

## 5.0 The Synoptic Passion Narratives

### 5.1 The Way to the Mount of Olives

**Mark 14:26-31** [26] And when they had sung the hymn, they went out to the **Mount of Olives**. [27] And Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ [28] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” [29] Peter said to him, “Even though they all become deserters, I will not.” [30] And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” [31] But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And they all said the same.

**Matthew 26:30-35** [30] And when they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. [31] Then Jesus said to them, “You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ [32] But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.” [33] Peter said to him, “Though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.” [34] Jesus said to him, “Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” [35] Peter said to him, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And so said all the disciples.

**Luke 22:31-38** [31] “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, [32] but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” [33] And he said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” [34] Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.” [35] He said to them, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said,

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“No, not a thing.” [36] He said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. [37] For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.” [38] They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “It is enough.”

On the east side of Jerusalem there are three hills:

- [Mount Scopus](#): from where the Romans attacked the city in 70 CE.
- The Mount of Olives.
- The Mount of Shame: An area considered a cursed section of the Mount of Olives, because Solomon built temples there for his wives’ gods.

The four Gospels tell us that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Mark and Matthew mention hymns (Mark 14:26, Matt 26:30), and refer to dialogue on the way. In the dialogue passages Jesus says two things: he predicts the disciples being scandalized and scattered and that Peter will deny.

### **(a) Mark’s Account**

Three important incidents have been related prior to this scene:

- The Judas plot (Mark 14:10-11).
- Jesus says that someone eating with him would betray him (Mark 14:17-21).
- The Eucharist institution narrative (Mark 14:22-25). Even though he knows he will be betrayed, Jesus gives of himself.

Now let us examine the statements of Peter’s denial and the disciples being scattered at the beginning of the Passion Narrative (PN). Once Jesus leaves the supper room his words are shocking. Mark wants the reader to see that the disciples fail. Why does Mark give us

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this setting for them? What does the Mount of Olives bring up in the mind of the reader? In the Old Testament the Mount of Olives is mentioned twice:

- Zech 14:4. Jesus quotes from Zech 13:7-9 on the way to the mount.
- 2 Sam 15-17: David has to flee Jerusalem because of Absalom's revolt. Ahithophel has betrayed David to Absalom. David flees and crosses the Kedron (2 Sam 15:23) and goes to the Mount of Olives. He weeps and prays. His followers are told that they cannot follow him now, but later (2 Sam 15:30-37). Ahithophel wants to seize David but let the others go (2 Sam 17:1-4). Absalom does not follow the advice and so Ahithophel goes and hangs himself (2 Sam 17:23).

The vocabulary of 2 Samuel is in mind all the time. The Son of David flees to the place where King David fled. The pattern of David and Son of David is a common one.

On the way Jesus speaks (v.27). The verb used, *skandalízō* (σκανδαλίζω - Greek: *to fall away, desert*) is the New Testament verb for loss of faith. In Mark 14:27 when Mark has Jesus say that they will be scandalized it is that they will lose faith as the Christians of Mark's time have done through their denial of Jesus. In this context we later examine Peter's curse (Mark 14:71) for it was typical of the way of denial. Mark is deliberately comparing the disciples to the Christians who come under testing in the church of the First Century CE. Mark supports this by having Jesus himself quote Zechariah. The early Christians studied the scriptures and saw that they applied to Jesus. We do not have Christian commentators on the Old Testament scriptures, as the early Christians did not produce such. The Old Testament is illustrative for the early Christians - but the emphasis is on Jesus. The frequent citation of the scriptures is not an attempt by the early Christians to understand them. These Christians were only interested in Jesus. The quotation cannot be assumed to have come from Jesus. If the early Christians understood Jesus through the Old Testament they were continuing the practice of Jesus. Zechariah is quoted many times in the Passion Narrative:

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<b>GOSPEL</b>	<b>QUOTATION</b>	<b>ALLUSION</b>
Mark 14:24		Zech 9:11
Mark 14:27	Zech 13:7	
Mark 14:50		Zech 13:7
Matt 26:15		Zech 11:12
Matt 26:28		Zech 9:11
Matt 26:31	Zech 13:7	
Matt 26:56		Zech 13:7
Matt 27:9-10	Zech 11:12-13	
Luke 22:20		Zech 9:11
John 16:32		Zech 13:7
John 19:37	Zech 12:10	

The shepherd motif runs through the whole series. The text cited in Mark and Matthew is not from the LXX. Christians had found another way of translating Zechariah in Greek to match the Passion Narrative more accurately. In the Hebrew Bible it is the bad shepherd who is to be struck. For Christians it is the good shepherd. The LXX does not refer to sheep being scattered. Mark uses these sayings because they set a tone. It is going to be a tragedy. They will be scattered, they will flee and Peter will deny. They failed.

Did Jesus make these predictions? Rationalism does not like miracles and predictions. The predictions here are precise. Jesus was extraordinary and this cannot be dismissed. There are various theories on this:

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- Jesus made the predictions but the early Church created the fulfilment of them.
- The narrative had the account of the denial and scattering so the early Church provided the predictions.
- The early Church created both predictions and fulfilment.
- The early Church created neither.

When Peter challenges Jesus, the others take courage and say the same. At the arrest all flee and Peter does deny. Mark is meticulous in showing that all Jesus' predictions are fulfilled by the Middle of the Passion Narrative:

REFERENCE	PREDICTION	FULFILMENT
All to be scattered	Mark 14:27	Mark 14:50
Peter's denial	Mark 14:30	Mark 14:66-72

**(b) Matthew's Account**

Matthew emphasizes discipleship and the bond between Jesus and his disciples (Matt 26:31) by introducing the word *flock* into the quotation from Zech 13:7. The portrait of Peter (Matt 26:33) is of a far more self-confident character who asserts that he will not fail: "I will never desert you." Finally, there is reference to only *one* cock-crow (Matt 26:34).

**(c) Luke's Account**

In Luke's account, Jesus predicts the trial or testing of Peter (Luke 22:31-32) and that Peter will deny (Luke 22:34). Peter's denial in Mark and Matthew is one of the *person* of Jesus, whereas in Luke it is a denial of *knowing* Jesus, i.e. a denial of faith. Luke asserts that no disciple will be safe from the test of fidelity. Yet Luke's account looks to the future with Peter's conversion and his strengthening of the others (Luke 22:32). In this way, Luke

is preparing for the portrait of Peter's ministry found in Acts. As with Matthew Luke refers to only one cockcrow (Luke 22:34).

## 5.2 Gethsemane

**Mark 14:32-42** [32] They went to a place called **Gethsemane**; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." [33] He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. [34] And said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." [35] And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. [36] He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." [37] He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? [38] Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." [39] And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. [40] And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. [41] He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. [42] Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

**Matthew 26:36-46** [36] Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." [37] He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. [38] Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." [39] And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." [40] Then he came

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to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? [41] Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” [42] Again he went away for the second time and prayed, “My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.” [43] Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. [44] So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. [45] Then he came to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. [46] Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

**Luke 22:39-46** [39] He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. [40] When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” [41] Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, [42] “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” [43] Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. [44] In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. [45] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, [46] and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

**(a) Mark’s Account**

Before examining the account proper, one should also look at Heb 5:7-10. Here there is an emphasis on *strong cries, tears, prayers, supplications*, and on Jesus’ prayer to be saved from death. There is a tradition of Jesus crying to be saved from death. Hebrews tells us nothing about the death. The Evangelists have tried to work with this tradition and shape it into narrative form. While Mark has no shout in Gethsemane he does have one

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from the cross: “My God, My God...” (Mark 15:34). So Mark has two prayers of Jesus - in Gethsemane and on the cross. Both focus on the problem as to whether Jesus will be delivered or not. This is part of the structuring of the PN by Mark. He takes material and deliberately makes an inclusion. Both prayers are in Aramaic and addressed to the Father. The Evangelists worked with traditions. Some of these traditions are scattered, some have already been structured while others such as Jesus’ prayer can be situated differently. On this last type of traditions the Evangelists go their own ways. This is a much more realistic way of seeing the Evangelists as people trying to write for a community than trying to look at them as redactors and have them combine material as mere words on paper. The Gospels are creative literature behind which there is a tradition that impels the Evangelist in a certain direction.

Supper has ended (Mark 14:32). Mark now paints a picture of disastrous events. Jesus knows what is going to happen - the disciples will flee and Peter will deny. Yet there is a hint of Jesus being in control. Yet when we get to the prayer scene Mark changes the atmosphere dramatically. Attempts have been made to see theological significance in the meaning of Gethsemane (*Oil Press*), but Gethsemane may just be the name in the tradition.

Mark last used the term *The Twelve* in Mark 14:17 in the context of the last supper. Mark also makes reference to the *Three* (v.33) and sometimes the *Four* (Three = Peter, James and John; Four = Three + Andrew). When he uses the *Three*, it is always in relation to the disciples. Why is Mark interested in the Three? Is it a separate tradition or for the narrative purposes of his own story. Peter has already said that he will not be scandalized (Mark 14:29), so Mark focuses on him. But why focus on James and John? They are concerned with the cup. Jesus has already said to them “Are you able to drink the cup...?”(Mark 10:38). The two to whom he talked about the cup are now present. Mark goes back on something Jesus had said.

In Mark 14:34 Jesus then says, “I am deeply grieved, even to death,” quoting Ps 42:6. This is a very powerful description. Mark gives a picture of Jesus who is very upset. Jesus then says, “Remain here and keep awake.” This is interesting visually. The disciples are told that Jesus will move, act and take the initiative. They are to remain and keep awake. Why? In the Gethsemane scene Jesus uses the verb *grēgoréō* (γρηγορέω - Greek: *to keep awake*) three times (Mark 14:34.37.38) It has also been used three times in Mark 13:34.35.37. Mark uses it in an eschatological context. This context is not just that of the death of Jesus, but his death is seen in the context of the struggle of the end times.

The tone of all this is eschatological. It is the conflict between two great powers, the Spirit of Light and the Spirit of Darkness. These powers work out their conflict in history and in people. Gethsemane then is the place of conflict between Jesus and the Great Betrayer. Christians then began to see their own death and the temptations in their lives as part of

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this struggle with Satan. They saw the eschatological theme in their ordinary attempts to serve God. The idea of *keeping awake* is not just simply to be awake, but to be vigilant of the eschatological struggle that takes place in one's personal life. The scene then is exhortatory in this eschatological sense.

Jesus goes forward and falls to the earth, on his face (Mark 14:35). In the Old Testament falling on the ground/face was a sign of prayer and of being in the presence of God. So Mark has Jesus in his desperation assume a position of awe before God.

Jesus talks about suffering and death (Mark 14:36). The *hour* means his death. We also think of this hour eschatologically. Jesus sees it not only as a trial of personal suffering, but also as a struggle with the forces of evil. As such the hour is an hour to be delivered from. Jesus has already talked about the hour in Mark 13:32. He says that the Son does not know the hour. The implication is that the Son does not control the hour. Jesus is asking to bring about the kingdom of God in another way. The concept *hour* is pre-Markan,<sup>1</sup> part of Christian preaching and which has come into Mark's Gethsemane prayer.

In the Old Testament *cup* was used figuratively for the cup of God's wrath, which either Israel or the nations would drink. Some scholars think that Jesus asked to be delivered from the cup of God's anger. Those who hold such views point to texts such as 2 Cor 5:21. The view is so peculiarly Pauline that it is questionable whether Mark can use it. It is going too far to suggest that God was angry with Jesus.

In the early *Targûmîm*, *cup* meant the cup of death. The same idea runs through the New Testament writings. The meaning here may be *the cup of death*. Other evidence lies in Mark 10:38-39. Here Jesus does not ask the disciples to become objects of divine wrath. Here the cup means the cup of death and suffering. Thus even though there are no extra-New Testament parallels, the Markan texts establish the plausible meaning of the cup as that of suffering and death.

In Mark 10:38-39 the cup was a challenge, now in Mark 14:36 Jesus asks for it to be taken away. This is a struggle for Jesus. The text here is parallel to that of Hebrews. It starts with Heb 4:14-16. This was a text offered to Christians in time of help. They could confidence in time of need because they had a high priest who had been tempted but without sin. But Christ was not made a high priest by himself. Heb 5:7-8 states: "in the days of his flesh ... he learned obedience through suffering."<sup>2</sup> There is a sense of struggle for the

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<sup>1</sup> Rom 3:11.

<sup>2</sup> In the New Testament and especially in the Pauline writings there are several hymns (Phil 2:6-11, Col 1:15-20). These are descriptive of Jesus and emphasize his splendour and grandeur. In Heb 5:7 there are many unusual words that make it sound like the hymn in Philippians. The hymns of Philippians and Colossians are in Greek yet evocative of the Old Testament. The earliest Jewish Christian hymns, *Magnificat* and *Benedictus*, are mosaics of Old Testament motifs. So too are the

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One who was Son. He had to learn obedience through suffering. This is part of the Christian picture. This is better than the argument of interpreters who say that Jesus could not have asked to be removed from suffering. In the context of Hebrew prayer people did ask God to have a change of mind. It is not strange for the Hebrew God to do this, but it is very difficult for the God of metaphysics to do so!

How did Jesus phrase his prayer? This is a good illustration of how the early Christians worked. The early Christians did not have the exact words and context of the prayer. But notice the wording: “Abba, Father!” There is a word **'abbī** (אָבִי - Aramaic: *my father*). However, the form of **'abbā** is not attested in Aramaic in Jesus' time. Accordingly it must have been some kind of abnormal emphatic word used by Jesus. This word is also found in Gal 4:6 and Rom 8:15. There is no other attestation of it. We presume that it was a peculiar custom of Jesus. It has something to do with Jesus' feeling towards God. What we probably have here is an echo of Christian prayer put on the lips of Jesus. We hear Jesus' prayer through the early Christian prayer.

Here the focus is on Peter (Mark 14:37). This is logical, for Peter was the spokesman. It was he who said he would die for Jesus and led the others to say the same. Jesus calls Peter “Simon” which is a narrative technique to make the story more intimate. The Greek text reads literally: “Were you not strong enough to watch one hour?” It is more than accidental that we get an expression about the “Strong One” in the parable beginning at Mark 3:27, about the strong man able to protect his possessions, until the one stronger than he comes along and takes them away. The Satanic presence is beginning to make itself felt. The only way Jesus can overcome Satan is by being stronger.

“The spirit indeed is willing ... flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38). In the Old Testament *spirit* and *flesh* were two different aspects of the human person. One human being had two dimensions. *Spirit* was used of God, Angels and Humans and meant the higher intellectual aspect. *Flesh* is not used of God or of Angels. Humans are of flesh. Yet this has nothing to do with sinfulness. It is the perishable dimension of humanity. For Mark *flesh* is weakness. *Flesh* is the means by which people can be conquered in the battle with evil. Jesus says it to the disciples, but Jesus is also referring to himself as well. Jesus has just manifested weakness. Yet Jesus is praying while the disciples do not pray, but sleep. Jesus will not be overcome because he is watching. The disciples are not watching, hence Jesus' warning. They are weak. They cannot get rid of the weakness of the flesh - but by watching and

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Jewish hymns of Maccabees. There are similar hymns attested at Qumran. The text of Heb 5 is very like one of the *Psalms of the Just One* (Ps 116), who prays to God and is delivered because of his prayer. Almost every word of Heb 5:7 is in Psalm 116: “in the days of” / “prayer” / “tears” / “save” / “from death” / “heard.” Heb 5 is probably quoting an early Christian hymn.

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praying they can overcome it. In Hebrews there is reference to “the days of his flesh” (Heb 5:7) and “he himself is beset with weakness” (Heb 4:2) and “who has been tempted as we are...” (Heb 4:15). There is a vein in the New Testament where “weak” is used of Jesus. Jesus is flesh. He had to experience our weakness.

Their “eyes were heavy” (Mark 14:40). Mark tells us that they did not know what to answer. He is playing on the Transfiguration scene. Peter’s desire for three tents (Mark 9:5) means that he did not understand. Even when God spoke, Peter did not understand and said something stupid. Now the disciples see the opposite side to Jesus and they still do not understand. They are so sleepy they cannot pray, cannot understand and so they are afraid.

Mark says that the “Son of Man” is betrayed (Mark 14:41). This is a very difficult title. It is used in the Passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:31; and 10:33). Mention of the Son of Man here would echo in the Reader the Passion predictions. There is no conflict for Mark in calling him Son of Man. Christians did not see a conflict between Son of Man and Son of God. For Mark the Son of Man is going to be handed over.<sup>3</sup>

“Get up and let us go!” (Mark 14:42). The disciples have failed yet they are not with Judas. They are still with him. Jesus thinks of them as belonging with him. At the beginning of his ministry (Mark 1:38) Jesus uses these words that now become his last words to his disciples. Look at the imperatives used here: Sit! (Mark 14:35), Remain! (Mark 14:36), Watch! (Mark 14:38.41). Pray! (Mark 14:44), Rise! (Mark 14:46). The disciples did not follow his commands, yet Jesus has not given up on them.

### **(b) Matthew’s Account**

Matthew calls the place *Gethsemane* (Matt 26:36) as does Mark. As in Mark’s Gospel, Matthew’s Jesus tells the disciples to sit while he goes to pray (Matt 26:36). Those disciples called to be with him at this time are named as “Peter and the two sons of

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<sup>3</sup> There are two basic ideas here. The first and basic meaning is where God gives him over. Judas is going to give him over, yet also God does so. The primary giver over is the Father, hence Jesus’ anguish (cf. Rom 8:32). This concept lies at the heart of the Christian mystery. Mark 9:31 suggests God is right in giving him over. Eventually as in Rom 4:35 “for our sins” is added. The earliest statement of this is blunt. The second meaning has to do with human agents (Judas and others). In a sense God gave him over, but it is Judas who gives him over to the High Priest. Then a chain is set up: High Priest → Pilate → Soldiers. All are guilty. There is even a hint that Satan is the Prime Giver Over. We are very close to an Old Testament viewpoint here. Compare Kings and Chronicles. God does something in Kings, but it is Satan who does it in Chronicles. It is the whole question of how to deal with an action that has bad consequences. In one way God is responsible, in another human beings and Satan are.

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Zebedee” (Matt 26:39). As in Mark’s Gospel, Matthew’s Jesus returns three times to these named disciples (Matt 26:40.42.43). Mark’s comment about the disciples’ incomprehension (Mark 14:40) is not found in Matthew.

#### (c) The Three-fold Division in Mark and Matthew

Some scholars want to make Jesus’ coming and going a principle of division. At the end of the scene Jesus prays and comes back three times (Mark 14:41). At the beginning of the scene Jesus goes away from the disciples (Mark 14:32), then from Peter, James and John (Mark 14:33.35) and then prays. So we have two sets of three here. Mark mentions a third time (Mark 14:41), but does not mention a second. It is Matthew who is logical and spells out a second and third time (Matt 26:42.44). Jesus does *not* pray three times in Mark. To show how uninterested Mark is in the third time, Mark never tells us that Jesus went away again between Mark 14:40 and Mark 14:41! Mark is not always logical, because he does not care about being logical. What is important for Mark is that the disciples were *sleeping*; he is interested in the disciples’ failure. This is patterned on Peter’s denial. Matthew changes this and emphasizes *prayer*. Christians took over from the Jews the custom of praying three times. It is found many times in the Old Testament (Daniel), in the New Testament (2 Cor 12:8) and in the *Didache* (Chapter 8). If Christians pray three times, and Matthew sees a reference to the third time, he has a chance to make Jesus pray three times and thus create a model of prayer. Matthew modifies the first prayer “if it is possible...” (Matt 26:39) and adds a second prayer “if it this cannot pass...” (Matt 26:42). He is more open to God not granting his request. This then is a catechesis to Christians about a style of prayer. Matthew likes to use the word *then* to divide his text:

- Matt 26:36: *then*, followed by the taking aside of Peter.
- Matt 26:38: *then*, followed by the long section with all the prayers.
- Matt 26:45: *then*, followed by his final words to the disciples.

The *then*-divisions focus on different things rather than on the coming and going of Jesus.

#### (d) Luke’s Account

Luke calls the place the *Mount of Olives* (Luke 22:39), a name not found in Mark and Matthew. In Luke 22:40, Jesus orders the disciples to sit while he goes to pray alone. In

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this, Luke differs from Mark and Matthew. Luke, as with Matthew, does not record the use of the Aramaic term *'abbā*. Jesus receives heavenly help and strength, which is the basis of his *agōnía* (ἀγωνία - Greek: *anguish*) (Luke 22:43-44). Jesus only returns once to the disciples who sleep “for grief” (Luke 22:45).

## 5.3 The Arrest of Jesus

[Mark 14:43-52](#) [43] And immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders. [44] Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him and lead him away under guard.” [45] And when he came, he went up to him at once, and said, “Master!” And he kissed him. [46] And they laid hands on him and seized him. [47] But one of those who stood by drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear. [48] And Jesus said to them, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? [49] Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” [50] And they all forsook him, and fled. [51] And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, [52] but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked.

**Matthew 26:47-56** [47] While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. [48] Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I shall kiss is the man; seize him.” [49] And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Hail, Master!” And he kissed him. [50] Jesus said to him, “Friend, why are you here?” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. [51] And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and

cut off his ear. [52] Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. [53] Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then should the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?” [55] At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs to capture me? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not seize me. [56] But all this has taken place that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

**Luke 22:47-53** [47] While he was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; [48] but Jesus said to him, “Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?” [49] When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, “Lord, should we strike with the sword?” [50] Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. [51] But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. [52] Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him, “Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? [53] When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”

### **5.3.1 The Arrival of Judas and the Arresting Party**

#### **(a) Mark’s Account**

It is an authorized crowd that comes, not a mob. They come from the religious authorities (Chief-priests, Scribes and Elders) and are armed for the purpose with regular arms. They come with Judas, who has a three-fold job. He has to tell: *where* Jesus is; *when* he can be found; *who* he is. Then there is the famous signal, the kiss (Mark 14:44). In the Old Testament a kiss was a sign of greeting. Among Christians it was a normal greeting. No

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one would have been surprised by it. Judas is doing nothing unusual, yet it is the sign to point Jesus out. The same can be said of the use of *Rabbi* (Mark 14:45). In Mark's Gospel the term is an address for Jesus used by the disciples. So addressing Jesus as *Rabbi* is not unusual. In one form of the tradition it is the normal form of address. Now the interesting thing is that while we know it became a title for teacher in Judaism, there is no Jewish documentary evidence for this before the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Jesus gives no response as none is needed.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

For Matthew the use of *Rabbi* (Matt 26:49) is different. Matthew's Gospel was written in the post-70 CE period. In this context, Matthew is very hostile to the Jewish teachers. The only disciple in his Gospel to call Jesus *Rabbi* is Judas (Matt 26:25.49). Matthew is certainly prejudiced against the term. While in Mark's Gospel, Jesus gives no response. Matthew (Matt 26:50) has Jesus give one. He calls Judas *comrade*, which means more than a friend. It means a friend with something in common. The usage is thus ironic.

### **(c) Luke's Account**

Luke, unlike Mark and Matthew, mentions the crowd first (Luke 22:47). He makes no mention of arms, nor does he say who sent the crowd. Unlike the other two Gospels, Luke has the chief-priests, the officers of the Temple police and the elders present (Luke 22:52). Luke is unable to say that Judas kissed Jesus (Luke 22:47); this is to avoid the shocking element of a gesture of friendship turned into an act of betrayal. Jesus says, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?" (Luke 22:48). By Luke's time, the kiss had become a symbol of Christian love and Luke is revolted at the way Judas could use it. The reference to swords at this point (Luke 22:49) points back to the Last Supper scene (Luke 22:35-38) where the disciples have swords.

## **5.3.2 The Cutting Off of the Servant's Ear**

### **(a) Mark's Account**

All the Gospels have this story. In Mark, the person who does this is simply a bystander and Jesus makes no comment (Mark 14:47).

## **(b) Matthew's Account**

In the other Synoptic Gospels the sword-wielder is a disciple; indeed, John tells us it was Peter.<sup>4</sup> Once a disciple is responsible there is the problem of the morality of the action and so Jesus could not remain silent. Therefore the three evangelists who identify the sword-wielder as a disciple have Jesus reject his violent action.<sup>5</sup> Since in Matthew the sword-wielder is a disciple (Matt 26:51), Jesus addresses him and the issue (Matt 26:52). The phrase "... for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" is probably a proverb used by the early Christians. Jesus is clear in rejecting anything that will interfere with his obedience to God's plan. In Matt 26:53 Jesus refuses to call for heavenly help. Just as he rejects armed intervention by the disciples to prevent his fulfilling God's will, so too he rejects supernatural help. Matt 26:54 underscores Matthew's consistent portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah who fulfils the Old Testament. These three elements, the rejection of armed violence, the refusal of supernatural help, and the fulfilment of the Scriptures, all emphasize how Jesus follows God's will.

If the sword-wielder were a disciple where did he get the sword? Were Jesus and his disciples, revolutionaries or zealots? This is one modern approach. By the end of the First Century CE Christians were debating whether they should use violence when oppressed. Three evangelists, beginning with Matthew, all independently give the same answer: No!

## **(c) Luke's Account**

For Luke, the sword-wielder is a disciple (Luke 22:49). The phrase "those who were around him" suggests people who were in solidarity with Jesus. The act of violence (Luke 22:50) is rejected most clearly by Jesus (Luke 22:51). The healing of the servant's ear is not found in the other Gospels, but is very much in keeping with Luke's presentation of Jesus as compassionate. For Luke, Jesus does not use his power to save himself but to heal his enemies.

### **5.3.3 Jesus' Protest**

#### **(a) Mark's Account**

In Mark Jesus protests that he is being treated like a robber. The word used here, *lēstēs* (ληστής - Greek: *insurrectionist, violent robber*) suggests a violent armed man, for

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<sup>4</sup> Matt 26:51; Luke 22:49-50; John 18:10.

<sup>5</sup> Matt 26:53; Luke 22:51; John 18:11.

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whom police and arms are required (Mark 14:48). Jesus protests that he is not such. Why have them come out to arrest him? In the Synoptics, beginning with Mark, Jesus says that he taught in the Temple. This was part of the Christian apologia for Jesus: there was no need for him to be treated as a *criminal*. For Mark, Jesus' last public word occurs in Mark 14:49. It is the cultic Christian answer to Jesus' arrest to say that the Scriptures were being fulfilled. In all the Gospels there is a sense of this being part of Jesus' plan. Jesus obeys the Scriptures and God's will.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

Matthew's account (Matt 26:55-56a) is a basic repetition of Mark's presentation.

### **(c) Luke's Account**

For Luke, the Jewish religious authorities are present at the scene (Matt 26:52) and it is to these that Jesus protests (Matt 26:52-53).

## **5.3.4 The Fleeing of the Disciples**

### **(a) Mark's Account**

In Mark there is a parody on discipleship. They left everything to follow Jesus. Now they leave everything to get away (Mark 14:50). Mark refers to them as *they*. He cannot any longer bring himself to call them disciples.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

Matthew's account (Matt 26:56b) is a basic repetition of Mark's presentation. However, Matthew tells that the *disciples* flee. It is a sad commentary that the disciples will not stand with him. He will go alone. One wonders why there was no attempt to arrest the disciples. The only one they seemed to want was Jesus. This is not an uprising nor are we dealing with a bandit group. The authorities are just not afraid of the disciples.

### **(c) Luke's Account**

Luke makes no reference to the fulfilment of the Scriptures; he omits the desertion of the disciples, since for him, they never fully desert Jesus. This is consistent with Luke's

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concern to soften or omit anything that takes from the dignity of Jesus. For Jesus, the moment is “your hour, and the power of darkness!” (Luke 22:53). In Luke 4:13 Satan left Jesus after the temptation until an “opportune time.” Now Satan’s time has come again.

#### 5.3.4 The Naked Young Man

This account is only found in Mark (Mark 14:51-52). A certain young man was following with Jesus, clothed only with a linen garment over his nakedness. They seize him and leaving behind the linen cloth, he fees naked. Who is this young man? Can he be identified by name? All sorts of attempts were made in antiquity to name him. Some scholars have said that it must have been someone who lived by, and since Mark’s mother had a house in Jerusalem, it is Mark! This is a rather over-imaginative theory.

How does Mark think of this figure? He is “following” Jesus (Mark 14:51). He wants to be or is a disciple. Since he is seized he is not of the arresting party. He seems a would-be-disciple. Is it his last attempt at being a disciple? Yet he flees even more disgracefully. Some scholars have attempted to describe him symbolically arguing from the [Secret Gospel of Mark \(SGM\)](#). The [SGM](#) was contained in part of a letter that purports to have been written by [Clement of Alexandria](#). Prof. [Morton Smith](#) of Columbia University, who discovered the letter in 1958 CE, published it. It was found copied into the last page and binding paper of a 1646 CE edition of I. Voss’s *Epistolae Genuinae S. Ignatii Martyris*. If genuine it would have been written in Alexandria circa 200 CE. It describes two stages of Mark’s composition of Gospel material, with the second depicted as an editorial enlargement of the first:

- During Peter’s stay in Rome Mark wrote the acts of the Lord. This represented what Mark thought likely to increase the faith of the catechumens. It did not contain secret acts.
- After Peter’s death, Mark came to Alexandria bringing his own notes and those of Peter. From these he transferred material to his first account, making a more spiritual gospel. To the previous acts he added others and brought in certain sayings of which the interpretation would lead the hearers into the inner sanctuary of truth hidden by seven veils.

[Clement’s letter](#) concludes telling us that Mark left the final edition to the Alexandrian Church where it was kept for those being initiated into the mysteries. Unfortunately it was given to a group who used to advance a more carnal doctrine. Clement concludes by

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saying that one should refute these by denying Markan authorship. If this letter were judged not to be genuine, then the value of SGM would be reduced. Most scholars think it is genuine. The SGM was probably composed 70-170 CE and since Mark was composed 60-100 CE we can see the possibility of dependence in either direction. Some theories:

- This Gospel has become the basis of a great deal of reflection. There was a Proto-Gospel from which Mark edited scandalous things. Thus the Canonical Gospel reflects Church control. Mark's "Gospel" is a safe orthodox Gospel.
- For some scholars Jesus was a homosexual and this was censored out of the Gospel story.
- It is a mysterious account. For Clement there was an extra sacrament to fill out initiation. It implied some kind of secret ritual that occurred after Baptism (tomb) and Eucharist (meal). Clement points out that eventually with some, it was used for homosexual activity. Does this point to a mystery cult that ends up leading to homosexuality?
- Some scholars identify the fleeing young man as Jesus. He is seized yet escapes. According to Christian faith Jesus eventually escapes. Mark 16 has a young man in the tomb, with a white garment. Both figures are Jesus.
- Other scholars say that the young man represents Christians who go down to the waters of baptism naked and come up clothed.

Yet the question must be asked: why in the midst of a sober account would there be a mysterious liturgical account? For Mark nakedness was pejorative, a scandal which could not be read positively. To flee was also negative. It forms part of the Markan inclusion. The disciples left everything (Mark 10:28) to follow Jesus. Here they leave everything to get away from him. It is the last disciple who flees so shamefully.

## 5.4 Jesus Before the Jewish Authorities

[Mark 14:53 – 15:1](#) [53] And they led Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes were assembled. [54] And Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, and warming himself at the fire. [55] Now the chief priests and the whole council sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. [56] For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree. [57] And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying, [58] “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands’.” [59] Yet not even so did their testimony agree. [60] And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” [61] But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” [62] And Jesus said, “I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” [63] And the high priest tore his garments, and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? [64] You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?” And they all condemned him as deserving death. [65] And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” And the guards received him with blows. [66] While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. [67] When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” [68] But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. [69] And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” [70] But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter,

“Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” [71] But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” [72] At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept. [15:1] As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate.

**Matthew 26:57 – 27:2** [57] Then those who had seized Jesus led him to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders had gathered. [58] But Peter followed him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest, and going inside he sat with the guards to see the end. [59] Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, [60] but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward [61] and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days’.” [62] And the high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer to make? What is it that these men testify against you?” [63] But Jesus was silent. And the high priest said to him, “I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” [64] Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.” [65] Then the high priest tore his robes, and said, “He has uttered blasphemy. Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. [66] What is your judgment?” They answered, “He deserves death.” [67] Then they spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him, [68] saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” [69] Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. A servant-girl came to him and said, “You also were

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with Jesus the Galilean.” [70] But he denied it before all of them, saying, “I do not know what you are talking about.” [71] When he went out to the porch, another servant-girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” [72] Again he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.” [73] After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Certainly you are also one of them, for your accent betrays you.” [74] Then he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know the man!” At that moment the cock crowed. [75] Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said: “Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly. [27:1] When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together against Jesus in order to bring about his death. [2] They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate the governor.

**Luke 22:54 – 23:1** [54] Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest’s house. But Peter was following at a distance. [55] When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. [56] Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, “This man also was with him.” [57] But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” [58] A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, “You also are one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not!” [59] Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, “Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean.” [60] But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what you are talking about!” At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. [61] The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.” [62] And he went out and wept bitterly. [63] Now the men who were holding Jesus began to mock him and beat him; [64] they also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck

you?” [65] They kept heaping many other insults on him. [66] When day came, the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, gathered together, and they brought him to their council. [67] They said, “If you are the Messiah, tell us.” He replied, “If I tell you, you will not believe; [68] and if I question you, 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.” [70] All of them asked, “Are you, then, the Son of God?” He said to them, “You say that I am.” [71] Then they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!” [23:1] Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate.

### **(a) Mark’s Account**

There are three parts to this: the testimony, the [high priest’s](#) interrogation of Jesus and the abuse and mockery of Jesus. Jesus is taken before the [Sanhedrin](#) (Mark 14:53). Mark points up that the whole thing is arranged in haste. They seek testimony against Jesus (Mark 14:55). They do not want to be fair to him. They want rid of him. Many were giving false testimony (Mark 14:56). That is they could not find satisfactory testimony. As in the Old Testament case of Susanna, false evidence is not consistent. They don not agree. This is the problem of the testimony; the Sanhedrin cannot use it. Mark 14:58 is a very difficult sentence. The testimony here about destroying and building the Temple is false. Finally the high priest steps in (Mark 14:60). The testimony is not successful and so he asks a direct question. Later on in Mark 15:29 the passers by will mock Jesus. They will taunt him about destroying the Temple. Everybody seemed to know of this claim. When Jesus dies the veil of the Temple is torn from top to bottom (Mark 15:38) and Jesus is verified. The Temple issue was very important. The Jews did put to death those who raised their voice against the Temple. This situation goes back to the time of Jeremiah.

Mark may be attacking a false understanding of the statement or a manner in which the statement is being used incorrectly. Mark thinks that the Temple’s destruction is not automatic. Mark does not see God acting in an automatic way. Mark does not want the statement to be used wrongly. When Jesus dies (Mark 15:38) the veil of the Temple is torn. That is the destruction Mark thinks of: the Temple of God was destroyed with the death of Jesus and God abandoned the Holy Place. From that moment on the real holy place has not been the Sanctuary in Jerusalem.

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In Mark there are false witnesses throughout (Mark 14:60). When the high priest stands up he has to take over, as the testimony is not effective. He stands up in the middle of the assembly. A confrontation begins between Jesus and the high priest. The high priest is bluffing. He wants Jesus to say something. Jesus stays silent. Jesus' silence is found here and before Pilate (Mark 15:5). All this has been written against the background of those Psalms that tell of false witnesses trying to attack the Just One. In the Suffering Servant passage of Isa 53:7 there is reference to "opening not his mouth." Yet this is not the kind of language used here. Mark does not use the Psalms or Deutero-Isaiah. Jesus' silence gives the narrative a peculiar dignity. The High priest then asks about the issue of Jesus' identity (Mark 14:61).

For Mark "Son of God" was a very exalted title used in connection with Jesus' ministry, while for Matthew the "Son of God" is begotten of Mary by the Holy Spirit (hence the Infancy Narratives). When the High priest says "blasphemy" (Mark 14:64), it is a response to the way Christians understood Jesus. And this is what the Jews of the 70s said. In Mark 14:61 there is a reference to "Son of the Blessed." Why has Mark this phrase and why does Jesus say "at the right hand of Power"? Why not say, "God"? It sounds like the Jewish approach of not using the name of God. Yet none of the Jewish writings *of this time or immediately after this time* use *Power* and *Blessed* of God. It is found in later Judaism and refers to the God who speaks on Sinai.

Jesus says that he is the Messiah (Mark 14:62) and that they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds. We must work on two levels here: what the evangelist meant and what the reader would have understood. A Christian reader would have heard this as the confession of faith that the Christian community *itself* would make. Jesus says, "I am." This term has come up in Mark 8-9. Peter says, "You are the Messiah!" And Jesus tells him to tell nobody (Mark 8:29-30). Jesus talks of the suffering of the Son of Man and Peter rejects this. If one is going to make a confession of Jesus as the Messiah, one must also understand him that he is the Son of Man who will suffer. Jesus also talks of the Son of Man coming in the glory of the Father. This complex of the suffering and judging Son of Man being the same as the Son of God, is Mark's understanding of what goes into the Christian picture. In the trial Jesus talks of the glorious Son of Man coming to judge. For Mark the Son of Man comes from God. Jesus says, "I am" to this and compliments it.

The high priest accuses him of "blasphemy" (Mark 14:64). Why would it be blasphemous to say, "I am the Messiah"? What Jesus is claiming is more than the Davidic Messiah. When the high priest says "blasphemy," he is saying what the Jews of 60/70 CE were saying. When Christians talked of the Son of God, they meant Son of Man. The terms are interchangeable - because Jesus is the One Person for whom all the titles apply. On the level of the Gospel we hear how Christians and Jews talked about Jesus.

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Peter's presence has already been indicated in Mark 14:54. Mark constructs the scene so that two things happen at the same time: Jesus is rejected by the Jewish Authorities (Mark 14:56-65) and Peter denies Jesus (Mark 14:66-72). Mark 14:68 constitutes a formal statement of denial. This is repeated in Mark 14:70. Both these statements are denials of having been with Jesus. The third denial is found in Mark 14:71 where the text reads: "...he began to curse, and he swore an oath..." It may be a typical biblical self-curse or may even suggest that Peter reinforces his denial by cursing Jesus. With the crowing of the cock in Mark 14:72 Jesus' predication of Mark 14:30 is fulfilled. The Greek text reads: "Peter remembered *how* Jesus had said..." Peter not only remembers the words, but the context in which Jesus uttered them.

Mark 15:1 sees Jesus delivered to Pilate. Thus the prediction of Mark 10:33 is fulfilled. The verse is a bridge between the Jewish and Roman Trials of Jesus.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

The sequence is different. The Temple is not a false issue. Jesus has said, "I am *able* to destroy..." (Matt 26:61). The high priest then adjures Jesus "by the living God" (Matt 26:63). This oath is interesting. Jesus has told his followers not to use oaths. Now he is forced to take one, while Peter is swearing that he does not know Jesus. Matthew changes "Son of Blessed" to "Son of God" (Matt 26:63). Matthew also changes the Markan "I am" to "You have said it." Matthew has the same expression at the Last Supper. Judas asks, "is it I Rabbi?" and Jesus replies, "You have said it." (Matt 26:25). It shows knowledge of what Judas is about. It is true, but not the way Jesus would have phrased it. It is not a negation. Matthew wants to indicate that Jesus knows what is in the person's mind. It is a qualified affirmative: "it is true but you do not believe it." There is irony in Jesus' claim to be a judging Son of Man. Jesus will judge the high priest. It will occur at Jesus' death. For Matthew and Mark the tearing of the veil is a sign that God has turned his back on the Temple.

What could Jesus have meant by using the title *Messiah*? The problem originates with his disciples. *They* said he was Messiah and Christians continued this. This would explain the charge *King of the Jews*. But why did Jesus not fully affirm or deny what the disciples said? *Messiah* occurs very rarely in the First Century CE documents. Sometimes it means *anointed King of the House of Israel* or sometimes the *one who would set up a final material/spiritual kingdom on the earth*. A possible meaning then is *anointed King of the House of David, who will set up a kingdom on this earth*. In the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) the Messiah is an *anointed high priest who will reign in the last days*. Also it means *prophet*. It has a meaning dependent on the context. Why does Jesus not affirm that he is Messiah? He never expresses a care for setting up a material kingdom or defeating enemies. He was

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not interested in claiming to be Son of David. Jesus left his own role in the Kingdom to God. Jesus never talks about his role and that is what makes it difficult to know when the Kingdom of God will come. How God will make him King and Messiah is left in God's hands. It is part of his relationship with God. Thus his ambiguous answer, The Messiah has a role in God's plan, so he does not deny being Messiah. To affirm being Messiah may define that role.

Did Jesus say that he was Son of God? In Jewish literature of the time of Jesus there is one example, a small fragment of the DSS using the parallelism *Son of the Most High/Son of God*. In all likelihood the title was not used in Jesus' lifetime but was a post-Resurrectional Christian title. Does that mean that in Jesus' life there was nothing connected with being Son of God? There are passages where he is a son and also there are the Abba passages. So the son relationship was part of his lifetime. The Son of God title is tied in with being Messiah and is a particular understanding of the Davidic Messiah in the light of his own filial relationship. Thus the high priest wants to know if Jesus is the Messiah and if he claims that he has a special relationship with God.

Matt 26:69 links up with Matt 26:58, which places Peter in the courtyard. Matt 26:70 constitutes Peter's refusal to admit any association with Jesus. In Matt 26:71 the maid accuses Peter of being a disciple, and Peter denies it (Matt 26:72) "with an oath," activity which Jesus had forbidden. By means of the oath Peter denies any knowledge of Jesus. Yet his Galilean accent betrays him (Matt 26:73). Peter's unfaithfulness is reinforced by a self-curse (Matt 26:74). With the crowing of the cock, Jesus' prediction of Matt 26:34 is fulfilled. The final image of Peter in this scene is of one who is emotionally overcome by what he has done: "...he went out and wept bitterly."

Matt 27:1-2 functions as Mark 15:1 does; the verses both link the Jewish and Roman Trials of Jesus and fulfil the prophecy of Matt 20:18-19.

### (c) Luke's Account

According to Luke, "Peter was following at a distance" (Luke 22:54). The verb used, *akolouthéō* (ἀκολουθῶ - Greek: *to follow [as a disciple]*) suggests that Peter is still in the role of disciple. Those who arrested Jesus had made a circular fire and Peter joined them (Luke 22:56). Peter denies knowledge of Jesus (Luke 22:57). For Luke, Peter does not reject Jesus as Messiah, but denies personal acquaintance. In Luke 22:58 Peter denies his own identity as a disciple. In Luke 22:59 he is accused of being a Galilean, which might have implications of being a Zealot. Luke's account of the third denial has no mention of cursing and swearing. As with the other Gospel accounts the cockcrow reminds of what Jesus said. "The Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61) is found only in Luke. For

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Luke, Peter denies that he knows Jesus, but does not deny Jesus as Messiah. In short, Peter's action is one of cowardice, not loss of faith.

Luke's mockery scene follows the denial by Peter (Luke 22:55-62) and precedes the hearing by the Jewish Authorities (Luke 22:66-71). Luke does this, as he wants to connect the Jewish and Roman trials. In the mockery scene, Jesus is both blindfolded and questioned (Luke 22:64). Mark has Jesus only blindfolded (Mark 14:65) while Matthew has Jesus only questioned (Matt 26:68). Luke is unique in stating that "they kept heaping many other insults on him" (Luke 22:65), which might suggest other insults based on his relationship to God.

The account of Jesus before the Jewish Authorities (Luke 22:66-71), which *follows* the mockery scene, has no mention of false testimony offered by witnesses. For Luke, it is a morning trial (Luke 22:66) and Jesus has been in prison during the night; whereas Mark and Matthew locate the trial at night. Luke's Jesus gives evasive answers: "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I question you, you will not answer" (Luke 22:67-68). In this way, Jesus identifies the insincerity of the question and refuses to answer. The second question, "Are you, then, the Son of God?" is asked by "all" (Luke 22:70). Luke is clearly placing guilt on all the Jewish Authorities. Luke avoids the formal accusation of blasphemy, which is found in Mark and Matthew. For them, it is this formal accusation that allows the trial to reach its conclusion in a death sentence (Mark 14:64; Matt 26:66). For Luke, the lack of a formal accusation makes a trial unnecessary and Jesus is handed over to Pilate (Luke 23:1).

## 5.5 The Fate of [Judas Iscariot](#)

### (a) Matthew's Account

**Matthew 27:3-10** [3] When Judas, his betrayer, saw that he was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, [4] saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." [5] And throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. [6] But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." [7] So they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. [8] Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. [9] Then was

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fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, [10] and they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

The fate of Judas in the Passion Narrative is only recounted in Matthew’s Gospel.<sup>6</sup> The chief priest, elders and scribes take Jesus to Pilate in Matt 27:2. Yet Matt 27:3 has them in the Temple. Matthew is combining material. When Judas sees they have judged against Jesus he acts. The least defensible translation of the Greek word *paradidous* (παραδιδούς) is *betray*. To “betray” means *to give information*. The Greek does not suggest this. Judas is never a witness in the Trial. All Judas does is give information for the arrest. Now he sees the results. The Gospels do not tell us why Judas gave Jesus over. Judas’ repentance cannot be explained away by asserting that he did not want Jesus condemned. The real question is that he repents now. It is a difficult scene to which we tend to apply sacramental notions. We are in a different world, that of the Jewish mind-set. It is the mind-set where something said or done cannot be undone. Once Jesus’ blood is going to be shed, it will have an effect. The deed cannot be undone. In the early Church there was something similar. Peter (failure) can be forgiven while Judas (deliberate betrayal) cannot.

He brings back the thirty pieces of silver in Matt 27:3. For Mark (Mark 14:10) when Judas went to the chief priests they were glad and promised him money. Judas does not go looking for the money. It is secondary and not important in Mark. In Matthew’s account (Matt 26:14) it is primary. The thirty pieces of silver are mentioned. Judas has done it for the money. Bringing back the money is to undo what has been done; hence the detailed description of the haunted character of the money.

Judas says he has sinned in Matt 27:4. The chief priests do not care. They are not interested in justice, only in what to do with the money. It is an anti-Jewish caricature of religious legalism. Judas hangs himself in Matt 27:5. It is an Ahitophel-type story.<sup>7</sup> Although he dies, the guilt continues. The chief priests will not have the money in the treasury, as it is blood money. Eventually it is used to buy the Potter’s Field, the Field of Blood. Matthew has a fulfilment citation. Most think the quotation is Zech 11:12-13. The Old Testament quotation has a different context: God is talking about himself. The real problem though lies in the word for treasury. The Hebrew word for *treasury* is *’ōsar* (אֹצָר) which is close to

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<sup>6</sup> See Acts 1:16-20 for Luke’s account of Judas’ fate.

<sup>7</sup> See 2 Sam 17:23.

**yôṣēr** (יֹזֵר) which means *potter*. All sorts of debates have taken place as to whether there was a pottery in the treasury. Matthew uses both ideas. He takes the word **yôṣēr** from the Zechariah quotation (which has connotation of Temple smelter) and links it with **yôṣēr** in Jer 18 concerning the potter. According to Jeremiah the potter's place was in Gehennah. The blood of the sacrifices flowed through there. In the Old Testament story (Gen 37:28), Judah sells his brother for twenty pieces of silver (and in some accounts thirty). These ideas are glued together. Judas is responsible for all that happens. All these motifs are joined. In Acts (1:16-20) there is another account of Judas' death. It is another collage of scriptural references: buying of land / unjust gains / Field of Blood. For Luke it is Judas' blood that gives the place its name. The whole story is shot through with the tone of Ps 109.

## 5.6 Jesus Before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Mark 15:2-20 [2] And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." [3] And the chief priests accused him of many things. [4] And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." [5] But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate wondered. [6] Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. [7] And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. [8] And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he was wont to do for them. [9] And he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" [10] For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. [11] But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. [12] And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?" [13] And they cried out again, "Crucify him." [14] And Pilate said to them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." [15] So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas; and having scourged Jesus, he

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delivered him to be crucified. [16] And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the praetorium); and they called together the whole battalion. [17] And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on him. [18] And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" [19] And they struck his head with a reed, and spat upon him, and they knelt down in homage to him. [20] And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak, and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

**Matthew 27:11-31** [11] Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." [12] But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. [13] Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" [14] But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge; so that the governor wondered greatly. [15] Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. [16] And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. [17] So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?" [18] For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. [19] Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." [20] Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. [21] The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." [22] Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified." [23] And he said, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified." [24] So when Pilate saw that he was

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gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” [25] And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” [26] Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified. [27] And they gathered the whole battalion before him. [28] And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, [29] and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” [30] And they spat upon him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. [31] And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe, and put his own clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

**Luke 23:2-25** [2] They began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king.” [3] Then Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “You say so.” [4] Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no basis for an accusation against this man.” [5] But they were insistent and said, “He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place.” [6] When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. [7] And when he learned that he was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. [8] When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. [9] He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. [10] The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. [11] Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate. [12] That same day Herod

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and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies. [13] Pilate then called together the chief priests, the leaders, and the people, [14] and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. [15] Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us. Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. [16] I will therefore have him flogged and release him.” [17] [18] Then they all shouted out together, “Away with this fellow! Release Barabbas for us!” [19] (This was a man who had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder.) [20] Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again; [21] but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” [22] A third time he said to them, “Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him.” [23] But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that he should be crucified; and their voices prevailed. [24] So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. [25] He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

**(a) Mark’s Account**

It begins with Pilate spontaneously asking, “Are you the King of the Jews?” (Mark 15:2). How did Pilate know the charge? This is abbreviated popular narrative. It is taken for granted that he knew. The title *King of the Jews* is not an ordinary title. It occurred in Matthew’s Infancy Narrative (Matt 2:2) but here it is not a current title. Having it appear in the Roman Trial means that Pilate is asking if Jesus is a claimant to this political role. There has been no king since 6 CE. Thus the title could have been a nationalist title for one who claimed to rule over all Palestine. The Gospel did not create it. According to Christian tradition the question the Romans were concerned about was the “King of the Jews” issue. The Romans were worried about such claimants.

How could Pilate think that Jesus was making such a claim? Perhaps it was a derivation from the question of the Messiah. Mark does not make the connection while

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Matthew does. In the Barabbas story Pilate asks do the people want Barabbas or “Jesus the Messiah” (Matt 27:17)? For Matthew, *Messiah* and *King of the Jews* are interchangeable. Matthew applies logic to Mark. Mark has the question of the *Messiah* in the Jewish trial, and the question of *King of the Jews* in the Roman trial. Matthew has put them together. It is the intent of Mark and Matthew to show the Jewish trial was about religion and the Roman one about politics.

Jesus answers, “You have said so.” Is this an affirmative or not? Pilate does not understand it as an affirmative. Pilate then asks about the charges (v.4) and Jesus is silent. That is the whole trial scene in Mark. Jesus has said nothing. It is like the dialogue with the high priest. Jesus will not deal with false charges. There may be an echo here of the Innocent One beset by evil men (as in the Psalms), yet we do not have here the language of the Old Testament.

When there is a counter figure it can heighten the innocence of Jesus. Barabbas is a very important figure in the story. Mark says this happened at a feast (Mark 15:6). We presume he means Passover. The custom is outlined (Mark 15:6). Those in prison are mentioned among whom was Barabbas but it is not clear if he had committed murder (Mark 15:7). The release of Barabbas would be unusual as an occupying force would not release a criminal just after a riot in which people were killed. The crowd comes and asks for the custom (v.8). Pilate uses the title “King of the Jews” (Mark 15:9). Is it sarcasm or the only title by which he knows Jesus? Pilate perceives that *phthónos* (φθόνος - Greek: *murderous envy*) is the motivating force behind the chief priests’ desire to deliver him up (Mark 15:10). The chief priests stir up the crowd (Mark 15:11). Mark does not develop the story well; he is content to contrast Jesus and Barabbas.

The crowd cries “crucify” (Mark 15:13) and then the trial concludes quickly. Then Barabbas is released; Jesus is flogged and sent for crucifixion. Mark never says Jesus was *sentenced*. Mark is more interested in the idea of *giving over*. Judas gives him over to the chief priests who give him over to Pilate who finally gives him over to the soldiers. Concerning *Roman scourging* some scholars argue for different kinds of scourging. Here it is a scourging relating to crucifixion. One could have a scourging that was a penalty in itself. It was a very serious penalty, but not a death penalty. Usually the prisoner was tied to a small pillar and had his back scourged. Thus vital organs were not destroyed.

### (b) Matthew’s Account

Matthew expands on Mark. He calls Pilate “governor” (Matt 27:11). The chief priests and elders accuse Jesus (v.12). Pilate asks if Jesus has *heard* their accusations (Matt 27:13). Perhaps this is an extra legal dimension. The judge has to be sure that the prisoner

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heard the question. In a legal Roman trial a silent prisoner was considered to have answered “yes”. Yet in codified Roman law it is not stated that silence implies consent.

The Barabbas story is more developed. Barabbas is described as “a notorious prisoner” (Matt 27:16). Pilate asks for the choice between Barabbas and Jesus who is called the Messiah (Matt 27:17). That is the reading in most texts. But there is a famous alternate reading found in the Old Syriac and in variations of D which reads “Jesus Barabbas.” Barabbas is the patronymic. According to Origen the majority of copies used his personal name, Jesus. Origen did not like this and accordingly scribes removed the personal name. What does his name mean?

- Barabbas could mean Bar-Rabbi i.e. the son of the Rabbi/Teacher.
- Or it could be Bar-Abba i.e. the son of Abba (a personal name). Yet Abba as a personal name is only more common in late Judaism. In Talmudic times it was common.
- Or again Bar-Abba could mean Son of God and the choice was between Jesus as *either* Son of God *or* King of the Jews. The people want the Son of God, but the Romans execute him as King of the Jews. Yet Jesus is *never* call Bar-Abba.

There now follows the famous scene of Matt 27:24 where Pilate washes his hands. He declares his innocence. Note the people’s answer (Matt 27:26). In is a very dramatic scene. It is totally influenced by Jewish folklore. In the Old Testament people washed their hands to declare their innocence, especially in murder cases. The people’s response is very interesting. Pilate makes a formal statement concerning innocence and carries out a gesture of innocence. For Matthew, Judas is guilty and tries to get rid of the blood by throwing away the money (Matt 27:5). The Chief-priests are guilty so they try to undo it by buying a field (Matt 27:7). Pilate is also guilty for he knows that Jesus is innocent and will not take responsibility for Jesus’ blood. Only the people accept the responsibility (Matt 27:25). Matthew says that even if they did not do what Judas, the chief priests and Pilate did, the Jewish People of that time was responsible for Jesus’ death. From the perspective of the 70s Jesus was sent to the Lost Sheep of the House of Israel and they rejected him. Jesus, after his resurrection, then sends his disciples to the Gentiles. Matthew argues that the Jewish People have joined the Jewish Authorities. He deliberately generalizes. In the NRSV translation the text reads “his blood *be* on us.” It is not a wish, though. Nor is it a curse. The Church Fathers took it as a self-curse. It is an Old Testament legal formula for

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taking responsibility for blood. Thus they accept the responsibility of accepting the blood of the dead Jesus on their heads. For us, Judas, the chief priests and Pilate are guiltier, but only the Jewish People are prepared to take responsibility. In the period 30-70 CE the Jews decided they did not believe in Jesus. By Matthew's time the Synagogue and Church were separate entities. Thus Christians had to leave the Synagogue. Matthew is transferring this to the Pilate scene. Matthew was Jewish and his community was Jewish. They see no future in Judaism hence the move to the Gentiles. Why has Matthew the reference to "our children"? It is because the *second generation* is the one that pays for accepting the responsibility in the 60s and 70s.

In dealing with the mockery of Jesus by the soldiers, Matthew's description is more complete in Matt 27:27-28. As in Mark, Matthew has the soldiers assemble the "whole battalion" (Matt 27:27). The gathering would seem to take place in the palace courtyard. In offering detail, Matthew makes explicit what Mark has implied, namely that the gathering is hostile to Jesus. In Matt 27:29 Matthew extends the paraphernalia placed on Jesus, beyond robe and crown to include a reed sceptre. As in Mark, the mockery has not been ordered by Pilate, but seems to have been spontaneous horseplay on the part of the soldiers. The reference to the "scarlet robe" probably suggests an ordinary red military cloak. Thus, Matthew suggests that a soldier supplied the garment of mockery. For Matthew, as with the other Gospels, the crown (Matt 27:29) is not an instrument of torture, but of mockery, like the robe and sceptre. Matthew emphasizes *mockery* by using the verb ***empaízō*** (ἐμπαίζω - Greek: *to mock*) before and after the soldiers' salutation (Matt 27:29-30). The mockery quickly gives rise to physical abuse (Matt 27:30). Finally, in Matt 27:31, Jesus is dressed again before being taken away to the place of crucifixion. The Roman death penalty envisaged the criminal carrying the lateral beam of the cross behind his neck with arms fastened to it, going naked to the place of execution and being scourged as he went along. The fact that Jesus is only disrobed at the place of execution may reflect a Roman concession to Jewish sensibilities regarding public nudity.

### (c) Luke's Account

The Jewish Authorities (Luke 23:2) make three accusations against Jesus: that he perverts the nation (which Pilate would understand as a political revolt); that he forbids the people to pay taxes to Caesar and that he claims to be a king (and as such an opponent of Caesar). Luke has already shown these accusations to be false.<sup>8</sup> Pilate questions Jesus (Luke 23:3) and in asking "are you the king of the Jews?" is thinking in a political way. Thus

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 9:41; 20:20-26.

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Jesus' ambiguous answer: "You say so." Pilate declares that he finds no crime in Jesus (Luke 23:4). He will make this declaration three times in the course of Luke's Passion Narrative.<sup>9</sup> The Jewish Authorities respond by their persistent political accusations (Luke 23:5: "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place"). The reference to Galilee allows Luke to introduce his unique story of a trial before Herod Antipas (Luke 23:6-12).

The story of the trial of Jesus before Herod is unique to Luke. It may be historical, but it is more likely an interpretation of Ps 2:2: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and his anointed..." It is difficult to understand why Pilate sent Jesus to Herod. Most biblical scholars think that the scene is worked up from Ps 2. The description of Herod here (Luke 23:8) fits with what Luke has already told of him.<sup>10</sup> Herod was hoping to see Jesus "perform some sign" (Luke 23:8). In short, he looks for miracles, not salvation. However, Jesus is silent (Luke 23:9). In Luke 23:10 the negative role of the Jewish Authorities is stressed again. Even Herod mocks Jesus (Luke 23:11) because he has received no sign. Luke 23:11 continues with "... he put an elegant robe on him, and sent him back to Pilate." Is this part of Herod's mockery? Pilate understands it as a sign of innocence (Luke 23:15). The text uses the word *lamprós* (λαμπρός - Greek: *splendid, shining*) which implies a dazzling white, the colour of innocence. This is the favoured interpretation of most contemporary biblical scholars. Pilate and Herod had been enemies (Luke 23:12) probably because of Pilate's mass murder of Galileans.<sup>11</sup> According to Luke, they now become friends in their agreement that Jesus is innocent and in taking a stand against the Jewish Authorities.

In Luke 23:13-16 the examination of Jesus is concluded. Luke 23:13 has Luke emphasize the guilt of the Jewish people along with that of their leaders. After a second examination of the charges, Pilate proclaims Jesus to be innocent (Luke 23:14) and concurs with Herod's conclusion (Luke 23:15). Both Herod and Pilate agree that Jesus does not deserve death. Thus Pilate decides to flog Jesus (Luke 23:16). The verb used here *paideúō* (παιδεύω - Greek: *to teach, instruct, chasten, flog, scourge*) leads to two possible interpretations. Either Pilate wanted to teach Jesus a lesson with a light beating or the term is euphemism for brutal scourging. Note that Luke never actually tells of the beating/scourging. It is presented as something intended instead of the death penalty, not a preparation for it. According to Luke, Pilate felt that there was no further legal action necessary and wanted to release Jesus with a stern warning.

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<sup>9</sup> Luke 23:4,14,22.

<sup>10</sup> Luke 9:9.

<sup>11</sup> Luke 13:1.

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As Luke has left out the entire dialogue between Jesus and Pilate found in the other accounts, he has to explain the Passover amnesty and who Barabbas is. It is clear from Luke 23:18 that Luke does not like Barabbas and thus we have the emphatic statement of how evil he is and that he is an insurgent and murderer (Luke 23:19). Pilate is presented again in a favourable light “wanting to release Jesus” (Luke 23:20). While the Jews insist on Jesus’ death (Luke 23:21), Pilate proclaims Jesus’ innocence for the third time (Luke 23:22). The climax of the trial is reached with “and their voices prevailed” (Luke 23:23). Finally, Pilate yields (Luke 23:24). There is no mention of a pre-crucifixion scourging. For Luke, there has been no Roman trial at all. In Luke 23:24 Luke once again underscores Barabbas’ guilt and Jesus’ innocence and suggests that Pilate caves in (Luke 23:24) and hands Jesus over to the will of the Jewish leaders (Luke 23:25). Luke does not have any account of Jesus being mocked by Roman soldiers.

### 5.7 Crucifixion and Death

#### 5.7.1 The Requisition of Simon of Cyrene

[Mark 15:21](#) [21] And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross.

**Matthew 27:32** [32] As they went out, they came upon a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; this man they compelled to carry his cross.

**Luke 23:26-32** [26] As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. [27] A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. [28] But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. [29] For the days are surely 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 this when the wood is green, what will

happen when it is dry?” [32] Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him.

### **(a) Mark’s Account**

The scene moves from the place where Roman authority was centred in Jerusalem and where he had been tried and condemned to the place outside Jerusalem where executions took place. The “they” are the Roman soldiers. None of the Synoptic Gospels tells precisely *where* the place of execution was in relation to Jerusalem. All three Synoptic Gospels suggest that the crucifixion took place outside the city walls. The spot is pictured near a road or pathway, for passers-by speak to Jesus on the cross. This road probably leads into the city from the countryside as Simon of Cyrene passes along it.

Jewish law regarding public executions demanded that the event take place *outside* the camp<sup>12</sup> or the city.<sup>13</sup> Roman law required that crucifixion take place by crowded roads so as to terrify the population. Normally the vertical part of the cross stood implanted at the place of execution, while the condemned carried only the crossbeam. It is this crossbeam that Simon carries. There is a suggested thesis that he became a Christian. This thesis is strengthened by Mark’s retention of the names of Simon’s sons, who were probably known to Mark’s readers. Roman law insisted that the condemned carry their own crossbeam. A plausible suggestion to allow one accept the Simon episode as historical, is that Jesus was probably so weak that the soldiers feared he would die before arrival at the place of execution. As it is, once crucified, he dies quickly.

Simon is identified as a Cyrenian. Cyrene was the capital of the North African district of Cyrenaica in Libya. We are *not* told that Simon is a Jew; indeed Simon is a Greek name. His sons’ names are Greek (Alexander) and Roman (Rufus).

### **(b) Matthew’s Account**

Matthew’s Account follows the same basic details as in Mark. However, there is no mention of Simon’s sons.

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<sup>12</sup> Lev 24:14; Num 15:35-36.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kgs 21:13.

### (c) Luke's Account

Luke has no references to Rufus and Alexander. He makes Simon a model of the Christian disciple. Luke then adds the scene of Jesus meeting the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23:27-32), which is unique to him. The Torah forbade the public lamentation over one who was to be executed.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the women's' lament (Luke 23:27) witnesses to the fact that Jesus was innocent. As is typical in Luke's portrait of him, Jesus does not think of himself but of the women and their fate. Luke 23:29-30 contain Jesus' prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem. For Luke, Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem are linked. In v.31 the "green" wood refers to Jesus, while the "dry" wood refers to those guilty of his death. The force of the comparison is that if Jesus who is innocent has to suffer, what will happen to those guilty of his death? In Luke 23:32 Luke introduces those who are to be crucified with Jesus and alludes to Isa 53:12: "...he was numbered with the transgressors."

#### 5.7.2 The Crucifixion

**Mark 15:22-27** [22] And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). [23] And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh; but he did not take it. [24] And they crucified him, and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. [25] And it was the third hour, when they crucified him. [26] And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." [27] And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left.

**Matthew 27:33-38:** [33] And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull), [34] they offered him wine to drink, mingled with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. [35] And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots; [36] then they sat down and kept watch over him there. [37] And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews."

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<sup>14</sup> Deut 21:22.

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[38] Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left.

**Luke 23:33-34** [33] When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [34] Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing.

**(a) Mark’s Account**

Mark’s account of the crucifixion lists seven things that are relevant to the scene:

- The name of the place.
- The initial offering of wine.
- The crucifixion.
- The division of clothes.
- A time reference.
- The inscription of the charge.
- The two bandits.

The name of the place (Mark 15:22) in its Aramaic form is **golgotha** (*skull*), in its Greek form, **kraníon** (κρανίον) and in its Latin form, **calvaria**. What does the name imply? One suggestion is that the appearance of the site was similar to a skull because it was a rounded knoll, rising from the surrounding surface. Raymond E. Brown notes:

One would never be able to prove beyond doubt where Golgotha stood, but no candidate more credible than the traditional site [viz. the [Church of the Holy Sepulchre](#)] is likely to emerge. Traditions of the 2d and 4th cents. about the place of the burial, which point to the Holy

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Sepulchre, have more value than much modern guesses that have no serious archaeological support.<sup>15</sup>

Jesus is offered wine twice. At the beginning of the crucifixion (Mark 15:23) the soldiers offer **oinos** (οἶνος - Greek: *wine*), but Jesus does not take it. At the end, after Jesus' cry of desolation (v.36), someone from the bystanders fills a sponge with **óxos** (ὄξος - Greek: *coarse, bitter wine*), puts it on a reed and gives it to him to drink. It is done in the context of mockery, but remains unclear if it is in itself mockery. Neither does Mark relate that Jesus drinks it.

What Mark describes may have occurred. Prov 31:6-7 suggests that a drugging wine be offered to those dying in pain. Mark describes the wine as mixed with myrrh, which was used for embalming (Mark 14:3). What is surprising in the account is that Roman soldiers offer the wine; normally family or friends would have done this. His enemies must see the offer of wine then as a testing or taunting of him. Jesus' refusal to drink the wine underlines his determination to give himself fully to the Father's will.

The crucial moment of crucifixion (Mark 15:24) is phrased both briefly and in an uninformative manner: "and they crucified him." Nothing is offered about the form of the cross, about how he was affixed, nor about the amount of pain. The Greek term **staurós** (σταυρός - cross) and the Latin **crux** do not mean a cross in the sense of two beams crossing each other. They refer to a stake to which people could be attached by impaling, hanging, nailing or tying. Its origins are probably Persian; although in the Hellenistic Period it was commonplace. Eventually the Romans adopted the practice. Since Jesus had to carry a crossbeam, the likelihood is that the cross was *tau*-shaped or one with four arms. No Gospel account tells whether Jesus was nailed or tied to the cross. Some Gospel texts suggest that Jesus was nailed.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that nails were used to affix Jesus to the cross.<sup>17</sup>

Mark indicates that Jesus' clothes were divided. Criminals were usually led naked to their execution; the Romans made an exception for Jesus. Thus, Jesus still has his own clothes. The normal Roman practice would have been to crucify people naked. Was this the case with Jesus? Raymond Brown concludes: "I would judge that there is no evidence to settle the question even if the evidence favors complete despoliation."<sup>18</sup>

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15 Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 939-40.

16 Luke 24:39; John 20:25,27. However, do these texts reflect what actually happened or are they a rewording of Ps 22:16b?

17 For a detailed discussion of this see Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 949-52.

18 *Ibid.*, 953.

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Mark has a long sequence of time indications dividing the day. Mark 15:25 refers to the “third hour,” Mark 15:33 to the “sixth hour” and Mark 15:34 to the “ninth hour.” If Mark is correct, and the other Gospels reject this, Jesus would have been crucified around 09.00 AM, John, on the other hand, has Jesus sentenced to be crucified at noon. It is not possible to reconcile these differences. Mark 15:25 also has a second reference to crucifixion. This is probably another example of the free-flowing Markan narrative style.

Mark states that the crime with which Jesus was charged existed in a written form at the place of crucifixion. This is a reference to a Roman technique of informing the general public. Crucifixion was used to deter crime. Thus, lay the usefulness of specifying the crime punishable by death. According to Mark the inscription reads: “The King of the Jews.” Mark does not report who wrote the text.

Finally, Mark places the reference to the two bandits at the end of the list of items pertaining to the crucifixion. All of the Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified with two others and agree on their relative positions on either side of Jesus. Yet few details are given about the co-crucified. Their presence illustrates the indignity to which Jesus, the innocent one, was subjected. Jesus had protested his arrest as if he were a bandit (Mark 14:48). Now he is crucified amid bandits. Mark’s use of the term *lēstēs* (ληστής - Greek: *insurrectionist, violent robber*) suggests that they were violent men. There is nothing in the charge against Jesus suggesting that he was violent.

### **(b) Matthew’s Account**

Matthew includes the same list as Mark, in the same order, except for the time reference, which he omits. He describes the wine as mixed with gall (Matt 27:34), which alludes to the LXX version of Ps 69:21a: “they gave me poison for food.” The second offering of wine (Matt 27:48) refers to vinegar, which also alludes to Ps 69:22b (LXX): “and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” According to the psalm, gall and common wine are unpleasant offerings and when offered to the just one, reflect hate and contempt. For Matthew, God through Ps 69 has predicted the abuse of the Just One, Jesus. In Matthew’s account, Jesus takes the wine offered in mockery, but refuses to drink it since he recognizes the mockery. Matt 27:35 reads: “And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots.” The account of the crucifixion is subordinated to the division of clothes.

Matthew has removed the second reference to crucifixion (Matt 27:36). Why so? Matthew (and Luke) “may have found Mark’s introduction of a complete time frame too radical an innovation; or, if the Marcan frame was liturgical in origin, they may not have

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repeated it because they had no such liturgical prayer pattern in their own churches.”<sup>19</sup> For Matthew the inscription reads: “This is Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matt 27:37). For Matthew the writers of the text are “they” (i.e. the Roman soldiers). In Matt 27:38, Matthew follows Mark closely in his description of the two co-crucified.

### (c) Luke’s Account

Luke has nothing of the Aramaic name of the place, nor of Jesus’ refusal to drink nor any reference to time. His only reference is to two criminals (Luke 23:33). Jesus’ prayer in Luke 23:34 is unique to Luke. It is a prayer of forgiveness to all implicit in his death. The fulfilment of Ps 22:18 is emphasized.<sup>20</sup>

#### 5.7.3 The Mockery

**Mark 15:29-32** [29] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads, and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, [30] save yourself, and come down from the cross!” [31] So also the chief priests mocked him to one another with the scribes, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. [32] Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

**Matthew 27:39-44** [39] And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads [40] and saying, “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross.” [41] So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, [42] “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43] He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, ‘I am the Son

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 962.

<sup>20</sup> Ps 22:18: “they divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

of God’.” [44] And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

**Luke 23:35-43** [35] And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” [36] The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, [37] and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” [38] There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” [39] One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” [40] But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? [41] And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” [42] Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” [43] He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

### **(a) Mark’s Account**

Jewish passers by, who have not been pre-programmed by the Jewish authorities, blaspheme Jesus. They do so, on the basis of what they have heard about him. Before giving voice to their blasphemy, they communicate their hostility by their body language as they wag their heads in derision. The subject which gives rise to the mockery is the idea that Jesus could or would destroy the Temple sanctuary and rebuild it in three days. That this charge is on the lips of passers by suggests that it was well known.

Mark has the chief priests mocking and speaking about Jesus in the third person (Mark 15:31). Mark is reminding his readers of the pattern established in the Sanhedrin trial: charges against Jesus by the Jewish authorities as they interrogate him are resumed in mockery as he hangs on the cross. The title under which he is mocked is “the Christ, the King of Israel.”

The challenge to Jesus to save himself (Mark 15:30) is a deriding of Jesus’ impotence. This may well have been influenced by Ps 22:9 (LXX): “Commit your cause to YHWH; let him deliver, let him rescue the one in whom he delights!” There are also motifs

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derived from the Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry, particularly in relation to forgiving sins, healing and delivering people from death.

In Mark 15:32b, Mark returns to those crucified with Jesus. Mark describes how the co-crucified kept on reviling Jesus. Yet Mark does not record their words. The force of this mockery is the culmination of hostility. Not only do passers by scorn Jesus, but also the Sanhedrin and even those who share his fate.

### (b) Matthew's Account

Matthew follows Mark in the mockery scene, but introduces the motif of "Son of God" (Matt 27:40). By the time of the composition of Matthew's Gospel, the Temple was in ruins, and Jewish hostility was concentrated on Jesus' identity. In Matthew's temptation scene, Satan asks Jesus "if you are the Son of God..." (Matt 4:3). It is a major Matthean motif that returns here. When the Jewish authorities mock Jesus at the cross, they use the titles "King of Israel ... Son of God" (Matt 27:42-43). Matt 27:42 concentrates on the belief element: "let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." For R. E. Brown "the irony is that if he came down, he would *ipso facto* become unbelievable."<sup>21</sup> Like Mark, Matthew has the co-crucified revile Jesus. Since he does not offer words, Matthew assumes that it was done in the same way.

### (c) Luke's Account

According to Luke 23:35 there are three groups of onlookers: the people who watch; the rulers who mock; and the soldiers who also mock. The scene is shaped by allusions to Wis 2:17-20 and to Ps 22:7-8.<sup>22</sup> The reference to vinegar in Luke 23:36-37 is an allusion to Ps 69:21: "they gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." Luke 23:38 has Pilate proclaim Jesus as King of the Jews. Luke 23:39-41 are unique to Luke where one criminal reviles Jesus (Luke 23:39) while the other confesses Jesus'

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 996.

<sup>22</sup> Wis 2:17-20: "Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries. Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected;" Ps 22:7-8: "All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver, let him rescue the one in whom he delights!"

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innocence (Luke 23:40-41). The one who proclaims Jesus' innocence seeks salvation in Paradise, which is offered to him (Luke 23:43).

#### 5.7.4 Darkness and the Death of Jesus

**Mark 15:33-36** [33] When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. [34] At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [35] When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah." [36] And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." [37] Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

**Matthew 27:45-50:** [45] From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. [46] And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" [47] When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." [48] At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. [49] But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." [50] Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.

**Luke 23:44-46** [44] It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, [45] while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. [46] Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last.

### **(a) Mark's Account**

There is no way to know whether the Evangelists thought that there was physical darkness at Golgotha. According to R. E. Brown, they probably did. Nonetheless, the focus of the Gospels is on the symbolic and theological dimensions of darkness. Mark emphasizes that darkness extended until the moment when Jesus died (Mark 15:33). As Jesus dies, his scream quotes Ps 22:1. The reaction to the cry is to offer Jesus vinegary wine, which fulfils Ps 69:21. Perhaps Mark is saying that at Jesus' death, God now offers a sign as part of the judgement on the world. After three hours of darkness, Jesus speaks for the first and only time. The verb used in Greek, *βοάω* (βοάω - Greek: *to cry out*) suggests a loud scream. Normally the crucified died of exhaustion. Mark is suggesting that Jesus fulfils Ps 31:22: "But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help" and Ps 39:12: "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears." Mark says that Jesus "breathed his last." He does *not* say that Jesus died or was killed or had his life taken from him. On the contrary, Jesus gave up his life in free obedience to the Father's will and in love.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

Matthew follows Mark, but strengthens the Marcan symbolism. All the Jewish people (Matt 27:25) accept responsibility for Jesus' death. It is not unexpected that God sends the darkness as a warning of immanent judgement. Matthew's account of Jesus' death is similar to that of Mark with such elements as the loud cry and the yielding up of his spirit (Matthew 27:50). Like Mark, Matthew emphasizes the voluntary manner in which Jesus offers his life.

### **(c) Luke's Account**

While Luke follows Mark quite closely in referring to darkness (Luke 23:44), he tells of the tearing of the Temple curtain *before* Jesus dies (Luke 23:45). His idea is that Jesus has just promised a place in Paradise to the criminal who defended him. The Temple's curtain is torn, namely, Paradise is thrown open. Jesus then dies (Luke 23:46) and the criminal is the first into Paradise after him. Jesus' prayer is presented as a fulfilment of Ps 31:5: "into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God." Here the emphasis is on Jesus' relationship with his Father.

### 5.7.5 The Repercussions of Jesus' Death

**Mark 15:38-41** [38] And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. [39] Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" [40] There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. [41] These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

**Matthew 27:51-56:** [51] At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. [52] The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. [53] After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. [54] Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!" [55] Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. [56] Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

**Luke 23:47-49:** [47] When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." [48] And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. [49] But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

### **(a) Mark's Account**

Mark's description of the rending of the Temple curtain is not literal, but metaphorical or symbolic (Mark 15:38). Jesus now replaces the Temple in the role of mediator between God and humanity. All barriers between God and humankind are cast aside (as symbolized by the tearing of the inner curtain) and the barriers between Jew and Gentile are no more (as symbolized by the tearing of the inner curtain). The centurion standing by (Mark 15:39), witnesses the manner of Jesus' death and the rending of the Temple curtain. It is this that leads him to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. He, a Roman Gentile, is the only human to make such a confession in Mark's Gospel.

According to Mark, the women who observed from a distance were: "Mary Magdalene ... Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses ... Salome ... many other women..." (Mark 15:40-41). Mark has not mentioned these women before and now offer this background information. He contrasts the centurion who stands opposite Jesus with the women who stood at a distance. The centurion confesses Jesus as God's Son, while the women are silent and offer no evaluation of him. This is consistent with Mark's negative portrayal of Jesus' disciples as inadequate. There may even be an allusion here to Ps 38:11: "My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my neighbours stand far off." In short, observing the crucified sympathetically from a distance does not constitute discipleship. Perhaps Mark is addressing issue sin his own community and offers a warning that non-involvement and reluctance to confess the resurrection is reprehensible.

### **(b) Matthew's Account**

Following Jesus' death, Matthew mentions a series of events that follow: the tearing of the Temple curtain, an earthquake and the splitting of rocks (Matt 27:51); the rising of the dead from their graves (Matt 27:52). As with Mark's account this is not a literal one. Rather, it is a theological statement that the old order has passed away and that which the people of Israel longed for over centuries has now begun to happen. For Matthew, the centurion and the bystanders witness all these apocalyptic events and thus the centurion makes his confession.

According to Matthew the women are from Galilee. They are: "[those who] had followed Jesus from Galilee ... among them ... Mary Magdalene ... Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee" (Matt 27:55-56). While Matthew treats the disciples of Jesus more favourably in his Gospel than Mark does in his, he follows Mark closely in content and tone here.

### (c) Luke's Account

As with Mark and Matthew, Luke does not say that Jesus died. Imperial Rome, by means of its centurion, proclaims that Jesus is innocent (Luke 23:47). The multitudes who beat their breasts (Matt 27:48) do so as a sign of repentance, which Luke understands as a fulfilment of Zech 12:10: "And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first born." For Luke, the Eleven along with the Galilean women are present at Calvary; they stand at a distance (Matt 27:49).

#### 5.7.7 The Burial of Jesus

[Mark 15:42-47](#) [42] When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, [43] Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. [44] Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. [45] When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. [46] Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. [47] Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body was laid.

**Matthew 27:57-66** [57] When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. [58] He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. [59] So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth [60] and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. [61] Mary Magdalene and the other

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Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. [62] The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate [63] and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ [64] Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” [65] Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” [66] So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

**Luke 23:50-56:** [50] Now there was a good and righteous man named Joseph, who, though a member of the council, [51] had not agreed to their plan and action. He came from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and he was waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. [52] This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. [53] Then he took it down, wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid it in a rock-hewn tomb where no one had ever been laid. [54] It was the day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning. [55] The women who had come with him from Galilee followed, and they saw the tomb and how his body was laid. [56] Then they returned, and prepared spices and ointments. On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

**(a) Mark’s Account**

The evening of Jesus’ death is a Friday and his body must be buried before the onset of the Sabbath (Mark 15:42). Mark depicts Joseph of Arimathea (Mark 15:43) as sympathetic to Jesus as he “himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.” The Council here does not refer to the Sanhedrin, but to a local council. The description of Pilate in Mark 15:44-45 is unique to Mark, where the emphasis is on the speed and amazing aspect of Jesus’ death. Isa 22:16 may have influenced the reference in Mark 15:46 to the

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tomb hewn out of the rock: “What right do you have here? Who are your relatives here, that you have cut out a tomb here for yourself, cutting a tomb on the height, and carving a habitation for yourself in the rock?”

**(b) Matthew’s Account**

Matthew’s account follows that of Mark closely. The only particular Matthean nuance is the presentation of Joseph as a wealthy and explicit disciple of Jesus.

**(c) Luke’s Account**

Joseph is presented as a good and righteous man (Luke 23:50). Luke 23:51-52 follow Mark, while Luke 23:53 is similar to Matthew. In Luke 23:54 Luke gives the same time indications as Mark, but they are not offered as a motivation for Joseph. Luke 23:55-56 are added to link the story of the burial with the Easter story.