry had previously forced Pilate to withdraw the Roman standards from Jerusalem. **For many Roman governors, efficiency in ruling provinces and keeping peace took precedence over individual justice**; for instance, a Roman soldier who had burned a law scroll was executed to pacify Jewish antagonism, not because the Romans cared about burning their religious book.<sup>72</sup>

#### 9. Barabbas released (Matt. 27.15-21, 26; Mark 15.6-15; Luke 23.18-25; John 18.39-40).

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas (Matt. 27.20-21).

This section develops Pilate’s encounter with Jesus, augmenting the (in a worldly sense) apolitical character of his kingdom stressed in John 18:36–37; Jesus is no threat to Roman security (John 19:8–12). But the people provide Pilate other political realities to deal with, and become increasingly insistent that Jesus be handed over. The people here are essentially the leaders of the people who bear primary responsibility for leading them to oppose Jesus: hence “the Jews” (John 18:38; 19:7, 12, 14) are the

<sup>69</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 240.

<sup>70</sup> Matt. 27.19 Gr: Καθημένου δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος ἀπέστειλεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ λέγουσα **Μηδὲν σοὶ καὶ τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ**. πολλὰ γὰρ ἔπαθον σήμερον κατ’ ὄναρ δι’ αὐτόν “And when Pilate was set down upon his judgment seat, his wife sent a communication to him saying, “Do nothing to this righteous man, for I have suffered much today in a dream because of him!” (My translation)

<sup>71</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4: 185.

<sup>72</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 240.

“leading priests and officers” (John 19:6, 15). A flat, composite character, they speak with one voice like a chorus in a Greek tragedy.<sup>73</sup>

### **The Paschal Amnesty Custom (John 18.39)**

Pilate’s offer may suggest that he thought himself indulgent on special occasions; his otherwise brutal disposition, however, colors all the other brief Jewish reports of his activity that remain extant. ***What is the historical likelihood that he might have followed an existing amnesty custom in Judea?***

Although all four gospels attest the paschal amnesty custom, ***most scholars remain skeptical of the custom because the proposed analogies from other locations appear inadequate.*** Yet an argument against the custom from silence (in a narrative that can be confirmed at many other points) may not take adequate account of the burden of proof in favor of the Gospels’ usual authenticity. One could argue that John follows a literary practice of his day in creating customs to suit his narrative, but if John is independent of the Markan tradition (less likely in the Passion Narrative than elsewhere), it would testify to the pre-Johannine character of John’s primary point here. ***Like most customs of the Roman administration in Palestine, this one is currently unattested*** (a not surprising situation given the freedom of governors to ignore and supersede earlier customs), but if the Gospels usually correctly report events, especially when they multiply attest them (as possibly here), ***the assumption should begin in favor of, rather than against, their claims if no hard evidence to the contrary is available. If the particular custom is unattested outside the Gospels, analogies suggest its general consistency with Roman policy.*** In tentative support of the custom, one can adduce parallels from other Roman administrations and the Gospel writers’ assumption that their audiences were familiar with this practice in the gospel tradition. Although Roman law dictated that judges should not ignore laws, decrees, or custom (Justinian *Inst.* 4.17), ***Roman provincial officials often followed, but were not bound by, “precedents of their predecessors or local customs.” Prefects were, in any case, free to issue amnesties. Pilate’s offer of amnesty thus could be a custom Pilate himself initiated, though it is more likely an earlier one he merely decided to continue*** (John 18:39). Pilate could have abolished a preexisting custom, but given previous conflicts with the people (e.g., Josephus *War* 2.174, 177) and the dangers of popular unrest at festivals (e.g., Josephus *War* 2.224), he probably would not have done so (though its lack of attestation in Josephus may suggest that one of his successors eventually abolished the custom). Politically prudent rulers in the East presumably often continued festival traditions begun by their predecessors (e.g., Alexander in Diodorus Siculus 17.16.3; contrast the imprudent Verres in Cicero *Verr.* 2.2.21.51–52). Doing away with pardons and other civic customs was considered despicable (Cicero *Rosc. Amer.* 1.3), and ***governors who wished to make a positive impression typically continued as many as possible of the precedents the people liked*** (Cicero *Att.* 6.1).

***Romans sometimes deferred to local custom in forgiving an offense*** (e.g., Plutarch *R.Q.* 83, *Mor.* 283F); ***they also sometimes freed prisoners en masse on local feasts*** (Livy 5.13.8),<sup>74</sup> a custom known in various other ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean cultures. Although the later practice of pardoning

<sup>73</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 1114. For “speaking with one voice,” see also Virgil *Aen.* 11.122–131; Apuleius *Metam.* 11.13; Exod 24:3; 2 Chr 5:13; 1 En. 61:11–13; Josephus *Life* 259; Acts 4:24; Rom 15:6.

<sup>74</sup> Blinzler, *The Trial of Jesus: The Jewish and Roman Proceedings Against Jesus Christ Described and Assessed from the Oldest Accounts*, Newman, First American Edition, 1959, 206. During local festivals Romans sought to show particular benevolence to local populations even with respect to executions (Philo *Flaccus* 83). They offered mass amnesties when it proved politically advantageous (Cicero *Phil.* 8.9.32).

criminals at Easter (*Cod. theod.* 9.38.3–4, 8) is probably dependent on the Gospels, sometimes they also released captives because of the people's demands. Romans usually delayed punishments during their own festivals in Rome. Roman law permitted two kinds of amnesty: *abolitio* (acquitting a prisoner before trial—*Codex* 9.42 (*De abolitionibus*); *Dig.* 48.16) and *indulgentia* (pardoning a convicted criminal, *Codex* 9.43.3).<sup>75</sup> Since Pilate had not yet pronounced sentence against Jesus, an *abolitio* allowed him to easily circumvent the whole matter placed before him. ***We accept many ancient claims about customs that are attested in only one source, though more pleased when that source is corroborated in part or whole by other sources; the gospel tradition's account is plausible, and given the fact that it could be checked in the earliest period, appears more likely than not.***<sup>76</sup>

### **The Day of Atonement Ritual and Barabbas**

Pilate's decision to release Barabbas is presented as a motif that symbolizes the Day of Atonement ritual, which was a significant Jewish holiday involving the sacrifice of animals for the expiation of sins. The release of Barabbas can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the release of the scapegoat in the Day of Atonement ritual, with Jesus taking on the role of the sacrificial goat.

In the Day of Atonement ritual, two goats were presented before the high priest, and in my view, this presentation of two men put before the crowd, one which is to live and other condemned to die, is visually provocative. One of the goats was sacrificed as a sin offering, while the other goat, known as the scapegoat, was released into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the sins of the people. The release of Barabbas by Pilate can be seen as a symbolic representation of the release of the scapegoat, with Jesus taking on the role of the sacrificial goat.

In John's account, we read the role of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, a concept closely linked to the atonement process in the Day of Atonement ritual where the sacrificial lamb played a central role. By connecting the release of Barabbas to the Day of Atonement ritual and underscoring Jesus' role as the Lamb of God, the Gospel of John presents the crucifixion of Jesus as the ultimate act of atonement for the sins of humanity. All gospel writers discuss Barabbas and his freedom associated with the trial of Jesus, but in John's account I see a more express connection to the Day of Atonement.

### **The Significance of Barabbas' Name**

The name "Barabbas" means "son of the father," (Βαράββᾶς) and his release by Pilate in exchange for Jesus is often interpreted as a symbolic representation of the freedom and redemption of all humanity. In a sense, Barabbas can be seen as a representative for all of humanity, as his release represents the release of all of mankind from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus, the true "son of the Father," was sacrificed so that mankind could have eternal life, and his death and resurrection represent the ultimate act of love and redemption. Thus, the story of Barabbas serves as a powerful reminder of the sacrifice that Jesus made for all of us and the freedom that we have been given through his death and resurrection.

## **10. Pilate washes his hands of the affair (Matt. 27.24-26).**

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<sup>75</sup> Blinzer, *Trial*, p. 207-208.

<sup>76</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 1116-1117, emphasis added.

**When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing... rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands ... saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people... “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified (Matt. 27.24-26).**

### **Washing his hands**

Washing hands was a typically Jewish (but also sometimes Gentile) way of declaring one’s innocence (Deut 21:6; *Letter of Aristeas* 306), but Pilate’s words and action absolve his guilt no more than the exactly parallel words of the chief priests in Matthew 27:4, or those of others who acceded to subordinates’ unjust demands for the cause of political expediency (e.g., Jer 38:5). This was not the first time that the threat of riots had forced Pilate to relent; he had brought Roman standards (viewed by Jews as idols because they venerated the “divine” emperor) into Jerusalem, and withdrawn them only because mass protests forced him to either slaughter the populace or relent.<sup>77</sup>

**“His blood be on us” Gr: Τὸ αἷμα αὐτοῦ ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς (Matt. 27.25).**

Once the responsibility for a murder or crime was attached to one person, another was considered free (cf. Gen 27:13; 2 Sam 3:28- 29). ***Matthew probably relates this cry of the crowd to the judgment of AD 66–70 that crushed the next generation of Jerusalemites***; he would *not* have approved of the anti-Semitic use to which this verse was subsequently put (cf., e.g., Mt 5:39, 43-44).<sup>78</sup>

**11. Jesus is mocked and scourged (Matt. 27.27-31; Mark 15.15-20; John 19.1-12).**

### **Mocking**

The ridicule of Jesus as “king of the Jews” (John 19.3) reinforces a title this narrative ironically grants Jesus through the mouth of his pagan enemies (John 18.33; 19.14, 19); for John, it is not the high priest alone who can unwittingly prophesy (John 11.51). Even after Jesus’ flogging (19.1), physical abuse continues as part of the mockery: that the soldiers “gave” Jesus “blows” (19.3) connects them with Jesus’ Jewish captors (18.22), ***reminding the reader that Jesus faced rejection from both his own nation and the larger “world”*** (John 1.10–11). The imperfect verb εδιδόσαν probably suggests repeated blows.

Some soldiers guarding the Temple Mount seem to have converted to Judaism, but those who abused Jesus (John 19.2), whether from the Antonia garrison or (perhaps more likely) the addition troops Pilate had brought in for Passover, were certainly of the majority who remained Gentile (19.3). (Although one would expect to find a larger contingent of soldiers in the Fortress Antonia, Pilate brought soldiers with him at Passover and would keep his own temporary residence heavily guarded.)<sup>79</sup>

### **Scourging**

Like many other peoples, Romans did not limit the number of lashes, and thus sometimes victims not even sentenced to death died or were disabled under cruel supervisors. Indeed, Josephus had opponents scourged “until their entrails were visible” (*War* 2.612) and reports a procurator laying bare a man’s bones, though the man survived (*War* 6.304). This form of scourging also proved more severe than

<sup>77</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 120.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

<sup>79</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 1120-1121, emphasis added.

most Roman public corporal disciplines as well (cf. Acts 16:22; 2 Cor 11:25); sometimes this kind of scourging caused death itself. Unlike the lesser *fustigatio* (beating), the severer disciplines of *flagellatio* (flogging) and especially *verberatio* (scourging) accompanied the death sentence, although John's audience and even John himself probably would not have recognized these fine distinctions. Whereas Romans used rods on freemen and sticks on soldiers, they used scourges on slaves or provincials of equivalent status. In the Synoptic tradition Pilate orders the preliminary scourging that, whether with rods or whips, generally preceded crucifixion and other forms of capital punishment. In John he offers an earlier scourging, but in light of the negative outcome of Pilate's complaint to the Jerusalem aristocracy, it will have served the same purpose. ***Probably stripped and tied to a pillar or post, Jesus was beaten with flagella— leather whips “whose thongs were knotted and interspersed” with pieces of iron or bone, or a spike***; it left skin hanging from the back in bloody strips. Various texts attest the horror with which this punishment was viewed. Soldiers normally executed this task in the provinces. ***Some felt that the flagellum was merciful because it so weakened the prisoner as to hasten his death on the cross.*** That the Gospels mention but do not describe the practice makes them read more like official reports than rhetorical documents with a heavy element of pathos at this point; nevertheless, John's audience would undoubtedly understand the basic procedure, for floggings and executions were generally public affairs in the Roman Empire.<sup>80</sup>

### **Pilate worked to not crucify the Savior**

#### **Pilate was neither liked nor right**

1. He appealed to Herod [to possibly pass the responsibility] (Luke 23.4).
2. Pilate wanted to “chastise him and release him” (Luke 23.16).
3. He wanted to wash his hands of the responsibility (Matt. 27.24).
4. Pilate, being in fear,<sup>81</sup> after he scourged Jesus,<sup>82</sup> sought to release him (John 19.12).

Joseph Smith taught:

The object with me is to obey and teach others to obey God in just what He tells us to do. It mattereth not whether the principle is popular or unpopular, I will always maintain a true principle, even if I stand alone in it.<sup>83</sup>

Thomas S. Monson taught:

Courage becomes a living and an attractive virtue when it is regarded not only as a willingness to die manfully, but as the determination to live decently. A moral coward is one who is afraid to do what he thinks is right because others will disapprove or laugh.<sup>84</sup>

#### **An appeal to possible mercy**

“Pilate had probably been a silent observer of this barbarous scene (the scourging). ***He stopped it, and determined to make another attempt to touch the springs of Jewish pity, if such existed.*** He went

<sup>80</sup> Keener, *The Gospel of John*, p. 1119-1120, emphasis added.

<sup>81</sup> John 19.8.

<sup>82</sup> John 19.1-7.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph Smith, *HC*, 6:223; *Teachings*, p. 332.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas S. Monson, "Courage Counts," *Ensign*, Nov. 1986.

outside, and to the multitude said: 'Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him.' This was the governor's third definite proclamation of the Prisoner's innocence. 'Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!' Pilate seems to have counted on the pitiful sight of the scourged and bleeding Christ to soften the hearts of the maddened Jews. But the effect failed. Think of the awful fact—a heathen, a pagan, who knew not God, pleading with the priests and people of Israel for the life of their Lord and King! When, unmoved by the sight, the chief priests and officers cried with increasing vindictiveness, 'crucify him, crucify him,' Pilate pronounced the fatal sentence, 'Take ye him and crucify him,' but added with bitter emphasis: 'I find no fault in him.'<sup>85</sup>

Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written (John 19.21-22).

### **12. Jesus is taken to Golgotha (Matt. 27.32-34; Mark 15.20-23; Luke 23.26-31; John 19.13-17).**

“We have no king but Caesar!” (John 19.15).

The people who had by covenant accepted Jehovah as their King, now rejected Him in Person, and acknowledged no sovereign but Caesar. Caesar's subjects and serfs have they been through all the centuries since. Pitiably is the state of man or nation who in heart and spirit will have no king but Caesar!<sup>86</sup>

**Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away (John 19.16).**

**“And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross” (Matt. 27.32).**

Cyrene, a large city in what is now Libya in North Africa, was ethnically divided among Libyans, Greeks and Jews; the Jewish community probably included some local converts. “Simon” is a Greek name commonly used by Jewish people (because of its resemblance with the biblical “Simeon”). Like multitudes of foreign Jews, Simon had come to Jerusalem for the feast. Roman soldiers could impress any person into service to carry things for them. The condemned person himself normally had to carry the horizontal beam (Latin *patibulum*) of the cross out to the site where the upright stake (Latin *palus*) awaited; but Jesus' back had been too severely scourged for him to continue this.<sup>87</sup>

Simon of Cyrene carrying Jesus' cross to Golgotha is a significant event in the Christian faith and has been depicted in various forms of art and literature throughout history. I see some possible associations between his act of service as it applies to our quest to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to hear him as we walk the covenant path:

1. Bearing One's Cross and Serving Others: The act of carrying the cross is often interpreted as a metaphor for bearing one's own burdens and struggles in life. Simon, who was forced to carry

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<sup>85</sup> James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 308.

<sup>86</sup> [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 309.

<sup>87</sup> Keener, *Background*, p. 121.



the cross for Jesus, represents the idea that sometimes we are called upon to help others bear their crosses as well.<sup>88</sup>

2. Universal Brotherhood: Simon was a stranger to Jesus, but he stepped forward to help him in his hour of need. This act of compassion and brotherhood is seen as a symbol of the universal love and compassion that is at the heart of the Christian faith.<sup>89</sup>
3. Redemption and Salvation: In some interpretations, Simon's act of carrying the cross for Jesus is seen as a symbolic act of redemption and salvation. By bearing the burden of the cross, Simon is believed to have shared (in a small way) in the redemptive power of Christ's suffering and death.<sup>90</sup>
4. Humility and Service: Simon's willingness to help Jesus, despite the trauma this experience would have involved and the fear it probably caused him, is seen as an act of humility and service. This act can be seen as a reminder that true greatness lies not in power or wealth, but in service to others.

### **The Crucifixion – A Medical Understanding**

"The major pathophysiologic effect of crucifixion, beyond the excruciating pain, was a marked interference with normal respiration, particularly exhalation. The weight of the body, pulling down on the outstretched arms and shoulders, would tend to fix the intercostals (rib) muscles in an inhalation state and thereby hinder passive exhalation. Accordingly, exhalation was primarily diaphragmatic, and breathing was shallow. It is likely that this form of respiration would not suffice and that hypercarbia (elevated blood levels of carbon dioxide) would soon result. The onset of muscle cramps or tetanic contractions, due to fatigue and hypercarbia, would hinder respiration even further.

"Adequate exhalation required lifting the body by pushing up on the feet and by flexing the elbows and adducting the shoulders. However, this maneuver would place the entire weight of the body on the tarsals (feet) and would produce searing pain. Furthermore, flexion of the elbows would cause rotation of the wrists about the iron nails and cause fiery pain along the damaged median nerves (in the wrist). Lifting of the body would also painfully scrape the scourged back against the rough wooden stipes. Muscle cramps and paresthesias (numbness) of the outstretched and uplifted arms would add to the discomfort. As a result, each respiratory effort would become agonizing and tiring and lead eventually to asphyxia (suffocation).

"The actual cause of death by crucifixion was multifactorial and varied somewhat with each case, but the two most prominent causes probably were hypovolemic shock and exhaustion asphyxia. Other possible contributing factors included dehydration, stress-induced arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms), and congestive heart failure with the rapid accumulation of pericardial and perhaps pleural effusions (fluid

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<sup>88</sup> And behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn a wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your c fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God. (Mosiah 2.17).

<sup>89</sup> He said unto them: Behold, here are the waters of Mormon (for thus were they called) and now, as ye are desirous to come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are a willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort... that ye may have eternal life. (Mosiah 18.8-9).

<sup>90</sup> In this sense, Simon represents the matrix of life that God has created, in other words, we are all deeply spiritually and biologically connected to all life on earth, more so that we realize.

buildup around the heart and lungs)...Death by crucifixion was, in every sense of the word excruciating (Latin, *excruciates*, or 'out of the cross')."<sup>91</sup>

**And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha (John 19.17).**

James E. Talmage wrote:

"The Place of a Skull." -- The Aramaic Hebrew name "Golgotha," the Greek "Kranion," and the Latin "Calvaria" or, as Anglicized, "Calvary," have the same meaning, and connote "a skull." The name may have been applied with reference to topographical features, as we speak of the brow of a hill; or, if the spot was the usual place of execution, it may have been so called as expressive of death, just as we call a skull a death's head. It is probable that the bodies of executed convicts were buried near the place of death; and if Golgotha or Calvary was the appointed site for execution, the exposure of skulls and other human bones through the ravages of beasts and by other means, would not be surprising; though the leaving of bodies or any of their parts unburied was contrary to Jewish law and sentiment. The origin of the name is of as little importance as are the many divergent suppositions concerning the exact location of the spot."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> William D. Edwards, et al, "[On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ](#)," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Mar. 21, 1986, Vol. 255, No. 11, pp. 1461)

<sup>92</sup> [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 575.