

Matthew Chapter 26-28 – The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus – Part 7
Matthew 27:1-26 – Arrest, Trial, and Conviction of Jesus Christ

Introduction

Matthew Chapter 26:1-27:10 has many scenes with many different focal points. The section begins with Jesus setting the stage (Matthew 26:1-2). Then, the leaders of Israel plot with Judas to take Jesus at an opportune time. This plan was sanctioned by Jesus when Mary came and anointed Him for His burial. Peter gets focused, and his failure is exacerbated by his insisting that he will never fail.

Jesus is arrested, and He is brought before the Sanhedrin, where they attempt to lie about Jesus and have false witnesses testify about Him, but these prove unsuccessful. Eventually, Caiaphas, the high priest, asks Jesus a direct question, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus responds in the affirmative and then testifies against them “...hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” Caiaphas now closes the case against Jesus. And the Sanhedrin agreed that Jesus deserves death.

Once the judgment is announced, they spat in His face and beat Jesus with their fists, mocking Him by demanding of Him, “Prophecy to us, Christ (Messiah), who is the one who struck you?”

I can only imagine the shame and distress of those who were there, especially those who abused Him, when they died and realized their rebellion and eternal death (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

From the Sanhedrin, Jesus was handed over to Pilate so that the ultimate punishment would be given to Him. The cross was intended to demonstrate defeat, shame, and death. But God determined the cross to demonstrate love, sacrifice, and atonement.

Matthew 27:1-10

While it is obvious that Judas is the focus of these verses, there are three main points to observe:

1. Judas’ remorse did not result in reconciliation; it resulted in death.
2. The Sanhedrin has had a full night of conspiracy and entrapment. They decided that Jesus was worthy of death and also had a plan on how to carry out that sentence. They would have the Roman authority carry out the sentence. Therefore, they involve Pilate, the governor.
3. All this activity is part of the pre-ordained plan of God.
 - a. The treachery of the elders (Acts 2:22-23)
 - b. Judas’ bribe was used to buy a field for a burial plot (Acts 1:16-20)

Matthew 27:11-26

Luke 23:2 indicates that there are three accusations made against Jesus.

1. This man is misleading our nation. In context, this is to Rome; this accusation claims that Jesus was plotting a revolt against Rome.
2. This man is telling people not to pay taxes to Caesar.
3. This man is saying that He Himself is Christ, the King.

Matthew Chapter 26-28 – The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus – Part 7
Matthew 27:1-26 – Arrest, Trial, and Conviction of Jesus Christ

These first two are not true and are not part of the accusations listed in the Gospels. These two are added to exacerbate the confessed “crime” that Jesus is the Messiah, the King of Israel. Claiming to be king is grounds for execution if the rule is not sanctioned by Rome.

Rome does not care who is ruling a conquered nation as long as that king is subservient to Rome.

Matthew picks up with the main charge, “Are You the King of the Jews?” Jesus acknowledges this, but He does not defend Himself against other accusations by the chief priests and elders. Pilate is amazed and even asks Jesus why He does not defend Himself. Jesus’ lack of defense amazes Pilate.

Why does Jesus not defend Himself? Let's think about this: if Jesus wanted to defend Himself, could He not run circles around both the chief priests and the elders or anyone else in that room? God’s plan was for Jesus to go to the cross; therefore, He had to be convicted not only by the Jews but also by Pilate.

The only thing that Jesus admits to is being the Messiah, the King of Israel. This admission permitted Pilate to carry out the crucifixion even though he did not find Jesus to be a threat.

Matthew greatly truncates the trials and Jesus’ interactions before Pilate and Herod. In fact, Matthew doesn't even mention Herod; why is that? The purpose of the Book of Matthew is not to give the most detailed account of the person of Jesus Christ. Rather, it is to provide the information that is necessary for the reader to ascertain that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah and the kingdom of heaven was being offered.

Matthew provides what is necessary to demonstrate to the reader that Jesus was put on the cross for being the Messiah. All the other information concerning His trials before Annas, Herod, and other interactions with Pilate serve as historical data on how Jesus responded. Matthew records what is necessary to demonstrate that Jesus was crucified for being the Messiah.

Since Pilate did not really think Jesus was a threat, he wanted to release Him. In the text, Pilate was obligated to release one prisoner, and so Pilate put up both Jesus and a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. In Matthew, Pilate gave them that choice because he knew that envy was the impetus for why Jesus was handed over to him.

Envy – φθόνος *phthonos* – “a state of animosity toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage.” Remember that true motivation against Jesus was not truth; it was not even blasphemy or sedition, but they were evil, and envy filled them (John 11:47-48).

Matthew records something totally unique in verse 19. While he was sitting on the judgment seat Pilate’s wife sent him a message, saying, “Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him.”

There is nothing we can infer as to what this dream entailed. We can see that in her dream, she concluded this Jesus was a righteous Man, and that being involved in this issue would be treacherous. Pilate was given every opportunity to release Jesus, but just as God had foreknown, Pilate proved himself to be weak, not seeking justice but acting out of fear (19-26).

Matthew Chapter 26-28 – The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus – Part 7
Matthew 27:1-26 – Arrest, Trial, and Conviction of Jesus Christ

After having Jesus scourged, Pilate handed Him over to be crucified. From history, we know what a Roman scourging was.

The Roman scourge, also called the “flagrum” or “flagellum,” was a short whip made of three or more leather straps connected to a handle. The leather straps were knotted with a weight at the end and embedded with metal, nails, and bone shards. Scourging would quickly remove the flesh, leaving skin hanging like ribbons, and would expose a bloody mass of muscle and bone, sometimes even exposing the internal organs.

The flagrum was a powerful weapon of torture and a brutal punishment carried out by professionally trained soldiers where the victim would be stripped naked and tied or shackled to a sturdy column or between two columns. According to Jewish law, you could not beat someone more than 40 times, so the Jews always stopped at 39. The Romans, however, had no such law. The scourging was also used as a fact-finding method. The theory is that if one did not confess during scourging, he was most likely innocent, or the beating was to prevent suspected crimes.

To what level was Jesus scourged? The text does not state clearly, but we do know that Jesus’ beating was so severe that He was unable to carry His cross.

Conclusion

What have we observed? In the midst of betrayal, arrest, false accusations, beatings, and judgments, we have proclamations of innocence.

Matthew 27:3-4 – When Judas, who had betrayed Him, saw that He had been condemned, he felt remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.”

Pilate also stated that He had done nothing wrong. Pilate’s wife called Jesus a righteous man. However, none of these proclamations yielded anything good. Despite Pilate’s knowledge that Jesus was innocent and desired to release Him, in the end, his fear drove him to not do what was right but rather stifle a riot by giving in to the people and not risking his position as governor of Israel. Instead of doing what was right, Pilate released an insurrectionist and a murderer and condemned an innocent man, scourging Him and giving Him over to crucifixion.