

The Arrest and Trials of Jesus

Grateful Acknowledgments to Chuck Swindoll

According to the Gregorian calendar, the arrest and trials of Jesus took place on April 6th, 32AD, during a nine hour period.

The Jews put together a plan that was illegal, fallacious, unfair, and unwarranted. No man was ever more innocent, and no man ever stood before six more illegal and unfair trials than Jesus.

The Arrest

Now, in order to bring Jesus to trial, they had to first arrest him. And in order for there to be an arrest, two things had to take place: The cooperation of Judas, and the location of Jesus.

They tried to grab Him on other occasions, but He always alluded their arrest (because His time was not yet: John 7:8). So Judas agreed, for 30 pieces of silver, to betray Jesus Christ. It was the cost of a common slave, a very cheap price.

But for 30 pieces of silver, Judas really sold HIMSELF, not Christ.

On the night of His arrest, while Jesus was in the garden (John 18:1), He prayed to the father that He would not have to go through this suffering and crucifixion, but He wanted to do the Father's Will above all (Matthew 26:39-44). Once He was assured that it was the Father's Will that He go to the cross, He cooperated willingly with the arrest, even with the abuse that His body would suffer. Up until now, He had not gone under the blows of Romans or Jews.

First it was night. The crowds at Passover would not be in the street.

Jesus would be easy to detect if He ran. They expected a running, they expected to capture Him in some way, that's why the band of men came with lanterns, torches, and weapons (John 18:3).

As to the amount of soldiers a band consisted of, it was anywhere from 600 to 1,000 men. In John 18 verse 12, the word for captain in the Greek is chiliarchos, which means leader of a thousand soldiers. So there could have been 1,000 soldiers that came for Jesus that night. They came prepared for a fight.

But, Jesus did not run. Instead, Jesus went forth to meet them (verse 4)! They didn't expect that! They didn't think it was Him.

Verse 8 shows His compassion. Here He is giving Himself up and He's filled with compassion towards (His disciples) by asking the Romans to let them go their way. You and I would be mainly concerned with our own flesh. At this point, Peter cuts off the right ear of a servant of the high priest (verse 10), and Jesus has compassion on this victim as well, because Jesus touched his ear and healed him (Luke 22:51).

The Romans decided that this emotional scene had gone far enough. They came forward, arrested and bound Jesus (John 18:12).

The proper manner, taught by the academy of soldiering in Rome, was to take the accused by the right wrist, twist his arm behind him so that his knuckles touched between his shoulder blades, and at the same time, jam the heel of the

boot down on the right instep. And tied the other arm with a loose noose around the neck (Jim Bishop, The Day Christ Died).

At this point, the disciples deserted Jesus (Mark 14:50).

So He is all alone. From this point on He was not free. He was the property of the State, and the State planned to devour Him. He was not the Son of God to them, He was a rebel rouser. He was a fake. And this is the first experience Jesus had with pain. From now on, all the blows Jesus took, His hands were behind His back.

The "trial" starts at John 18:13. But before we look at these passages, let's briefly look at the historical background.

Historical Background

The Jews lived on a piece of land ... which was ruled by the Roman Empire. The Romans were ruled by ... Tiberius ..

Tiberius ruled with an Iron fist. He was a sadistic, anti-Semitic gentile, as was Pilate. It had been passed down from Rome that [the Jews] would never carry a prisoner to a capital punishment.

The Jews could not take a life. If they could have, they would have stoned Jesus, because that was the method of killing.

But since they were under Roman authority, they must crucify Him; that was the Roman method of capital punishment.

So they could "try" a man and bring him only so far, namely to their council called the Sanhedrin. A body of seventy to seventy-three men; that's the greater Sanhedrin. The lesser Sanhedrin had twenty-three men, but they could not pass judgment on capital crimes. So, before the full body of men this man must stand. Once they come to an accusation they must carry that to the Roman authority, who happened to be Pilate. And when he says thumbs down, then and only then can death occur. And that's why Jesus was crucified for treason rather than stoned for blasphemy.

You see, the Jews did not try Him for treason, they found Him guilty of blasphemy. But they twisted the accusation when they came before the Romans and they turned it into treason because, in Rome, death is instantaneous for those guilty of treason.

Contrary to popular opinion, there was not one trial for Jesus, there were SIX! They were not all Jewish, half of them were Jewish and half of them were Roman. First there was Annas.

Then there was Caiaphas, with a body of men making up the Sanhedrin.

And then third, there was this official band called the Sanhedrin.

All these were Jewish "trials". The whole question of treason is not even verbalized! Then it goes to trial number four: Pilate the Governor. This is where they accused him of treason because they were before a Roman Civil Court. And ultimately, after trial number five, which was really a clowning experience in front of Antipas (all he wanted to see was some tricks by Jesus), He came finally to Pilate again, His sixth and final trial.

Because of pressure from his wife, and because of Rome, Pilate gave the death sentence to Jesus. Pilate was never convinced of His guilt by the way, and the only half-way fair trial that Jesus got was before Pilate.

Laws governing Criminal Trials

Now, here are some of the illegalities of the Jewish trials.

1. If a man was arrested for a capital crime, he could never be arrested at night. It had to be in broad daylight.

Jesus' arrest took place between 1 and 2 o'clock at night.

2. If a man was arrested for a capital crime, no one cooperating in the arrest could be in any way connected to the one accused.

No arrest for a capital crime could be made based upon information given by a follower or colleague of the accused.

Because they felt if the accused was guilty so were his followers. But the entire plot revolved around Judas, one of the followers. This law was blatantly and openly ignored.

3. No Jewish trial could ever be held at night. The law stated that it must be held in the daytime.

Listen to the code, which is taken from the Talmud:

The members of the court may not alertly and intelligently hear the testimony against the accused during the hours of darkness.

But, if you check the record, both before Annas and before Caiaphas, these trials were held in darkness!

4. The members of the Jewish court, after hearing the testimony of true witnesses (none of which were ever brought before Jesus) in a capital crime, could not immediately act and judge. They were to go home and remain alone and separate from one another for two days (at the least, one full day), thinking about the testimonies they had heard. During that time, here's what they were to do. Here's the language of the code:

Eat like food, drink like wines, sleep well. And once again return and hear the testimony of the accused. Then, and only then, shall you render a vote.

They didn't do that! The Jewish court never left the presence of Caiaphas!

5. In fact, even the method of voting was specified! They never took an "all in favor say I, all opposed say nay" kind of vote.

Their vote was supposed to be taken from the youngest to the oldest so that the youngest wouldn't be intimidated or influenced by the older votes.

This NEVER happened.

6. No trial could be held before only one judge, and never without a defense attorney! All of that was overlooked, openly, willfully ignored and disobeyed. Even though they were people of "the book", they didn't follow their own rules.

In the history of jurisprudence, I don't know of a more fallacious series of "trials".

The First Trial

The first man before whom Jesus stood was a crook. John 18:13 tells us they led him to Annas. Why Annas?! He wasn't even the High Priest! He was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the High Priest.

What's the father-in-law doing seeing an accused man at 2 o'clock in the morning when he is no longer in the court? That's Caiaphas's job. Well, do you remember when Jesus put together some leather thongs, and he made a whip, and went into the temple and he drove the moneychangers from the temple (Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15)?

Well, the man in charge of that bazaar at the time was named Annas, who was the High Priest at that time. He has been the High Priest for seventeen years. He was the boss of the "Mafia".

The "Mafia" was in charge of two special things at Passover. First, the changing of money (and the discount rate was atrocious)!

Second, the purchasing of sacrificial animals (and the cost was incredible). If you were smart enough to bring your own animal, you had to have it pass the Mafia, or Annas' men. And when you brought your animal there, they would take a careful look at the animal and would surely find some marks that would keep you from using your animal! So you must buy their animal, and their animals were three times, sometimes four times more than you would ever pay back home for a good old sheep. And all the profit wound up in Annas' pocket. He was a crook. He passed off the throne to his son-in-law who was nothing more than a puppet of Rome and a pawn in the hand of his father-in-law. Annas never forgot the time Jesus drove them out of the temple and he lost all that money. And he wrote down in his mind, One of these days, buddy, I'm going to get back at you.

And now he's got his chance.

Here's Jesus, hands tied behind His back, standing in front of Annas. Everything about it is illegal. He has no business standing before someone who is not in the council. And there are NO witnesses! As a matter of fact, he wasn't even required to answer!

No Jew had to make his own statement. There were statements made against the accused and the council would decide on a verdict, but the accused could remain mute from beginning to ending. But that's not the way they did it.

There are two things that he probed. Annas wanted to know about the men, and then he wanted to know about His teaching (John 18:19).

Jesus doesn't answer to his first question, but as to His teaching He answers in a most unusual way.

John 18:20-21, "Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said."

Jesus was struck by an officer after He said this (verse 22). By the way, brutality was never allowed in the court either. Under the rules of trial procedure, Jesus knew that it was against the law to solicit the testimony of any, except

WITNESSES ! and collaborators. Besides, under the law, no prisoner had to undergo preliminary examination. So, Jesus told him to ask witnesses what He taught. After He was struck, "Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" (John 18:23).

Jesus was under perfect control of the Holy Spirit. And let me add, when you are treated unjustly and unfairly, which is the lot of the Christian, if nothing more, etch it into your mind Jesus'

great control and be sure that you can have the same kind of control.

1 Pe 2:21-25, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."

He bore this without retaliation. Hands behind His back, taking the punches of grown men, and we never read where He fell unconscious. Oh, He never fell with that cross. That comes from Church tradition, that's NOT in scripture. He could have, but it doesn't say He did. The point is, without sleep, and without a break, Jesus endured everything from the soldier's heel in the garden all the way to the nails in the cross.

When Annas was finished with Him, he had no answer. He was silenced. He himself was judged, not Jesus Christ. And so they carted Him off to Caiaphas (verse 24).

Second Trial

Mark 14:53, "And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes."

Caiaphas got together a group of men about 3:30 in the morning.

Remember, it's illegal because it's dark, it's illegal because it's a preliminary hearing, it's illegal because they're in the wrong place, Caiaphas' house, they're not in the council chamber.

It's a clandestine meeting, it's a KANGAROO court!

Mark 14:56-59, "For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three

days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together."

These witnesses were contradicting each other. Caiaphas has to get this case down to Pilate. He was told by his father-in-law that he wants this man killed! And Caiaphas knows that he has no witnesses! So what does he do? Well, he tries another illegal route. He talks to the accused (Mark 14:60), but Jesus held his peace and said nothing (verse 61). Then Caiaphas asks him if he's "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed" (verse 61), and Jesus answers him! "I am."

You might be wondering why does he answer now and not before? In another gospel, just before Caiaphas asked this question, Caiaphas said, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:3) And when a pious Jew heard that, he was obliged to answer. Under oath, he could not plead any amendment, he had to answer. And look at His answer:

Mark 14:62, "And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

That sounds like he's God! In fact He is. He was simply laying a prophesy on Caiaphas that he couldn't handle.

And in good legal fashion, Caiaphas grabbed the collar of his robe and he gave it a yank. Because the Talmud required that when a moderator heard blasphemous words, he was to publicly disagree by tearing his garments. By the way, Leviticus taught that no official was to tear his garments, and so that's where the Talmud cuts grains with scripture, but they were driven by the Talmud at least the parts that they LIKED! The other parts they left out.

Mark 14:63, "Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?"

Well, that's a nice way out, isn't it? Who needs witnesses when you don't have them to begin with? By the way, it's not allowed for the moderator to make the decision, the council had to make the decision. He didn't say let's take a vote in the order prescribed by law. No! Instead he said "What think ye?" (verse 64), and they all condemned him.

Then they added some extra curricular activities; they spit on Him, covered His face and beat Him with their fists, and mocked Him.

Third Trial

By the time the first two trials were over, Jesus was bleeding and bruised when, as yet, there was no official verdict cast upon His life. All that transpired occurred during the hours of darkness, and therefore nothing would be recognized as official by the Romans until He had His audience before the Sanhedrin.

Luke 22 records what transpired about 6 o'clock in the morning. Luke 22:66 says it was day. Mark 15:1 tells us it was early in the morning. Understand that the supreme court of the Jews was the Sanhedrin. What they discovered and declared became law.

There was no such thing as going to a higher court, because there was NO higher court! Therefore, when the Sanhedrin met, and passed final judgment, it was as the law of the Medes and the Persians, Jesus was destined for the cross. Luke 22:66-71, "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, Art thou the Christ?"

tell us. And he said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe:

And if I also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go.

Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. Then said they all, Art thou then the Son of God?"

And He said unto them, Ye say that I am. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of his own mouth."

This third trial was the shortest of all the trials. Jesus, in their mind, was guilty. Besides Nicodemus, who acquiesced in silence, they voted unanimously to take Him to Pilate. The charge was blasphemy, but that would not stand up in a Roman court. Therefore, between the time that they dismissed and gained an audience with the governor, Pilate, they made plans to switch the accusation to treason, and they claimed that He was guilty of attempting to overthrow the government. Luke 23:1, "And the whole multitude of them arose, and led Him unto Pilate."

Fourth Trial

The law is no longer the Talmud, the law is now the Roman Code of Criminal Procedure. And there were four steps that they must follow to make this an accurate court of law. We'll carry them through one by one.

First, here's a little background on Pilate. He was an anti-Semitic, Spain born Gentile. He was appointed by Caesar to govern Judea. He is what we would call the governor of the State, though in those days they had provinces. Pilate was a marked man in the mind of Caesar, and also his court, because of the number of revolutions that had broken out under his rule. He had made some unwise decisions, he had murdered some Jews, he had tightened the screws of Roman requirements, he lacked diplomacy.

Therefore, the State over which he served was in turmoil.

Caesar, with tacit approval, left him there as governor, but he was under investigation at this particular time. After the trial and death of Jesus, Pilate was banished to Gall and, while he was there, he died of suicide. Pilate was a very unstable man, and because of a few political maneuverings on his part, he became the governor of a province.

The time was around 6:30 to 7 o'clock in the morning.

John 18:28, "Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the Passover."

They were CRIMINAL in attitude, but they were extremely LEGAL in their "religion". The Talmud stated that no Jew could enter a Gentile court on Passover, or he would be defiled. So they stayed out of the court itself, and apparently, Pilate came out to them.

John 18:29, "Pilate then went out unto them"

You'll see him coming out and going back in continuous fashion. Now, the first law of Roman criminal code in its procedure was accusation, that's the first thing that Pilate covered.

John 18:29-30, "What accusation bring ye against this man?"

They answered and said unto him, If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee."

This is a sarcastic answer and did not answer Pilate's question!

If He was not guilty, we wouldn't be here, Pilate!

John 18:31, "Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law..."

Pilate doesn't know that it's a capital punishment under way.

He simply said if it's a problem in your law, then you take Him and you judge Him.

John 18:31, "...The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:"

This changes the whole thing. From the other gospels, they declared that He's guilty of treason, and that He claimed to be another Caesar.

John 18:33, "Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again ..

" You see, he's entering in again.

John 18:33, "...and called Jesus. The second law of Roman criminal code in its procedure, after accusation, was interrogation, to probe and search for evidence against the man. Thus the following questions:

John 18:33-35, "Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and

the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?"

He wanted to know if Jesus was in the process of overthrowing the government..

John 18:36, "Jesus answered, 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."

If Jesus wanted to overthrow the government, His servants would be fighting, carrying on a revolution, taking lives, storming the temple, ruining this procedure. But you don't even find my servants out there!

The third process in the Roman code was defense. And now Pilate, acting on behalf of a defense attorney, begins to look at this side of Jesus. By the way, the Roman Law, much like American law, allowed for a defense attorney, but you never find where Jesus was allowed that! So Pilate looks at it from Jesus' point of view..so you're a king!

John 18:37, "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

John 18:38, "Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?"

This has NOTHING to do with the case, it has a lot to do with Pilate's mind set. He was a very mixed up, miserable man.

In a matter of months, he would be taking his own life. He is in a quandary regarding the area of objective, sound truth. And so he says, What's truth?

John 18:38, "And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all."

The fourth step is a verdict. Accusation, interrogation, defense, and a verdict. And all four are acted out for us right here.

Pilate says he finds no guilt! All he finds is some spiritual kingdom, and that's not going to affect or threaten Rome!

Jesus is not guilty of treason!

Luke 23:4-5, "Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man. And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." Now when Pilate heard the word Galilee, he had an ingenious idea. Galilee really wasn't his jurisdiction, and since he didn't want this case, he tried to find somebody else to try Jesus!

Fifth Trial

Luke 23:6-7, "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilaean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time." Herod was his life long enemy up until this event. Herod's the one who beheaded John the Baptist. He's the one who dealt with vicious cruelty over his subjects. Now, Herod has looked upon Jesus as a magician, and he has been anxious to see Jesus do a trick.

Luke 23:8, "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him." By the way, you do not see where Jesus responds to Herod in any way. It was no proceeding at all. All Herod wanted was a game, he wanted a jester for his court, he wanted a clown.

When Jesus wouldn't cooperate, we read that they mocked Him as a king. Luke 23:10-11, "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate."

Sixth Trial

Now back at the Palace, Pilate was probably eating breakfast and thinking, Whew! That's over. And he looks out his window, and there came Jesus back, bound and robed as a king. It was obvious to Pilate that Herod was not in any cooperative mood.

The whole event brought Herod and Pilate together as friends.

Luke 23:12, "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

Pilate did not want to declare Him guilty, so he tried several avenues to get out of that verdict. The first thing he offered was to chastise and beat Jesus, then release Him, but they said no. The second thing he tried to do was release Jesus through a custom they had. It was a custom to release a prisoner on the Passover.

Matthew 27:15, "Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would."

Barabbas was a notorious criminal, he was a murderer, he was an insurrectionist, he was guilty of sedition, and he was bound in prison awaiting death by crucifixion. It was a capital crime he had committed. He was the one guilty of treason. So, Pilate thought that if he were to put Barabbas next to Jesus,

and offered to release one of them, the crowds would say, "Don't release Barabbas! Release Jesus!" But it backfired upon him. They said they wanted Jesus crucified (Matthew 27:19-23)!

So, then they gathered a whole band of soldiers, stripped him and put on a scarlet robe, placed a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his right hand, mocked him by bowing down and saying, Hail, King of the Jews!, and they struck him on the head, spit upon him, and led him away to be crucified. (Matthew 27:26-31).

Conclusion

You and I deserve that spit. We deserve the nails in his feet and hands. It's our sin He bore, not His. It's our place He took, not the Father's. We are the guilty ones, we are like sheep gone astray, turned everyone to our own ways. We are the rebels. Our

iniquity has separated us from God, not His. But the message in all of this is because of love. He did it for us. He became sin for us.

Here is a true and intriguing story of someone's experience. A minister of God didn't have anyone to work with, so he asked God to make him available to whatever would be His will.

He checked the want ads, because he needed some money, and he saw there was a bus driving job made available to him.

So he worked as a bus driver in south Chicago.

If you know anything about Chicago, it's not south Chicago you want to drive a bus in! but that's where they had the need. He found out later it was because nobody else would stay on the job.

So he drove it.

Before a week passed, some thugs got on the bus and didn't pay, they sat in the back, sneered and jeered and mocked him.

The next day the same thing happened. The third day it happened again. After it went on for about a week, he decided he didn't have to put up with that. So he decided to call an officer inside the bus and make them pay. He saw one down about a block, and after he got on he told the officer that the fellows back there hadn't paid for several days, would you at least make them pay today?

And he did, but unfortunately the officer got off the bus. When the door was closed the bus driver drove a little further and turned a corner, and that was the last thing he remembered.

They knocked a couple of teeth out of his head, they stole his money, and when he woke up the bus was empty.

He sat there in confusion and disillusionment wondering What kind of ministry is this, Lord? I told you I was available and this was the job you opened up? And he went home, turned the bus in, took the rest of the day off. He stared up at the ceiling as he was nursing his wounds, and he thought, I'm not gonna let them get away with that. So, through an interesting chain of events, they rounded up, with the help of some officers, the very fellows and took them to court. All four of them.

The day of the hearing he stood before the court, and the judge listened carefully, and decided the fellows were guilty. And they didn't have any money to buy their way out, so they had to spend some time in jail. Suddenly the minister realized, Here's my chance. He said, Your honor, may I speak for a few moments?

The judge said, Yes you may. The minister said, I'd like for you to tally up all of the time these fellows together would be spending in jail, and I'd like to go in their behalf. And the judge responded,

Well, that's highly irregular, it has never been done before.

And the minister responded, Oh yes it has.

About 2,000 years ago. And then in about 4 minutes, he gave them the gospel. Three of the young men came to know Christ on the spot! One of them later, after the minister was incarcerated. That fellow was having a ministry with those four guys who heard the message that somebody else wanted to pay the price for their sin. A living testimony for what Jesus did for us.