

Harmony Of The Gospels -- Lesson #13

The Arrest, Trial, Crucifixion And Burial Of Jesus

Matthew 26:47-27:66; Mark 14:43-15:47; Luke 22:47-23:56; John 18:2-19:42; Acts 1:18-19

- I. ***Jesus is Betrayed, Arrested And Forsaken (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-52; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:2-12)***
 - A. The presence of Judas is mentioned by each gospel writer. His betrayal made a deep impression upon them. The arresting party which accompanied Judas consisted of the band of officers and men from the temple guard of Levitical police, Pharisees, scribes, servants, chief priests, captains of the temple and elders.
 - B. John mentions the foreknowledge of Jesus to remind us that He could have avoided the arrest had He chosen to do so. Before Judas could identify Jesus, the Lord had twice declared Himself to be the party whom they sought. Jesus wanted him to complete the sign, not as a friend but as a traitor.
 - C. Peter apparently stood ready to made good on his boast that he would suffer, and, if need be, die, in His Lord's service. John knew the household of the high priest (John 18:16). He knew Malchus by name and he also knew his household (John 18:26).
 - D. By the healing of Malchus' ear and the words spoken to Peter, Jesus shows that the sword is not to be used either to defend the truth or to advance His kingdom. We must be careful not to put undue influence on "carnal weapons" which are equally futile in our efforts to advance the truth.
 - E. The party which came to arrest Jesus was large. The word "band" used by John to describe part of it is *speira*, which is the Greek name for the cohort, a division of the Roman army which in the time of Augustus contained 555 men. Ten cohorts, or a legion, were usually quartered in the castle Antonia, at the northwest corner of the temple complex. It is not likely that the entire cohort was there, but the gospel writers do refer to it as a great multitude.
 - F. All the predictions of Jesus had failed to prepare the apostles for the terrors of His arrest. Despite all His warnings, each apostle sought his own safety. The young man who fled naked is usually presumed to be Mark.

II. ***Jesus First Examined By Annas, The Ex-High Priest (John 18:12-14, 19-23)***

- A. John restates the fact of one man dying for the people to remind the reader that Jesus was about to be tried by those who had prejudged Him and decided upon His death.
- B. The high priesthood was a life office. According to Josephus, Annas was high priest, but the Romans had given the office to Caiaphas. As high priest, therefore, and as head of the Sadducean party, the people looked to Annas before Caiaphas, taking Jesus to him first. The influence of Annas is shown by the fact that he made five of his sons and sons-in-law high priests. Annas is said to be about sixty years old at this time.
- C. Jesus was under arrest, and as the trial had not yet begun there was ample time to introduce new charges against Him. If, in addressing the high priest, He had just spoke words worthy of punishment, the officer who struck Him should, instead, have preferred charges against Him and had Him punished in a legal manner. If the officer could not do this (and the point here is that he could not), he was doubly wrong in striking Jesus. Therefore, Jesus rebuked the wrong-doer.

III. ***Jesus Is Tried And Condemned By Caiaphas And The Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53, 55-56; Luke 22:54, 63-65; John 18:24)***

- A. It is likely that Annas had apartments in the same palace with Caiaphas, and that from these apartments Jesus was led into some hall large enough to hold the Sanhedrin, which had not convened. However, this was not its formal session as a court; it was meeting more in the capacity of a committee.
- B. They took Jesus' words in John 2:19-22 and twisted them against Him. The accounts of Matthew and Mark show how the witnesses failed to agree. A man could only be condemned on the testimony of two witnesses agreeing as to some fact or facts constituting a ground for condemnation (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15).
- C. While the testimony might be used to show that Jesus was boastful, it was insufficient to justify a sentence of blasphemy. A threat to destroy the temple might be construed as blasphemy, but a promise to rebuild the temple, if destroyed, was altogether different. The high priest, knowing this, sought to extort from Jesus some additional evidence. Jesus gave no explanation, since the future would explain His meaning, and speak the truth to all who had the ears to hear it.
- D. Seeing that Jesus was not going to be lured into an answer, Caiaphas desperately tried to question Jesus plainly and bluntly. Caiaphas actually had no legal right to ask either of these questions. No one could

be compelled to testify against himself, but he knew the claims of Jesus, and realized that if Jesus repudiated them He would be shamed forever, and if He asserted them He could be charged with blasphemy.

- E. The "right hand of power" was commonly understood to mean the right hand of God. By the words "nevertheless" and "henceforth" Jesus brings His present state of humiliation into contrast with His future state of glory. One day, He would sit in judgment and they would stand on trial before Him.
- F. Though Jesus had given the very answer which the high priest was longing to hear, he hypocritically pretended to be shocked at it, and rended his clothes and feigned horror. Jesus, having stood out for examination, is now given back to the officers to be led away into the council chamber. The officers heaped many indignities upon Him to try and show that He was not to be regarded as human.

IV. ***Peter Denies The Lord Three Times (Matthew 26:58, 69-75; Mark 14:54, 66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27)***

- A. John's familiarity appears to have been with the household as well as with the high priest personally. The doorkeeper evidently recognized John as a disciple, and was therefore suspicious of Peter. The cowardly "I am not" of Peter is a sad contrast to the strong "I am He" of Jesus.
- B. Though his faith in Christ was shaken, he still loved Him enough to desire to see what would become of Him. Peter's second denial was committed before four different parties, but in such a quick succession that the event is regarded as one.
- C. Peter, exasperated by the repeated accusations, lost his temper and began to emphasize his denial by profanity. Desire to make good his denial is now supreme in his thoughts and the Lord whom he denied is all but forgotten.
- D. When Peter remembered the loving tenderness Jesus manifested when He foretold Peter's crime it formed a background against which the sin appeared in all its terrible enormity.

V. ***After Dawn, Jesus Is Formally Condemned By The Sanhedrin (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71)***

- A. Since blasphemy was not a criminal offense among the Romans, the Sanhedrin consulted together and sought for some charge of which the Romans would take notice. They found no new ground of accusation against Jesus, but they decided to pervert the Lord's claim to be the Christ, making Him an insurrectionist.
- B. Jesus protested against the violence and injustice of His trial. His judges were asking Him whether He was the Christ without any inten-

tion of investigating the truth of His claim. They asked in an unlawful spirit and in an unlawful manner.

- C. Jesus appealed to them to try the question as to who He was, but they insisted on confining the question as to who He claimed to be, assuming that the claim was false.
- D. They unconsciously admitted that they lacked evidence against Jesus. The Sanhedrin could try and condemn, but they could not put to death without the concurring sentence of the Roman governor. To obtain this sentence they now lead Jesus before Pilate in the early dawn, having made good use of their time.

VI. Remorse And Suicide Of Judas The Betrayer (Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19)

- A. Judas, having no reason to fear the enemies of Jesus, probably stood in their midst and witnessed His condemnation. Judas' "remorse" is not necessarily repentance. He recognizes not only that he is guilty of betrayal but that Jesus whom he has betrayed is "innocent."
- B. The rulers certainly did not want to undo what had been done to Jesus. Judas, who had every opportunity of knowing Jesus, and who was greedy enough to betray Him, was forced to admit for the sake of his conscience that there was no reason why he should have betrayed Christ.
- C. The law of God made no provision as to the use of blood money; it was the tradition of the elders which forbade it to be put into the treasury. They could take out the Lord's money and spend it for blood, but when it was spent they could not put it back!
- D. The money was ultimately used to buy a field wherein those who were foreigners were buried. Whether rich or poor, they were not wanted in Jewish graveyards. The potter's field, being excavated for clay, would be of little value, and would therefore sell cheap.
- E. The parenthesis in Acts 1:18-19 contains the words of Luke inserted in the middle of a speech made by Peter. His account of Judas' death varies in three points from that given by Matthew, but the variations are easily harmonized. First, Judas evidently hung until his abdomen was partially decomposed; then his neck giving way, the rope breaking or something happening which caused his body to fall, it burst open when it struck the ground. Second, Judas is spoken of as purchasing the field, and so he did, for the priests bought it with his money, so it legally was his purchase. Third, the field is called "the field of blood" for two reasons and Matthew and Luke each gives one of them.

VII. *Jesus Before Pilate The First Time (Matthew 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38)*

- A. The Jewish rulers first attempted to induce Pilate to accept their verdict, condemn Jesus upon it and execute Him without a trial. If they had succeeded in this, Jesus would have been put to death as a blasphemer. However, as Pilate had insisted upon trying Jesus, and as blasphemy was not a capital offense under Roman law, Jesus was condemned and executed as the "King of the Jews."
- B. As the Jews insisted on their own verdict, Pilate made them pronounce their own sentence, declining to mix jurisdiction by pronouncing a Roman sentence on a Sanhedrin verdict. However, the Jews responded that it was not in their power to pronounce the sentence for which their verdict called, since they could not put Him to death.
- C. The Jews then changed their verdict into a charge, and they became witnesses as to the truth of the matter charged. Their assertions were false. The first charge, that Jesus was a perverter of the people, was extremely vague. The second charge, that He taught to withhold tribute from Caesar, was a deliberate lie. The third charge, coupled with the other two, was intended to convey a sense which was maliciously false. Jesus was a spiritual king, and thus was not an offender against the Roman government.
- D. The question asked by Pilate expressed surprise. There was certainly nothing in the manner or attire of Jesus to suggest a royal claimant. The question was designed to draw Jesus out to show if He was a fanatic. Jesus admitted that He was a king, but the statement He made negated the sense contained in the Jewish accusation. Pilate knew that the accusations came from a suspicious source, and wanted Jesus to tell him plainly what had incurred the wrath of the Jews.
- E. Jesus told Pilate that that these kingly claims were not problematic for the Romans. He furthermore enlightened Pilate as to the nature of His kingdom. He was the incarnation of truth, and all those who desired to live according to God's truth were His subjects. The question of Pilate in John 18:38, although the subject of much debate, evidently was asked in an honest way to investigate the case of Jesus further. However, Pilate left the question unanswered and proceeded with the trial.
- F. Pilate was irritated that that Jesus did not speak in His own defense. He had already seen enough of our Lord's wisdom to assure him that it would be an easy matter for Him to expose the emptiness of all these charges. The Lord's silence was a matter of prophecy (Isaiah 53:7). Jesus kept still because to have successfully defended Himself would have been to negate the purpose for which He came into the world.

VIII. ***Jesus Before Herod Antipas The Tetrarch (Luke 23:6-12)***

- A. "These days" refers to the passover season. Pilate had come up from his residence at Caesarea to keep order during the passover, and Herod had come from Tiberias to keep in favor with the Jews by showing respect to their festival.
- B. The rulers felt their case had failed before Pilate, so they became more urgent in the presence of Herod, since Herod had less reason to fear them than Pilate. In the midst of this, Jesus stood silent, answering neither question nor accusation. Herod, as stated ruler, adulterer and murderer, wanted Jesus to amuse him, but Jesus had nothing but silence for him. The only contemptuous word which Jesus is recorded to have spoken in reference to Herod is recorded in Luke 13:31-32.
- C. Herod took vengeance upon the silence of Christ by treating Him with abusive contempt. However, finding nothing in Jesus worthy of condemnation, he returned Him to Pilate. Pilate gained half his desire: Herod was now his friend, but the case of Jesus was still on his hands.

IX. ***Jesus Before Pilate The Second Time (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16)***

- A. No one knows when or by whom this custom of releasing a prisoner was introduced, but similar customs existed elsewhere. Both the Greeks and Romans desired to bestow special honor upon certain occasions by releasing prisoners.
- B. Josephus tells us that there had been an insurrection against Pilate's government about that time caused by his taking money from the temple treasury for the construction of an aqueduct. This may have been the matter referred to by the gospel writers, for in it many lost their lives.
- C. Although it was still early in the morning, the crowd came to demanding their annual gift of a prisoner's release. Pilate welcomed the demand because it was a possible escape from his problem. Even though Jesus had been found innocent by both he and Herod, Pilate did not have the courage to deliberately release him. He sought to please the rulers by scourging Him. Pilate sought to please everybody, but ended up pleasing nobody.
- D. After he found the mob persistent, he boldly declined to do its will and turned back into the Praetorium declaring his intention to release Jesus. He secretly hoped that a good scourging would satisfy the crowd. He believed that the more moderate ones would take pity on Jesus when they saw Him, for scourging was so cruel that the condemned person often died under its infliction.
- E. If Pilate had found Jesus guilty, he would have condemned Him at once. As it was, he sought to return Jesus to the Sanhedrin as having

committed no crime of which the Roman law could take note. After the scourging, Pilate presented Jesus to the crowd, not as a king, but as merely a man. However, none of the Jewish rulers ever wavered in their demand for crucifixion.

- F. Thinking that Pilate was accusing them of trying to put an innocent man to death, they defended themselves by revealing the fact that in addition to the charges that they had accused Jesus of, they had found Him clearly guilty and worthy of death on another charge, i.e., blasphemy.
- G. Pilate, in an effort to please the Jews, crucified Jesus, reversing the sentence which he suggested he might render to please Jesus. Pilate condemned the innocent when brought before him, but the Sanhedrin searched and arrested the innocent so that they might condemn Him. Therefore, they bore the greater sin.
- H. Pilate's act of washing his hands was symbolic, intended to show that he regarded the crucifixion of Jesus as a murder, and therefore he washed his hands of the guilt thereof. At the destruction of Jerusalem the Jews answered in part for the blood of Christ.

X. ***The Roman Soldiers Mock Jesus (Matthew 27:27-30; Mark 15:16-19)***

- A. Mark mentions the scourging to show that it preceded the crucifixion, but we see from John's account that the scourging took place somewhat earlier in the proceeding. The Praetorium is probably the old palace of Herod; the soldiers take Jesus into the palace courtyard, where they fulfill Jesus' predictions in Matthew 20:17-20.
- B. Pilate delivered Jesus to their punishment, but not into their hands. After the sentence of death, the soldiers take Jesus back into the Praetorium and renew the mockeries and indignities which had been interrupted so that Pilate could show Jesus to the people.
- C. It is likely that the mock robe and crown were removed when Jesus was brought before Pilate to be sentenced, for it is highly improbable that a Roman judge would pronounce the death sentence while the prisoner was clothed in such a manner.

XI. ***Jesus On The Way To The Cross At Golgotha (Matthew 27:31-34; Mark 15:20-23; Luke 23:26-33; John 19:16-17)***

- A. Cyrene was a city in North Africa and it had a large Jewish population. The Cyreneans had one or more synagogues in Jerusalem (Acts 2:10; 6:9; 11:20). There were many Cyreneans engaged in spreading the gospel (Acts 13:1). He was commanded to carry the cross of Jesus. On the way to Golgotha, only women of Jerusalem expressed their sorrow. Some of these women would survive until the siege of Jerusalem. Je-

Jesus bore His own suffering in silence, but He pitied those who would have to live through that anguish.

- B. Jesus furthermore reflected upon the sorrows which the Romans would bring upon the Jews. If the innocence of Jesus could not even stop the Roman persecution, what will the guilty, rebellious inhabitants of Jerusalem do when the Romans come against them?
- C. Jesus was taken to Golgotha, but the exact location is unknown to us today. However, we do know that it was outside of the city (John 19:20; Hebrews 13:12). The mixture of sour wine mingled with gall and myrrh, a custom thought to have originated with the Jews and not the Romans, was intended to dull the pain of those being crucified or scourged. Jesus declined it because it was the Father's will that He should suffer. He could not go to the cross in a drugged, semi-conscious state.

XII. *The First Three Hours On The Cross (Matthew 27:35-44; Mark 15:24-32; Luke 23:33-43; John 19:18-27)*

- A. The two robbers on the crosses next to Jesus had probably been condemned because they were insurrectionists and outlaws. According to Josephus, large numbers of them were crucified during the Jewish wars. These two may have been crucified at this time for the sake of convenience, but the fact that Jesus was placed between them suggests that it was done to heighten His humiliation. Pilate had no personal ill-will toward Jesus, but he did want to show contempt for the Jews' "King."
- B. The Lord's first words on the cross remind us of Isaiah 53:12. These words are consistent with His own teaching (Matthew 5:44), and it was echoed by Stephen (Acts 7:59-60). Peter and Paul both spoke of the ignorance of the Jews (Acts 3:17; 1 Corinthians 2:8).
- C. A quaternion or band of four soldiers did the work of the actual crucifixion. The Roman law awarded them the garments of the condemned as their reward. The "coat" was the tunic or undergarment which reached from the shoulders to the knees. Ordinarily it was in two pieces, but this one, being one piece, was more valuable. Even the small part the soldiers played in the crucifixion was the subject of prophecy (cf. Psalm 22:18).
- D. It was customary for the Romans to place a writing above the head of the crucified to indicate the cause for which they died. Pilate wrote the accusation in a way which would show his contempt for the Jewish people. They had forced him to crucify an innocent man, and he retaliated by giving Him the title which his enemies accused Him of professing. Hebrew, Latin and Greek were the languages of religion, law and

philosophy, respectively. Pilate used them because all three were spoken by people in Jerusalem.

- E. At first, both of the robbers reviled Christ, but one repented and asked to be remembered in His kingdom. It is unlikely that the robber had a conception of the spiritual kingdom of Jesus, but he arrived at the conclusion that Jesus was the Messiah and would come in His kingdom despite His death. Many make the thief an example of salvation today, but he cannot be because of the fact that he lived before the new covenant was instituted (cf. Hebrews 9:15-17). Jesus could change its terms to suit the occasion at this point.
- F. By using the title "woman," Jesus addressed His mother at the end of His ministry with the same word which He had used at its beginning (John 2:4). He made her welfare one of His last cares on the cross when He was making atonement for the sins of the world (1 Timothy 5:8).

XIII. *The Second Three Hours On The Cross (Matthew 27:45-50; Mark 15:33-37; Luke 23:44-46; John 19:28-30)*

- A. The darkness that was "over all the land" for three hours was a sign of judgment and/or tragedy (cf. Amos 8:9-10). The judgment is therefore a judgment on the land and its people, but it is also a judgment on Jesus; for out of this darkness comes His cry of desolation.
- B. We can imagine what it would mean to a righteous man to feel that he was forsaken by God. The more we feel the love of another, the greater our sense of loss at being deprived of it. Considering the relationship of the Son and the Father, we can never know the depth of anguish the cry expressed as the darkness was lifted.
- C. Jesus had come, ministered, suffered and had conquered. There only remained the taking possession of the grave, and thereby overcoming death. By His righteousness Jesus had triumphed in man's behalf and the mighty task was accomplished. None of the gospel writers speak of Jesus as dying because He yielded up His spirit voluntarily (John 10:18).

XIV. *The Phenomena Accompanying The Death Of Christ (Matthew 27:51-56; Mark 15:38-41; Luke 23:45, 47-49)*

- A. The veil was the heavy curtain which hung between the holy and the most holy places in the sanctuary. It signified that the way into the holiest, and by extension, into heaven, was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was standing (Hebrews 9:7-8). The moment Jesus died, the veil was appropriately rent from top to bottom, disclosing the most holy place to the priests who were at that time offering the evening incense in the holy place.

- B. The earthquake, the rending of the rocks and the consequent opening of the graves occurred at the moment Jesus died, while the resurrection and appearance of the bodies of the saints occurred after His resurrection. Matthew mentions the event here because of its association with the rending of the rocks, which opened the sepulchers in which the saints were buried.
- C. The Roman centurion's faith surpassed those who had far better opportunities to believe in Jesus. Furthermore, the people who had acted under the influence of the priests now yielded to a greater authority. This change of feeling led many to repent and confess Christ at Pentecost.
- D. The women, at one time, stood close to the cross before the darkness. They probably feared violence in the darkness, so they withdrew to a safer distance. Matthew, Mark and Luke, who mentioned the women toward the close of the crucifixion, do not mention the mother of Jesus as being with them. It is likely that she had withdrawn with John, being unable to endure the sight any longer.

XV. *The Burial Of The Body Of Jesus (Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-46; Luke 23:50-54; John 19:31-42)*

- A. According to rabbinical writing, the few hours before the Sabbath were called the Preparation, but afterwards the term was applied to the entire day preceding the Sabbath. Jewish law forbade that a body should hang overnight, for a dead body was cursed (Deuteronomy 21:22-23).
- B. The execution squad was well acquainted with the signs of death. Consequently, not fracturing Jesus' legs shows that they considered Him to be already dead. His swift death undoubtedly indicated a voluntary ending of His life because His work was ended. He had said of Himself that He could lay down His life that He might take it again (John 10:17).
- C. When Jesus was buried by one who was rich, it was a fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 53:9). Joseph's initiative was remarkably courageous, and Pilate probably granted his request only because he was convinced that Jesus was not really guilty of high treason. Pilate was surprised because men rarely died the first day on a cross, and there are instances where men lived an entire week on a cross.
- D. Myrrh was a resin and the aloe was pulverized wood. Both were aromatic. The spices were wrapped between the folds of the linen in order to partially embalm the body. Two members of the Sanhedrin united to bury Jesus, each showing his reverence in his own way.
- E. To the linen cloth Joseph added the honor of a burial in his own tomb. The unused state of the tomb is mentioned to show that there is no shadow of doubt as to whose resurrection opened it.

XVI. *The Watch Of The Women By The Tomb Of Jesus (Matthew 27:61-66; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55-56)*

- A. The preparation of spices by the women showed that part of the burial was not, in their estimation, completed. This unfinished burial led the women back to the tomb early on the first day of the week and therefore brought the glad news of the resurrection.
- B. Matthew mentions the preparation day, drawing the mind back to what we would call Friday night. It is highly improbable that the Jews would leave the tomb of Jesus unguarded for one whole night. Had the phrase "after three days" meant three full days to them, they would have said "until the fourth day."
- C. The marvelous signs accompanying the death of Jesus appealed to men's fear rather than to their love, and were, therefore, calculated to make a far deeper impression upon His enemies than upon His friends. We see, therefore, that these Jewish rulers had an active interest in the dead Christ while His apostles and friends were listless in despair.
- D. They were fearful that the disciples could make a stir among the people by stealing the body and proclaiming His resurrection. The apostles, on the other hand, when the actual resurrection had taken place, did not learn for fifty days what use to make of it, thus showing that they could not have staged a resurrection.
- E. They sealed the stone by drawing a string or tape across it and fastening the ends with wax or clay to the surface of the rock on either side. If either of the seals were broken, it would show that the tomb was entered from the outside.