

The Life and Times of Jesus Christ

10

The Trial of the Messiah

Heaven must have watched on in awed silence as Jesus was forcibly led down the slopes of the Mount of Olives toward Jerusalem by “a large crowd armed with swords and clubs” (**Matthew 26:47**). This was the one who could instantly summon the intervention of twelve angelic legions – a total of 72,000 warrior angels – that had probably been his messianic body-guard from the time of his arrival on earth, constantly at his disposal. Within seconds, they could have wiped out the arresting party, just as they had wiped out the Assyrian invaders seven centuries earlier (**Isaiah 37:36-37**). And more than this, here was one who simply had to utter the declaration, “I am he,” and all opposing would fall back (**John 18:6**).

But Jesus did not call on his messianic legions, nor did he utter a word to protect himself. For just as he had previously declared that he always limited his actions to doing “only what he sees his Father doing” (**John 5:19**), so now, in the early hours of this Passover morning, he knew that his Father was doing a very different work, for Jesus himself had told his disciples, “everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled” (**Luke 18:31**).

A Portrait of the Messiah

The Divinity of the Messiah

The Birth of the Messiah

The Childhood of the Messiah

The People of the Messiah

The Inauguration of the Messiah

The Opposition to the Messiah

The Last Week of the Messiah

The Last Night of the Messiah

▶ **The Trial of the Messiah** ◀

The Death of the Messiah

The Resurrection of the Messiah

At the House of the High Priest

The arresting party entered Jerusalem by one of the city’s eastern gates. It was probably around midnight by now, and the streets of the city were deserted as Jesus was marched through the Tyropoeon Valley that divided Jerusalem into two halves – the Lower City (where most of the poorer classes lived) and the

Upper City (where the wealthy classes resided). He was led up to the gate of a large house in the Upper City. The gate opened and Jesus was led into the courtyard of the palatial home belonging to Caiaphas, the high priest and president of the Sanhedrin.

But Jesus was not taken immediately to see Caiaphas. He was taken first to Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas and a former high priest. Annas probably also lived within the palace of Caiaphas, in a section of his own.*

Read John 18:19-24

This was not technically a trial. A proper legal interrogation would require witnesses, and there were none here, a fact to which Jesus alludes when he answers:

“Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely they know what I said.”

To this seemingly impudent answer, one of the officials struck Jesus in the face, at which Jesus protests, “If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?” When Jesus asks Annas to “testify as to what is wrong,” he uses the legal word for “testify,” probably alluding once again to the fact that the proceedings so far were not legal.

It appears that Annas is mostly interested in securing information about the teachings of Jesus and about his disciples. He probably wanted to net as many of Jesus’ disciples as he could that night, but Jesus refused to provide any useful information. When this information was not forthcoming, he immediately sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas, who had gathered with a hastily convened Sanhedrin in another portion of the palace.

The Pre-Dawn Meeting of the Sanhedrin

This was not the first time that the Sanhedrin had met informally in the palatial residence of Caiaphas. **Matthew 26:3-5** reveals that just a few days earlier another similar meeting had been convened.

“Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. ‘But not during the Feast,’ they said, ‘or there may be a riot among the people.’”

Now once again the Sanhedrin had been called out in the dead of the night in order to deliberate on the problem of Jesus. But this time, they had Jesus in their custody and had to deliberate on what to do with him.

From this point on, Caiaphas, as the ruling high priest, presides over this informal meeting of the Sanhedrin and begins to interrogate Jesus himself in an attempt to find a basis for a charge against him.

* Of all the Sadducees, Annas had the most political experience. He was a man who understood the machinations of both the Jewish and Roman political systems. **John** refers to him as “high priest” even though he had been deposed in around AD 15 by Valerius Gratus, then governor of Judea. It is likely, however, that he still retained the title “high priest,” even though the office had officially passed to his son-in-law, Caiaphas.

Caiaphas plays two crucial roles in the story of Jesus' trial:

His role as high priest

As the ruling high priest, Caiaphas had a recognized spiritual authority before God. This is reflected in **John 11:49-50**:

“Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, ‘You know nothing at all!* You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish.’”

John 11:51-52 then points out the irony of Caiaphas' declaration, for he was unwittingly acting as God's instrument to predict the atonement value of Christ's death.

To appreciate what was happening in **John 11:49-52**, we need to understand the high priest's role before God. The high priest's most essential job was to officiate the sacrifice of one for the many. As the Sinai Covenant prescribed it, the death of one for the many was through the sacrifice of an unblemished goat on the Day of Atonement. But in **John 11:49-50**, without realizing what he was saying, Caiaphas predicted the death of one for the many – this time being the unblemished sacrifice of Jesus himself for the people of Israel.

But the declaration of **John 11:49-52** also reveals something of Caiaphas' character. In pronouncing that “it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish,” Caiaphas showed he was ultimately concerned more with political expediency than with the issue of Christ's guilt or innocence. **John 11:49-52**, therefore, sets the pace for Jesus' trial before Caiaphas in two ways:

- It shows that Caiaphas was willing to sacrifice Jesus on the altar of political expediency, regardless of whether he believed Jesus to be guilty or not.
- It shows that Caiaphas had already decided that Jesus was to die (note **John 11:53**). Therefore the trial was not designed to prove or disprove Jesus' guilt. It was designed to find grounds to carry out the decision that had *already* been made.

John 11:49-52 makes a particular point of underlining Caiaphas' role as high priest of the nation of Israel. One of the responsibilities of the high priest was to purge the Temple of all defilement (**2 Chronicles 29:4-17**), something that Jesus had twice taken upon himself to do (**John 2:13-17; Matthew 21:12-13**). Another of the high priest's responsibilities was to officiate at the anointing of the ruler of Israel (note **Numbers 27:18-21; 1 Kings 1:39**). Once again, ironically, the high priest presided over the trial convened to determine whether Jesus was indeed the rightful “king of the Jews” (**Luke 23:1-3**).

His role as president of the Sanhedrin

Not only was Caiaphas the ruling high priest at the time of Jesus' trial, he was also the presiding officer of the Sanhedrin, the one responsible for making sure that every decision was made in a Scriptural and ethical manner.

* Caiaphas' exclamation, “You know nothing at all!” is completely in line with Josephus' description of the arrogance of the Sadducees who “in their intercourse with their peers are as rude as to aliens.”¹

Read Matthew 26:57-68

Many scholars have pointed out that the trial before Caiaphas displays many illegalities. According to the Mishnah, some of these illegalities include:

- Trials were allowed only in the regular meeting places of the Sanhedrin (not in the palace of the high priest)
- Trials could not occur on the eve of the Sabbath or Feast Days or at night.
- A sentence of ‘guilty’ had to be pronounced on the day following the trial, not on the day of the trial itself.

We must remember, however, that the Mishnah was written over a century after the Sanhedrin ceased to exist and reflects the way Pharisaic rabbis thought the Sanhedrin *should* have operated. And even if the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin at Caiaphas’ residence was illegal, this does not mean that it didn’t happen exactly as recorded in the Bible. The meeting of the Sanhedrin at night was necessitated by the urgency of seeing Jesus tried and executed before the crowds realized what was happening. And as Jesus himself had earlier pointed out, “this is your hour – when darkness reigns” (**Luke 22:53**).

The fact that there is a difference between the Mishnah’s precepts and the Gospel record should not be surprising. As Craig Keener points out:

“The Mishnah...differs from the Gospels because it reports legal ethics whereas the Gospels report violations of those ethics. Many of the Mishnah’s rules represent legal standards widely accepted in the ancient Mediterranean world. Later rabbis sought legal safeguards to prevent hasty trials and miscarriages of justice – the very sort of injustices that took place at Jesus’ trial. The picture of the Sanhedrin’s activity in the Gospels is much closer to Josephus’s first-century description: the powerful Sadducees were hardly interested in following Pharisaic ethics and probably did what they had to do to get the job done. Their primary responsibility as Jerusalem’s aristocracy was to keep peace for Rome, and Jesus appeared to be a threat to Rome’s power and to their own authority.”²

The Testimony of Jesus

The verdict against Jesus could not have been passed had it not been for the testimony of Jesus himself. **Matthew 26:59-60** tells us that the Sanhedrin could not find even false evidence against Jesus, “though many false witnesses came forward.” Some of the witnesses came forward with the accusation, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man,’” an apparent twist of Jesus’ words in **John 2:19**, but even then **Mark 14:59** tells us that “their testimony did not agree.”

All through this parade of false witnesses, Jesus himself had remained silent, fulfilling the prophecy of **Isaiah 53:7**. Caiaphas was rapidly growing frustrated. He could not lay any formal charge against Jesus without the proof of witnesses, and so in desperation, he turned to Jesus and asked, “Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?” (**Matthew**

26:62). Yet still Jesus did not respond with a word in his defence (**Matthew 26:63**). Finally, in exasperation, Caiaphas exclaimed:

“I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.”

And it was only at this point that Jesus broke his silence – the one time when silence could have secured his release. In fact, up till now he had carefully avoided ever stating directly that he was the Messiah (note **Luke 9:20-21**; **John 10:24-25**). But now, in front of his accusers, he finally voices what people had long been pleading with him to say. He declares: “Yes, it is as you say.”

Jesus’ answer was extraordinarily crafted not only to admit clearly that he was indeed the Messiah, but also to implicate his accusers in this very admission. Rather than just say, “Yes,” Jesus said, “*You* have said it.” In this way, Jesus cleverly placed the responsibility back on his accusers. “He made them admit to His identity before they formally found Him guilty of death...He would die not merely upon His own admission to deity but also upon theirs...So they condemned Him by the words ‘of his own mouth.’ But He also condemned them by their words. They could not say that they did not proclaim the Son of God guilty of death.”³

Thus, in one short answer, Jesus turned the trial around and put his accusers on trial. “I am,” declared Jesus, “the very person you say that I am.” For Jesus had already explained the dynamics of the real trial long before in **John 3:18-20**:

“Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed.”

But Jesus doesn’t leave it there. So that there be no doubt as to his meaning, he goes on to describe exactly who this “Christ, the Son of God” is:

“But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Caiaphas’ response to this was: “He has spoken blasphemy!” But take another look at the testimony of Jesus. Where is the blasphemy in this statement? Jesus either spoke the truth or he did not. Indeed, if any in the Sanhedrin truly believed that the Messiah would come (which the Pharisees, who made up the majority of the Council, did), then this Messiah would eventually say words to this very effect. For Jesus was declaring that he was the one prophesied in **Daniel 7:13**:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.”

This charge of blasphemy is one of the most puzzling aspects of Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. Did his claim to be "the Christ" really equal a claim to be "the Son of God"? Did his claim to be the "Son of God" mean he was claiming divine status? And did his claim to be the Son of Man prophecied in **Daniel 7:13** mean that he was making himself equal with God. According to all available writings from the time, the answer would be no. Yet neither the Sanhedrin nor Jesus himself denied this connection. It appears that in the first century at least some rabbis taught that the coming of the Messiah meant that "God hath taken a body and eaten with men and saved men."⁴ For *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* had predicted almost two centuries before the trial of Christ:

"...the Most High shall visit the earth, coming Himself as man, with men eating and drinking, and breaking the head of the dragon in the water. He shall save Israel and all the Gentiles, God speaking in the person of man."⁵

There is no question that Jesus himself understood the term "Son of Man" to be more than a mere human servant of God, for in **John 5:26-27** he declared:

"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son *to have life in himself*. And he has given him authority to judge *because he is the Son of Man*."

Jesus' theology clearly attributed divine self-sustaining life to the messianic Son, and viewed the Son of Man as a person with complete authority to judge the world. It is unlikely that this was a theology unknown to the Sanhedrin. They shared a common theological background. Like Jesus, they knew the teachings of the sages and the aspirations of the common people. From their reaction, it is clear that they knew Jesus was claiming divine attributes when he agreed that he was "the Son of the Blessed One."

Caiaphas expressed his grief and shock at Jesus' "blasphemy" in the traditional Jewish way. He tore his clothes, despite the specific prohibition of **Leviticus 10:6** and **21:10**. This tearing of the high priest's clothes was simply one more illegality in a string of illegalities that took place that morning, and foreshadowed the tearing of another garment later that day – the rending of the veil that stood before the Holy of Holies (**Matthew 27:51**).

The Verdict of the Pre-Dawn Meeting

Of all the illegalities of this pre-dawn trial, the principal one was the manner in which Caiaphas extracted a confession from Jesus. The Torah regulated the conduct of any trial, specifying that a man could not be condemned to death on the basis of his own testimony, but only on the testimony established by a minimum of two concurring witnesses (**Deuteronomy 17:6**). Caiaphas' statement, "Why do we need any more witnesses?" was a direct violation of **Deuteronomy 17:6**.

On the basis of the Gospel record, Frank Morrison concludes:

"Jesus of Nazareth was condemned to death, not upon the statements of His accusers, but upon an admission extorted from Him under oath."⁶

The assembled members of the Sanhedrin then pronounced: “He is worthy of death,” basing their decision on **Leviticus 24:15-16**. And so Jesus was condemned to death, ostensibly on a single charge: *Blasphemy*.

Yet it is clear that blasphemy was simply the excuse, not the real reason behind Jesus’ conviction. Why was Jesus on trial? Why was he condemned to death? There have been many reasons put forward for the real reason Jesus was tried and crucified. Some have rightly suggested that he rocked the boat too much and challenged the spiritual authority of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Others point to his cleansing of the Temple and claim, with reason, that this was a direct challenge to the leadership of the priestly aristocracy. In other words, on both a religious level and a political level, Jesus was a thorn in the side of the leadership of Israel.

But what did Jesus himself have to say? According to Jesus, why were the rulers trying to kill him? We see Jesus’ answer in **John 8:37-38**:

“I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, *because you have no room for my word*. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and *you do what you have heard from your father*.”

Then, in **John 8:44-47**, Jesus goes on to describe exactly what his enemies had heard from their father.

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies...Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.”

From the very beginning, Jesus had described his primary enemy as “the prince of this world” (**John 16:11**). He had engaged in a direct assault on Satan’s rulership of the world in order to “destroy the devil’s work” (**1 John 3:8**). When he received news that demons had submitted to his name through the preaching of his disciples, he declared in **Luke 10:18**: “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Jesus had also clearly predicted that the coming confrontation in Jerusalem was “the time for judgment on this world” when “the prince of this world will be driven out” (**John 12:31**). He had even described his coming arrest and trial as “the prince of this world is coming.” Paul later alluded to this confrontation with “the prince of this world” in **1 Corinthians 2:8** when he wrote:

“None of the rulers of this age understood [God’s secret wisdom], for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”

When Judas betrayed Jesus, the Gospel record makes it clear that he did so as an instrument of the prince of this world (**Luke 22:3; John 13:27**), and it is obvious that Jesus saw the Sanhedrin also as the primary instrument of the prince of this world, for in **Luke 22:53** he told them:

“Every day I was with you in the temple courts, and you did not lay a hand on me. But this is your hour – when darkness reigns.”

The Ridicule of the Guards

At this point in the mock trial before Caiaphas, **Matthew 26:67** tells us that “they spit in his face and struck him with their fists.” Now that Jesus had condemned himself by his own words, the members of the Sanhedrin showed their contempt for his supposed messiahship, but humiliating him. The Messiah was expected to be the all-conquering one, but the very fact that Jesus was bound, slapped and spat upon was the final proof, in the Sanhedrin’s eyes, that Jesus was an imposter.

After the Sanhedrin had finished this cruel mockery, the members of the council retired to deliberate on what should be done with Jesus. At this time, they handed Jesus over to the temple guards, who continued the beatings. **Luke 22:63-65** provides us with more detail:

“The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, ‘Prophecy! Who hit you?’ And they said many other insulting things to him.”

It was common for soldiers to play sport with their captives, humiliating them and making a parody of them. The Herodian and Roman soldiers also later played sport with him (**Luke 23:11; Matthew 27:27-31**), but the temple guard knew something that their Roman counterparts did not. They knew the Scripture and so began to twist the very messianic prophecies that Jesus claimed to fulfill.

Read Isaiah 11:1-5

This was one of the most famous messianic prophecies, and some of the teachers of the law during Jesus’ time believed that this passage predicted that the Messiah would have supernatural senses. He would not “judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears.” In fact, one tradition held that the Messiah would have a superior sense of smell.

And so the temple guard blindfolded him, struck him repeatedly, and demanded: “Prophecy! Who hit you?”

The Three Denials of Peter

Read John 18:15-18

Peter and John (the “other disciple” mentioned in **verse 15**) had followed the arresting party “at a distance, right up to the courtyard of the high priest” (**Matthew 26:58**). Because John was “known to the high priest,” he was able to slip through with the arresting party as they enter the courtyard of Caiaphas’ palace, but Peter had to wait outside the gate. Finally John returned and sweet-talked a servant girl on duty in the courtyard. She opened the gate and let Peter in, but as she did, her suspicions were obviously aroused.

Jesus was now in the upper room of Caiaphas’ house, being questioned by the Sanhedrin. Down below, the lower ranks of the arresting party had built a charcoal fire to keep themselves warm. They had no idea how long the interrogation might take, or when they may be called on to take Jesus to another part of the city.

Because spring nights are cool in Jerusalem, and because it was the least conspicuous thing to do, Peter joined the crowd sitting around the fire. He may have been trying to concoct a plan to rescue Jesus, for **Matthew 26:58** tells us that Peter “entered and sat down with the guards to see the outcome.” He still had his sword with him and, based on Jesus’ words in **Luke 22:36-38**, he may have been trying to think of a way to rescue Jesus (note **Mark 14:29-31**). Even now Peter was determined not to be one of those who fell away, yet he must have felt greatly disillusioned. His one attempt to fight off the arresting party had been thwarted by none other than Jesus himself (**John 18:10-11**), and now Jesus was in the heart of enemy territory. Where was the glorious Messiah that he expected? For just a few hours before, Jesus had declared in **John 13:31-32**:

“Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.”

Yet Jesus hadn’t resisted his arrest. Was he planning some supernatural display of his messianic power? Would he suddenly reveal his full glory before his very captors? Even while Peter was pondering these things, the servant girl who had been at the gate approached Peter and looked closely at him, as if trying to decide whether she recognized him. “You were one of the ones with Jesus of Galilee, we’re you?” she asked. Peter brusquely replied, “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”*

It is at this point that the Gospel accounts diverge slightly.

- **Matthew 26:71-72** – “Then [Peter] went out to the gateway, where another girl saw him and said to the people there, ‘This fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth.’ He denied it again, with an oath: ‘I don’t know the man!’”
- **Mark 14:68-70**– “[Peter] went out into the entryway. When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, ‘This fellow is one of them.’ Again he denied it.”
- **Luke 22:58** – “A little later someone else saw him and said, ‘You also are one of them.’ ‘Man, I am not!’ Peter replied.”
- **John 18:25** – “As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, ‘You are not one of his disciples, are you?’ He denied it, saying, ‘I am not.’”

How can these seemingly contradictory accounts be reconciled? We need to remember that these are all snippets of the events that took place, that each writer selects a part of the story to focus on, sometimes condensing, sometimes expanding on the narrative. Here is a possible harmonization of the four accounts:

Peter was sitting with the others at the fire, warming himself, when the servant girl (who had opened the gate for him at John’s request) approaches him with her suspicion that he is one of Jesus’ disciples. Peter strongly denies this, and then stands up and walks into the nearby arched entranceway,

* This was the first of the three denials “before the rooster crows,” predicted by Jesus (**John 13:38**). Although **Matthew** and **Mark** record the other two denials in quick succession, John’s account indicates that there were intervals between the denials during which other things happened (note also **Luke 22:58-49**).

probably getting ready to run if someone tries to arrest him. He stands there for a while, just beyond the reach of the fire's warmth, trying to remain inconspicuous, but he can see that there is now suspicion in the courtyard. The servant girl who had originally approached him has looked in his direction several times and is now speaking with some of the other servant girls.

Peter now thinks it best not to stand apart from the group. He walks back to the fire, but this time remains standing, warming himself with the others at the outer perimeter of the crowd. The two servant girls are now speaking with some of those near Peter, raising again the suspicion that Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. One of the nearby men asks Peter directly: "You are one of his disciples, aren't you?" Peter immediately denies this accusation, swearing with an oath that it isn't true.

About an hour went past (**Luke 22:59**), and then another of the high priest's servants joined the crowd around the fire. **John 18:26** tells us that this man was a relative of Malchus, the high priest's servant who had his ear cut off by Peter. Upon seeing Peter, he asked: "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?" This accusation was now of a totally different order, for here was a man who recognized Peter from his defense of Jesus in Gethsemane. Another man piped up: "He has to be a disciple of Jesus. His Galilean accent gives him away!" At this, Peter completely denied any knowledge of Jesus and "began to call down curses on himself" (**Matthew 26:74**).

In first century Jewish culture, a person could affirm the truth of a statement in two ways. He could swear on oath by God's throne, by the Temple or even by his own head that his statement was true. Or he could call down a curse upon himself, saying, "If what I am saying is not true, then let God judge me ever so severely" (see **Ruth 1:17; 1 Samuel 14:44; 2 Samuel 3:35**). Peter used both an oath and a curse to emphasize his strong denial of this third accusation.

It is at this point that the rooster crowed for the second time (**Luke 22:61**), and Jesus turned to look directly at Peter. He immediately remembered Jesus' prediction and slipped away from the crowd, and once outside the gate, broke down and wept bitterly.

At what time did Jesus turn to look at Peter? There are two possibilities. Either Peter was in a position to view Jesus where he was being interrogated in the upper room of Caiaphas' house, or Jesus was at that time being led down into the courtyard, ready to be taken to the Sanhedrin's chambers at the Temple. Either way, that one statement – "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter" (**Luke 22:61**) – is one of the most poignant in the whole Gospel narrative.

The Post-Dawn Meeting of the Sanhedrin

Read Luke 22:66-71

Luke's account indicates that a full session of the Sanhedrin then met after dawn, probably in the council chambers within the Temple precincts, and there was a brief reenactment of the earlier trial as members questioned Jesus on his messi-

anic claims. This meeting was probably convened to give the formal appearance of legality, and to ratify the verdict given earlier that morning at Caiaphas' house.

The Sanhedrin was a council* of 71 men, drawn from the three classes named in **Mark 14:53** – the chief priests, the elders of the Jewish community and the teachers of the law. According to *Compton's Expert Commentary*:

“By the chief priests is meant the acting high priest, those who had been high priests, and members of the privileged families from which the high priests were taken. The priestly aristocracy comprised the leading persons in the community, and they were the chief members of the Sanhedrin. The teachers of the law (KJV “scribes”) formed the Pharisaic element in the Sanhedrin, though not all Pharisees were professional scribes. The elders were the tribal and family heads of the people and priesthood, mostly the secular nobility of Jerusalem....According to Josephus, in the time of Christ the Sanhedrin was formally led by the Sadducean high priests, but practically ruled by the Pharisees, who were immensely popular with the people...”⁷

But not all of the 71 members of the Sanhedrin participated in the pre-dawn and post-dawn trials of Jesus. At least two members of the Council – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea – were conspicuously missing.

Nicodemus, who was called “one of their number,” had been present at an earlier meeting of the Sanhedrin and had stood up for Jesus (**John 7:50-52**). Likewise, Joseph of Arimathea is described as “a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God” (**Mark 15:43**) and as “a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews” (**John 19:38**). **Luke 23:50** also tells us that Joseph of Arimathea was “a member of the [Sanhedrin], a good and upright man, *who had not consented to their decision and action.*” While it is possible that both Nicodemus and Joseph were dissenting voices on the night of Jesus' trial, it is more likely that they were not invited to Jesus' trial at all. We can see this from the following verses:

- **Matthew 26:59** – “The chief priests and the *whole* Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.”
- **Matthew 27:1** – “Early in the morning, *all* the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death.”
- **Mark 14:64** – “...They *all* condemned him as worthy of death.”
- **Luke 23:1** – “Then the *whole* assembly rose and led him off to Pilate...”

Once again, during this dawn trial, the fateful question was posed to Jesus:

“If you are the Messiah, tell us.”

This time Jesus answered:

“If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer.”

Jesus' fate now depended upon him keeping silent. In Jewish Law, a man could

not be condemned on his own testimony. If Jesus had refused to answer, he would probably have been released and not faced the ordeal of crucifixion at that time. But Jesus then repeated his earlier declaration:

“But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.”

There was no question that this was a messianic declaration. The phrase “at the right hand of the mighty God” meant that he was in the position of God’s first-born, the one to whom God had delegated his full authority. And Jesus identifies his very trial as the starting point for this glorification, for he says “from now on” the Son of Man would be revealed in his full glory. But the Sanhedrin asked one final question:

“Are you then the Son of God?”

To this, Jesus frankly replied:

“You are right in saying I am.”

The Sanhedrin’s verdict was then uttered in its final statement, probably voiced by Caiaphas himself:

“Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.”

The trial of Jesus was unique. Never before had a person been tried on the basis of his identity rather than his conduct. As Josh McDowell points out: “In most trials, people are tried for what they have done, but this was not true of Christ’s. Jesus was tried for who he was.”⁸

Irwin Linton, a lawyer, makes this observation:

“Unique among criminal trials is this one in which not the actions but the identity of the accused is the issue.”⁹

His judges themselves bore testimony to this fact, because they made it clear what they considered the sole reason for his guilt in **John 19:7**:

“...We have a law, and according to that law he must die, *because he claimed to be the Son of God.*”

You must remember that the chief priests and elders of the people had already decided Jesus must die (**Mark 14:1**). As **Mark 14:55** puts it:

“The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus *so that they could put him to death...*”

Even Nicodemus had pointed out the illegality of this kind of pre-trial verdict (**John 7:50-51**). Yet the verdict had *already* been given that Jesus be killed (**John 11:47-53**). In that sense, Jesus had already been placed on trial and found guilty long before this day. All the religious leadership now needed was the semblance of legality to rubberstamp that decision. And they found something they could work with in Jesus’ supposedly blasphemous claim to be the firstborn of God.

But this was not the end of the story of Jesus’ trial. For if the Sanhedrin had then carried out the sentence of execution against Jesus, he would have been put to

death by stoning, not by crucifixion, for crucifixion was not a Jewish method of capital punishment.

Although they claimed, quite truthfully, not to have the jurisdiction to execute a person for a capital offence (**John 18:31**), there was nothing really stopping them from taking matters into their own hands. They could have dragged him outside the city and stoned him in secret, as they did later with Stephen (**Acts 7:57-60**) and as they had already twice tried to do with Jesus (**John 8:59; 10:31**).

No, the Sanhedrin specifically wanted to make the charge against Jesus a Roman one for two important reasons:

- By making Pontius Pilate (the governor of Judaea) take responsibility for Jesus' death, they could escape the consequent condemnation of the common people who "held that [Jesus] was a prophet" (**Matthew 21:46**).
- By having a Roman court of law pronounce Jesus guilty of anti-Roman behavior, the prescribed method of execution would be crucifixion, not stoning. Thus even in his death, Jesus would be shown to be under the curse of God (**Deuteronomy 21:22-23**). If stoned, the people could still claim that the Sanhedrin had executed a prophet, but if crucified, Jesus' claim to messiahship would be voided and his very rejection by the Sanhedrin thus justified.*

But for the charge against Jesus to stick it had to change from a charge of blasphemy (a matter of Jewish Law) to a charge that would hold in a Roman court of law. And so, as they marched Jesus off to face the Roman governor at about seven o'clock in the morning, the religious charge of blasphemy transformed into a political charge of sedition.

The Roman Trial

The trial of Jesus under Roman law, like the previous trial before the Sanhedrin, took place in three stages:

Before Pontius Pilate

Read Luke 23:1-4

Read John 18:28-38

Representatives from the Sanhedrin (including the incumbent high priest, Caiaphas, and the former high priest, Annas) took Jesus to Pilate's residence in Jerusalem – the former palace of Herod the Great. They refused to enter the palace, however, because to do so would have made them ceremonial unclean and thus disqualify them from participating in the Passover ceremonies later that day (**John 18:28**). And so Pilate came out to meet them on the front steps of his palace.

Pilate initiated the Roman legal proceedings with the usual question: "What charges are you bringing against this man?" But the response from the Sanhedrin representatives was most unusual. "If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."

* Ironically, it would be the very curse of crucifixion, which the Sanhedrin regarded as the final negation of Jesus' claims, that would become the means of justification before God apart from the Law (**Galatians 3:13**).

This short exchange reveals a depth of political intrigue unspoken within the Gospel narrative, and two conclusions emerge:

- It is likely that the Sanhedrin had already informed Pilate of the threat Jesus posed to peace in Jerusalem. The cleansing of the Temple earlier in the week would undoubtedly have reached Pilate's ears, through his network of spies and informants, and since **John 18:12** tells us that a Roman chiliarch was among the arresting party, there is reasonable proof that Pilate had been informed of the upcoming arrest. Even Pilate's wife was aware of who Jesus was (**Matthew 27:19**). And in order to expedite Jesus' trial before Pilate, the Sanhedrin had probably sent a representative earlier that morning to inform the governor that the prisoner was on his way, informing him of the charges against Jesus.
- As historical records show, Pilate had no love for the Jews, and probably used this occasion to spite the Sanhedrin. Right throughout the trial of Jesus before Pilate, there is a clear indication that both Pilate and the Sanhedrin are playing a careful political game, seeking to leverage their positions to the detriment of the other.

Caiaphas and Annas had probably approached Pilate with confidence that he would handle the matter quickly and quietly. And so Pilate's next words must have infuriated the Sanhedrin. "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law," he told them. In saying this, Pilate was taking the same approach Gallio later took at Paul's arrest in Corinth (see **Acts 18:12-16**). But to this suggestion, they exclaimed, truthfully enough, "But we have no right to execute anyone." This was a fact they knew Pilate could not refute.

The Sanhedrin then began to accuse Jesus before Pilate (**Luke 23:2**), and their accusation contained three distinct charges:

- **Subverting the Jewish nation** – While this would have been of concern to Pilate, who wanted to avoid unrest within Judaea at all costs, this charge was not technically a matter for Roman jurisprudence.
- **Opposing the payment of taxes to Caesar** – This was a more serious offense in Roman eyes, for Pilate's primary responsibility was to make sure that taxes were sent to Rome without disruption. This charge, of course, was totally untrue and would not hold up under cross examination. All Pilate would need to do is ask Jesus himself his position on paying taxes to Rome, and Jesus could easily have answered in a form similar to **Luke 20:20-26**.
- **Claiming to be king** – This was the most serious charge of all, and the one upon which Pilate's judgment would be based. For the Sanhedrin sought to paint Jesus as a royal pretender to Jerusalem's vacant throne, a dangerous political activist and a threat to Roman rule in the province.*

Pilate was politically perceptive. He probably saw through the duplicity of the Sanhedrin and realized that Jesus was more of a threat to their position than to Rome itself. But at their insistence, he decided to investigate their claims for him-

self. Knowing that the members of the Sanhedrin would not cross his threshold for fear of contaminating themselves spiritually, Pilate shrewdly withdrew to his audience chamber within the palace and summoned Jesus to appear before him.

In **John 18:33-38**, we find the record of Pilate's actual interrogation of Jesus. His prime question related specifically to the third charge brought by the Sanhedrin. "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Jesus, as always, probed the heart of the man, and Pilate could not escape the sharp sword of Jesus' words (note **Hebrews 4:12-13**). He asked if Pilate was simply following a legal procedure, or did he really want to know for himself? But this reply irritated Pilate, for he was accustomed to being the interrogator, not the one interrogated. "Am I a Jew?" he spat contemptuously, and then asks Jesus what he himself thought to be reason for the Sanhedrin's charges against him. To this, Jesus explains the nature of his kingdom.

"Jesus asserted that his 'kingdom' was not of this world because he had no military support and did not relate to any geographic locality. He did not, however, deny that 'king' could be his proper title. He affirmed that his kingdom had a different origin and a different character from any that Pilate knew. Had he been an ordinary revolutionary, he would have offered armed resistance to those who took him captive."¹⁰

Pilate appears surprised by Jesus' response. He had probably been expecting a belligerent rebel, but Jesus did not appear to fit the picture painted by the Sanhedrin. "He could not reconcile the character of the prisoner with the charge brought against him."¹¹ And so Pilate pressed an answer to his question:

"You are a king, then!"

To this, Jesus replied:

"You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

This answer again amazed Pilate. Never before had he spoken to a prisoner in this way. Jesus was completely forthcoming in his answer, admitting to his royalty. Yet he declared once again that the stakes were not simply the physical throne of Jerusalem. Truth itself, Jesus said, was at stake. In his statement, "Everyone on the side of truth listens to me," Jesus was rephrasing what he had declared to Nicodemus in **John 3:19-21**, where he declared:

"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. *But whoever lives by the truth* comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

* There is a strong irony in this third charge. Jesus, who had disappointed the crowds by *not* leading a revolution against Rome now stood accused of this very crime.

The verdict had already been issued against the Sanhedrin, Jesus explained, but it had not yet been issued against Pilate himself. Once again, Jesus had turned the tables and put his accusers on trial, for they were not “on the side of truth.” And now, as an unlikely prosecutor, Jesus now challenged Pilate as to where he himself stood on this issue. Stunned by this response, Pilate retorted: “What is truth?”

What did Pilate mean by this question? No one is certain. He may have been sarcastic, scornful, impatient or even sincere. But the question was clearly rhetorical, for he then walked out to the waiting Jewish leaders and pronounced his verdict of innocence. “He may have regarded [Jesus] as a harmless philosopher or as an impractical dreamer. Certainly he did not look on Jesus as a dangerous subversive.”¹² As Craig Keener explains:

“Many philosophers claimed the right to reign as kings, but many who made such claims were also apolitical and posed no real threat to the authorities.”¹³

“Pilate’s ‘great amazement’ appears to be mingled with respect for Jesus and antipathy for the Jewish leaders, and so he takes tentative steps to release the prisoner.”¹⁴ And so Pilate went out to the waiting chief priests and pronounced his own verdict: “I find no basis for a charge against this man” (**Luke 23:4**).

The reaction of the Sanhedrin representatives was predictable. They saw their plot against Jesus evaporating and unless they did something, Jesus would soon be released. Their one chance to get rid of him would soon be gone. And so they refused to back down, insisting:

“He stirs up the people all over Judaea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

This was a mistake. None of this had any bearing in a Roman court of law. Furthermore, when Pilate heard that Jesus was a Galilean, he realized that Jesus technically fell under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, who was also residing in Jerusalem over the Passover Week. And so Pilate immediately sent Jesus to Herod.

Before Herod Antipas

Read Luke 23:8-12

Herod was evidently pleased when Jesus was brought before him. He may have wanted to assuage his suspicions that Jesus was in fact John the Baptist brought back to life (note **Matthew 14:1-2**), but he primarily hoped Jesus would perform some kind of circus-style miracle for him. But Jesus remained silent and refused to perform any kind of miracle.

Right through Christ’s audience with Herod Antipas, the chief priests continued “vehemently accusing” Jesus before Herod. So finally, Herod dressed Jesus up in an “elegant robe” (possibly, Herod’s own royal robe) as his soldiers began to mock him. Herod then sends Jesus, dressed in this parody of kingly regalia, back to the palace of Pontius Pilate.

Before Pontius Pilate Again

Read Luke 23:13-25

Pilate once again found himself at the end of this “pass the buck” sequence of interrogations. There was nowhere else to pass the buck, for he could not pass it back to the Sanhedrin without endangering his political career. A little background information is now in order to help us understand Pilate’s position.

Little is known of Pilate before he became fifth governor of Judaea, between AD 26 and AD 37. His advancement into the role of governor depended, however, on patronage, and there is strong indication that Pilate’s patron was a senator named Sejanus, although Tiberius Caesar may have had a hand in Pilate’s appointment.

Judaea itself was classed as a third-tier imperial province.¹⁵ The governors of such provinces were drawn from the equestrian rank* of Roman society and commanded only auxilliary troops. As Helen Bond explains:

“The governors of Judaea had only auxilliary troops at their disposal. These appear to have been descendents of the Herodian troops drawn predominantly from Caesarea and Sebaste. They amounted to five infantry cohorts and one cavalry regiment scattered throughout the province. One cohort was permanently posted in the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem.”¹⁶

The small province of Judaea was under the shadow of the larger province of Syria to the north – a first-class imperial province governed by a legate drawn not from the lower equestrian ranks, but from the consular ranks of the imperial Senate itself. The Syrian legate had four full Roman legions at his disposal, and could be called on to intervene in Judaea should a military crisis arise. Pilate was in a position where he must keep the peace in Jerusalem at all costs, or risk intervention from the Syrian legate. And so with this in mind, we can better understand the political strings being pulled by the Sanhedrin during this final stage in Jesus’ trial before Pilate.

Pilate made three attempts to free Jesus:

The first attempt

A large crowd had now gathered outside the Pilate’s residence, made up of the chief priests, the elders of the community, and a number of other people who had come to watch the proceedings against three Jewish revolutionaries (Barabbas and two of his men) who were on trial for insurrection against Rome (ironically, the very charge brought against Jesus). Pilate announced to the people in **Luke 23:14-16**:

“You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

* Equestrians formed the middle rank of the Roman nobility and provided men for various public offices, ranging from military commands to the governorship of lesser provinces.

But the chief priests began to shout out: “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

Around this time, Pilate received a message from his wife. The note read: *Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him* (**Matthew 27:19**). This obviously stirred a deep fear within Pilate, for he had already sensed there was something extraordinary about this prisoner. And so Pilate made an offer to the crowd:

“It is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”

Although the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover Feast is unknown outside of the Gospel accounts, historical documents confirm that it was a Roman custom in other parts of the empire, and thus could well have been a custom in Judaea at that time.¹⁷ This custom may have been designed to placate the Jews at a time when the pilgrim crowds swelled the population of Jerusalem to a size where riots could easily be sparked by the slightest provocation.

Pilate had latched on to the charge brought against Jesus and now referred to him before the crowd as the “king of the Jews.” Jesus himself, after all, had admitted to being a king, and Pilate probably used the title in the very philosophical sense that he believed Jesus himself was using it. He may have even been using the term “king of the Jews” in the sense of “Messiah,” for Pilate was fully aware of the Jewish prophecies of a coming Savior-King. But the chief priests started to shout: “Release Barabbas! Release Barabbas!” The crowd soon started screaming out the same demand in unison.

Pilate found he had seriously miscalculated the mood of the crowd. He could see that a riot was in the making, so he ordered that Jesus be taken away and flogged, hoping that this would satisfy the mob.

The second attempt

After the flogging, Pilate again appealed to the crowd in **John 19:4**:

“Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.”

Jesus was then led out again, this time with a scarlet cloak for his robe and a woven vine of thorns as his crown. At the sight of him, Pilate announced: “Behold, the man!” (KJV).

But if Pilate thought that the sight of Jesus in the parody of a king would placate the crowd he was wrong. The Sanhedrin, who had already mocked him in such a way, now saw the very humiliation they wanted to underscore before the people. And so, “as soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted: ‘Crucify! Crucify!’” To this, Pilate responded: “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against this man” (**John 19:6**).

One of the members of the Sanhedrin then shouted out: “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God” (**John 19:7**). At this point, Pilate became “even more afraid” and went back into the

palace. It is possible he now understood what was at stake – the “truth” that Jesus had previously spoken to him about. The charge from the Sanhedrin was now in the open. They were no longer insisting on a charge of sedition, but were now claiming a charge of blasphemy. And with the crowd growing larger as the morning progressed, Pilate was unsure what would happen next.

He had Jesus brought before him again. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus. But Jesus gave no reply. Exasperated, Pilate then said: “Do you refuse to speak to me? Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” To this, Jesus finally replied in **John 19:11**:

“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

Once again, Jesus had declared that it was not he was on trial. In effect, Jesus was saying: “There is a judge higher than you, Pilate. He is now presiding over a case in which all mankind is on trial.”

The third attempt

Pilate now tried all the harder to secure Jesus’ release. If he indeed had the power to set Jesus free, as he had earlier so confidently asserted, then Jesus would now be freed. But once again, Pilate had miscalculated the determination of the Sanhedrin and had overestimated his own authority.

This time, Pilate sat down on the judge’s seat at a place known as Gabbatha, the “Stone Pavement.”* Members of the Sanhedrin were now shouting out to him: “If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar!”

Pilate was particularly vulnerable to this kind of political attack. His patron Sejanus had recently been arrested for treason, and Tiberius Caesar was paranoid of a wider conspiracy, and was now dealing with all those under Sejanus’ political wing. Pilate was on the list for a possible purge. He knew it and the Sanhedrin probably knew it. If a report was sent by the Sanhedrin to Rome stating that he had released a potentially dangerous revolutionary, and if Jesus later proved to be a revolutionary, then Pilate’s tenuous position may be further weakened. In fact, history tells us that just a few years later, Pilate was recalled to stand trial before a Senate inquiry.

As Jesus is led in, Pilate announced again: “Here is your king!” To this, the crowd responded: “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” (**John 19:14-15**)

“Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked, his one last attempt to secure Jesus’ release. To this, the chief priests answered in **John 19:15**:

“We have no king but Caesar.”

* According to archaeological finds, the location of the Stone Pavement may have been in the Antonia Fortress, not at Pilate’s palace.

The matter was now irreversible. Pilate could not be seen to be a less loyal subject to Caesar than the Sanhedrin itself. And so Pilate symbolically washed his hands in a silver basin (**Matthew 27:24**), using a Jewish custom to show that he wanted to take no part in an unjust decision. He then declared:

“I am innocent of this man’s blood. It is your responsibility!”

The response came back from the crowd: “Let his blood be on us and our children!”* At this, Pilate released Barabbas to the crowd and signed the official papers ordering the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the end, Jesus had been proven right. Pilate, it turned out, did not have the power to release Jesus. He was caught in the vice of political machinations beyond his control, and had been manipulated by spiritual powers beyond his understanding. For Jesus was indeed the “stone the builders rejected” (**Psalms 118:22**). He was “a stone that causes men to stumble” (**Isaiah 8:14**) – the kind of stone that was a threat to safety on the construction site and that would be removed at all costs. And yet, as **Isaiah 28:16** reveals, God had planned all along for this stumbling block to be “a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.” Who could have known that as this man – bruised, scourged and now being led away to be crucified – would become the hope of mankind.

* Although many have used this self-condemnation to claim that the Gospel accounts are anti-Semitic, **Matthew 27:25** is simply a record of what actually happened. Firstly, this was not the self-condemnation of a *race* of people (i.e. the Jews), but of a specific generation. The crowd said: “Let his blood be *on us and our children!*” Even God provided only for judgment to be extended to the third and fourth generation (**Exodus 34:7**). History shows that that generation, together with their children (which Jesus called “this adulterous and sinful generation” – note **Mark 8:38**) *did* suffer the consequences of delivering their Messiah up to be crucified, as Jesus himself had predicted in **Luke 19:41-44**. Just one generation after the death of Jesus, Jerusalem was destroyed and the Temple demolished. Secondly, it must be remembered that God provided a way out for that generation. The New Covenant, established by Jesus himself, overrode the judgment of God. Indeed, when Peter spoke to the pilgrim crowd on the Day of Pentecost, just 40 days after the resurrection of Jesus, he pointed out their sin before God (**Acts 2:36**), but then told them the good news of the New Covenant: “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ *for the forgiveness of your sins*. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. *The promise is for you and your children* and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (**Acts 2:38-39**). God has not cursed the Jewish people. Today, as before, the Gospel of Jesus the Messiah is “first for the Jew, then for the Gentile” (**Romans 1:16**).

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- ¹ *Compton's Interactive Bible NIV: Expert Commentary*, John 11:49-50 (Softkey Multimedia, 1996).
- ² Craig Keener, "Mistrial of the Millennium," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com>.
- ³ Herschel Hobbs, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p.140.
- ⁴ Testament of Simeon 3:9, *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Newfoundland: World Bible Publishers, 1927), p.226.
- ⁵ Testament of Asher 1:40-41, *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden* (Newfoundland: World Bible Publishers, 1927), p.226.
- ⁶ Frank Morrison, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p.139.
- ⁷ *Compton's Interactive Bible NIV: Expert Commentary*, Mark 14:64 (Softkey Multimedia, 1996).
- ⁸ Josh McDowell, quoted by Edythe Draper, *Draper's Quotations for the Christian World*, extracted from QuickVerse 6.0, Deluxe Edition.
- ⁹ Irwin Linton, quoted by Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p.139.
- ¹⁰ *NIV Bible Commentary, Vol.2: New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker & John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.362.
- ¹¹ *NIV Bible Commentary, Vol.2: New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker & John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.361.
- ¹² *NIV Bible Commentary, Vol.2: New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker & John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.362.
- ¹³ Craig Keener, "Mistrial of the Millennium," *Christianity Today*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com>.
- ¹⁴ *NIV Bible Commentary, Vol.2: New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker & John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.126.
- ¹⁵ Strabo, *Geography*, 17.3.25, 17.8.40.
- ¹⁶ Helen Bond, "Pontius Pilate," *The Ecole Initiative*, <http://cedar.evansville.edu/~ecoleweb/>.
- ¹⁷ *NIV Bible Commentary, Vol.2: New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker & John Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p.198.

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