



# THE WORLD'S GREATEST TRIAL



# *The World's Greatest Trial*

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*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,  
and a light unto my path.*

Psalm 119: 105

## *Preface to The World's Greatest Trial*

**Jesus will not judge the world as he was judged by his Hebrew brethren. Acts 17:31 – “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (KJV)**

The Jewish procedures used in the trial of Jesus were a clear violation of their laws and show the great injustice as illustrated by the following examples.

1. It has been determined by many Bible scholars that, under the Mosaic Code of the Israelites, Judas would be considered a co-criminal or an accomplice of Jesus and not a credible witness; therefore his word was insufficient to legally arrest Jesus.
2. Their Code prohibited the arrest of one accused of a capital crime in which his life might be forfeited after the hour of sunset and before the hour of sunrise. Arresting one after darkness was considered a denial of that individual's rights. They arrested Jesus at midnight.
3. Annas had no legal right to interrogate Jesus. He was not an officer of the Court and no provision existed for a one-man court. The Code required at least three, and finally, seventy-three. He had no charge upon which to arrest Jesus, and only after Jesus was arrested did he seek to find one. Jesus knew he did not have to testify against himself but rather he reminded them of his open ministry in their synagogues.
4. Standing before Caiaphas, he was condemned in an illegal trial. In capital trials the judges were to deliberate two days and two nights on a fasting diet before a decision. They laid aside this aspect of their Code and condemned Jesus with dispatch.
5. All voted against Jesus – but under Jewish practice of law unless there was one dissenting vote, it was tantamount to acquittal.

## Though Tried Unjustly, Jesus was Comforted

**Hebrews 5:7** – “Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.”

Jesus was heard – in that he feared (a godly fear). He agonized in Gethsemane (with some MSS indicating he sweat drops of blood). His fear was real even as it was godly. He was called upon to perform everything perfectly as it was written “...in the volume of the book.” (Psalm 40:7) His concern was that something might have been left undone or done improperly which might result in his eternal death and separation from his Father. He was heard and assured in that he feared.

Additionally, Jesus had reason to be deeply concerned lest some false and dreadful charge should be laid upon him to becloud the truth of his death. With lying witnesses and with all the power of Satan, “the god of this world”, being employed in Jesus’ death, the last thing the priests and Satan wanted was to have Jesus put to death for the truth. But, the record is clear, Jesus died because He was the Son of the Blessed, the Messiah, and he was The King of the Jews – both charges were true. Jesus seems tranquil and assured, having had his prayer answered. (Matthew 26:45, 46) He would willingly die for the truth.

Even in John 19:21, 22, when the religious leaders wanted the inscription written over Jesus in the three languages changed from “The King of the Jews” to “This man said, I am King of the Jews,” Pilate stood firm and said, “I have written what I have written.”

And certainly, think how comforted Jesus was. It is one thing to die for some false charge, but try as they would to accuse him of a false charge, God’s providence moved mightily so that Jesus died because he was the Son of the Blessed and because he was the King of the Jews.

# *The World's Greatest Trial*

**The greatest trial... because Jesus was the greatest person on earth. One might expect the Son of God to judge sinful men, but, no, sinful men judged the Son of God.**

## *A Memorial Meditation: Following Jesus from the Last Supper to the Crucifixion*

Scriptures are from the *New American Standard Bible – Updated Edition* (NASU) unless noted otherwise. Some words in the Scriptures cited below were bolded or capitalized to add emphasis. Also note that the times are approximate.

### **Jesus' Final Hours Before Arrest**

- 8:00 pm – 10:00 pm**    **The Memorial Supper Instituted**  
Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:19-20;  
Mark 14:22-26
- 10:00 pm – 11:00 pm**    **The “New Commandment” and the tender words of John 14 before they left the upper room.** John 13 and 14: in the upper room. John 14:31 – “Arise, let us go from here.” On the way to Gethsemane: John 15 and 16 and 17.
- 11:00 pm – 12:00 pm**    **The agony of Gethsemane**  
Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42;  
Luke 22:39-46.  
Jesus arrested –  
John 18:1-12; Matthew 26:47-56;  
Mark 14:43-50; Luke 22:47-53

**Mark 14:43-46 recounts the betrayal and arrest of Jesus.**

## *The Trial of Jesus*

**There were basically two trials (civil and religious): three stages each, six in all.**

**12:30 am Religious Trial, Phase I –  
Before Annas [No provision for one-man court]**

### **John 18:12-24**

12 So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him,

13 and led Him to **Annas** first; for he was father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year.

14 Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people.

15 Simon Peter was following Jesus, and so was another disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest,

16 but Peter was standing at the door outside. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the doorkeeper, and brought Peter in.

17 Then the slave-girl who kept the door said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”

18 Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter was also with them, standing and warming himself.

19 The high priest then questioned Jesus about His disciples, and about His teaching.

20 Jesus answered him, “I have spoken openly to the world; I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and I spoke nothing in secret. [**Note: No charge is given.**]

21 “Why do you question Me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; they know what I said.”

22 When He had said this, one of the officers standing nearby struck Jesus, saying, “Is that the way You answer the high priest?”

23 Jesus answered him, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the wrong; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?” [**Jesus is not silent as a Lamb here.**]

24 So Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

**Matthew 26:57-61 gives the account of Jesus' questioning before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; the effort to find false witnesses, resulting in only two charging him with the claim that he would destroy and rebuild in three days the temple; and then the adjuring by Caiaphas as to whether he was the Christ.**

**1:00 – 2:00 am Religious Trial, Phase II –  
Before Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas  
(This was an illegal trial for the Sanhedrin  
was never to meet before daylight.)**

**Mark 14:53-65**

53 They led Jesus away to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes gathered together.

54 Peter had followed Him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers and warming himself at the fire.

55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, and they were not finding any.

56 For many were giving false testimony against Him, but their testimony was not consistent. **[Satan, prince of liars, cannot muster two witnesses to agree.]**

57 Some stood up and began to give false testimony against Him, saying,

58 “We heard Him say, ‘I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.’”

59 Not even in this respect was their testimony consistent.

60 The high priest stood up and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, “Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?”

61 But He kept silent and did not answer. Again the high priest was questioning Him, and saying to Him, “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” **[Matthew 26:63 “I adjure thee” – This meant Jesus had to answer under oath – there could be**

**no “Fifth Amendment” plea.]**

62 And Jesus said, **“I am; [Jesus affirms the truth but it is in the illegal trial.]** and you shall see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING WITH THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.” **[Daniel 7:13]**

63 Tearing his clothes, the high priest said, “What further need do we have of witnesses?”

64 “You have heard the blasphemy; how does it seem to you?” And they **ALL** condemned Him to be deserving of death.

65 Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with their fists, and to say to Him, “Prophecy!” And the officers received Him with slaps in the face.

**2:00 - 3:00 am      Denial by Peter**

Luke 22:55-62; Mark 14:66-72; John 18:26  
(Interwoven)

**Mark 14:66-72**

66 As Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came,

67 and seeing Peter warming himself, she looked at him and said, “You also were with Jesus the Nazarene.”

68 But he denied it, saying, “I neither know nor understand what you are talking about.” And he went out onto the porch, and a rooster crowed.

69 The servant-girl saw him, and began once more to say to the bystanders, “This is one of them!”

70 But again he denied it. And after a little while the bystanders were again saying to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean, too.”

71 But he began to curse and swear, “I do not know this man you are talking about!”

72 Immediately a rooster crowed a second time. And Peter remembered how Jesus had made the remark to him, “Before a rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times.” And he began to weep.

[Matthew 26:75 says that Peter “wept bitterly” – implying godly sorrow. See 2 Corinthians 7:9, 10.]



### **John 18:26**

“One of the slaves of the high priest, being a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, “Did I not see you in the garden with Him?”

### **Luke 22:55-62**

55 After they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter was sitting among them.

56 And a servant-girl, seeing him as he sat in the firelight and looking intently at him, said, “This man was with Him too.”

57 But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know Him.”

58 A little later, another saw him and said, “You are one of them too!” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!”

59 After about an hour had passed, another man began to insist, saying, “Certainly this man also was with Him, for he is a **Galilean too.**” [John 7:51, 52: No prophet from Galilee – Jonah was from Galilee.]

60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about.” Immediately, while he was still speaking, a rooster crowed.

61 The Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, “Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times.”

62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

### **4:30 am Religious Trial, Phase III – Before Sanhedrin at Daybreak**

#### **Luke 22:66-71**

66 **When it was day**, the Council of elders of the people assembled, both chief priests and scribes, and they led Him away to their council chamber, saying,

67 **“If You are the Christ, tell us.”** But He said to them, “If I tell you, you will not believe; **[He does not say “I am” here.]**

68 and if I ask a question, you will not answer.

69 **“But from now on the SON OF MAN WILL BE SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND of the POWER OF GOD.”** [Daniel 7: 13]

70 [KJV] Then said they all, “Art thou then the son of God?” And he said unto them, “Ye say that I am.” [Diaglott – **“You say; I**

am.”] **[They charged him with blasphemy – but he was God’s son – it was the truth.]**

71 Then they said, “What further need do we have of testimony? For we have heard it ourselves from His own mouth.” **[At the illegal trial]**

### **Mark 15:1**

1 Early in the morning the chief priests with the elders and scribes and the whole Council, immediately held a consultation; and binding Jesus, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate.

**[Jesus, in an illegal trial admits he was God’s son, but he doesn’t do so in the legal trial.]**

### **5:00 am Civil Trial, Phase I – Before Pilate – Hall of Judgment**

#### **John 18:28-38**

28 Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

**[How hypocritical for them to kill the son of God; but they could not have their shoe leather touch the porch stones.]**

29 Therefore Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?”

30 They answered and said to him, “If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him to you.” **[No charge – an evildoer must break the law and be charged for that.]**

31 So Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.” The Jews said to him, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death,”

32 to fulfill the word of Jesus which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

33 Therefore Pilate entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” **[Pilate knew Jesus had been hailed King five days earlier in Jerusalem.]**

34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” **[This is Pilate’s charge, not the Jews.]**

35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?"

36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed **over to the Jews**; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm."

37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "**You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth.** Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." [Second truth stating he was a King.]

38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews and said to them, "**I find no guilt in Him.**"

### **5:30 am Civil Trial, Phase II – Before Herod**

#### **Luke 23:6-12**

6 When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a **Galilean**.

7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time.

8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him.

9 And he questioned Him at some length; **but He answered him nothing.** [Jesus knew he was to be crucified at the third hour – **9:00 am. He says nothing, which hastened his trial. (Isaiah 53:7, John 13:1)**]

10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.

11 And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.

12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other. [This was the Herod that beheaded John the Baptist.]

**6:00 am Civil Trial, Phase III –  
Before Pilate [Pilate says 6 times Jesus is innocent.]**

**John 18:39-40**

39 “But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you **the King of the Jews?**”

40 So they cried out again, saying, “Not this Man, but Barabbas.” Now Barabbas was a robber.

**John 19:1-16**

1 Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him.

2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him;

3 and they began to come up to Him and say, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and to give Him slaps in the face.

4 Pilate came out again and said to them, “Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know **that I find no guilt in Him.**”

5 Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the **purple robe**. Pilate said to them, “Behold, the Man!”

6 So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, “Crucify, crucify!” Pilate said to them, “Take Him yourselves and crucify Him, for I find no guilt in Him.”

7 The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God.”  
**[Charge]**

**8 Therefore when Pilate heard this statement, he was even more afraid;**

9 and he entered into the Praetorium again and said to Jesus, “Where are You from?” But Jesus gave him no answer.

10 So Pilate said to Him, “You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?”

11 Jesus answered, “You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; **for this reason he who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.**” **[Jesus takes Pilate off the hook.]**

12 As a result of this Pilate made efforts to release Him, but the Jews cried out saying, “If you release this Man, you are no friend of Caesar; everyone who makes himself out to be a king opposes

Caesar.”

13 Therefore when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.

14 Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, “Behold, your King!”

15 So they cried out, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Pilate said to them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.”

16 So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified.

## *The Crucifixion of Jesus*

**Arranged from the four gospels into one complete record.**

**7:45 am**

**Matthew 27:26-31**

26 Then he released Barabbas for them; but after having Jesus scourged, he handed Him over to be crucified.

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole Roman cohort around Him.

28 They stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him.

29 And after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

30 They spat on Him, and took the reed and began to beat Him on the head.

31 After they had mocked Him, they took the scarlet robe off Him and put His own garments back on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.

**8:00 or 8:30 am**

**John 19:17**

17 They took Jesus therefore, and He went out, bearing His own cross, to the place called the Place of a Skull, which is called in Hebrew, Golgotha.”

**Luke 23:26-32**

26 When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

27 And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him.

28 But Jesus turning to them said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

29 “For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’

30 “Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, ‘FALL ON US,’ AND TO THE HILLS, ‘COVER US.’

31 “For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

32 Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

### **Matthew 27:33-36**

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull,

34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

36 And sitting down, they began to keep watch over Him there.

### **9:00 am**

### **Mark 15:25**

25 It was the third hour when they crucified Him.

### **Luke 23:34**

34 But Jesus was saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”<sup>1</sup> And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

### **John 19:19-22**

19 Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was

<sup>1</sup> Early manuscripts omit the sentence “But Jesus... are doing.” Nevertheless this could have been Jesus’ sentiments.

written, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."  
20 Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek.

21 So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"

22 Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

### **Mark 15:27, 28**

27 They crucified two robbers with Him, one on His right and one on His left.

28 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And He was numbered with transgressors."

### **Matthew 27:39-44**

39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads

40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying,

42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.

43 "HE TRUSTS IN GOD; LET GOD RESCUE Him now, IF HE DELIGHTS IN HIM; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'"

44 The robbers who had been crucified with Him were also insulting Him with the same words.

### **Luke 23:36, 37**

36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,

37 and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

### **John 19:25-27**

25 Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.

26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!”

27 Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

### **Luke 23:39-43**

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”

40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”

41 “And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.”

42 And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

43 And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” [The original Scriptures are not punctuated. By placing the comma after “today” rather than before, the thought would be consistent with Luke 24:46, Jesus being in the grave parts of three days.]

### **12:00 noon**

#### **Mark 15:33-36**

33 When the sixth hour came, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.

34 At the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “ELOI, ELOI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?” which is translated, “MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

35 When some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, “Behold, He is calling for Elijah.”

36 Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink, saying, “Let us see whether Elijah will come to take Him down.”

#### **John 19:28-30**

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, “I am thirsty.”

29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to



His mouth.

30 Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.

### **3:00 pm**

#### **Luke 23:46**

46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, “Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT.” Having said this, He breathed His last.

#### **Matthew 27:50, 51**

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit.

51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

#### **Matthew 27:54**

54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

#### **Mark 15:39-41**

39 When the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, “Truly this man was the Son of God!”

40 There were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome.

41 When He was in Galilee, they used to follow Him and minister to Him; and there were many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

#### **Luke 23:48**

48 And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, began to return, beating their breasts.

#### **John 19:31-37**

31 Then the Jews, because it was the day of preparation, so that the bodies would not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), asked Pilate that their legs might be

broken, and that they might be taken away.

32 So the soldiers came, and broke the legs of the first man and of the other who was crucified with Him;

33 but coming to Jesus, when he saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

34 But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.

35 And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you also may believe.

36 For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, "NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN."

37 And again another Scripture says, "THEY SHALL LOOK ON HIM WHOM THEY PIERCED."

### **5:00 pm – 6:00 pm**

#### **John 19:38, 39**

38 After these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away His body.

39 Nicodemus, who had first come to Him by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds weight.

#### **Luke 23:50, 51**

50 And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man

51 (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God;

#### **Mark 15:44, 45**

44 Pilate wondered if He was dead by this time, and summoning the centurion, he questioned him as to whether He was already dead.

45 And ascertaining this from the centurion, he granted the body to Joseph. ■

# *The Trial of Jesus Christ*

by Homer Hamlin

[Scriptures are from the *King James Version*.]

Each year as we celebrate the Memorial of Jesus' death, we are brought closer to him, especially through the realization of what he suffered during that last day which ended in his death. Nothing that is recorded of his life has such an impact on our appreciation of the magnitude of his suffering and sacrifice on our behalf.

The basis for this discussion came from a talk that was given at a service club luncheon several years ago, in what was described as a non-religious talk, looking at the legal aspects of the trials of Jesus Christ. Mr. Howard Rankin, a lawyer of Portland, Oregon, who has assured me to feel free to use it as I choose, did the original research. He explained that some years ago he was asked to prepare a talk on the *World's Greatest Trial*, which was identified by the one making this information available to us, and trust that it will prove a blessing in our appreciation of Jesus' suffering on our behalf.

At the conclusion of the celebration of the Passover, probably about April 6, A.D. 33, Jesus instituted the Memorial of his death, a ceremony properly celebrated by Bible students on the anniversary of the date each year. At the conclusion of the partaking of the bread and wine, Jesus and the apostles went out to the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus was already aware that he was to be betrayed by one of his own apostles, Judas, and thus began the *World's Greatest Trial*.

It will help us to understand the trial better if we know something about the characters involved other than Jesus. The most important of the characters was Annas, for he was directly responsible in ordering the death of Jesus. He was considered by some to be the uncrowned king of Judea; he was the wealthiest and most influential man in the entire province. It is believed that he directed Caiaphas to tell the people that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. How right his words, and how

terribly evil his motives! (John 18:14) There is no question that Annas masterminded the proceedings that led to Jesus' crucifixion. Annas had been chief priest for seventeen years and, then, had appointed each of his six sons to the office, and deposed them in succession, finally appointing Caiaphas, his son-in-law. Annas controlled the moneychangers in the temple, probably making a substantial profit. When Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple, he struck at the very heart of Annas' wealth and power (Mark 11:15-17), and, in effect, signed his own death warrant.

It is evident that Annas served only his own interests, and had little or no regard for the law. As mentioned above, he was probably the greatest political force in Israel, and the one primarily responsible for the death of Jesus.

The next character in our story is Pontius Pilate who was born in what today is Barcelona, Spain. He probably would have remained an unknown had he not managed to marry Claudia, granddaughter of Caesar. For this conquest, Pilate was elevated to the rank of Roman General, and was given as his first assignment the governorship of Judea. He seems not to have been qualified either morally or intellectually for this responsibility. Soon after his arrival in Judea, he imposed certain rules and regulations and denied certain religious rights, which precipitated riots and insurrections, requiring that the Romans call in troops from other areas.

Another actor in our story who presided over one of Jesus' trials was Herod, probably the grandson of the Herod who slew the infants when Jesus was a young child. Herod was the Vice-Tetrarch of Galilee, and the one who ordered the beheading of John the Baptist. He had indeed desired to meet Jesus and hoped that he would provide entertainment of some kind for his court. Jesus referred to Herod as "that fox", the only personal derogatory remark he ever made.

And finally, there was Barabbas. Being a conquered people was as unpleasant and distasteful to the Judeans in A.D. 33 as it would be to people today. The burning ambition in the hearts and

minds of many in that day was to drive the hated Romans from their soil, and to restore the government and political independence as a nation. Barabbas was the insurrectionist, revolutionist hero of his day. He was the popular hero who sought to organize sufficient arms and forces to reestablish the kingdom. Even Jesus' own disciples had thought that this was what Jesus would do!

Today we are able to analyze and study the Mosaic Code and the Roman law, Justinian's Code of procedure, as they existed in Jesus' time. By applying the facts as reported in these trials, all of which took place within six hours, we are able to arrive at certain conclusions concerning the legality of these events. We know that numerous errors at law occurred during these trials, and, had Jesus had the right of appeals, almost any one of these would have been sufficient to release him. Sometimes we in America believe that we were there first to become deeply concerned with the rights and liberties of the individual and the need for adequate safeguards for the protection of those rights. But that is not true. The Judeans (Jews) were more deeply concerned about protecting those rights and liberties; then, they established greater safeguards and more elaborate procedures to insure those safeguards than we possess today. We must remember that a son of Abraham must under no circumstances be put to death unjustly or wrongly.

### **Mark 14:43-46 recounts the betrayal and arrest of Jesus.**

**Here was the first of the errors of the law.** Jesus was arrested upon the information furnished by an accomplice, a co-criminal. Under their Mosaic Code, the one who himself was a co-criminal or conspirator, was not considered a credible witness; therefore, his word was insufficient legally to justify the arrest of another. Nevertheless, Jesus was arrested upon the information of an accomplice, his disciple, Judas Iscariot.

He was arrested at about the hour of midnight, in the garden, as the soldiers and the multitude sent by the high priest bore swords, staves and torches. The Mosaic Code prohibited the arrest of one accused of a capital crime, in which his life might be in forfeit, after the hour of sunset and before the hour of sunrise. Their belief was that one who was taken away from his family,

friends, and neighbors during the hours of darkness, might in some manner be denied his legal rights, that adequate safeguards might not be undertaken to insure that he was justly arrested. Yet Jesus was arrested during the hours of darkness – the middle of the night.

**John 18:12, 13 is the account of the second error of Jesus' trial.**

Annas, father-in-law to the high priest of that year, Caiaphas, **had no authority or legal right or standing whatsoever to try, or even interrogate Jesus.** He was not then an officer of the court, and the Mosaic Code did not provide for a one-man court anyway, the smallest number being three, and then, finally, seventy-three. They believed that a one-man court was insufficient to try a man for a crime, for one judge might be partial and might not adequately protect the rights of the accused.

It appears from the proceedings before Annas that Jesus, this son of a carpenter, this uneducated person, knew his legal rights. How he acquired this knowledge is a mystery to those who do not know the truth. (John 7:15 , “And the Jews marveled, saying, how knoweth this man letters having never learned?”) Jesus knew that he did not have to testify against himself, and that they must bring forth two or three witnesses to prove their case (Deuteronomy 19:15). He knew that as long as he taught openly in the temple, in the synagogues, and in the fields, he had done nothing wrong, for he never taught secretly. He knew that they must prove their case against him according to the law, but they failed to do so.

**John 18:19-24 relates how Jesus was sent to Caiaphas and interrogated regarding his disciples and his doctrine.**

Jesus had refused to answer Annas, and was then sent bound to Caiaphas who was the high priest that year, and evidently the chairman of the Greater Sanhedrin, which he had convened shortly following the hour of midnight. Under the Mosaic Code, the Greater Sanhedrin could not be convened during the hours between sunset and sunrise, for the Judeans believed that the judges could not intelligently, alertly, and accurately hear the testimony against a man accused of a capital crime during the

hours of darkness, but only during daylight. Yet they tried Jesus shortly after midnight.

**Matthew 26:57-61 gives the account of Jesus' questioning before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin; the effort to find false witnesses resulting in only two charging him with the claim that he would destroy and rebuild in three days the temple; and then, the adjuring by Caiaphas as to whether he was the Christ, the son of the Blessed.**

In the proceedings before the Sanhedrin, there was no prosecutor or district attorney, as we know him today. The charge was made and proved by the complaining witnesses themselves, and the members of the court were denied the right to actively interrogate or prosecute the accused. Jesus was first accused of the crime of sedition, in seeking some manner on which to tear down or destroy the Hebrew religion. The two witnesses accused Jesus of saying that he would tear down the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days. We know from John 2:21, "But he spake of the temple of his **body**." However, they believed that he intended to destroy the Temple of Jerusalem and rebuild it again in three days. It had taken them more than forty years to build the temple. Since there were only two witnesses, and they were not in complete agreement, Caiaphas realized that he would lose this particular charge, so he took charge of the prosecution, contrary to the Code.

Finding that he was not going to be able to establish the charge of sedition, Caiaphas changed the charge in the middle of the trial, a proceeding that would not be permitted today. He changed the charge to blasphemy. This was a crime in which the accused allegedly claims unto himself a speck of divinity – either that he is divine, or that he is the Son of God. [In John 8:41 the religious rulers claimed "we have one Father, even God." It is strange that they could claim God as their Father and convicted the Son of God for admitting the truth of his Sonship.]

Jesus declined to answer the charges of Caiaphas, which he was legally permitted to do until Caiaphas pulled a major stroke when he said to Jesus, "I **adjure** you" (Matthew 26:63). This is the only case of adjuration mentioned in the Bible, I believe. It was a very solemn and seldom-used Hebrew oath, going beyond our

present-day oaths, “So help me God”. For in addition to requiring the one to whom it is directed to answer truthfully, it also compels him to answer. In today’s language, Jesus could not take the Fifth Amendment. Jesus recognized the solemnity of this oath, and when he was asked, “...I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God, Jesus saith unto him, ‘Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven’” (Matthew 26:63, 64). With this testimony from Jesus, that he indeed was the Christ, the son of the living God, Caiaphas closed the testimony and asked for an immediate vote after literally condemning Jesus before even a vote was taken (verse 65). This was a gross violation of their law.

Under the Mosaic Code, at the conclusion of the testimony of a capital crime, the judges were directed, in the language of the Code, to retire to their homes and there to eat light foods and drink light wines and sleep well for two days and two nights, and then, to return and to hear again the testimony against the accused and then, and only then, to vote.

Caiaphas also asked for a simultaneous, or voice vote, which was another flagrant violation of their law. The Code expressly provided that the vote should be cast one at a time, beginning with the youngest member and then ascending in seniority until the oldest and most mature had voted, since only in this manner would the vote of the junior member not be influenced by that of the elder and more wise.

They all voted that Jesus was guilty. Under the Mosaic Code, a unanimous verdict of guilty was a verdict of acquittal. The seeming paradox is explained by the belief of the Judeans that unless the accused had secured the sympathy and belief in his innocence by at least one member of the court he had been denied a fair trial. To us, it might suggest that a unanimous verdict would raise the possibility of a purely emotional decision, possibly indicating the “mob psychology”. But in their Code, a guilty verdict must be one less than all, and more than half. They **all** voted guilty.



As previously mentioned, it was not lawful for the Jews to put anyone to death (John 18:31). However, they took Jesus to Pilate who was then in Jerusalem. It seems clear that Pilate understood and followed each of the four steps of Justinian's Code of Criminal Procedure – accusation, interrogation, defense, and verdict – for he first said as he came out of the palace, “What accusation do you bring against this man? And they answered, and said unto Pilate, ‘If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.’ Then said Pilate unto them, ‘Take him, and judge him according to your law.’ The Jews therefore said unto him, ‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.’” Upon hearing the accusation of the Jews, Pilate took Jesus into the palace and followed the second step, that of interrogation, and examination. John 18:28-38 records this part of the trial. He asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus then entered a defense, the third step, being one of justification. He said, “My kingdom is not of this world; if my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my Kingdom not from hence.” Being satisfied with that defense, and the obvious fallacy of the charges, Pilate returned his verdict to the Jews; “I find in him no fault at all.”

In the meantime, the chief priests, the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the soldiers were stirring up the multitude to demand the crucifixion of Jesus. Pilate sought in some way to avoid this responsibility, and when they said “He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place” (Luke 23:5), Pilate seized upon this information as a possible solution. If he were a Galilean, he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, so Pilate had Jesus sent to Herod. This would be called today “a change of venue on the judge's own motion”. Jesus would not answer Herod's questions, so they mocked him, arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him back to Pilate. (Luke 23:11)

For the second time, Pilate took Jesus into the palace and said, “Whence art thou? But Jesus did not answer” (John 19:9-11). Pilate asked why Jesus did not answer, knowing that he had the power to release Jesus or to crucify him. To this, Jesus replied that Pilate only had power from God, and that those who had delivered him had the greater sin. Then Pilate again went to the crowd and

said; “I find no fault with this man. The crowd cried out, ‘Crucify him; crucify him,’ And Pilate replied, ‘But why? Why? What crime has he done?’”

Pilate, knowing the innocence of Jesus, made one more effort to release him, as he recalled that it was the custom at the beginning of the Feast of the Passover for the governor to release for the crowd any one prisoner then held captive. When Pilate asked them whether he should release Jesus or Barabbas, the chief priests and elders persuaded the people to demand Barabbas and to crucify Jesus (Matthew 27:20-22). Since Pilate could find no guilt in Jesus, he demanded (verse 23) of the priests a reason for their charges. When Caiaphas saw that there might be a release of Jesus, he played his masterstroke – he changed the alleged crime from a Jewish crime to a Roman crime! One that Pilate would find almost impossible to resist, that of treason – treason against Caesar, for any man who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar. Probably Pilate reasoned that if he were to do nothing about someone who claimed to be king, and Caesar heard of this, it would go hard for him and Jesus had acknowledged that he was a king. Nevertheless, Pilate tried once more to release Jesus by saying to them, “... shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” (John 19:15).

And, so, realizing the innocence of Jesus, but the impossibility of resisting the priests, Pilate washed his hands of the matter, and delivered Jesus to be crucified.

Let us review for a moment the trials, suffering, and the mental anguish that Jesus bore through the awful hours of that last night of his life on earth. First, Jesus was betrayed by one of his twelve apostles, Judas; then, he was arrested as a common criminal; next he was denied by another apostle, Peter; then, illegally charged by Annas and Caiaphas; then, illegally condemned by an illegal vote; sent off to the Roman, Pilate, charged only with a Jewish crime, then, sent off to Herod where he was mocked, insulted, beaten, and crowned with thorns; then, returned to Pilate who found no fault in him. Then the Jews, realizing that they had no case, turned the case into a Roman charge of treason, using Jesus’ admission that he was King of the

Jews as evidence of treason against Caesar, adding a terrible insult, “We know no king but Caesar”, and requesting the release of Barabbas, the murderer, instead of Jesus.

Then followed the degrading procession in which Jesus was required to carry his own cross until he could no longer bear the burden. Then came the painful and degrading crucifixion along with two common criminals. In spite of the pain and anguish, Jesus instructed John to take care of his mother, Mary, even as he suffered on the cross.

Yes, the suffering of Jesus on our behalf, and for the whole of the human race, is still so vivid even after nearly 2000 years, that we can shed tears of love and sympathy for this greatest gift ever given in this vast universe – and further, the greatest and most precious of all gifts that will ever be given!

But there on the crude cross, pierced with nails and wounded in his side, Jesus’ death was not the end but the beginning: his death as the “ransom for all to be testified in due time” was the crowning glory of the fulfillment of the law, the perfect man’s life sacrificed for Adam’s forfeited perfect life, far beyond the highest expectations of any Jew of Jesus’ time. Thus the Scripture, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (I Corinthians 15:22), becomes a vital and guaranteed promise, since Jesus has accomplished His Divine purpose, assuring the blessing of all the families of the earth. ▲

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*For there is one God,  
and there is one mediator  
between God and men,  
the man Christ Jesus,  
who gave himself  
as a ransom for all,  
the testimony to which  
was borne at the proper time.  
1 Timothy 2:5, 6 (KJV)*

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## *Isaiah 53*

- 1 Who has believed what we have heard?  
And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
- 2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him,  
and no beauty that we should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by men;  
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief  
and as one from whom men hide their face  
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.
- 4 Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
- 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement  
that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray,  
we have turned every one to his own way;  
and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
Yet he opened not his mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,  
so He did not open His mouth.
- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
stricken for the transgression of my people?
- 9 And they made his grave with the wicked  
and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him;  
he has put him to grief;  
when he makes himself an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring,  
he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand;

- 11 he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
make many to be accounted righteous;  
and he shall bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore I will divide with him a portion with the great,  
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors. (RSV) ◇