

Notes on John 18

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Jesus' Arrest — John 18:1-11

See also Matt. 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53

Verses 1,2

1. Where did Jesus take His disciples (locate on a MAP)?
2. Who else went there (vv 2,3), and how did they know to go there?
3. **Special Assignment:** What do other accounts reveal about Judas' involvement? What does this show about Judas?

Jesus and His disciples walk to the garden on the Mount of Olives.

Jesus had finished His final admonition to His apostles and His prayer for them. The time of His arrest, trials, and death, was at hand. With His disciples He crossed the Brook Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem (see MAP). He entered a garden. Other accounts call this the Garden of Gethsemane (meaning "oil press"), and tell us it was on the Mount of Olives.

This was a place where Jesus and His disciples had often met, and Judas knew this. Having agreed to betray Jesus, Judas would no doubt expect to find Him in His usual places. So, this was one place where He would search.

Other accounts explain that the Passover was at hand and Jerusalem was crowded with multitudes who came for the feast. Many of these had demonstrated their favor toward Jesus in the triumphal entry. So, the Jewish leaders sought to arrest Jesus secretly to avoid causing a riot among the celebrants at the Passover. Judas' knowledge of Jesus' habits could help them accomplish this. See Matthew 26:5.

John does not tell us of the anguish of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. He had, however, added very useful information regarding Jesus' final instructions to the apostles and His prayer to God for them.

The enemies come to arrest Jesus.

Judas came with soldiers and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees for the purpose of arresting Jesus, as Jesus had predicted. They were armed with weapons (swords and clubs, according to other accounts), evidently expecting a fight. They also came with torches to help see in the darkness. Like the disciples, Jesus' enemies expected Him to try to be an earthly king by military might. They expected that He and/or His disciples would put up a stiff resistance.

To deal with any possible violence, they sent a large group, though we are not told how many. Mark calls it a great multitude (14:43). Besides the officers sent from the priests and Pharisees, there was a detachment of troops. This refers to a Roman cohort, usually consisting of several hundred men, though it is possible that only as much of the group as could be spared was actually sent. Note that the Jews had apparently obtained the help of the Romans even at this point.

Verses 4-6

4. What question did Jesus ask them and what answer did they give? (Think: Why would Jesus ask this?)
5. How did Jesus identify Himself to them and how did they react? (Think: Why would they react this way?)

Jesus identifies Himself to His enemies.

Jesus knew what was happening and did not wait for the soldiers to attack. Nor did He seek to withdraw, as He had at previous attempts to capture Him. He now knew the time had come, so He went to His enemies and initiated the confrontation. He asked them whom they sought. When they said they sought Jesus of Nazareth, He identified Himself openly to them. His con-

duct, knowing their intent, shows that He gave Himself up willingly. Despite their intent, no one forced Him to give His life.

His captors then “drew back and fell to the ground.” The reason why they so reacted is not stated. Perhaps they drew back seeking shelter in preparation for battle they expected to ensue. As the front lines retreated, they may have run into those behind them in the dark, causing mass confusion and stumbling. Many of these people knew of Jesus’ miracles, so they may have feared He would even use miraculous powers to attack them (such as Elijah used when an attempt was made to arrest him in 2 Kings 1). Or perhaps they were so shocked by His openness, they stepped back not knowing how to react. Here was one who was clearly beyond their conception. He was so open and frank, yet they had come to capture and kill Him.

Other accounts add that Judas had a sign arranged with the Jews. The one whom he would kiss would be Jesus. Judas fulfilled his bargain, kissing Jesus as though in salutation. Doubtless, this was intended to avoid arousing suspicion among Jesus and His disciples, while still giving the necessary sign to the Jews to identify Jesus. Yet, the hypocrisy and deceit of the traitor is incredible. We are amazed that he could, with such two-faced audacity, betray the very one who had so kindly befriended him, taught him, and proved beyond doubt that He was from God (see notes on Judas’ agreement to betray Jesus). We have no doubt that Judas deserves to be the classic symbol of traitors and betrayers.

Verses 7-9

6. What question did Jesus ask again and what request did He make?
7. Why did Jesus make this request, and what prediction did it fulfill?

Jesus seeks the freedom of His disciples.

Since the Jews had fallen back and done nothing, Jesus again asked who they were seeking. He then told them a second time that He was the One they were seeking.

Then He requested that the disciples be let go. He was the one who was wanted by the authorities. They had no reason to seize the disciples. And Jesus’ death was all that was needed to fulfill God’s plan for a sacrifice for sin. So, Jesus sought the freedom of the disciples, thereby fulfilling His prophecy of John 17:12 that none of them would perish.

Verses 10,11

8. What did Peter do to protect Jesus? (Think: Why would he have done this? In what ways was he right or wrong?)
9. **Special Assignment:** Check other accounts and tell what Jesus did to the man whom Peter struck. What can we learn?
10. What did Jesus say to Peter and why?

Peter strikes the high priest’s servant.

The disciples by this time had gathered before Jesus’ enemies and apparently thought that the time had come to fight to protect Jesus (cf. Luke 22:49). One of them drew his sword and cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. John adds details that no other account includes: the disciple who did this was Peter, the servant was named Malchus, and the ear was his right ear.

The disciples had thought all along it would come to a military fight. Peter had valiantly affirmed His willingness to give his life for Jesus. He was here acting quite boldly by human standards, keeping His commitment. Commentators observe that it is not likely that Peter meant to cut off the man’s ear. More likely, he was aiming for the man’s head but missed, perhaps because the man dodged the blow.

Incredibly, however, from the disciples’ viewpoint, Jesus did not urge on the fight, let alone take a lead in it. Quite the contrary, He rebuked Peter telling him to put up his sword. Then He healed the one who had been wounded (Luke 22:51).

This is amazing, first in that Jesus did a great miracle in the very presence of His enemies. Some modern “faith healers” claim they cannot do miracles in the presence of those who lack

faith in their power. Those with true miracle power had no such hindrance. Yet, despite this evidence that Jesus was from God, the Jews continued in their determination to arrest and kill Jesus. If they had hearts to receive the truth, they would have changed long before this. The miracle, however, further demonstrates how inexcusable their conduct was.

According to other accounts Jesus explained that there was no need for anyone to use physical force to defend Him. If needed, all He had to do was to ask and, instead of 12 disciples to defend Him (11 not counting Judas), He would have 12 legions of angels (Matt. 26:53).

Then Jesus explained why He did not use any power to oppose His arrest. The things about to happen were a fulfillment of God's purpose (and of prophecy — Matt. 26:56). It was the "cup" the Father had given Him to drink (cf. Matt. 26:39). This was the Father's plan. Whether they liked it or not, this was the way it was supposed to happen; otherwise, He would have used the force available to Him to stop it.

He had been telling them for a long time this was going to happen, and had told them again just a few days earlier. They should have had faith enough to follow His lead. If He was not resisting, they should have known that His way was best, and they too should not have resisted.

Other accounts show that the disciples then forsook Jesus and fled. This also fulfilled prophecy, for Jesus had just predicted this just a few hours earlier (John 16:32; etc.)! The disciples, especially Peter, had denied they would forsake Him, yet almost immediately they did exactly what He had said they would do.

Again, the main reason for their conduct was a lack of understanding. His plan was not their plan. When He did not resist, and even rebuked them for their attempts to resist, He completely contradicted their expectations. Had He fought, they would probably have fought with Him, for that is what they expected to happen. When He refused to fight and allowed Himself to be taken, they lost their faith and their nerve and left in confusion and uncertainty. The shepherd was in the process of being smitten, and the sheep were being scattered.

King argues that the fact Peter was carrying a sword, after three years of hearing Jesus' teaching, leads to a safe conclusion that Jesus was not opposed to the use of physical violence for personal protection. However, I see no evidence here for such a "safe conclusion," at least not as regards our conduct today. There is no indication the disciples had carried swords before this time, so Jesus may have had no occasion to discuss the matter earlier. Peter used the sword in a way that clearly shows He and the other disciples expected to use force to make Jesus a king; so the fact he carried the sword at all is just part of the disciples' overall confusion about Jesus' teaching. And above all, we must remember that the Old Testament law was still in effect. I know of no one who denies that God allowed the use of physical force under the old law. Personally, I see no evidence here one way or the other regarding use of physical force under the gospel.

Jesus' Trials — John 18:12-19:16

Here begins a series of trials of Jesus, first before the Jews, then before the Romans. They may be summarized as follows:

Trials before Jewish authorities:

Before Annas

Before Caiaphas and the council

"Official" trial before the council

Trials before Roman authorities:

Before Pilate (first hearing)

Before Herod

Before Pilate (second hearing)

The Jewish trial before Annas — John 18:12-24

Cf. Matt. 26:57-68; cf. Mark 14:53-65; John 18:12f,19-24.

When considering the “trials” before the Jews, we should remember that, at every point, these are not “trials” in the normal sense of the word. They were more like consultations of Jesus’ prosecutors. As such, they were thoroughly illegal, since they were carried out by men who were charged to give fair treatment to those accused of illegal conduct.

They were illegal primarily in their purpose. The purpose of a trial is supposed to be to determine whether or not a man is guilty of a crime and therefore worthy of punishment. Evidence should be presented from both the accusers and the accused and then a verdict reached based on the evidence. Such was never the slightest intention of those who conducted these “trials.”

They did not hold these trials to find out whether or not Jesus was guilty of anything or to determine whether or not He should be killed. They had already decided all these things in their own minds long before they arrested Him — See Matt. 21:46; 26:3-5; 12:14; John 7:1,19,25,30,32,44; 8:37,40,59; 10:31,39; 11:45-53,57; 12:10,11; 5:18; Mark 14:10ff; etc. The reason for the trial was the Jewish leaders’ jealousy of Jesus and their rebellion against His teaching (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10; 11:18; John 11:47,48; 12:11,19,42,43; 7:32).

There was absolutely no possibility that these trials occurred so the leaders could find out whether or not Jesus had done anything wrong. They had questioned Him publicly and privately for months and could never prove Him wrong about anything. They could not even disprove His teaching, let alone prove Him guilty of a crime (John 8:46; Matt. 22:46). There was absolutely no evidence to even arrest Him, let alone convict Him in trial.

Hence, the purpose of the trial was not to determine whether or not Jesus was guilty. The verdict had already been reached without evidence. They considered Him guilty and had determined to kill Him. The purpose of the trial was to find a formal accusation: the **charge** or grounds which they would use to kill Him. His fate had been decided. The only issue that remained was what **excuse** they would use to rationalize what they had already determined to accomplish! “The verdict is ‘Guilty!’ Now, what’s the accusation?”

Since the Romans were in power, it was unlawful for the Jews to kill a man on their own (John 18:31). They needed grounds that would convince the Roman authorities that Jesus was worthy of death. They likewise needed grounds that would satisfy the people so they would not turn against the Jewish leaders. Certainly, they could not use their **real** reasons: that they were jealous and angry that Jesus had repeatedly proved them wrong. They probably were not honest enough to admit that reason even to themselves. And that reason made them look bad, instead of making Jesus look bad. They needed some charge, whether true or not, that could be made to look plausible as a reason for Jesus to be killed.

All this means that the trial began for an entirely illegal, immoral, evil, and hypocritical reason. It was therefore doomed from the beginning to be filled with hosts of other illegalities and miscarriages of justice. We will see as we proceed that this is exactly what happened.

It is amazing to see the power that hypocritical self-will can have in human minds. These men were incredibly picky in insisting that the letter of the law must be followed in minute detail (Matt. 15:1ff). Yet, here they did not hesitate to totally abandon all semblance of obedience to the law in order to murder a man, and a known prophet at that!

Verses 12-14

11. What did the Jews do to Jesus and where did they take Him?

12. Who were Annas and Caiaphas?

Jesus was led first to Annas

The troops arrested Jesus and bound Him. They first took Him to Annas who, we are told was father-in-law to Caiaphas, the high priest.

V19 calls Annas the high priest. History records that Annas had been high priest before Caiaphas, and was still honored and had the influence of that office. It was also common for Romans to change the high priests, contrary to Jewish law. Perhaps the Jews still considered Annas to be high priest, though officially the Romans had put Caiaphas in that position (cf. Luke

3:2; Acts 4:6). Hally notes that these men had become wealthy from the booths in the temple that Jesus had overthrown (*Handbook*, p. 480). This would also prejudice them against Jesus.

(Note that some texts place v24 here in the text and infer that vv 14-23 actually occur while Jesus was before Caiaphas — see Clark.)

Caiaphas was the one who had prophesied that Jesus would die for all the people (though Caiaphas himself did not understand the significance of what he said — 11:50). This reminds us that these men had already reached a verdict regarding Jesus before the trial even began. The high priest himself had already stated that Jesus should die, long before He had even been arrested!

Verses 15,16

13. Who followed Jesus and how did they get into the courtyard of the high priest?

Peter and John enter the courtyard of the high priest.

Having been rebuked for his attempt to defend Jesus, and having fled with the other disciples when Jesus' enemies arrested Him, Peter nevertheless followed at a distance to see what would happen. In a way, Peter is obviously wrong here. He had said He would never stumble at Jesus, and would even die before turning from Him, yet here he had fled and refused to stay with Jesus in His greatest time of need.

Peter eventually entered the courtyard of the high priest. This was perhaps the same place where the later trial before Caiaphas occurred (v24). Perhaps the courtyard surrounded a house or even several houses where the high priest(s) lived. Annas apparently had an interview with Jesus first, perhaps while waiting for the whole Sanhedrin to arrive. Then he sent Jesus to Caiaphas (v24).

There was another disciple also present (probably John, since he does not name himself). This disciple gained access to the area where the trial was occurring because he knew the high priest. He then arranged for Peter to be let into the courtyard. This set the stage for Peter's denials, which are recorded in subsequent verses.

Verses 17,18

14. What accusation was made against Peter and how did he respond?

15. What prediction did this fulfill, and where else can we read about this event?

16. Where was Peter standing and what was he doing there (v18)?

Peter's first denial

John records the first of Peter's denials at this time (other accounts wait and tell the whole story of the denials later, but no doubt they occurred from time to time during the trials as John describes them).

According to other accounts, as Peter sat in the courtyard, a servant girl said he was with Jesus. Peter denied saying he did not know what she was talking about. This is the first of the three times Peter would deny Christ, according to Jesus' prediction.

John says this occurred toward the beginning of the trial, and adds that the maid was the doorkeeper. Luke adds that Peter was warming himself with others at a fire and the girl saw him in the firelight and this helped her identify him. When we warm ourselves at the fires of our Lord's enemies instead of standing with Him, we have already denied Him by actions. Denial in words is sure to follow.

Verses 19-21

17. What did the high priest ask Jesus, and how did Jesus respond (vv 19-21)?
(Think: What point was Jesus making?)

Jesus refuses to give Annas information about His teaching.

Annas asked Jesus about His disciples. Perhaps he was still concerned about a rebellion caused by the disciples. He also asked Jesus about His doctrine. It is obvious from the context that he hoped Jesus would say something that would incriminate Himself.

Jesus responded that His teaching had been done publicly in public places. Perhaps He said this because Annas' question implied some secret plot with the disciples. In any case, Jesus had nothing new to tell them. They already knew His teaching and had no valid reason for asking Him about it. Their only possible motive would be to hear something they could use against Him. He simply referred the high priest to the people who heard His teaching. Note that, unlike some secretive religious organizations, Jesus' public teaching revealed His true doctrine. He did not hide His teaching behind a cloak of secrecy. He taught nothing "in secret," but taught "openly to the world."

Jesus was here following His legal rights and, in so doing, pointing out the high priest's hypocrisy. This trial was illegal and both Jesus and the high priest knew it. Jesus was required to answer nothing, and surely was not required to provide evidence against Himself. The high priest and his followers knew what Jesus had taught. If there was error in it, they should have called witnesses and produced the proof according to legal precedent, instead of trying to get Jesus to provide it for them!

However, the high priest also knew that no one had been able to convict Jesus of error in His public preaching. He had defeated them every time, so there was no sense trying to use that to convict Jesus. Instead, he was "fishing" for something to use.

Annas was acting as though Jesus was on trial for His teaching, but Annas and Jesus both knew what had been taught and knew it could not be proved wrong. There was no reason for Jesus to discuss it. This was not the real reason for the arrest and trial.

Verses 22,23

18. What did one of the officers do to Jesus (v22)?

19. What did Jesus say in response? (Think: Again, what was His point and what lesson can we learn?)

An officer struck Jesus, but He called for evidence that He had done wrong.

For His statement, Jesus was struck by one of the officers who stood by Him. He implied Jesus had no right to so answer the high priest.

However, Jesus had said nothing disrespectful to the high priest's office (cf. Acts 23:2-5). He had made a calm statement of truth and legal fact, which was completely appropriate and within His rights. If He had taught error, proper legal procedure required them to produce the proof. If they could not produce it, they had no right to strike Him for expressing His legal rights.

The statement Jesus had made would bother no one unless they knew that He was right and they were being frustrated in their efforts to convict Him. Surely, prisoners had the right to state that they were not being treated in harmony with the law. People who cannot defend their religious views with proof are generally the ones who result to physical violence and persecution against those who convict them of error.

The Trial Before Caiaphas – 18:24-27

Verse 24

20. Where was Jesus sent next?

21. **Special Assignment:** Study other accounts and describe what happened to Jesus in this trial.

Jesus was then sent to Caiaphas.

Jesus' interview before Annas was evidently ended, so He was sent to Caiaphas. Here the council of elders and scribes gathered. This is the Sanhedrin council (a term based on the Greek name — v59), the highest Jewish tribunal or political body. It was made up of 70 men from the following groups: "chief priests," which were past and present high priests and their families; "scribes," who were Pharisee lawyers and copyists; and "elders," who were heads of the various Jewish tribes. The high priest was president of the council.

John gives virtually no details regarding this trial, but other accounts go into great detail. We will summarize the high points from the other accounts.

False witnesses came and accused Jesus of saying that He could destroy the temple in three days. This referred to Jesus' statement as recorded in John 2:19, though they did not quote it properly and they surely perverted His intent. He did not say He could destroy the temple, but that they would do it. And His meaning was a reference to the temple of His body — that they would kill Him, but He would be raised after three days (John 2:21,22). Mark 14:56,59 adds that the testimony of the witnesses, including even this testimony, did not convict Jesus because the witnesses could not agree among themselves.

The high priest then began to question Jesus, obviously with the hope that he could lead Jesus to say something they could use against Him. But Jesus made no response. Luke 22:67,68 partly explains why. First of all, it was obvious what their intent was. Nothing He could say would convince them He was innocent. And if He spoke to ask them a question, they would have no answers (or wouldn't answer honestly). They had never been able to answer in the past, so why would they now?

Besides why did He need to say anything? Their witnesses were getting nowhere even without His rebuttal. Furthermore, He knew what the outcome had to be and that nothing could stop it. He was unwilling to attempt to stop it.

The high priest then used his authority as priest and adjured Jesus by the living God to tell if He was the Christ, the Son of God. To "adjure" meant to call upon someone to speak under oath, to swear. (See Vine and Thayer on ἐξορκισθῶ. Cf. Gen. 24:3; Judges 17:2; 1 Kings 22:16; cf. related words in Gen. 24:29; 47:29; Mark 5:7; Acts 19:13; 1 Thess. 5:27; Neh. 13:25.)

Hence, Jesus said: "Thou hast said." This is obviously a form of consent (cf. Mark 14:62). This is how they interpreted it (v65). Hence, the NKJV translated "It is as you said."

The high priest then said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy — i.e., He had claimed for Himself that which belonged only to God. The rest of the council agreed and pronounced their sentence: "He is worthy of death." Conveniently, the verdict just happened to be exactly what they had intended from the beginning! Such a magnanimous sense of justice!

Note the devious method the council took to get their desired conviction. They proclaimed Him worthy of death for blasphemy. Why? Because He claimed to be the Christ, the Son of God, when He wasn't. But how did they know He wasn't? This was the very point they should have been there to consider. It was the only really pertinent point. They ignored the fact they had no evidence that His claims were blasphemous, ignored the evidence that He was truly sent from God (His miracles), found Him guilty, and condemned Him to death.

Verses 25-27

22. Describe Peter's second denial.

23. Describe Peter's third denial. (Think: Why would Peter deny Jesus like this? According to other accounts, how did he feel afterward?)

Peter's second and third denials

John here returns to discuss Peter's denials. As Peter warmed himself at the fire (v18), it was again said that Peter was with Jesus. This time Peter took an oath (according to other accounts) saying he did not know Jesus.

There are some questions in harmonizing the accounts here. Some translations add that it was another "girl" (or maid) that made the statement. But Peter's reply in Luke's account is, "Man, I am not..." The word "girl" or "maid" is added by the translators, but this is based on the fact that the word for "another" is feminine. Mark's account says "the maid" saw him, perhaps indicating the same one as before. John says, "They said..." to him.

The explanation probably is something to the effect that several people joined in the accusation. Note that several accounts say one person said it to others who were there. Probably all these things happened. A maid said it, perhaps the same one as before. Then others took up the accusation, including another maid and a man or men. Finally, Peter denied it.

In any case, there is no contradiction. Jesus prophesied, and the Scriptures record, three denials. The number of accusations or accusers is not stated. The answers given by Peter are either indirect quotations or they were all stated in Peter's denial.

The third denial came as a result of accusations from several people. They said Peter must be one of Jesus' followers, for his speech betrayed him — i.e., He was a Galilean like Jesus (Mark 14:70). John adds that a servant of the high priest, a relative of Malchus, joined the accusations thinking he remembered seeing Peter in the garden.

Peter again denied and other accounts add it was done with cursing and swearing. Like worldly people, and like he himself used to be before he became a follower of Jesus, he put himself under threat of punishment if he was not speaking truth. Of course, as is often the case, it was a false oath.

Immediately, even as Peter was speaking, the cock crowed (Matt. 26:74; cf. Luke 22:60). This reminded Peter that Jesus had said he would deny Jesus three times before the cock crowed. Luke's account adds that Jesus turned and looked at Peter. Evidently at this time Peter was where he and Jesus could see one another. No doubt, Jesus' look also served to remind Peter of Jesus' prediction that he would deny Him.

Realizing his guilt and fulfillment of Jesus' prediction, Peter went out and wept bitterly. No doubt, he wept in guilt over what he had done, but probably also in sorrow over the whole turn of events. His Lord whom He had loved and trusted was now being condemned to death, the very thing Peter had confidently affirmed would never happen to Him. Peter is confused because, in his willful stubbornness he refused to believe any of this would happen. It just was not what he expected. Plus on top of it all, he himself had failed miserably, even after the Lord had warned him he would do it and he himself had said he would never do it.

On the other hand, this is not the end of the story. Judas betrayed Jesus for money, and Peter denied him three times out of fear and confusion. Judas reacted to his guilt by killing himself. But Peter reacted with genuine remorse, and after Jesus' resurrection he understood what all this really meant. Then Peter became a firm disciple and preached the gospel without compromise to these very same people who killed Jesus. Here he denied Jesus before just a few of them; later he publicly accused a huge multitude of them of having killed the Son of God, and as a result thousands were converted.

Jesus' Trial before Pilate (first hearing) — John 18:28-40

Cf. Matt. 27:11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7.

Verses 28-30

24. Where was Jesus taken in the morning and why did the Jews not go in?

25. Who was Pilate (see other accounts), and what question did he ask?

26. What was the point of the Jews' claim in v30? (Think: What was wrong with their "reasoning"?)

The Jewish leaders take Jesus before Pilate for trial.

Other accounts show that the Sanhedrin met early in the morning to declare an official determination of Jesus' guilt. This was simply a ratification of the verdict they had reached in the night trials. Then they took Jesus to Pilate.

Pilate was the Roman governor at that time. The Jews would doubtless have killed Jesus themselves had they thought it was expedient to do so. However, since they were subject to Roman law, they had to have approval from the Romans to execute anyone (see v31). I suspect they were also hoping to convince the Romans to do their dirty work here, to avoid upsetting the multitudes or provoking them to a riot. If the Romans killed Jesus, the Jews could blame them for it, and they would be responsible to deal with any fallout from the people.

The Jews, however, would not enter the judgment hall or palace (Praetorium) of Pilate. They feared they would become defiled and could not eat the Passover feast. Johnson points out that no Jew could enter a house that had leaven in it during the Passover, which eliminated entering Gentile houses since they would not respect such a rule (King suggests a different reason why defilement might occur). Note how particular these Jews were in following such religious details, refusing to risk ceremonial uncleanness during the Passover; yet they had no scruples against condemning an innocent man to death by means of a whole series of illegalities!

Since the Jews would not come in, Pilate went out to them and asked what accusation they had against Jesus. The Jews seemed to think that the very fact they brought Jesus ought to be enough to bring a condemnation! Don't question us. If we say he's guilty, he is! Apparently, they hoped Pilate would take their word for the matter and accept their verdict without examining the evidence.

Luke's account names numerous specific accusations the Jews eventually made against Jesus, none of them being the accusation on which they themselves had condemned Jesus to be worthy of death. They knew Pilate would not care whether or not Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God. That was a violation, in their view, of religious law, but Pilate would not condemn a man for it.

They needed some accusation that would appear to Pilate to be a threat against the Roman government. They brought up such claims as forbidding tribute to Caesar. Never mind that they had specifically asked Jesus about this and He had said just the opposite. They also accused Him of being a rabble-rouser stirring up the people, which also had never happened.

Verses 31,32

27. What did Pilate tell the Jews to do and what objection did they raise? (Think: What did this have to do with the manner of Jesus' death — v32?)

Pilate tells the Jews to judge Jesus themselves.

Pilate obviously did not want to judge the case. He sought various means, recorded in the various accounts, to get the people to accept responsibility for the matter or even to persuade them to let Jesus go or give Him a lesser penalty. One thing he tried was to get the people to judge Jesus by their own law. He may have known they could not or would not do this, but he sought to remove himself from responsibility and place it on the Jews where it belonged.

The Jews did not accept this, however, because they were determined to kill Jesus and they could not do so under Roman law (cf. Matt. 27:2). The fact is that they did sometimes kill people, but this violated Roman law (Acts 7). Perhaps Jesus was so popular they were afraid to kill Him themselves. They had worked hard just to arrest Him without losing face before the people. I suspect that they hoped the Romans would do their dirty work and take the blame, so they themselves would not look so bad before the people.

The fact that Jesus must be killed by the Romans, however, became important in that it fulfilled the prophecies about how Jesus would die. Prophecy had predicted He would be hung and crucified by Gentiles (John 12:32; 3:14; 8:28; Matt. 20:18,19; 26:2; Mark 10:33; Luke 18:32). Jews killed by stoning rather than crucifying, so the method of killing would be determined by who did it. The prophecies predicted, in effect, that the Romans would do it. By insisting that Pilate deal with the case, the Jews were once again unwittingly fulfilling prophecy and thereby proving Jesus to be the very One whom they denied Him to be: the Christ, the Son of God.

Verses 33-35

28. What question did Pilate ask Jesus? (Think: Why would this concern Pilate?)

29. How did Jesus answer (v34), and what was Pilate's response (v35)?

30. Who had suggested to Pilate that Jesus was claiming to be a king — see cross-references?

Pilate questions Jesus about His claim to be a king.

The Jews eventually accused Jesus of claiming to be a king (see Luke 23:2,3; Matt. 27:11). This would, if true, be of concern to the Romans, since it would appear to make Jesus in competition with or rebellion against Caesar. The Jews, of course, thought this is exactly what the Messiah would be; hence, if He had taught this, He would have only been saying what they themselves hoped the Messiah would do! And they also knew that, in truth, Jesus had done nothing to ever imply rebellion against Rome. He had even told the people to pay the tribute money Rome demanded (Matthew 22:15-22).

Pilate questioned Jesus about this accusation and Jesus in turned asked the source of the accusation: Was it Pilate's idea or did He hear it from someone else? Jesus was probably trying to distinguish fact from rumor. Had Pilate observed some evidence that led him to think Jesus held this view, or was this just a rumor from the Jews? Of course, Jesus knew which it was. His question was intended to point out to Pilate that there was no proof of any conspiracy on His part against Rome. It would also question the Jews' motives, since if the charge was true, they would not be likely to tell the Romans except from some ulterior motives. They were surely no friends of Roman rule, but would generally have been glad if a leader had overthrown Roman rule.

Pilate responded that he was not a Jew. Perhaps he meant this to imply that, as a Roman, not a Jew, he knew the Jewish hatred for Rome. He said that Jesus' own people had turned Him over to Pilate and made accusations against Him. This might be intended to acknowledge that it was just an accusation and perhaps unfounded. In any case, Pilate was acknowledging that neither he nor the Romans had any proof against Jesus. Yet, he asked what Jesus had done to cause such animosity against himself. Pilate seemed willing to hear Jesus' side (unlike the Jews), yet he was surely confused by the fact these claims were being made. He thought surely there was some cause for all this.

Verse 36

31. How did Jesus describe His kingdom, and what evidence did He offer to substantiate it (v36)?

32. **Case Study:** Jews and Premillennialists claim that Jesus came to earth intending to establish an earthly kingdom. What does v36 show about this idea?

Jesus' kingdom is not of this world.

Jesus explained to Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world; hence, it was not in competition with Caesar and the Romans had no reason to fear Jesus. His disciples had no intention to fight Rome or the Jews.

This answer was important, not just for Pilate to understand, but also for Jews, for modern Christians, and for premillennial folks. Jesus had never come to be an earthly king like David, conquering enemies by physical force and ruling a civil government. The Jewish rejection of Him had not forced a change in His plans, as premillennialists often teach. He never intended to be such a king (cf. 6:15; Luke 17:21; Col. 1:13; Rom. 14:17).

The proof He offered is that He had refused to allow His servants to fight. They wanted to do so, but He had rebuked them for it. What earthly monarch, intending to take a government by force, would insist that his servants stand idly by while he was captured by his enemies? Would Jesus have so acted if He intended to use force to establish an earthly kingdom? The Jews expected Him to use such force, and modern premillennialists still expect it. But it did not happen and will not happen, because that is not the nature of the kingdom!

This passage is fundamental to our understanding of Jesus' kingdom and kingship. He did not establish an earthly kingdom when He came to earth, not because He could not, but because He never intended to do so. Nor will He establish such an earthly kingdom when He comes again. Premillennialists are as wrong about this as the first-century Jews were. See the next verse for further discussion.

Verse 37

33. For what reason had Jesus come to earth? Did Jesus affirm or deny He was a king?

Pilate then repeated his question and asked if Jesus was a king.

Asked about His kingly authority again, Jesus answered, "Thou sayest" or "It is as you say." This was a claim that the statement was true (cf. notes on the Jewish trial, see Luke 23:3; Matt. 27:11; Mark 15:2; 1 Tim. 6:12,13). The NKJV gives the correct sense: "You say rightly that I am a king.

Jesus then explained more about the nature of His monarchy. He was born into the world to be a king. He did not deny this. But His authority was not that of physical force but of spiritual truth. He came to bear witness to truth, and all who respect truth would hear and obey Him.

His followers were not an earthly nation. He used the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, to make voluntary converts. All those who respected truth and sought to be right with God would accept His word and follow Him.

Note the serious consequences of this both to Judaism (ancient and modern) and premillennialism. Both are even yet expecting the Messiah to come to earth and reign over an earthly kingdom, the very thing Jesus here denied. Their doctrine denies Jesus is now king and that the church is His kingdom, doctrines which are repeatedly taught elsewhere.

Jesus will not begin to reign when He returns. He is now king: Matthew 2:2; 28:18-20; Psalm 110:1-4; Zechariah 6:12,13; Acts 2:30-36; Ephesians 1:20-23; Hebrews 1:3-9,13; 6:20; 7:1; 8:1; 10:12,13; Revelation 1:5. The kingdom now exists and is the church: Daniel 2:31-45; Matthew 16:18,19; Mark 1:14,15; 9:1; John 18:36; Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-17,33; 1 Corinthians 15:22-28; Colossians 1:13,14; Hebrews 12:23-29; Revelation 1:9. The kingdom is spiritual in nature: Luke

17:20,21; Psalm 110:1-4; John 18:36; Romans 14:17; John 3:3-7; 6:15,27,63. To deny these truths is to teach fundamental error against Jesus' character and authority.

For further discussion of Jesus' kingdom and premillennialism, see our articles on that subject on our Bible Instruction web site at www.gospelway.com/instruct/.

Verse 38

34. What verdict did Pilate reach about Jesus?

Since Jesus had emphasized truth, Pilate asked, "What is truth?"

This appears to be a question of skepticism and agnosticism. There is no evidence that Pilate asked because he wanted an answer. Instead, He appeared to be making a point. He apparently did not believe anyone could know what the truth is. Many people today hold the same view and criticize anyone who appears to believe they know the truth in spiritual matters. Those who hold that view should realize they stand with Pilate, not with Jesus.

Pilate had, however, heard enough to know Jesus was not dangerous to Rome. In fact, the Jews had proved nothing against Jesus. So, Pilate plainly told the Jews, "I find no fault in Him at all." This is just one of several times he stated this verdict. In fact, no evidence was ever produced to prove Jesus was guilty of wrongdoing, let alone worthy of death. The one responsible for judging Him declared Him innocent. Whatever the final sentence may have been, the verdict was "Not guilty!" It necessarily follows that, in killing Jesus, Pilate deliberately chose to kill a man whom he knew and had declared to be innocent. He also gave the Jews fair warning that they were seeking the death of one who did not in any way deserve such a penalty.

Verses 39,40

35. What offer did he make to the Jews, and what choice did they make? (Think: Who was Barabbas, and what does this show about the Jews?)

Barabbas is released instead of Jesus.

Cf. Matthew 27:15-17. There was a custom at the feast for the governor to release some prisoner whoever the people wanted released. This custom was known both to the people and the governor. (Luke says the people actually asked for this custom to be honored by the governor.) The purpose of the custom, one would suppose, was a means whereby the governor could attempt to please the people and gain their favor.

Pilate offered the people a choice to have Jesus released or else a notorious man named Barabbas. Mark says Barabbas was guilty of insurrection and murder (15:7). John adds that he was a robber.

Note that, when the Jews asked for this man to be released, they asked for a man who was guilty of all the evil deeds for which the Jews had falsely accused Jesus and even more! He really was guilty of rebelling against Caesar, etc. Yet, they asked for him to be released and called for the death of Jesus, whom they could prove guilty of none of these things! Their hypocrisy is again incredible. If they really believed Jesus was guilty of claiming to be a king and rebelling against Caesar, and if they really objected to these things, then why ask for the release of one whom they knew to be guilty of all these? This act of itself proves beyond doubt that all their accusations against Jesus before Pilate were deceit and whitewash. They had other reasons for wanting Jesus dead, and Pilate was not fooled.

It appears that Pilate wanted to release Jesus instead of Barabbas, because he knew Jesus was innocent but Barabbas was guilty. Yet the people chose Barabbas.

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