

The Day Christ Died

The last twenty-four hours of Jesus' life stand as the most important in human history. During this time, the Great Creator of all that exists offered Himself to atone for the sins of all mankind.

The words that follow trace what took place as the Lamb of God advanced toward His death. This period begins with Jesus and His disciples keeping His final Passover. Contrary to what many believe, this observance actually took place on a Tuesday evening, making Jesus' crucifixion occur on Wednesday, the eve of the High Sabbath that began the Days of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6). The times assigned to each event are estimates based on the Biblical record. For the sake of clarity, the reconstruction of this event is divided into fourteen parts.

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Part I

Jesus' Last Passover

Tuesday evening, Nisan 14

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Jesus and His disciples arrive at a home prepared for them to partake of the Passover. They will keep this feast in an upper room. Although the name of the homeowner is not mentioned in any of the gospels, many authorities believe he may have been the father of John Mark. (Mt. 26:20)

As they enter the upper room, the disciples are arguing over power and status as well as who will be the greatest in the Kingdom (Lk. 22:14-30). Regrettably, this was a recurring dispute among them. A few weeks earlier, the mother of James and John actually lobbied for her sons to sit at Jesus' right and left side in the Kingdom (Mt. 20:20-28). Although their arguing is clearly a distraction, Jesus addresses this issue, and in doing so, offers a profound lesson about power and greatness in His Father's Kingdom.

He does so by kneeling before His disciples and washing their feet. So shocking is this act that Peter at first refuses to allow Jesus to do such a thing to him. However, he later consents. (Jn. 13:1-17)

As the meal progresses, Jesus indicates that He will be betrayed by one of His disciples (Mt. 26:21-25). He later identifies that disciple by saying, "He it is for whom I shall dip the sop and give it to him."

Note:

Given the eating styles of the day, everyone present may have dipped their hands in the dish with Jesus. Therefore, His words may have been of little use to the disciples in determining who the betrayer was. The point the Messiah may very well have been making was that His betrayal would come from a friend, with whom He had shared His food just as it was prophesied (Psa. 41:9).

Satan then enters into Judas Iscariot (Jn. 13:27), causing him to leave the upper room. However, the disciples are unaware of what he is about to do. They think he is going to purchase provisions for the feast or perhaps give something to the poor. (Jn. 13:27-30)

The Messiah then makes a powerful statement regarding Judas and his act of treachery. Jesus says that although His betrayal was prophesied in the scriptures, this did not mean that the one who would betray Him was not responsible for this act. Jesus then reveals that it would actually have been better if Judas Iscariot had never been born. (Mt. 26:24)

Then, quoting from the book of Zechariah (Zech. 13:7), Jesus informs the disciples that they will all desert Him. (Mt. 26:31-32)

Peter rebukes Jesus for even thinking such a thing. He then declares that he is prepared to go to prison and even face death for the Messiah. (Lk. 22:33)

Jesus responds by informing Peter that he (Peter) will deny his Lord three times before the cock crows the following morning (Lk. 22:34). Peter must have been genuinely mystified by these words. He was totally convinced that his loyalty to the Messiah was unwavering.

At this point, Jesus introduces new elements to the Passover. He institutes the symbols of the bread and wine as types of His body which would be broken (1Cor. 11:24) and His blood which would be shed (Mt. 26:26-28; 1Cor. 11:25).

After instituting the symbols of the New Covenant, Jesus teaches His disciples about their responsibilities as leaders in the New Testament church. This is often referred to as His "Farewell Discourse" and is given while they are still in the upper room. During this discourse Jesus promises the disciples that He will send the holy spirit to guide them. He also speaks of the connection between obedience and love. The point He makes is that you cannot have one without the other (Jn. 14).

Jesus and His disciples now prepare to leave the upper room. However, before they go, they sing a hymn (Mt. 26:30). The scriptures do not identify the specific song they sang; however, the one normally sung at the Passover was the last part of the "Hallel" (Psa. 114-118). During this song, the leader would sing the verses while the followers would respond with "Hallelujah."

At some point during this period, Judas Iscariot is meeting with the chief priests and the Pharisees and plotting the capture of Jesus. Additionally, Judas has received thirty pieces of silver for his betrayal just as it was prophesied (Zech. 11:12).

Part II

On the Way to Gethsemane

8:00 PM – 9:00 PM

After leaving the upper room, Jesus and His disciples begin to walk toward the Mount of Olives. Little do the disciples know that their time with the Messiah can now be measured in hours. (Mk. 14:26).

During this journey, the Messiah provides His disciples with instructions concerning their relationship to Him and His Father. He exhorts them to bear fruit and to keep His Commandments. He also warns them that they will be persecuted because of their loyalty to Him.

Jesus then speaks powerfully concerning the great sacrifice He will make in just a few short hours. His words are deep and very moving: "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends, if you do the things I command you" (Jn. 15:1-27).

As Jesus and His disciples continue to walk toward the mount of Olives, He informs them that after His death, He will return to the Father in Heaven. However, He will not leave his disciples alone. Jesus explains that He will send the holy spirit to guide and comfort them. The Messiah then emphasizes that although He will not be with them physically, He will always be connected to them and that they can count on His love and the love of the Father (Jn. 16:1-33).

As Jesus and His disciples approach the garden of Gethsemane, He offers up a very moving intercessory prayer. In it, He acknowledges that His end is near. He then appeals to the Father to restore to Him the glory he had before the world began. Additionally, Jesus asks His Father to bless the disciples as well as those who will believe because of what the disciples will teach. He concludes this prayer with words of great hope: "O righteous Father, the world has not known You: but I have known You, and these (the disciples) have known that You have sent me. And I have declared unto them Your Name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith You have loved me may be in them and I in them" (Jn. 17:1-26).

Jesus and His disciples then proceed to enter the garden of Gethsemane.

Part III

In the Garden of Gethsemane

9:00 PM – Midnight

Upon their arrival at Gethsemane, Jesus instructs eight of His disciples to wait and pray while He, as well as Peter, James, and John go further into the garden (Mt. 26:36-37).

Jesus then reveals to these three men that His soul was exceedingly sorrowful, “even unto death” (Mk. 14:34). With these words, Jesus is not suggesting that He wants to die, but rather that the great emotional stress He is experiencing at this time is so severe it is actually life threatening.

Jesus then leaves these three very close friends and goes further into the garden by Himself. There He falls to the ground and pours out His heart to the Father. Jesus appeals to Him to remove the “cup” containing the horror of His impending death. However, the Messiah also acknowledges that the decision regarding what would happen was up to the Father and that whatever His Father choose, He would honor it without hesitation (Mk. 14:35-36).

Note:

At this point, it is important to understand that never once did the Messiah consider abandoning the course He was on. There was not one ounce of doubt in Jesus concerning His commitment to His Father’s will. To suggest otherwise is simply ignorant of God’s great Plan and how it would play out. What Jesus was seeking was clarity. He would accept another course only IF it would achieve the same end (Mt. 26:39).

As Jesus suffers in the garden, His perspiration becomes as it were “great drops of blood.” In response to this incredible mental anguish, an angel is sent to strengthen Him (Lk. 22:44).

The Messiah will offer up His appeal for the Father to intervene three different times. After each prayer, He will return to His disciples, only to find them sleeping (Mt. 26:39-46).

Upon the conclusion of His third and final prayer in Gethsemane, Jesus hears the sounds of soldiers approaching. He quickly gathers His disciples and goes out to meet them (Mt. 26:46).

Part IV

The Arrest of the Messiah

Between midnight and 1:00 AM

Wednesday Morning

While still in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus and His disciples meet up with Judas Iscariot and a contingent of soldiers dispatched by the chief priests and the Pharisees (Jn. 18:2).

Jesus asks the arresting party whom they seek. When they inform Him they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah informs them "I am He" (Jn. 18:3).

Upon hearing Jesus' words, the soldiers stagger backwards and fall to the ground (Jn. 18:6).

Judas Iscariot then moves toward Jesus and kisses Him as a sign to the soldiers that this is, in fact, the one they seek (Mt.26:48).

At this point, Jesus requests that His disciples be allowed to go because it is Him they are looking for. Furthermore, He will offer no resistance to those who had come to seize Him (Jn. 18:8-9).

As the soldiers begin to arrest the Messiah, Peter draws his sword and attempts to defend his Lord. During the commotion he cuts off the ear of the servant of the high priest. His name is Malchus (Mt. 26:50-51).

Jesus rebukes Peter for his attack and informs him that He does not require the protection of His disciples. He explains to Peter that if He wished to be delivered from this situation, He could summon twelve legions (72,000) of angels to come to His defense. However, this is not what the Messiah has in mind. He clearly knows what lies ahead and His heart is ready for it. (Mt 26:52-53).

After this rebuke, Jesus touches the ear of Malchus and heals him of the wound he received by Peter. This is the last miracle Jesus will perform before His death (Lk. 22:51).

The Messiah then questions the tactics used by the chief priests and the elders when arresting Him. He says, "Am I leading a rebellion, that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me?" (Mt. 25:55). The point the Messiah was making is that if He had been leading such a rebellion, this action might have made sense.

However, because Jesus openly taught in the temple, this clandestine arrest simply defied logic. Therefore, those who orchestrated it must have been motivated by something else, perhaps fear. In reality, taking the action they did revealed a great lack of moral courage on the part of these "spiritual leaders." Jesus was exposing this fact.

At this point, the Messiah is bound and taken back to the city to be tried by the Jewish leadership under the direction of the high priests. As Jesus is being led away, all the disciples flee just as He had predicted they would (Mt. 26:31; Mk. 14:50-52).

As He proceeds toward the site of His trial, Jesus most assuredly pondered the events that were about to play out in the next several hours. This could not have been easy to do.

Part V

The Interrogation of Jesus

At the Home of Annas
1:00 AM – 2:00AM

Jesus is first taken to the home of Annas, where He will be briefly interrogated. Annas was the former high priest prior to Caiaphas. As such, he is regarded with great respect and seen as an expert in the religious matters of the Jews. Additionally, he is Caiaphas' father-in-law.

Annas begins his interrogation by asking Jesus about His doctrine as well as His disciples (Jn. 18:19). It is possible that by asking about Jesus' disciples, Annas is attempting to ascertain the Messiah's sphere of influence. Perhaps the Jewish leadership was even considering taking action against those loyal to Him. After all, they had even plotted to kill Lazarus after Jesus had raised him from the dead (Jn. 12:10). They may have considered doing the same to Jesus' inner circle of followers.

Jesus explains to Annas that His message was no secret. It was, in fact, declared openly in the temple. He then goes on to say that if Annas is truly interested in what Jesus taught, all he would have to do is ask any of the numerous people who had heard His message (Jn. 18:20-21).

At this point, a soldier strikes Jesus and rebukes Him for speaking to the high priest in such a disrespectful manner (Jn. 18:22). At this point it is interesting to note that the act of striking a man who had not been condemned was illegal. However, this did not deter the guard.

The meeting with Annas is brief but speaks volumes concerning the legitimacy of the trial that awaits the Messiah. It is now clear that the Jewish leadership is interested in only one thing. They intend to condemn the Christ.

At the conclusion of His interrogation by Annas, Jesus is bound and sent to the home of Caiaphas, the current high priest. It is here that He will be formally tried (Jn. 18:24).

Part VI

On the Way to the Palace of Caiaphas

2:00 AM – 2:30 AM

As Jesus is being led to the home of Caiaphas, Peter and a second disciple return and follow at a distance. Most authorities believe this second disciple is John, the son of Zebedee. (Jn. 18:15)

Because John knows the high priest, he is allowed to enter into the court. He then requests that Peter also be allowed to enter. (Jn. 18:15-16). His request is granted.

A young girl attending the gate at Caiaphas' palace asks Peter if he is one of Jesus' disciples. Peter responds, "I am not" (Jn. 18:17). This is his first denial of the Messiah. But it will not be the last.

As Jesus' trial begins, Peter waits in an open courtyard with some officers who have just started a fire to warm themselves (Lk. 22:55). Although it is a spring evening, it is very chilly. Jerusalem lies at an altitude of 2800 feet above sea level. This fact, along with the time (well after midnight), would explain why a fire would be started.

Part VII

The Trial before the Sanhedrin

The Palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest

2:30 AM – 5:30 AM

As the trial begins, a group referred to as the scribes, elders, and chief priests gather at the palace of Caiaphas. This group, which most authorities believe comprises the Great Sanhedrin, seeks to bring charges against Jesus. They begin by presenting several witnesses accusing the Messiah of crimes worthy of death. This is done in an attempt to secure a quick verdict. However, although many witnesses speak, their testimony only conflicts with that given by other witnesses (Mk. 14:55-56). This frustrates the chief priest which only intensifies the emotionally charged atmosphere of the trial. In an attempt to recover from this legal blunder, Jesus' accusers are forced to bring forth still more testimony.

Two additional witnesses come forth and testify that Jesus threatened to destroy the temple and then raise it up in three days. This appears to be the most compelling evidence of the trial thus far. The argument being advanced by the Jewish leadership at this point is that Jesus intends to desecrate the physical temple.

The temple was an exquisite building and stood as the most significant structure in Jewish life. Furthermore, any desecration of a sacred place was almost universally considered a capital offense in the ancient world. Even pagans agreed with the Jews on this point.

In reality, Jesus did make such a claim early in His ministry. But the temple He spoke of was the temple of His body (Jn. 2:19-21).

Unfortunately for the Jewish leadership, their star witnesses are unable to agree with each other (Mk. 14:57-58). This clearly was not anticipated and only serves to exacerbate the situation.

As the case against Jesus appears to be falling apart, the religious leadership turns to the high priest. Caiaphas is a highly skilled Jewish scholar and an expert interrogator. He begins his examination of the Messiah with a long pause. This strategy is employed in hopes that Jesus will explain His actions without Caiaphas having to utter a word.

Unfortunately for the high priest, Jesus stays silent. It is possible this silence may have lasted several minutes. Additionally, it must have created a very unsettling atmosphere in the trial. However, the silence is broken when Caiaphas demands that the Messiah respond to the accusations being leveled against Him (Mk. 14:60-61).

The emotional pitch at this point is extremely high. The incredibly disciplined high priest was clearly outmatched by this young Galilean. Despite his talents, Caiaphas was being embarrassed by the Messiah – in his own home no less. As a result, he quickly abandons his earlier strategy. The high priest is not in any mood for games. Therefore, his questioning of Jesus becomes filled with intensity. He may even have been screaming at this point.

Meanwhile, as the Messiah is being threatened in what can only be described as a kangaroo court, Peter is accused of being one of Jesus' disciples as he warms himself by the fire in Caiaphas' courtyard. Once again, Peter denies having any association with Jesus (Jn. 18:25). This is Peter's second denial of the Messiah. But there is another yet to come.

Caiaphas now intensifies his interrogation of Jesus. The next question he asks is very direct and cuts through any doubt concerning his opinion of the Messiah. With all the intensity of a passionate prosecutor, Caiaphas says, "I adjure you by the living God that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!" (Mt. 26:63). The phrase "I adjure you by the living God" is a legal formula. Here Caiaphas is demanding an answer in the strongest language he can use. This is done by imposing an oath. If Jesus refuses to answer, He will be breaking a legally imposed order to testify. However, if he responds, Caiaphas is convinced Jesus will still be ruined. If Jesus denies He is the Christ, the crisis will be over, but so will His influence. If, on the other hand, Jesus affirms that He is the promised Messiah, then He must be considered a liar because He has not delivered the Jews from Roman tyranny.

Caiaphas' ploy is simple. Since the false testimony of witnesses had failed to prove Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, the high priest is hoping that Jesus will openly blaspheme when He responds to this question, and thus Jesus will condemn Himself with His own words.

At this point, Jesus provides a very interesting response to Caiaphas' question. He says, "It is as you said" (Mt. 26:64). This answer is affirmative in nature but indirect in form. Essentially, what Jesus is doing is testifying to what Caiaphas has said. In essence, Jesus is agreeing with the assertion of Caiaphas. This response is an insult to the high priest, but the best is yet to come.

Jesus then speaks words that are brazen with confidence and strength. He says, "Nevertheless, I say unto you, henceforth you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Mt. 26:64). Once again, Jesus does not use the name of God in His testimony. Instead He uses the term "power."

Upon hearing these words, Caiaphas is infuriated. He rips his clothes and shouts "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses?" (Mt. 26:65). He then asks the council, "What do you think?" They respond, "He is worthy of death!" (Mt. 26:66)

It is now approaching dawn and Peter is still outside trying to gain a glimpse of his Lord. At this point, one of the servants of the high priest notices him. This servant reveals that Peter was in Gethsemane with Jesus during the Messiah's arrest, and accuses him of being a disciple. Then someone else says that Peter's speech reveals that he is a Galilean. This is further evidence that links Peter to Jesus of Nazareth. However, Peter continues to deny any relationship with the Messiah. He even begins to "curse and swear" in an attempt to distance himself from his Master (Mk. 14:70-71, Jn.18:26).

The words "curse and swear" do not refer to obscene or profane language as it is thought of today. What Peter was doing was invoking a solemn oath in which he places a curse on himself if he is lying. He may also have appealed to something sacred in an attempt to persuade his accuser that he was telling the truth, which he wasn't.

Immediately after Peter's third denial of the Messiah the cock crows (Mt. 26:74).

Although Jesus does not hear Peter's denials of Him, He does hear the rooster crowing. This sound prompts Him to glance out a window and look upon Peter. As their eyes meet, Peter remembers what Jesus had predicted about his loyalty. Now devastated with guilt and shame, Peter leaves Caiaphas' courtyard and weeps bitterly (Lk. 22:61-62).

As Jesus turns back toward His accusers, He is spit upon and then struck. At this point, the Messiah is blindfolded. His accusers then resume mocking Him and continue to strike Him. As this indignity continues, Jesus is silent. (Mt. 26:67-68, Mk. 14:65)

Shortly after daybreak, the Messiah is formally condemned by the full council (Lk. 22:66-71).

After being condemned by the high court of the Jews, the Messiah is bound and delivered to the palace of Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judea (Mt. 27:2).

Part VIII

The First Appearance of Jesus

Before Pontus Pilate
6:00 AM – to 6:30 AM

Jesus is taken to appear before Pontius Pilate by the Jewish leadership who had just condemned Him (Lk. 23:1). However, these men refuse to enter into the governor's palace because they are afraid of being defiled and not being able to take the Passover. Therefore, as Jesus is brought into the palace, Pilate goes out to meet His accusers. He then inquires about the charges these Jewish leaders are bringing against the Messiah (Jn. 18:28-29).

The elders of the people advise Pilate that Jesus is an evil man deserving of death. His crimes include perverting the nation, forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, and saying He is Christ the King (Lk. 23:2; Jn. 18:30).

Pilate sees this as a religious matter and tells those bringing this accusation to judge Jesus according to their law (Jn. 18:31).

The Jewish leadership protests Pilate's suggestion. They inform the governor that they cannot preside over such a trial because Roman law prohibits them putting a man to death (Jn. 18:31). Noticeably absent was any admission that they had already tried Jesus.

At this point, Pilate is undoubtedly taken aback by the blatant hostility these men have toward the Messiah. Therefore, he returns to his palace to question Jesus regarding the charges against Him. He begins by asking, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Jn. 18:33).

Jesus responds by asking if Pilate had drawn this conclusion on his own or if he was told this by others (Jn. 18:34).

Pilate is clearly puzzled by the open hostility these Jewish leaders have for someone who considers Himself a king. This ambivalence is reflected in his interrogation of Jesus. Here, the governor simply cannot understand why the Jews gathered outside his palace are clamoring for the death of their king. The idea of such a thing is totally foreign to him.

In Rome, loyalty to Caesar was a given. Why wouldn't it be the same with these Jews and their king? (Jn. 18:35). Pilate may even have wondered why the crowd that was growing outside wasn't preparing to fight in defense of their leader.

Jesus understood Pilate's confusion and informed him that looks can be deceiving. The fact of the matter was that the Messiah did have a kingdom that was very real. However, His Kingdom was no threat to Rome at all. If the truth be known, it was not even of this world. If it was of this world, then Jesus' servants would fight (Jn. 18:36).

As a result of this interrogation, Pilate concludes that Jesus is innocent of the charges brought against Him. He then informs His accusers of this fact (Lk. 23:4).

When the chief priests hear this, they start hollering out multiple accusations against Jesus. This prompts Pilate to ask the Messiah why he doesn't defend Himself against such brutal words (Mk. 15:3-4).

At this point, Jesus continues to stay silent, causing Pilate to marvel greatly (Mt. 27:12-14).

As the chief priests see their chance of getting rid of the Messiah slipping away, they become desperate. They passionately argue that Jesus was a genuine threat to the empire and that He was raising up pockets of rebellion from Galilee to Judea (Lk. 23:5).

When Pilate hears this, he has what he now believes is a way to avoid getting involved in this matter. Because Jesus is a Galilean, Pilate concludes that this is a jurisdictional matter. Therefore, he will send the Messiah to Herod Antipas who presided over Galilee at this time (Lk. 23:6-7).

Part IX

Jesus' Interrogation before Herod

6:45 AM – 7:15 AM

While Jesus is being moved to appear before Herod, Judas Iscariot returns to the chief priests and elders. In an attempt to absolve himself of guilt, Judas brings back the thirty pieces of silver he received for betraying the Messiah. He then confesses, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood" (Mt. 27:3-4).

Upon hearing Judas' confession, these spiritual leaders respond, "What is that to us?" (Mt. 27: 4). These words are an attempt to absolve themselves of any responsibility in Jesus' betrayal.

However, with their response they actually indict themselves, in that they did not dispute Judas' confession that Jesus was innocent: "I have betrayed innocent blood" (Mt. 27:4). With this in mind, Judas' confession should mean something to these men because, although he (Judas) betrayed innocent blood, they (the chief priests and elders) were responsible for condemning innocent blood. It is very possible they knew this truth.

Judas then throws the betrayal money into the sanctuary and leaves. Shortly after that he commits suicide (Mt. 27:5-10).

At this point, Jesus appears before Herod Antipas. Herod is the tetrarch over Galilee and as a Jew, is in Jerusalem to observe the Passover.

During this interrogation, Herod asks the Messiah several questions. However, Jesus stays silent. This silence causes the chief priests and scribes to "vehemently accuse Him." And although Herod finds Jesus "not guilty," He, along with his soldiers, mock Him before sending Him back to Pilate (Lk. 23:8-12).

Part X

The Second Appearance of the Messiah

Before Pontus Pilate
7:30 AM – 8:30 AM

Upon receiving Jesus from Herod, Pilate informs the chief priests that neither he nor Herod can find fault in the one they accuse. The governor then states that he will beat the Messiah and then let Him go. However, Pilate can tell that this judgment is not setting well with the Jewish leaders who appear before him (Lk. 23:13-16).

At this point, Pilate's wife strongly advises him to have nothing to do with condemning Jesus. She informs the governor that she has suffered many things in a dream that warn against taking any action. She appeals to her husband to walk away from this matter. (Mt. 27:19)

Upon hearing her words, Pilate attempts to placate Jesus' accusers. He decides to invoke a Passover custom in which a condemned man receives a full pardon. However, according to the custom, the people must choose who is to be pardoned (Mk. 15:6).

Pilate then orders that a man named Barabbas be brought forth and set before the crowd gathering outside. He then asks the crowd who should be released, Jesus or Barabbas (Mt. 27:17).

The chief priests and the elders persuade the crowd to ask for Barabbas to be released and for Jesus to be crucified (Mt. 27:20:21).

Pilate orders that Jesus be beaten (Jn. 19:1). At this point, Jesus is scourged in a ritual called "the half death." This is not simply a beating. It is a vicious act of torture in which the Messiah is nearly skinned alive (Mt. 27:26). Additionally, the soldiers commanding the affair beat Him in the face with a stick and spit on Him. Once this is done, they prepare to lead Him away to His death (Mk. 15:16-20). However, before Jesus is marched to the site of His execution, He is returned to the governor one last time.

Pilate then presents Jesus before the crowd and announces that he finds no fault in Him worthy of death (Jn. 19:4-5). The governor may be hoping that Jesus' bloody condition will satisfy the crowd's desire for Him to suffer. However, this overture fails.

The crowd in a near frenzy cries out, "Crucify Him!" (Lk. 23:20-22).

At this point, Pilate cannot grasp why the Jewish leadership so desperately wants Jesus to be executed. The Jews then inform him that Jesus "made Himself the Son of God" (Jn. 19:7-8).

When Pilate hears this accusation, he becomes even more concerned. In reality, the governor may not be as afraid of the Messiah as much as he is impressed with Him. The point is that Pilate is witnessing firsthand the incredible poise and dignity Jesus maintains at a time when every other man in history would be falling apart (Jn. 19:8). The question Pilate may be considering at this point is: Could Jesus be more than just a man?

Pilate then goes back into his palace and appeals to Jesus to put up a defense. At this point he tells the Messiah that he (Pilate) has the power to acquit Him and set Him free if Jesus would only stand up and fight to vindicate Himself (Jn. 19:9-10).

Jesus informs the governor that the only power he (Pilate) enjoys is given to him by God. The Messiah then reveals that those who delivered Him into the hands of Pilate bear the greater sin (Jn. 19:11).

Here Jesus is explaining that although he (Pilate) may ultimately order the execution of the Messiah, the real guilt would rest with Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders who knew better than to accuse Him in the first place.

The governor then presents Jesus to the crowd and asks one last time: "Shall I crucify your King?" (Jn. 19:15).

The chief priests respond by declaring "We have no king but Caesar!" (Jn. 19:15). These words are nothing short of shocking and may very well be the first time these men ever uttered them. Imagine what they would have thought if Jesus had announced such a thing in the temple.

Pilate then washes his hands in a basin and declares that if these Jewish leaders want Jesus crucified, he will fight it no longer. Pilate then states that he believes this is an unjust sentence and will not be responsible for it (Mt. 27:24).

The crowd responds, "His blood be on us and on our children (Mt. 27:25).

Part XI

On the Way to Golgotha

8:30 AM – 9:00 AM

As Jesus is being led away to be executed, He is forced to carry the beam on which His body will hang (Jn. 19:16).

Because of the immense exhaustion He is suffering due to the brutality of His scourging, Jesus is struggling to carry the beam. Therefore, a man named Simon is conscripted to carry it the rest of the way (Lk. 23:26).

Also being led away to be crucified with Jesus are two “malefactors” (Lk. 23:32). Although none of the gospels specifically indicate what crimes these two men have committed, it is possible they were convicted of insurrection. Matthew’s gospel refers to them as “robbers” (Mt. 27:38).

At this point, it is important to note that neither theft nor robbery were capital offenses. This being the case, most authorities believe the Greek word (*lestai*) Matthew used when describing these two men is better translated “rebels,” “guerrillas,” or “insurrectionists.”

It has also been suggested that these criminals may have been associated with Barabbas. This belief is based on the assumption that three stakes had been prepared, which suggests that Pontus Pilate had already ordered the execution of three rebels. Jesus took the place of Barabbas.

As the execution party moves toward Golgotha, several women in the crowd are crying. Upon seeing this, Jesus tells them, “Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children” (Lk. 23:27-28). He then reveals that the time is coming when the destruction will be so great that people will actually prefer death. He concludes His words by saying, “For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Lk. 23:31).

The point Jesus is making is that if such a tragic end could come to someone who is righteous (Jesus Christ), how much more tragic would be the end that comes to those who are unrighteous? To further illustrate this point, consider the effects of a fire: although a fire can burn a forest whose leaves are green, the forest whose trees are dry will be utterly destroyed.

Part XII

The Crucifixion of Jesus

9:00 AM – Noon
Wednesday Morning

Jesus now arrives at Golgotha where He is nailed to the beam that will suspend His mangled body. Prior to this, His clothes are removed by the guards presiding over His execution. They divide His garments without much thought, with the exception of a tunic. Because of the extraordinary quality of this piece of clothing, the guards decide to cast lots to determine which of them would keep it. (Jn. 19: 23-24).

While Jesus begins the initial hours of His torturous execution, He is offered wine mingled with gall (Mt. 27:34). Mark's gospel says the wine was mingled with myrrh (Mk. 15:23). When Jesus tastes it, He refuses to drink. The scriptures do not reveal why Jesus refuses this mixture. However, some authorities believe the myrrh in the drink may have acted as a narcotic to ease pain. Jesus detected this and refused to drink it in order to go through His suffering with His senses intact.

Jesus then utters the first of seven sayings He will make during His crucifixion. His words speak volumes about this great act and its purpose. "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Lk. 18:34).

Suspended above Jesus' ravaged body is a sign identifying the offense for which He is being executed. It was ordered to be placed there by Pontus Pilate. The sign reads "This is Jesus, the king of the Jews." Furthermore, it is written in three languages: Hebrew, Latin, and Greek (Jn. 19:19-20).

The chief priests protest the words Pilate has chosen to declare as the Messiah's crime. They want it to read that Jesus claims to be king of the Jews, not that he actually is their king. However, Pilate is not moved by this appeal and informs the Jewish leaders that the words above Jesus are there to stay, just as they were written (Jn. 19:21-22).

As Jesus is hanging for all to see, several people begin to taunt Him. They repeatedly challenge Him to free Himself. Even the chief priests, scribes, and elders mock him. They cry out that they will accept Him as the Messiah if He will only come down from the beam that suspends His broken body. (Mt. 27:39-44)

As Jesus is being mocked by those witnessing His execution, one of the malefactors being crucified with Him appeals to the Messiah to save Himself and also save them. However the other “thief” rebukes the malefactor for his words. He then appeals to Jesus for forgiveness and asks that the Messiah will remember him when He restores His Kingdom (Lk. 23:39-42).

In response to this cry of repentance, Jesus utters His second saying. He informs the thief that he has been forgiven and that he will live again in paradise. His exact words are “Verily I say unto you today, you shall be with Me in paradise” (Lk. 23:43).

The word “verily” in this verse is “amen,” and is used to introduce a shocking truth similar to the way a statement would be introduced today by saying, “You might find this difficult to believe, but it is true nevertheless.” Jesus then goes on to assure the man that his request was granted.

As it approaches midday, Jesus sees His mother and utters His third saying: “Mother, behold your son!” He then speaks to one of His disciples (probably John) and says to him, “Behold your mother!” With these words, Jesus is making provisions for Mary to be cared for upon His death (Jn. 19: 25-27).

Part XIII

The Death of the Lamb

Noon – 3:00 PM

As Jesus moves closer to His final breath, darkness covers the whole land (Mk. 15:33).

At some point during the final minutes of His life, the sins of all mankind are conveyed to the Messiah. Once this happens, God the Father turns away, leaving His Son to die alone. Feeling the enormous loss, Jesus utters His fourth saying. The Messiah cries out, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” which is translated, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:34).

Those witnessing the crucifixion who hear His words think Jesus is calling out the name of Elijah (Mt. 27:47).

Jesus is now utterly exhausted. The last fragment of His strength is depleted. As He hangs in this state, Jesus utters His fifth saying: “I thirst” (Jn. 19:28). In response, someone dips a sponge into a vessel and attempts to give it to Him (Mt. 27:48).

At this point, a soldier thrusts a spear into Jesus’ side causing massive bleeding. His death is now imminent (Mt. 27:49 Moffatt translation).

Jesus cries out in agony from the wound (Mt. 27:50). He then utters his sixth saying on the stake: “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30).

As Jesus is about to take his last breath, He utters His final words: “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit” (Lk. 23:46). He then bows His head and dies (Jn. 19:30).

At this point, an earthquake shakes the region and the veil of the temple is torn from the top to the bottom. Additionally, many tombs of the saints are opened, resulting in the dead being raised to life. So moving are these events that a soldier at the site of Jesus’ execution declares, “Truly this was the Son of God” (Mt. 27:51-54).

Meanwhile, certain Jews, not realizing what has just taken place, appear before Pilate and appeal to him to expedite the deaths of Jesus and the malefactors being crucified with Him. They do this because the Jewish High Day (the first day of Unleavened Bread) is approaching and they do not want these men to be hanging during this special Sabbath. They realize that the deaths can be hastened by breaking the legs of the condemned men. By doing so they will be unable to suspend themselves. As a result, they will suffocate. However, this can only be accomplished by order of the governor. (Jn. 19:31)

Pilate grants the request and sends word to the soldiers presiding over Jesus' execution to accelerate His death as well as the death of those with Him. However, as the soldiers prepare to break Jesus' legs, they notice He is already dead. (Jn. 19:32-37)

Part XIV

The Burial of Jesus

The Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea
3:00 PM – Sunset

As the Sabbath is rapidly approaching, a man named Joseph of Arimathea appears before Pilate and requests permission to take Jesus' body down from the stake and bury Him. After confirming that the Messiah was in fact dead, the governor grants Joseph's request (Mk. 15:42-45).

Joseph returns to the execution site and claims the body of the Messiah. Once it is received it is brought to a nearby tomb and prepared for burial. Accompanying Joseph is a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus. This is the same man who secretly met with Jesus a few years earlier (Jn. 3:1-8). Both of these men are prominent figures among the Jews. However, their respect for the Messiah is far greater than any concern they might have regarding how the chief priests might react. Both of these men knew Jesus was innocent. And although there was a degree of anxiety over how the Jewish leadership might view this gesture, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus are committed to carrying it out. (Jn. 19:38-42)

After quickly preparing the Messiah's body for interment, Joseph and Nicodemus place it in the tomb. They then secure the site by rolling a large stone over the entrance to the crypt. (Mt. 27:59)

This marks the end of a perfect life offered up as a
ransom for the sins of all mankind.

